

# FOR THE TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL TravelBizMonitor

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The flight got bumpy at times  
but we managed to touch great heights.



The obstacles were many  
but we managed to cruise around them.

The path was unknown  
but we always kept our foot on the accelerator.



Small it may be  
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## MoT, UNWTO unveil G20 Tourism and SDG Dashboard

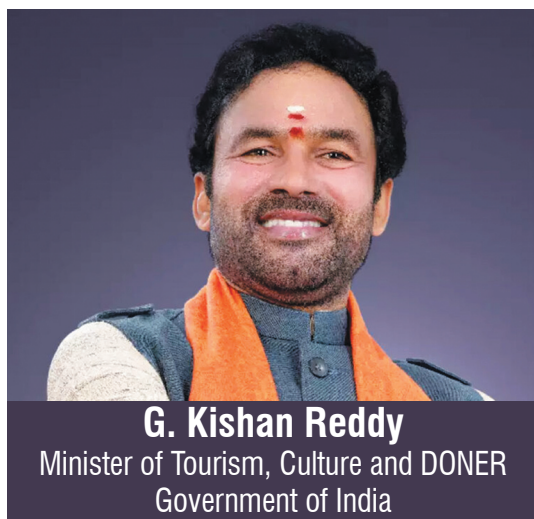
TBM Staff | Mumbai

Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, in collaboration with the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), unveiled the G20 Tourism and SDG Dashboard. G. Kishan Reddy, Minister of Tourism, Culture and DONER, launched the dashboard in a virtual ceremony.

Developed under the leadership of India's G20 Presidency and with the expert knowledge partnership of UNWTO, the dashboard is a testament to India's commitment to sustainable tourism. It showcases best practices, case studies, and insights from G20 countries, all modeled for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This dashboard is a lasting legacy of India's G20 Presidency, reflecting its dedication to global collaboration and sustainable growth in the global tourism industry.

The G20 Tourism and SDG Dashboard serves as a comprehensive online public platform, amalgamating the collective knowledge of the G20 Tourism Working Group. It consolidates the GOA Roadmap, survey results, case studies, and best practices from G20 countries. The dashboard offers insights into sustainable tourism practices and also provides a platform for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and growth.

The virtual launch witnessed participation from G20 Member countries, invited countries,



**G. Kishan Reddy**  
Minister of Tourism, Culture and DONER  
Government of India

international organizations, Indian States & Union Territories, and industry stakeholders.

The event commenced with opening remarks by the Additional Secretary (Tourism), Government of India highlighting the importance of the G20 Tourism and SDG Dashboard and mentioned that the dashboard has been developed in line with the vision of Prime Minister, Narendra Modi to make India's Presidency inclusive, ambitious and action-oriented. To create a legacy from India's G20 Presidency, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India has set up the G20 Tourism and SDGs Dashboard in partnership with United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

An address from UNWTO stated that "G20 countries represent over 70% of

tourism worldwide. Their leadership in the transformation of the sector is decisive. The G20 Tourism and SDGs Dashboard is a concrete outcome of the G20 Tourism Working Group and a reference tool for all. UNWTO is very happy to have joined hands with the Ministry of Tourism of India to make this possible."

In his address Reddy shed light on the significance of this initiative. The Minister highlighted that the G20 Tourism and SDG Dashboard is a testament to our nation's digital strides and serves as a beacon of knowledge for all the public and private stakeholders globally. It offers a wealth of knowledge and showcases best practices, all aimed at steering the tourism industry towards greater sustainability, resilience, and inclusivity.

Minister of State for Tourism and Ports, Shipping, and Waterways of India, Shripad Yesso Naik, during his address, stated that the G20 Tourism and SDG Dashboard is a pivotal step in the journey, that aligns perfectly with our commitment to harnessing the benefits of digitalization for the betterment of the tourism sector and achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030.

Rohan Khaunte, Tourism Minister, Goa, Atul Bagai, Country Head, India – United Nations Environment Programme, Secretary, Tourism, State Govt. of Gujarat and Jammu & Kashmir, and industry stakeholders also offered their insights into the global perspective on this initiative during the event. ♦

## Our investment in India is about driving outbound visitation: Merlin Entertainments

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

Merlin Entertainments Group, owner and operator of a wide range of tourist attractions in key global markets, has earmarked India and China as top source markets in the Asia region. The company is hopeful of reaching pre-Covid numbers of visitors, globally, by end of next year.

"Our investment in India is about driving outbound visitation as we are seeing positive growth in Singapore, Japan, England and Australia. We get about 6,000 Indians a week at the Madame Tussauds wax museum in

Singapore, where 80% of our total visitors are Indians. Our short-haul source markets will recover faster, but long-haul ones will take longer. By end of 2024, we will be back to 2019 guest figures," said Shannon Bailey, Regional Trade Sales Director – APAC, India, Merlin Entertainments Group, during her recent visit to Mumbai.

Merlin Entertainments Group works with DMCs and Inbound Tour Operators in India, and has seen an uptick in demand in MICE movement. "We appreciate and understand that the travel trade is a fragmented market. We participate in majority of roadshows and



tradeshows here in India."

The company sees maximum of its business from the markets of Mumbai and New Delhi. The London Eye, Madame Tussauds London and Legoland Florida are their top visited attractions. ♦

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# HDFC Bank, Marriott Bonvoy launch first co-brand hotel credit card for India

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Cashing on the upswing in travel and enhanced spending on the quality of experiences by the Indian traveller, HDFC Bank has partnered with Marriott Bonvoy to launch the first ever co-brand hotel credit card for the Indian market.

This is also the first such offering for the Indian market at a time when Marriott is one of the largest hotel chains in India with 145 hotels across 41 cities offering 16 brands and on the cusp of unveiling its 17th brand in India. This product is launched in collaboration with global payment solutions provider, Diner's Club.

Primarily this credit card, is targetted at leisure travellers in India, looking for exceptional luxury experiences, and according to Parag Rao, Country Head – Payments Business, Consumer Finance, Technology and Digital Banking, HDFC Bank, this card is a premium hospitality offering for exceptional stays, and a large portion of this is for personal stay and spend. He said, "The recent merger of



HDFC with HDFC Bank has brought together in excess of 100 million customers under our belt, with only 18 million credit card users in India. This clearly shows the scope of growth that we have together, and these are exciting times." He went on to say that this card offering is being extended to all the existing Bonvoy members.

Ranju Alex, Area VP, South Asia, Marriott International, said that they are betting on

their large portfolio of hotels in India across various brand categories and price points for this proposition. "It is a milestone to be launching this hospitality co-brand credit card since Marriott itself has 186 million members globally, so this is the power of our partnership. This is the right time to introduce this card to the world with great service, and amalgamation of innovation and customer-centricity." ♦

## Go City re-appoints Global Destinations as its India Representative

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Go City® (formerly Leisure Pass Group), the world's largest attraction pass business, re-establishes its presence in India through Global Destinations. Speaking on the development, Dan Penner, Senior Commercial Director – APAC, Go City®, said, "Go City® is delighted to re-appoint Global

**Go City**



Destinations as our representation company in India."

Throwing light about the APAC & Indian market, Penner said that given the importance of Asia Pacific, over the last few years Go City® has invested heavily

in building a presence in the region. "We are seeing India emerge as a very strong market and our passes are well received by trade partners and consumers. We have seen a huge increase in outbound travel from India this year, with most purchases

to London, Singapore, Dubai and Paris. Our expectation is that New York and the rest of the US will return significantly next year," he said.

He also said that in 2025, India is expected to hit 29 million outbound travellers which accounts for 6% of the urban population. "We believe by appointing Global Destinations we will be in the best position to capture this market," said Penner.

Pranav Kapadia, Founder, Global Destinations, said, "We are excited that Go City® has recognised the huge potential in outbound travel from India and to represent Go City® once again. Post Covid, India has become one of the fastest growing outbound markets, hence now is the perfect time for Go City® to re-establish its presence in India." ♦

## The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group appoints Rajan Kalra as Head of Sales (MICE) for Mumbai region

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group has appointed Rajan Kalra as the Head of Sales (MICE) for the Mumbai region. With an impressive career spanning over 17 years, Kalra will assume responsibility for the development and



execution of comprehensive sales strategies aimed at enhancing revenue, increasing visibility, and elevating the overall perception of the esteemed Lalit Hotels brand.

In his new role, he will spearhead sales initiatives within the Mumbai region, driving substantial revenue growth across The Lalit Hotels portfolio. His extensive background in Sales and Marketing is underscored by a distinguished track record of consistently surpassing targets and forging robust client and partner relationships. ♦

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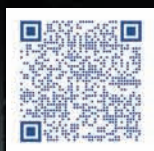


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# 'Sarawak expects to achieve 3.89mn visitors in 2023'

**Q Sarawak has made sustainability a cornerstone of its tourism strategy. What are steps have you taken in this direction?**

STB advocates the United Nation's Sustainability Development Goals as follows:

SDG 4 – Quality Education: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

SDG12 – Responsible Consumption and Production: Research and develop truly sustainable solutions to improve consumption and production

SDG 17- Partnerships for the Goal: Implement and stay on track towards achieving sustainable development

**Q Could you tell us more about your Rainforest World Music Festival? How does the festival help facilitate bringing more foreign tourists to Sarawak?**

The RWMF has been an iconic state event anticipated by many due to its unique blend of traditional and contemporary world music. Festival goers flock from nationally and internationally to immerse themselves in these experiences combining cultural diversity, music appreciation, sustainable practices, and an engaging atmosphere. In addition to that, the festival also empowers the local economy while promoting cross-cultural understanding. Local tour operators and travel agencies often create special packages for the festival goers that combine the festival experience with other attractions in Sarawak. This makes it easier for tourists especially international tourists to plan their trips and invites them to discover more in Sarawak ensuring they make the most out of their stay

**Q Post-pandemic, the first half of 2023 saw a surge in foreign visitors, with the total visitor count reaching 1.6 million by May. What would be the expected figure by the end of 2023?**

During the period Jan- July 2023, Sarawak received a total of 2.2mil (2,269,855) visitors with a growth rate (GR) of +222.5% as compared to the same period in 2022 (703,891 visitors). The Last 7 months (Jan-July 2023) visitor arrival data showed foreign visitor arrivals were 1.2 million and total domestic was 1.02 million. When comparing with the 2023 VA to the pre-pandemic level i.e., 2019 levels Sarawak's recovery rate is 88.1%. The current VA to Sarawak showed that the state will achieve a total of 3.89 million visitors in 2023.

**Q With your post-covid strategy, Sarawak aims to be Asia's premier destination for Eco-tourism by 2030. What is your roadmap for this?**

Post Covid-19 Development Strategy 2030



The Malaysian state of Sarawak has made sustainability a key area of its tourism development strategy. In order to educate the travel trade in the Indian market, Tourism Malaysia in association with TravelBiz Monitor has launched the Malaysia Master Specialist e-learning programme, and Sarawak is one of the featured states.

(PCDS 2030)

The Sarawak government has set in motion the Post Covid-19 Development Strategy 2030 (PCDS 2030), and the Sarawak Tourism Master Plan 2035 prioritising ecotourism, community-based tourism, and eco-community hosts as strategic focal points in its roadmap to make Sarawak a leading ecotourism destination.

Under PCDS 2030, ecotourism has been identified as the strategic focus under the Tourism Sector Aspiration. The Sarawak Government recognises how ecotourism is a positive force for conservation and development that is economically and ecologically sustainable around the world. Among those KPIs relevant to ecotourism are to increase Community-Based Tourism which includes expanding the number of homestay clusters as well as enriching the monthly household incomes of homestay operators; as well as build eco-community hosts, among others.

In terms of inspiring local tourism stakeholders to adopt a sustainability mindset and practices and developing effective strategies and innovations that will benefit the ecosystem as a whole, the Ministry of Tourism, Creative Industry and Performing Arts (MTCPI) Sarawak have conducted a Design Thinking for Responsible Tourism for the 12 Divisional Tourism Task Groups (DTTG) and the local communities in Sarawak.

3rd Sarawak Tourism Master Plan 2021-2035  
The Third Sarawak Tourism Master Plan 2021-2035 is to support the Post COVID-19

Development Strategy (PCDS) 2030 for the tourism sector.

The plan aims to increase the number of visitors to Sarawak from a baseline of 4.6 million visitors and RM11.6 billion in tourism receipts in 2019 to 12.7 million visitors contributing to RM50 billion in economic returns by 2035.

**Q Which are some of the traveler segments that Sarawak Tourism Board (STB) is targeting in India?**

- Free and Independent Travelers
- Leisure travelers
- MICE
- Education
- Experiential travelers

**Q The Indian market offers huge potential to every tourism board, keeping this in mind, does STB have any specific strategy for this market?**

STB developed 5 strategies for penetrating Indian market

**Strategy 1: Build a destination foundation and enhance the visibility of Sarawak**

- Increase awareness about "Sarawak" in the Indian market through Sarawak tourism product updates via online and offline platforms in strategic locations in India.
- digital promotion, storytelling and B2B sessions.

**Strategy 2: OTA Collaboration**

- OTA collaboration with the leading OTAs in India such as
- Make my trip
- Yathra.com
- GoIbibo
- Booking.com
- Agoda.com
- Cleartrip

**Strategy 3: Be Ready: Destination Readiness**

- To give awareness to Sarawak travel agents and tour operators, the accommodation sector & restaurants "HOW TO CATER INDIAN VISITORS"
- Design tour packages based on the Indian outbound travelers' product demands

**Strategy 4: Direct-to-Consumer Approach**

- B2C sessions based on the strategic locations in South India in partnership with airlines/ MATTA/ TM
- Tourism product updates in higher education institutions,
- Specific focus on Tier 2 locations near the metropolitan cities.
- Strategy 5: Be Social – Choose the right platform and set up a strategy for each platform
- Digital penetration through the most used social media platforms in India
- Instagram, FB , Twitter, LinkedIn and Pinterest ♦





# Explore New Orleans: A Melting Pot of Culture, Architecture, and People

**N**estled in the heart of Louisiana in the Southern United States, New Orleans is a captivating destination weaving Spanish, French, African, and Caribbean influences. It's a place where history, culture, and modern energy come together. Whether you're a history buff, a foodie, a music enthusiast, or an avid traveler, New Orleans has something for everyone.

New Orleans is synonymous with Southern hospitality. The locals are known for their welcoming nature and are eager to share their city's rich history and vibrant culture. Embark on a journey through a multicultural wonderland where music reverberates through the streets, festivals celebrate life's joys, and cuisine is an art form. It's a city that boasts Creole and Cajun influences, resulting in a culinary tapestry that will tantalize your taste buds. Every bite tells a story, from beignets at Café du Monde to gumbo and jambalaya.

## Fusion of Vibrant Cultures and Captivating Attractions

Culture is the lifeline of New Orleans. Music isn't just an art form here; it's a way of life. On any given day, the city beats to live performances that span jazz, blues, and everything in between.



New Orleans is also a city of festivals, where celebrations seem to happen around every corner. Immerse yourself in the colors, rhythms, and spirit of events like Mardi Gras, the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, and the French Quarter Festival.

## A Glimpse into the Past: Diverse, Distinct and Dynamic Neighborhoods

For the history enthusiast, New Orleans was founded in 1718 and is a treasure trove waiting to be explored. Wander through art galleries and antique shops and immerse yourself in captivating narratives. Stroll through the cobblestone streets and gaze upon an elegant architecture that tells tales of the city's past.

New Orleans comprises various neighborhoods, each possessing a unique identity and allure, making it an essential destination for visitors.

- **French Quarter:** The beating heart of New Orleans, the French Quarter is a captivating blend of history, entertainment, and stunning architecture. Roam the cobbled streets to find the majestic St. Louis Cathedral, the soul-stirring Jackson Square, and the lively French Market where culture and commerce converge.



- **Central Business District:** A dynamic epicenter of New Orleans' economic pulse, the Central Business District buzzes with a mix of professional style and vibrant nightlife.
- **Warehouse District:** An urban oasis, the Warehouse District seamlessly blends art, culture, and cuisine. Galleries and museums dot the landscape, offering a feast for the eyes, while the culinary scene is a feast for the taste buds, making this district a true delight for the senses.
- **Uptown and Garden District:** Embark on a journey through time Uptown and in the Garden District, where grand mansions exude old-world charm and boutique shopping beckons with unique finds.
- **Marigny / Bywater:** Dive into a vibrant artistic enclave in the Marigny and Bywater, where creativity thrives and live music pulses through the air on Frenchmen Street. This neighborhood offers an immersive experience in the local arts scene.
- **Mid-City:** Mid-City boasts the serene beauty of City Park, a green oasis that houses the New Orleans Museum of Art and provides a tranquil escape. Above-ground cemeteries stand as testaments to the city's unique burial traditions.

Visit the website at [www.neworleans.com](http://www.neworleans.com) to plan your itinerary, discover hidden gems, and immerse yourself in the wholesome energy that defines this enchanting city. ♦







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## WHAT AFTER CHANDRU?

*There is perfect logic in any astronomic leap of ideas to milk the tourism moolah.*

With the success of Mission Chandrayan 3, there is a scurry of different categories of people eager to give their stance about it.

From TV commentators and some well-meaning intellectuals who always cited problems in our backyard to scoff at moon missions, right down to youtubers with a messianic zeal to register their two-bit – everyone has an opinion.

No wonder tourism pundits will not be left behind. There have been suggestions to look seriously at developing space tourism to rake in the forex. This is no tongue-in-cheek suggestion but a serious proposal floating around that India must capitalize on this market.

I totally am for never leaving any pebble in the same position until we unearth another golden fleece that will make our day (and life).

We understand that the global space tourism market revenue is expected to reach US\$ 678.3 million before Christmas. It will also show an almost 40 percent rise to hover around almost 14k (in millions) of USD within the next decade.

The 'catching up with the Khannas' syndrome, we are told, will ensure more aspiring tourists from around the world, who will rush for tickets to enjoy weightlessness in space.

What is most interesting is that there are murmurs that our own space agency ISRO is reportedly already working to develop space tourism capabilities by itself. The news is that the space body is seeking involvement of private sector as well towards that end.

We had heard of local jeep tours to Pokharan desert by enthusiasts who were keen to see the spot where India tested its nuclear capabilities. This curiosity capitalization is probably all set to be milked more efficiently in days to come.

The Andhra Pradesh road transport authorities did carry busloads of bright-eyed students on special tours to witness the lift-off of Chandrayaan 3 from Sriharikota in Nellore district, combining it with visits to other spots in the vicinity offering wildlife and religious tourism. And ISRO welcomed those tours.

Where's the harm in dreaming and preparing for distant pastures, however astronomical? Well done, Chandru!

Anurag Yadav  
Industry Expert

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

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

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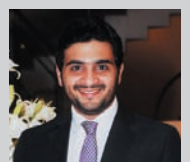
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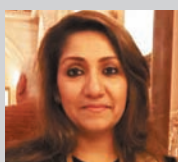
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# 'Perlis has the potential to become one of Malaysia's top ecotourism destinations'

## Q How are you positioning Perlis in the Indian market?

Perlis is ideal for visitors and tourists who want to experience a quiet lifestyle and a relaxing vacation because it is rich in nature. With a rustic atmosphere in the beauty of forests and caves or green rice fields, it can be an attraction for local and foreign tourists. Therefore, Perlis really has the potential to become one of the ecotourism destinations in Malaysia.

Perlis is a popular destination for travellers seeking nature eco-adventure and clean environment landscapes. Perlis has the potential to become one of the country's top ecotourism destinations in the future. Ecotourism is a rapidly growing sector of the tourism industry, and provides an authentic experience for travellers. Perlis has more ecotourism destinations and products that are available such as Wang Kelian, cave of darkness or Gua Kelam, Keteri hill or Bukit Keteri and Timah Tasoh lake or Tasik Timah Tasoh. Perlis is a hidden gem to be discovered and has a beautiful and unique scenery that can make Indian travelers stunning.

## Q Which are some of your key attractions that attract the Indian traveler?

One of the best natural attractions in Perlis is Wang Kelian View Point. It is a popular spot that offers panoramic view from the height of 304 meters above sea levels. It is a perfect place for natural beauty lover to get an experience on the carpet cloud phenomena and the best sunrise sights in Perlis. There, travellers can also find rows of vendors selling food and enjoy a meal while admiring the scenery. Besides that, there are various species of animals, primates and birds among them which is stump tailed macaque monkey or 'Beruk Kentoi', which is only found in the states of Perlis and Thailand.

Perlis also has its unique charm that can't be found anywhere and known for its beautiful limestone

The Malaysian state of Perlis is keen to position itself as an important ecotourism destination in the Indian market. In order to educate the travel trade in the Indian market, Tourism Malaysia in association with TravelBiz Monitor has launched the Malaysia Master Specialist e-learning programme, and Perlis is one of the featured states.



hills and endless miles of paddy fields. There is a 370-meter-long limestone cave known for its 'cave walk' in 'Gua Kelam', the most unique and adventures caves. It is popular among cavern explorers and commonly known as the 'cave of darkness'. In addition, the travelers may feel and hear the dripping sounds on the bats as well as the pouring water from the stalactites which makes us comforting. Perlis also have 'Gua Kelam 2' not far away from 'Gua Kelam 1' which is the longest limestone range in Malaysia and across to Thailand. Once upon a time, this area was famous for its tin mining activities and the travelers can see the remaining of mining activities in the cave while can see the uniqueness and beauty of limestone cave formations.

## Q Indians preferred travelling to Malaysia for over two decades now, how are you tapping the new-age adventure traveler here?

For the new-age adventure traveller, most suitable activities will be hiking or trekking. Perlis State Park is a perfect place for hiking lover because it is rich with collections of flora and fauna, caves, waterfalls, reptiles, mammals and birds. Travelers who love nature will be grateful for Perlis as hidden gem to be discovered. Perlis also introducing trail run in term of to create international sports. The

route involves the path of local fruit orchards, the Harumanis farm and the longest continuous limestone hill in Malaysia.

Besides that, Perlis will highlight for extreme sport activity which is motor cross and ATV adventure. Perlis offers various jungle trails for outdoor enthusiasts and all-terrain rider to attract various. In addition, Perlis has Keteri hill for rock climbing lover. This is the most challenging limestone hills to climb and after completed the climb, travellers will get to experience a spectacular view of the greenish paddy fields. Furthermore, Perlis can offer water sport activities such as kayaking along the river, boat race, climbing up slippery poles and fishing competitions. According to the geography of Perlis, these activities are suitable for traveler to participate with local people.

## Q Malaysia is home to a large population of Indian diaspora, in that context, what are some of the cultural offerings in the Perlis state you will like to highlight?

Perlis has its own cultural products in term of music, dance and theatre. For theatre, Perlis has unique storytelling experience of 'Awang Batil'. 'Awang Batil' is a traditional form of musical storytelling found in Perlis and ages hundred years old. It is a solo performer who

inherited many folk tales that are narrating his stories while playing the instrument and wear a masks. Some of his poems are sarcastic, alluring, teasing, and so on.

In addition, Perlis have a traditions musical dance performance which is 'Tarian Canggung' or Canggung dance. The Canggung dance is the identity dance of Perlis and it originates from a dance named Makyung Laut.

## Q How are you reaching out to the travel trade in Indian?

The rapid digital transformation in the tourism industry has created new roles and opportunities for travel professionals. With that, Indian can know about Perlis through Tourism Malaysia and social media influencer. Valuable information about Perlis can also be gained from searching in the internet whereby Indian might get an overview about Perlis prior travelling.

Cooperation is needed from Indian travel agent or formed an alliance and work together with Perlis travel agent by creating package that might include destination in Perlis as well as destination in India. This opportunity can provide an avenue for the prosperity of tourism industry for both Perlis and India, especially small state like Perlis in Malaysia. ♦



# Israel's longest suspension bridge opens in Jerusalem

TBM Staff | Mumbai

A new suspension bridge connects the Valley of Hinnom with Mount Zion. With a length of 202 meters, the bridge is the longest suspension bridge in Israel and is now passable. Pedestrians can use it free of charge daily from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Children up to the age of 14 must be accompanied by an adult. The bridge makes it possible to admire the natural beauty of the valley surrounding the Old City of Jerusalem from the south and to explore the holy sites via a new walking route.

The southern end of the bridge is near the farm in Gai Ben Hinnom, which is known for traditional local products such as olives, wine, and honey. Nearby tourist attractions include the City of David National Park, the Sultan's Pool and the restaurant and shopping area in and around the old station building HaTakhana HaRishona ('the first station'). Tourist attractions on the Mount Zion side include King David's Tomb, the Room of the Last Supper, and Dormitio Abbey. Pedestrians can continue into the Old City through the Zion Gate.

In the past 20 years, the Hinnom valley,



which was previously used as a rubbish dump, has been thoroughly renovated. The soil was remediated, and footpaths were laid. The valley offers hikers lush vegetation and, thanks to the new suspension bridge, a walking path to the Old City of Jerusalem.

The shekel 20 million project, about five million euros, was commissioned by the Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs and Heritage, the Ministry of Tourism, and the Jerusalem Municipality, in collaboration with the Jerusalem Development Authority and the Moriah Company. At 202 metres, the capital's new suspension bridge is the longest in the country. In addition to the bridge in Jerusalem,

there is an 80-meter-long suspension bridge in Nahal HaBesor and a 70-meter long one in Neshet.

Israel's Tourism Minister Haim Katz is pleased with the opening of the suspension bridge, "We built this bridge with its spectacular view to improve the tourist offer in this area. The summer vacation that has just started is a great opportunity for locals and visitors to get to know this special place. We will continue to invest in promoting Jerusalem as a tourist destination."

"The suspension bridge is an asset to tourism in the city," said Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Leon. "Jerusalem is the main city in Israel that continues to improve its tourist attractions and invests millions in the development of tourism in the city, for both domestic and foreign visitors. I invite everyone to visit Jerusalem."

Sammy Yahia Director of Tourism India and Philippines, said, "Israel is a country with a rich cultural, historical, and religious heritage, and is home to a variety of attractions that offer something for everyone. Whether you are interested in history, culture, nature, or just looking for a unique experience, Israel is a destination that is sure to deliver". ♦

## MEA introduces significant changes in the delivery of passports, visas and consular services

TBM Staff | Mumbai

In its move to mitigate predatory pricing, MEA tightens rules for selection of partners visas and consular service to the Indian diaspora and foreign visitors. Further, to make the service more robust, seamless and reliable, the MEA is committed to serve Indians migrating and foreigners visiting India with an overarching vision to strengthen India's Image and reputation. The Indian Missions of the MEA are the first touch points for any international traveller coming into India - the Indian Citizen or Person of Indian Origin (PIO) and Foreigners (traveling to India) residing overseas.

Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI, said, "Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has embarked on a transformational program to reform and strengthen its tendering and evaluation process in a holistic manner to select the right outsourced service providers. While the focus lies on L1 pricing, there is a strong emphasis on the four pillars of Quality



**JYOTI MAYAL**  
President, TAAI

Services, Sustainable and Viable Price, Data Protection & Security, and Ethical Practices & Integrity."

She also added, "It is important that the first impression of any individual travelling to India or having to work with any Indian Mission anywhere in the world needs to be impeccable, as the government is determined to work towards delivering the promise of New

India. Therefore, the MEA and its Missions as true representatives of the Indian government to the world must focus on offering superior, efficient, and cost-effective services as perhaps the first step in that direction."

Mayal concluded by stating, "India is positioning itself as a global leader in several sectors such as trade, cross border services, citizen services etc. As India marches towards a high momentum growth period, it will be critical to plan for factors that can impede progress and mitigate reputational and image risks for the Indian Government. Hence it became imperative for the government to focus on quality, reliability, and credibility of the service providers it engages with, to ensure services are delivered effectively, efficiently, and in line with established standards, else failure in service levels can erode confidence and trust in the government's capabilities, leading to public dissatisfaction. The focus on quality also indicates that public resources are utilised wisely and that citizens receive the best possible value for money." ♦



# Foreign tourist arrivals witnessed a twofold increase during the first half of 2023

TBM Staff | Mumbai

In the first half of CY23, Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) have surged by an impressive 106 percent, only 17 percent short of reaching the pre-Covid levels. This indicates that inbound tourism is steadily approaching its pre-Covid status. Experts are optimistic that FTAs will fully rebound to pre-Covid levels by the end of this year.

Yet, foreign exchange earnings (FEEs) are 46 per cent higher compared to last year and 12 per cent higher than pre-Covid levels, according to data from the Tourism Ministry.

FTAs during January-June 2023 were 43,80,239 as compared to 21,24,118 in January-June 2022 and 52,96,025 in January-June, 2019 registering a growth of 106.2 per cent and -17.3 per cent with respect to 2022 and 2019, respectively.

According to the data, majority of the travellers came from Bangladesh which took

23.5 per cent of the pie, followed by travellers from the United States at 18.1 per cent, 9.2 per cent travellers from the UK, 4.4 per cent from Canada and 4.2 per cent from Australia.

Over 46.51 per cent of the travellers from these countries visited India for leisure holiday



and recreational activities and about 25 per cent was the Indian diaspora. Business and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) was over 11 per cent and medical tourism was 6.5 per cent.

With India hosting the G20 summit this year, the country has not only seen an influx in travellers visiting India but has also brought thousands of delegates from across the globe.

'Bleisure' trips are a trend in 2023, where delegates can be seen extending their business trips for leisure purposes. This will also provide more opportunities to the hospitality industry.

The FEEs during June 2023 were INR 18,737 crore compared to INR 12,766 crore in June 2022 and INR 16,592 crore in June, 2019 registering a growth of 46.78 per cent and 12.93 per cent with respect to 2022 and 2019 respectively.

Tourism Ministry's data showed that over 41.8 per cent of the inbound travellers were women. RateGain's Adara data reflects an intriguing trend emerging as solo travellers dominate the booking landscape, underlining the preponderance of business-related visits. The surge in solo bookings suggests that most travellers are visiting Delhi for business purposes. ♦

## Fly Bharathi Aviations to raise funds, eyes stake in airlines

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Fly Bharathi Aviations and Aeronautics Pvt Ltd, which was incorporated as a company last month, said it has signed a preliminary pact with UK-based SRAM and MRAM Group for investments worth USD 1.8 billion.

In a statement, the company also claimed that it has acquired a majority stake in an existing airline, and was in talks to buy a majority stakes in one more Indian airline and two international airlines.

The company has already acquired a majority stake in an existing airline to start the operations, the statement claimed.

The company has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with SRAM and MRAM Group for investments to the tune of USD 1.8 billion. The funds will be utilised for the expansion of both domestic and international aviation business, the statement said.

According to the release, the company is promoted by Girish Shivshankar Pillai.

Data available with the corporate affairs ministry showed that the company's date of incorporation is August 19, 2023. It is registered under the Registrar of Companies (RoC), Chennai. ♦

## Mumbai International Festival scheduled to take place from January 20-28 next year

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The nine-day Mumbai International Festival will be held between January 20 -28 next year, the state government has decided after months of planning.

It will be held every year from 2024 onwards along the lines of the Dubai International Festival. It has also been decided to form a foundation that will plan the festival, decide its scope, destination, formulate guidelines and take all policy decisions among other things.

The Mumbai International Festival Foundation would be chaired by Anand Mahindra, business tycoon and chairperson of Mahindra and Mahindra Group and will have icons such as Sachin Tendulkar as its members.

The decision was taken in the state cabinet meeting. It would be the biggest festival ever with a vast cultural line-up, music fest, fun, food and fiesta in store for revellers. The festival has been planned to promote tourism and establish the city as an international tourist destination.

To make it unprecedented, the Directorate

of Tourism (DoT) is working to organise all popular festivals such as Kala Ghoda, Bandra Fair, Banganga, Worli Mahotsav and Mumbai Marathon during the same period. The foundation will also help to make it possible.

Other than Mahindra and Tendulkar, the foundation, which would be a 13-member body, will have the chief secretary as deputy chairperson.

The body will also have BMC commissioner, police commissioner, principal secretary tourism, Harsh Jain, CEO & co-founder of Dream11 & Dream Sports, Amitabh Chaudhry, managing director and chief executive officer, Axis Bank, Ronnie Screwvala, film producer, Neerja Birla, chairperson of Aditya Birla Education Trust (ABET), tourism director and others as directors.

The government has also appointed actor Sachin Pilgaonkar, filmmaker Madhur Bhandarkar and heads of hotel association, mall association, Credai and Indian association of tours operators as special invitees. The state has made a provision of INR 25 crore for marketing of the festival. ♦



# STIC Travel Group, Celebrating 5 Decades of Evolution

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

**E**stablished on September 14, 1973, as a Student Travel Information Centre, STIC Travel Group, has emerged into a company with focus on all aspects of the travel & tourism value chain. "Today, our journey encompasses partnerships with 12 international airlines, 4 cruise companies, and 3 car rental brands. Our portfolio has grown exponentially to encompass a spectrum of services in the MICE and Luxury sectors, solidifying our position as industry leaders," said Subhash Goyal, Chairman, STIC Travel Group.

Talking about his vision, he said, "Establishing STIC five decades ago has been an incredible odyssey, one that spans a lifetime in individual terms, but merely a chapter in the history of an organisation. Looking back, it's astonishing how this venture, rooted in my passion for travel and tourism, has flourished beyond my wildest dreams... Our journey is a testament to the power of vision, adaptability, and a passion that remains as fervent today as it was 50 years ago."

In 1970, as a student leader representing Delhi University Student's Union at a conference on Youth Unrest in Israel and London, I witnessed the freedom of travel enjoyed by students from around the world. This contrasted starkly with the limitations faced by students back home. The experience left an indelible mark, igniting a determination to enable Indian students to explore the world just as their global counterparts could."

This experience and the seed of entrepreneurship took root, when Goyal led his first student group expedition to Japan. "Not only did I traverse foreign lands at no cost, but I also managed to earn a considerable commission of INR 1,000/- per person – a substantial sum in 1970."

## Unifying Travel Business

The travel booking landscape was fragmented back then. Interestingly, the choice to establish a travel business wasn't a deliberate decision; it was more akin to destiny given Goyal's family background in book distribution and publishing. "In those initial years, our company garnered recognition



**Subhash Goyal**  
Chairman, STIC Travel Group

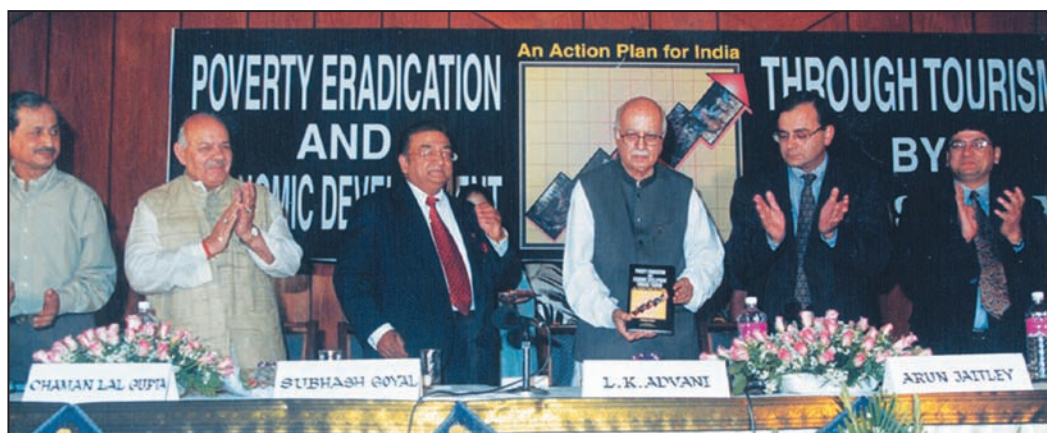
Ceylon (SriLankan Airlines) as a General Sales Agent. This made STIC pivot to a new business model altogether. "Our approach was not just to meet, but exceed airline expectations. This mindset helped us build a track record and other airlines soon sought our marketing and representation services."

Through these strategic steps, STIC Travel Group navigated from a singular focus on student travel to a comprehensive portfolio encompassing GSA representation, tours, etc.

The subsequent decades witnessed remarkable expansions. During the 70s and 80s, STIC introduced both outbound and inbound tour divisions, propelling it into a comprehensive tour operator role. With the advent of economic liberalisation in the 90s, STIC sensed the need to diversify our offerings. "In response, we ventured into the cruise marketing sector, rejuvenated our student and youth travel segment, and explored new verticals."

Over the last five decades, STIC has pioneered diverse travel-related ventures, catering to the ever-evolving needs of the Indian traveller. "Our journey began with the development of robust inbound and outbound tour divisions. From Nepal and Sri Lanka to captivating destinations such as Khajuraho, Kerala, and Kashmir, we ventured into unexplored territories. Expanding our horizons, we facilitated journeys to other markets like Africa, South America, and the Far East. Our travel offerings span the spectrum, encompassing everything from tours and MICE to cruises and expeditions."

STIC's growth can be attributed to the innate capacity to adapt. It consistently focused on pioneering niches that introduce fresh experiences or innovative products

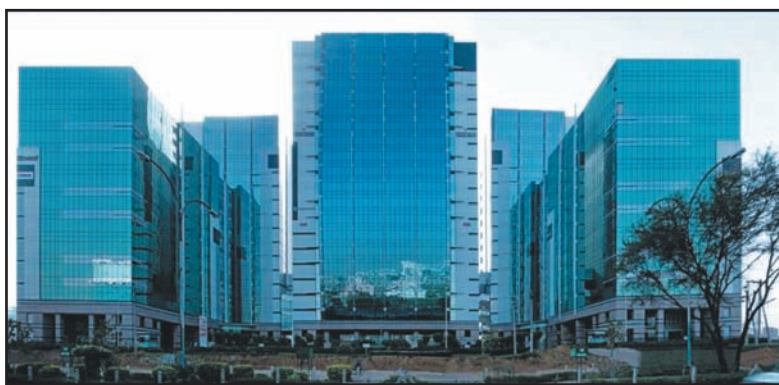


through efforts that resonated with the likes of renowned travel guides such as Lonely Planet and publications like 'India on Dollar 5 to 10 a Day'. An emblematic achievement was securing sole representation for the UNESCO-endorsed International Student ID Card, which we continue to uphold.

As our network expanded, we noticed a shift in clientele. Our once-student travellers had now become leading professionals from the business and government sectors. Their loyalty drove the creation of 'STIC Travels Pvt. Ltd.', catering specifically to non-student and business travellers."

The first step in STIC's evolution was grabbing the opportunity to represent Air





to the market. "This strategy has steered us toward specialisation, a trait that sets us apart. The ability to discern and respond to changing traveller preferences has driven us to establish ourselves as pioneers in numerous travel sectors."

In 2021, Goyal appointed his daughter, Isha, as CEO and Executive Director of STIC Travel. She formally joined the company in 2004 after completing her MBA. "As we celebrate our company's 50th anniversary, I believe that our greatest learning in this journey so far, lies in understanding that success is transient and learning is perpetual. Looking forward to the next 20 years, our commitment to innovation and excellence has been the foundation of our success, and it will continue to guide us. Over

the next two decades, our vision is to not only maintain our leadership in the industry but also to set new standards of excellence. We're dedicated to creating a positive impact on our customers, employees, and the communities we serve," she said.

### Isha lists key pillars for STIC's vision:

**1. Innovation:** STIC will continue to push the boundaries of what's possible, chasing and bringing new brands and travel experiences to the Indian audience.

**2. Global Reach:** In the next two decades, the aim to expand reach further, exploring new markets and partnerships to bring our offerings to even more customers worldwide.

**3. Talent Development:** Our people are our greatest asset. As we look ahead, we're committed to fostering a culture of continuous learning and growth. We want to attract and retain top talent by providing opportunities for development and advancement within our organisation.

**4. Customer-Centric Approach:** Our customers have been the driving force behind our success. In the coming years, we'll deepen our understanding of their evolving needs and deliver solutions that exceed their expectations, providing exceptional value and service.

**5. Digital Transformation:** Embracing the digital age is paramount. We'll leverage technology to enhance our operations, improve customer experiences, and drive efficiency across the board.

**6. Partnerships:** Collaboration will be a cornerstone of our journey. We'll actively seek out partnerships with like-minded organizations, startups, and industry leaders to leverage collective expertise for mutual growth.

At STIC, the strategic integration of technology is fundamental to its continued success and expansion. Isha said, "We've woven technology into the very fabric of our operations, employing it to enhance every facet of our business. From the moment a customer engages with us to the final service delivery, technology is a guiding force. Our CRM systems leverage data analytics to provide us with deep insights into customer preferences, enabling us to tailor our services to their specific needs. This personalised approach



**Isha Goyal**  
CEO & Executive Director  
STIC Travel Group

not only enhances customer satisfaction but also fosters lasting relationships.

Moreover, STIC is investing significantly in data analytics and artificial intelligence. "These technologies allow us to forecast travel trends, optimise pricing strategies, and enhance overall decision-making. This, in turn, empowers us to stay ahead of the curve and offer cutting-edge services that resonate with the evolving needs of modern travellers," she said.

While airlines have been a cornerstone of its business, STIC's vision extends well beyond. One of our major areas of focus lies in growing the cruise vertical. "We recognise the growing interest in cruise travel and are committed to becoming a leading conduit between exceptional cruise experiences and eager travellers. Our aim is to providing industry with an array of cruise options that cater to different preferences and destinations."

Talking about expansion via M&As, Isha said, "We are continually evaluating opportunities to enhance our business and explore avenues for growth. Our strategic decisions are rooted in a comprehensive analysis of market dynamics, customer needs, and industry trends. Our primary focus is to ensure that any step we take aligns seamlessly with our long-standing commitment to excellence and value creation. As we move forward, we remain open to avenues that contribute positively to our journey while maintaining our steadfast dedication to our mission and values." ♦



# Istanbul and Mumbai: A Tale of Two Iconic Metropolises

By Cüneyt Yavuzcan, Consul General of Türkiye in Mumbai

As our aircraft takes flight, we invite you to embark on a captivating journey to two of the world's most dynamic cities: Istanbul and Mumbai. These bustling metropolises, each steeped in history and culture, present a unique blend of tradition



and modernity. From the vibrant markets to ancient landmarks, and from delectable cuisine to warm hospitality, Istanbul and Mumbai offer an unforgettable experience that will leave a lasting impression. Let's explore the tales of these two iconic cities that have stood the test of time.

## Istanbul: Where East Meets West

Nestled at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Istanbul stands as a living testament to its rich past. The city's architecture reflects its diverse heritage, with the awe-inspiring Ayasofya Camii (Hagia Sophia Mosque) and the stunning Mavi Cami (Blue Mosque) showcasing the grandeur of its history. As you stroll through the cobble streets of the historic Sultanahmet district, the aromatic spices and colorful textiles of the Grand Bazaar will entice your senses, providing an authentic taste of Turkish culture.

## Mumbai: The City of Dreams

Welcoming you with open arms, Mumbai, the heart of India's film industry, is a city that never sleeps. Formerly known as Bombay, Mumbai's fast-paced life is a reflection of its status as the financial and entertainment capital of India. The iconic Gateway of India, overlooking the Arabian Sea, and the Victorian architecture of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus are emblematic of the city's colonial past. Mumbai's street food scene is legendary, offering tantalizing delights like vada pav and pav bhaji that will leave you craving for more.

## Cultural Kaleidoscope

Both Istanbul and Mumbai are melting pots of cultures, where traditions from different eras and civilizations converge harmoniously. Istanbul's Topkapı Sarayı (Topkapi Palace) and Mumbai's Elephanta Caves provide a glimpse into the historical riches that have shaped these cities. While Istanbul boasts traditional Turkish folk dances and mesmerizing Sufi whirling dervishes, Mumbai's Bollywood dance forms and vibrant festivals showcase the diversity and enthusiasm of its people.

## Bosphorus and Marine Drive: Splendors of the Waters

The Bosphorus strait in Istanbul and Mumbai's Marine Drive both hold significant importance in these cities. Istanbul's Bosphorus is a natural wonder that connects the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara, adorned with elegant palaces

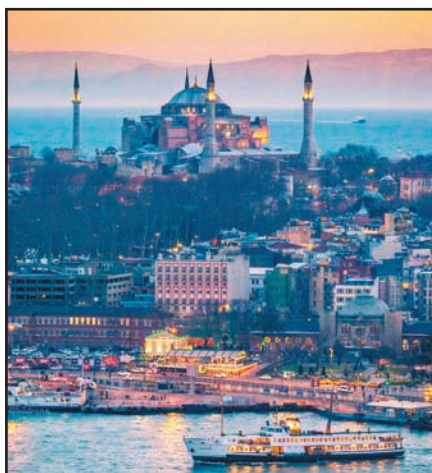
and beautiful waterfront mansions. The iconic Marine Drive of Mumbai, also known as the Queen's Necklace, offers stunning views of the Arabian Sea and the city's skyline, making it an ideal spot for a leisurely evening stroll.

## Hospitality and Warmth

The warm hospitality of both Istanbul and Mumbai is truly unmatched. In Istanbul, you'll be greeted with "Merhaba," a heartfelt Turkish welcome, while Mumbai's locals extend their warm "Namaste" to visitors. The genuine friendliness and helpful nature of the people in these cities create an atmosphere of comfort and a sense of belonging.

As our journey comes to an end, we hope you have been captivated by the enchanting tales of Istanbul and Mumbai. Both cities stand as proud symbols of their nations' history, culture, and aspirations. Istanbul's bridges between continents and Mumbai's city of dreams evoke a spirit of adventure and possibility. Whether you immerse yourself in the ancient wonders of Istanbul or embrace the vibrant spirit of Mumbai, these cities promise an unforgettable experience that will leave you yearning to return. So, as we prepare for landing, we invite you to explore the magic of Istanbul and Mumbai, two iconic metropolises that epitomize the beauty of human civilization. ♦

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






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## ‘Sydney and NSW offer myriad opportunities for different segments of travellers’

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

**F**or seasoned travel marketer, Samar Chokshi, life has come a full circle with his latest position as Country Manager – India for Destination New South Wales (DNSW).

Through his previous stints at Singapore Tourism Board and Tourism Australia, a combined experience of over 18 years, Chokshi comes prepared with the skills required for this job, and complete understanding to promoting an established tourism destination in a market as complex as India, and the opportunities that it entails, and the challenges that come with it.

Talking about Sydney, the most popular and visited destination in Australia, he said, “I have added layers to my experience along with the current challenge to promote Sydney and NSW. Sydney is the largest and oldest city to be developed in Australia. It has heritage, it has character, the Royal National Park, the Hunter Valley, and is the home of lots of firsts. It is a popular incentives destination as many corporate offices have their base in Sydney. Events and festivals are a huge draw in Sydney, and the city has been ranked as the premiere state for festivals for tenth year in running.”

What works for Chokshi is the know-how about Sydney and NSW as well the mind-set of the new-age Indian traveller, keen to explore, indulge and soak in newer experiences at their own space. “The kind of variety that Sydney and NSW offer is profound and caters to varied segment of travellers. A lot has changed on the ground post Covid with new hotel developments, newer restaurants and activity-based travel



**Samar Chokshi**  
Country Manager - India  
DNSW

in Sydney and surroundings, providing a wholesome experience.”

The massive growth in aviation capacity to Australia is a clear indication of the demand for Down Under, and will surely aid traveller numbers to Sydney from India. “Air India operates three weekly flights from Mumbai, and Qantas has increased frequency from Bengaluru. IndiGo via code-share with Qantas, Singapore Airlines, Scoot, and VietJet all are offering enhanced flight choices to travel to Sydney,” Chokshi said.

What works for Sydney is its food & wine,

nature-based activities, adventure offerings and the Sydney Harbour Bridge is a big draw. “It is a conscious effort to promote heritage walks, coffee culture tours, indigenous tours, coastal walks from Bondi Beach to Bronte, helicopter rides, seaplane rides, etc. Post covid, Business Events has been the fastest growing segments for us. We have had large groups of 650-700 pax visiting Sydney, and smaller tours are in the pipeline. It is pretty much year round business, with 30-40% increase in spend,” he said.

The three-year multiple-entry visa for Australia has been a standard product, and now under a new agreement, business travellers can get five-year multiple entry visa. “The visa turnaround time has been an advantage for Australia to capitalise on the demand, and fulfil the need.” Indian travellers stay on an average four nights in Sydney, and spend around AUD 400-500 per night. “There has been a growing demand for self-drive holidays, as well as chauffeur driven travel to explore the destination at one’s own pace. India is the fourth largest source market for us, and has seen a 96% recovery in pre-Covid numbers until May this year.”

Enlisting his favourite activities in Australia, Chokshi says that the food & wine offering in the nation Down Under is top notch, and the kind of permutations and combinations available are unmatched in the world. “Whether it is Sydney or the Hunter Valley, food & wine tops my list of things to do in Australia. While enjoying water-based activities or undertaking day excursions, one can soak in the local ingredients and the natural produce, a perfect way to unwind and enjoy an authentic Australian holiday.” ♦

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# Qatar National Library: Where Knowledge, Culture and Innovation Converge

TBM Staff | Mumbai

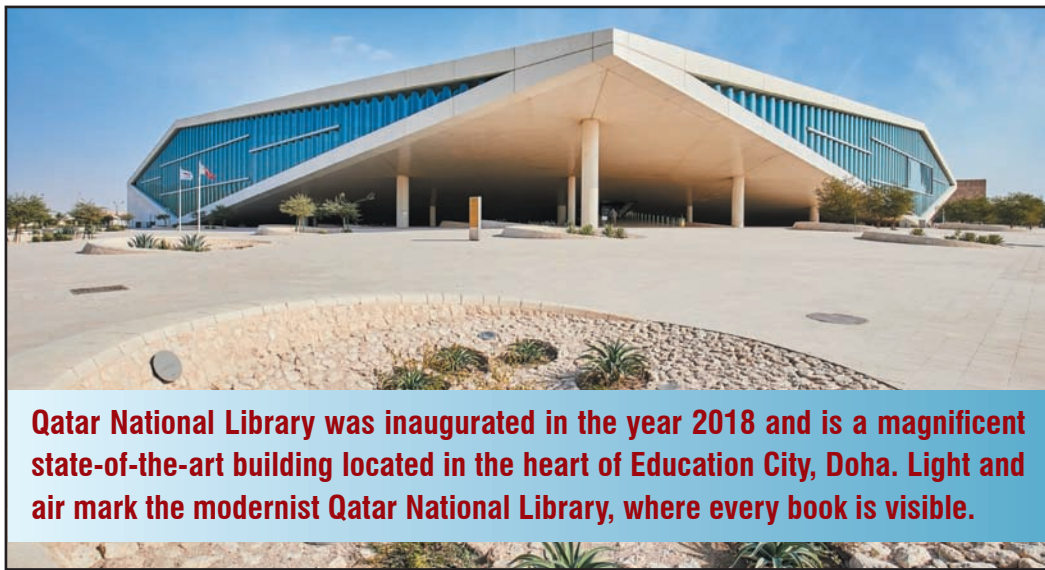
**Q**atar National Library (QNL) located in Doha provides an environment that fosters learning, play, and innovation. Tools and equipment are provided at the library's Innovation Stations, catering to a dizzying

one should visit the Qatar National Library, here's what one can expect as a visitor.

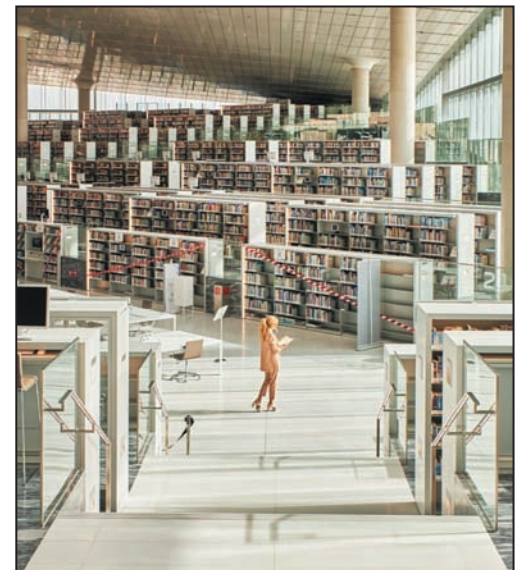
**Architectural Marvel:** The Qatar National Library is an architectural masterpiece designed by renowned architect Rem Koolhaas. The building itself is a stunning combination of modern design and traditional Islamic architecture, making it a visually captivating

collection, the library provides access to a vast array of digital resources, including e-books, online journals, databases, and multimedia materials. This digital library ensures that visitors have access to a wealth of knowledge and information, even beyond the physical premises.

**Community Engagement:** The Qatar



**Qatar National Library was inaugurated in the year 2018 and is a magnificent state-of-the-art building located in the heart of Education City, Doha. Light and air mark the modernist Qatar National Library, where every book is visible.**



array of activities and interests - videography, photography, design, sound editing, and 3D printing. Designed by Rem Koolhaas, the diamond-shaped exterior of the library belies its spacious interior, which prioritizes light and visibility. The library mimics two pieces of paper that are pulled apart and folded diagonally at the corners to create a shell-like structure surrounding the open-plan interior. The primary internal space is meant to let in just the right amount of light while maintaining a link to the outside world. Natural light flows through the glass façade, making it ideal for reading and socializing. The bookshelves themselves are an integral part of the 45,000 sq meter building, rising out of the floor and blending into the architecture.

No doubt, the library is a treasure trove of information - from the region's culture and history to cutting-edge digitisation technology. Moreover, the building doesn't look like a traditional one, rather it's an architectural marvel.

The QNL has more than one million books. Readers can choose to relax anywhere in the 45,000 square-metre seating area. And it has all the facilities one might expect from a library, including a café, children's section, and restaurant; what perhaps makes it most unique is the preservation and conservation department.

There are several compelling reasons why

destination.

**Vast Collection:** The library houses an extensive collection of books, manuscripts, periodicals, and multimedia materials in various languages, covering a wide range of subjects. Whether you are interested in literature, history, science, or art, you are likely to find something that piques your interest.

**Cultural Hub:** The library serves as a cultural hub, hosting numerous exhibitions, workshops, lectures, and events throughout the year. These activities provide opportunities to engage with Qatar's rich heritage, art, literature, and research, fostering intellectual and cultural exchange.

**State-of-the-Art Facilities:** The Qatar National Library features modern technology, comfortable reading spaces, study rooms, exhibition halls, a children's library, and a dedicated area for researchers. The state of the art facilities are designed to provide a conducive environment for learning, research, and exploration.

**Heritage and Special Collections:** The library boasts an exceptional collection of rare and valuable manuscripts, maps, photographs, and archival materials related to Qatar's history and heritage. These collections provide insights into the country's past and are of great significance for researchers, scholars, and history enthusiasts.

**Digital Resources:** In addition to its physical

National Library actively promotes community engagement and inclusivity. It offers various programs and services for all age groups, including educational activities for children, workshops for adults, and programs for individuals with special needs. It is a place where people from diverse backgrounds can come together to learn, share ideas, and connect.

Overall, the Qatar National Library is a place where knowledge, culture, and innovation converge.

The library has numerous facilities for individual and group collaboration, research, and study. These include - an assistive technology room including 16 computer stations with adjustable leveling, equipped with cutting-edge hardware and software technologies; a 200-seat special events area with lights, an LED screen, speakers, and noise-dampening curtains; A dedicated area for young adults; A 686-square-meter Children's Library; 4-room Innovation Station; 2 instruction rooms; A computer lab; 8 group study rooms; 28 individual study carrels; 3 media viewing rooms; 26 large interactive screens and 465 computers; A 120-seat auditorium

Whether you are a student, a researcher, a book lover, or simply curious about Qatar's rich heritage, a visit to the library is an enriching and rewarding experience. ♦





# Start-Up Forum

## Bringing Innovations to the Forefront

### Flyzy

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.

**Website –** <https://startupmentorboard.vgmrtechsolutions.com>

The Board is spearheaded by well-known thought leader Ashish Kumar, who is also the Co-Chairman of FICCI Travel Technology Committee. It comprises Bharti Maan, who has led start-ups to scale rapidly; Patrick Richards, an experienced travel industry leader in the UK; Chetan Kapoor, an analyst with deep understanding of the travel and tourism business and trends; Kartik Sharma, an artificial intelligence practitioner; Karthik Venkataraman, a digital transformation & an e-commerce visionary; Jure Bratkic, who led innovative solutions in the USA and Kyasha Bhoola, with expertise and advanced insight into the travel industry across Africa.

**\*One can register for the SMB Program at**

<https://startupmentorboard.vgmrtechsolutions.com/form.html>

**Startup Name:** Flyzy

**Core Team:** 1. Deepak Meena, CEO , 2. Arjit Singh, CMO, 3. Hansraj Patel, CTO

**Founding year:** 2021

**Company Website:** <https://flyzygo.com/>

**Description :** In the ever-evolving world of travel, innovative solutions are reshaping the industry, and one platform that is making significant waves is Flyzy. As a B2B travel distribution platform, Flyzy has emerged as a game-changer for travel agents, providing them with a seamless and cost-effective way to buy and sell travel inventory.

The most remarkable aspect of Flyzy is its commitment to empowering travel agents by offering a platform with just 1% platform fees, in stark contrast to the exorbitant 30% fees charged by other platforms. This competitive pricing model instantly captures the attention of travel professionals, enabling them to enhance their profit margins and reinvest in their business growth.

With over 100,000 units on boarded on their platform, Flyzy boasts an extensive and diverse inventory that caters to the varied needs of travel agents worldwide. From cozy boutique hotels to luxurious resorts, from adventurous travel experiences to relaxing getaways, Flyzy ensures a comprehensive range of options to delight even the most discerning travellers.

The platform's reach extends far beyond borders, as evidenced by its impressive track record of facilitating over 7,000 trips across four continents. Whether it's the pristine beaches of the Maldives, the enchanting landscapes of Europe, the cultural wonders of Asia, or the exotic allure of Africa, Flyzy opens the gateway to unforgettable travel experiences.

Flyzy's primary aim is to streamline the operations of travel agents, providing them with a user-friendly interface that simplifies the entire booking and management process. With advanced technology and intuitive tools at their disposal, travel agents can efficiently handle bookings, manage itineraries, and stay on top of their business, all in one centralized platform.

<https://youtu.be/6dRXTctlhx8>





# Train your brain!

## The *neuroplasticity* of travel!

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

**I**magine you're learning to ride a bicycle for the first time. Initially, you may struggle to maintain balance and coordination. Still, with practice, your brain starts creating new neural pathways dedicated to the skill of riding a bicycle. As you continue to practice, these connections strengthen, making the task easier and more automatic. This learning and improvement process is an outcome of your brain's neuroplasticity.

Neuroplasticity, or brain plasticity, is a remarkable essential brain function. The brain's ability to adapt, alter, and reorganise throughout life. This process comprises learning, experience, and environmental changes forming and pruning neuronal connections. Neuroplasticity is essential for cognitive development, memory, learning, and neurological healing. Neuroplasticity affects our daily life, personal growth, and cognition. Daily undertakings like learning a new recipe, playing a musical instrument, or using a new software programme demonstrate neuroplasticity. Each time we do these things, our brain makes or strengthens connections. Our brains are malleable during childhood and adolescence, allowing us to learn, speak, and develop talents. However, neuroplasticity persists into maturity. It allows our brains to adapt to problems and develop new answers.

Travelling is more than just seeing new locations and making memories; it drives personal and cognitive growth. Travel's impact on neuroplasticity—the brain's extraordinary ability to adapt and change—is fascinating. Travelling exposes our brains to new experiences and challenges, boosting neuroplasticity and changing how we think, learn, and perceive the world.

As we step foot in an unfamiliar place surrounded by unfamiliar sounds and symbols, our brain instantly faces the challenge of communication. The struggle to learn a new language is a quintessential part of the travel experience. Every attempt to learn basic phrases or interact with locals triggers the formation of new neural connections dedicated to language acquisition. With persistence and practice, these connections grow stronger, enabling us to navigate the

linguistic landscape of the new culture.

Travel also tests our spatial skills as we navigate unfamiliar cities and landmarks. Brain adaptability comes into play, creating spatial and cognitive maps to improve our spatial memory, helping us easily find our way. Spatial maps and cognitive maps are created, allowing us to easily find our way back to our accommodation or a specific destination, even in the most labyrinthine of locations.

Cultural immersion is another integral part of travel that shapes our brains. Engaging in different customs, traditions, and cuisines exposes our minds to diverse knowledge and experiences. As we partake in local festivals or try exotic foods, our brains assimilate these unique encounters, forging new neural connections associated with cultural understanding and empathy. The neural tapestry of our minds becomes interwoven with the colours of various cultures, enriching our perspectives and fostering a greater appreciation for the diversity of the human experience.

Travel opens the door to a world of novel experiences. Whether hiking through a lush forest, snorkelling in the ocean's depths, or marvelling at ancient ruins, our brains light up with excitement. Engaging in such diverse activities activates different brain regions, fostering neuroplasticity by expanding our repertoire of experiences and memories. Each new adventure becomes a brushstroke on the canvas of our minds, contributing to the masterpiece of our individual stories.

Adaptability is crucial during travel when facing unexpected challenges like flight delays which may force us to adapt quickly to new circumstances. In such moments of unpredictability, our brains activate their plasticity, allowing us to come up with alternative plans and solutions. Our neuroplasticity empowers us to devise alternative solutions, increasing our creativity.

Moreover, travel breaks us free from the shackles of routine and comfort zones. The unfamiliarity of new surroundings triggers our brain's adaptability, promoting cognitive flexibility and creativity. Whether trying exotic foods, attempting adventure sports,



*Dr Nimit Chowdhary is a Professor at the Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Jamia Millia Islamia. He has more than 29 years of academic experience, of which he has been a full professor for 16 years in India, China, and Mexico. In addition, he was a visiting faculty at Gotland University (Sweden), the University of Girona (Spain), IIM Sirmour, IIQM, and EDII. He is a recipient of many academic awards and recognitions. He has authored 20 books and more than 200 academic papers and chapters. He has travelled extensively to around 40 countries and almost all states within the country*

or engaging in spontaneous interactions with locals, our brains actively embrace these novel experiences, reinforcing neuroplasticity. The more we step out of our comfort zones, the more our brains become primed for innovation and open to the infinite possibilities life offers.

Travel encourages mindfulness and relaxation, enhancing focus and cognitive function. When we are present at the moment, free from the distractions of everyday life, our brain enters a state of heightened plasticity. As we negotiate randomness and unexpectedness during travel, our brain rewires and reorganises, leading to improved focus and mindfulness. As we let go of worries and immerse ourselves in the wonders of the world, our minds become more receptive to change and growth.

Travel is a transformative journey that goes far beyond merely exploring physical landscapes. This adventure shapes our brains, fostering neuroplasticity and enhancing our cognitive abilities.

So, let's travel! ♦

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



# VIDEC's India Air Travel Market Sizing & OTA Benchmarking Study, FY20-FY26

**TBM Staff | Mumbai**

**A**ir is the largest travel category, accounting for slightly less than half of the total India travel market or Rs.1,743 billion (\$22B)

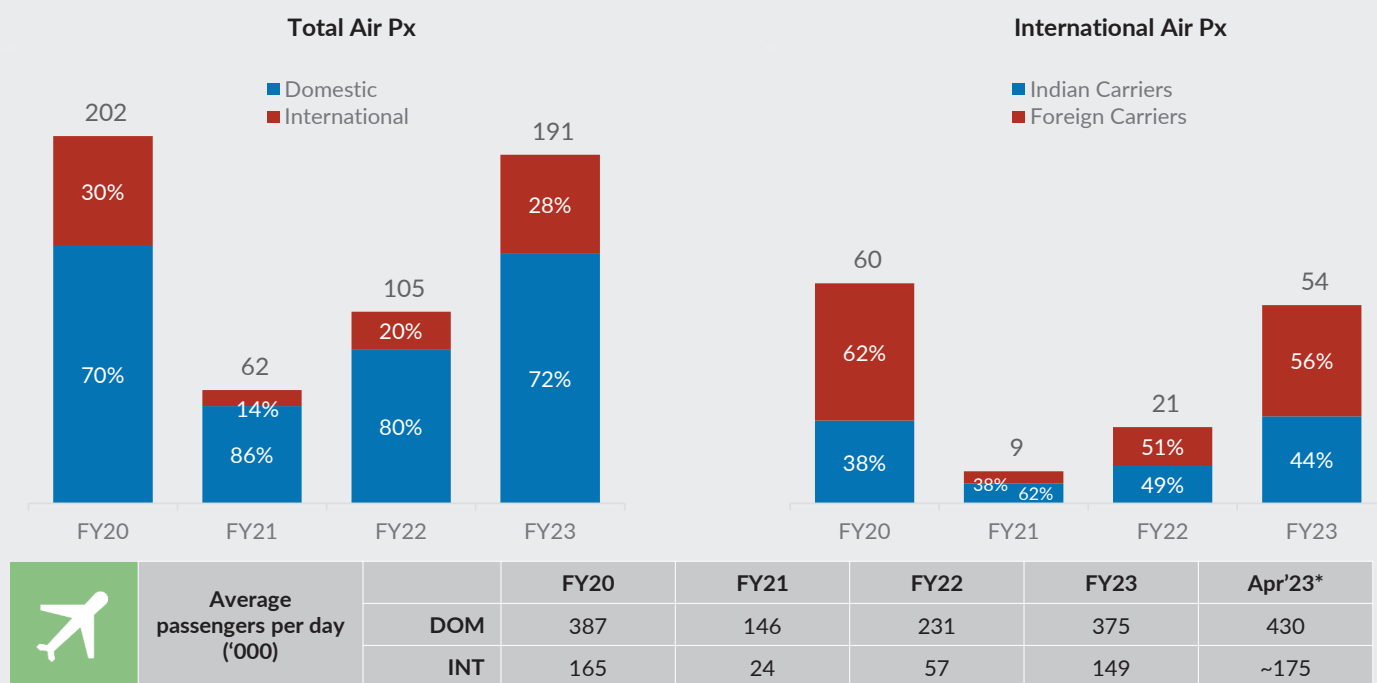
in FY23. The domestic air GBV is Rs.781 billion (\$9.8B) in FY23, 30% above its pre-pandemic levels. The growth is driven by a rise in average ticket prices (ATPs) despite domestic passenger traffic's recovery at 97%, just shy of 141 million passengers in FY20.

The international traffic accounted for 28% of the total flown passengers but contributed to 55% of the total air GBV (Rs.963 billion) in FY23.

Foreign carriers cornered a majority share in international airlift from India in FY23.

**Figure 1: India Total Flown Passengers (M), FY20-FY23**

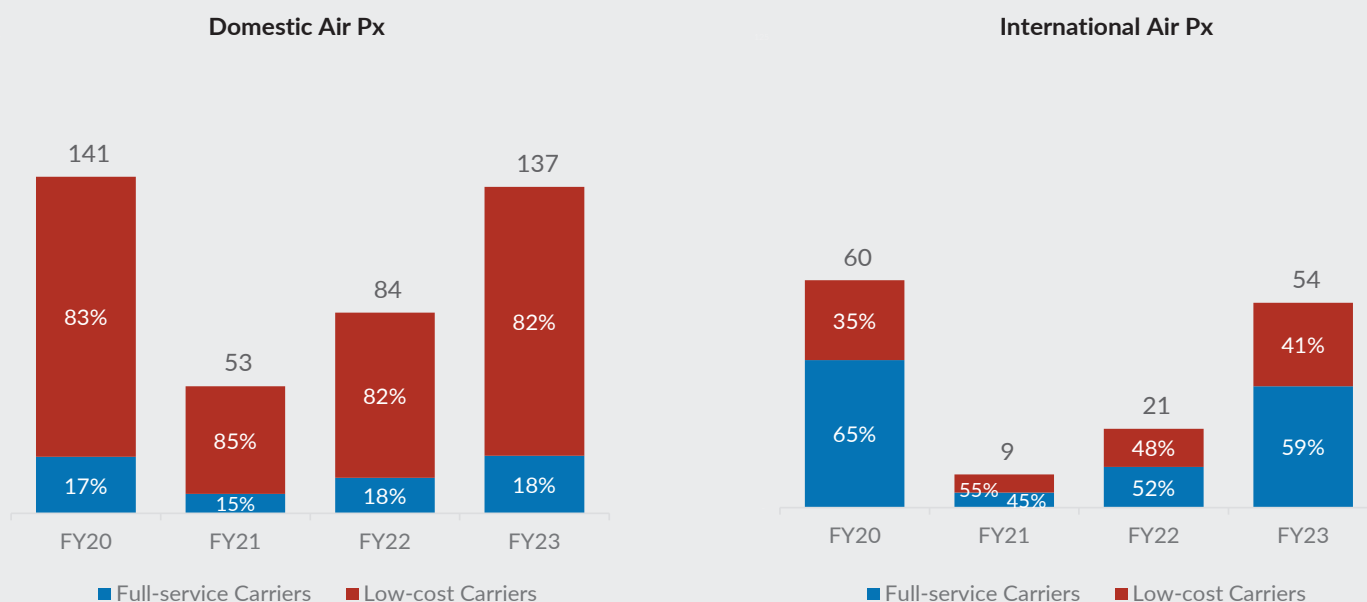
**videc**



\*Provisional figures  
Source: Directorate General of Civil Aviation, India; Ministry of Civil Aviation, GoI

**Figure 2: India Flown Passengers (M), Share by Airline Type, FY20-FY23**

**videc**



Source: Directorate General of Civil Aviation, India; VIDEC Consultants



However, the local carriers, aided by favourable government policies, have increased their share in international traffic from 38% in FY20 to 44% in FY23. Since the pandemic, the local carriers have enhanced operational efficiency to drive better yields through a variety of measures such as smart network planning and optimized dynamic pricing. Complex air products such as international travel, family, groups and corporate travel necessitates the role of travel agents, ergo international air is more than 75% offline as of FY23.

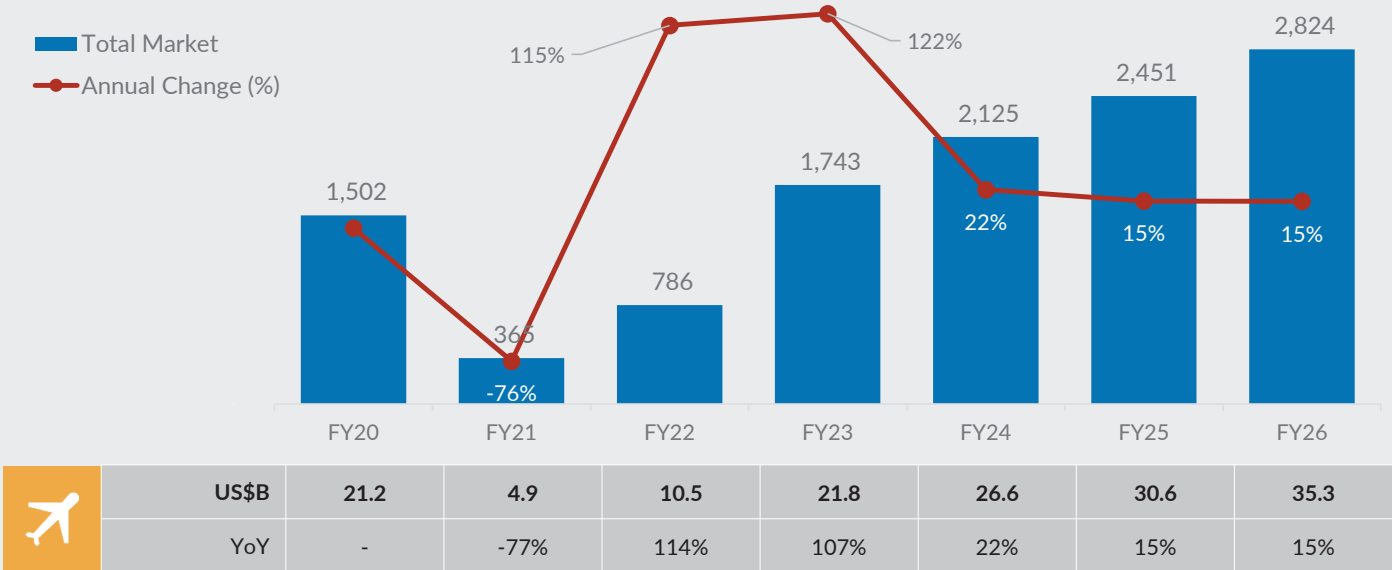
Air category continues to be the largest contributor to the GBV for most OTAs. The

OTA air GBV stood at ₹583 billion (\$7.3B) or 33% of the total air market in FY23. Widespread access to the Internet and a well adopted digital payment mechanism, coupled with increasing connectivity to non-metro cities and rising purchasing power has brought in a vast number of first-time flyers into the market. Those traditionally traveling via ground transport are steadily upgrading to flights, representing a huge opportunity for OTAs.

Virendra Jain, co-founder and CEO at VIDECON said, "The OTAs are notably credited for bringing the Indian air category

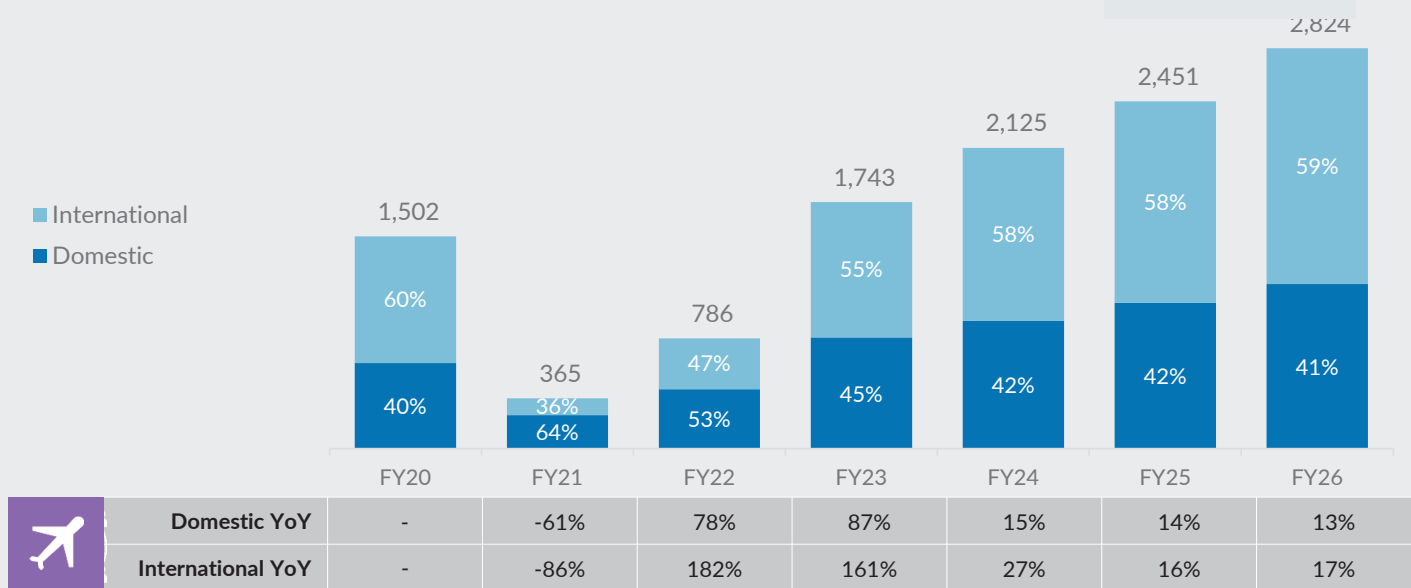
online. The domestic online market is highly penetrated at 67%, in stark contrast with the international segment at 25% in FY23. Together, the two biggest players - Indigo and Tata Group airlines, flew every four in five domestic passengers in FY23. The recovery and growth in international segment are going to spearhead the total air market CAGR for the next three fiscals. The journey of the Indian air travel market from 200 million to 500 million passengers and a fleet size of 700 to 1,500 planes will set the broad contours for growth in the next decade." ♦

Figure 3: India Total Air Market (₹B) and Annual Change (%), FY20-FY26



Note: Total air market includes passenger revenues of all local and international carriers operating to/from India. FY24-FY26 projected; with select projections for FY23. Refer methodology for more details.  
Source: VIDECON Consultants

Figure 4: India Air Market (₹B), Share by Destination (%), FY20-FY26



Note: Total air market includes passenger revenues of all local and international carriers operating to/from India. FY24-FY26 projected; with select projections for FY23. Refer methodology for more details.  
Source: VIDECON Consultants





## ‘The pandemic led to a remarkable increase in awareness about the North East’

The North East region of India has emerged as a must-do travel destination in the past couple of years, especially with a range of adventure activities available. **Amit Periwal, Director, Clubside Tours and Travels Pvt Ltd and Chapter Chairman, East India, ATOAI**, spoke to **Disha Shah Ghosh** about their offerings for the region, challenges and the expansion of their geographical footprint.

**Q The awareness about the tourism opportunities in the North East is still not very profound. Tell us about some of your offerings for travel in this region.**

In the past, the North East has remained a secluded and hidden gem in the tourism circuit. However, the pandemic brought a silver lining as it encouraged people to explore their own country when international travel was restricted. This period led to a remarkable increase in awareness about the North East.

Our programmes cater to diverse interests, including cultural explorations, tribal tours, spiritual journeys, wildlife, adventurous treks, and delightful culinary tours. Each state in the North East boasts its own distinct festivals, and our immersive festival programmes ensure guests can revel in the region's vibrant celebrations. Whether it's immersing in cultural traditions, connecting with indigenous tribes, seeking spiritual solace, or relishing the rich biodiversity,

our tours offer something unforgettable for every traveller.

**Q The adventure travel segment in India is still a small pie of the ocean. Which are some of your top selling products in that space?**

Adventure Travel is the fastest growing segment in India. Everyone now wants some element

bouquet of adventure activities from soft adventure like hiking, to medium and high altitude trekking, overnight camping experiences, wildlife and now with our operations in Andamans we are also catering to all water adventure activities as well.

**Q You have offices in Kolkata, Darjeeling, Siliguri, Guwahati and recently opened one in Port Blair. Tell us about the importance of these locations for your business.**

These locations are the main entry and exit points for East and North East. The international

airports in East India are in Kolkata, Bagdogra and Guwahati and recently in Port Blair also the new terminal building of the international airport has been inaugurated. For us to ensure the quality of service delivery, these locations become very important strategically. We operate in a lot of remote areas with limited infrastructure, it's always very

“Adventure Travel is the fastest growing segment in India. Everyone now wants some element of experience which becomes a take away and something they can remember forever. Achievement of having done something which has an element of risk is always very satisfying.”

of experience which becomes a take away and something they can remember forever.

Achievement of having done something which has an element of risk is always very satisfying. The East and North East gives us the opportunity to cater to a

important to ensure that the tourists are well informed, and know what to expect when they visit the secluded locations and being present in the entry points gives us the opportunity to set the expectations well for the rest of the tour.

**Q How complex is organising a customised adventure tour, in India, and overseas, especially since it's a niche segment?**

Organising a customized adventure tour, whether in India or overseas, is a complex endeavour. It requires attention to safety protocols, in-depth product knowledge, and effective client expectation setting. Mitigating risks and having well-defined evacuation plans are crucial for ensuring the safety and well-being of participants. Dealing with limited infrastructure and connectivity in remote areas demands careful planning and coordination. Building strong local partnerships with experienced guides is vital for a seamless and exceptional adventure journey. Despite the challenges, the rewarding outcome of providing clients with unforgettable experiences and personal growth opportunities makes it all worthwhile.

**Q What initiatives are being taken by ATOAI East Chapter?**

We have conducted a First Aid, Survival, Rescue and CPR training at HMI in Darjeeling in January. This was initialised by ATOAI East Chapter with support from India Tourism Kolkata Office. Grp Cap Jai Kishan (Principal HMI) was very supportive and agreed to conduct the course at HMI with professional trainers. We are also planning to conduct a refresher course for the participants in the next few months.

The G20 Tourism meet on adventure was also held in Siliguri and Darjeeling. This was a great opportunity for us to showcase our region and the potential of adventure tourism in the country to government officials, adventure tour operators, travel bloggers and adventure enthusiasts.

We also have another Certification course for Adventure First Aid, CPR and Wilderness Responder to be conducted in Siliguri in January along with a seminar and a buyer – seller meet exclusively for adventure in the region so we will start planning on that soon. ♦

disha.shah@saffronsynergies.in



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