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CATALYSTS OF CHANGE REDEFINING INDIAN TOURISM FOR A GLOBAL TOMORROW

Dear Readers,

The global tourism landscape is undergoing a pivotal transformation, and India is at the forefront of this evolution. In October, as we observe World Tourism Day, it is a fitting moment to take stock of our nation's dynamic progress and the critical forces shaping its tourism trajectory.

Our cover story this month highlights a significant paradigm shift: the emergence of specialised travel marts that are redefining how India presents itself to the world. These meticulously curated B2B marketplaces are not only consolidating opportunities but are also strategically aligning product portfolios with global demand across various sectors, including wellness, wildlife, weddings, and MICE tourism. This approach transcends the limitations of generic expos, offering direct and meaningful engagement between international buyers and Indian stakeholders—including airlines, hotel chains, and investors.

While the promise of these forums is undeniable, the real challenge lies beyond the deal tables. India's continued growth in the tourism sector now rests on a robust framework of infrastructure, transparency, and sustained partnership. It is heartening to witness states like Kerala exemplifying best practices through their travel mart, demonstrating that operational resilience, sharp product definition, and environmental stewardship are not mere value-adds but imperatives for enduring success. Rajasthan's sophisticated

heritage presentation, Madhya Pradesh's innovative wildlife strategies, and Goa's reinvention beyond traditional offerings further underscore India's readiness for international engagement.

Our exclusive feature delves into the essence of India's evolving tourism philosophy—one that places cultural exchange, sustainability, and empowerment at its core. Stakeholders now recognise that tourism is more than just the act of travel; it is about shaping economies, preserving our collective heritage, and embracing a model of inclusive development that leaves no community behind. This holistic vision—amplified by technology and a renewed emphasis on innovation—positions India not only as a preferred destination but as a proactive leader in responsible and regenerative tourism.

It is crucial to emphasise that organisers must execute marquee events and government initiatives with rigour while maintaining a long-term focus. Only through consistent policy implementation, deep international collaboration, and measurable outcomes in sustainability and local capacity-building can we convert potential into enduring achievement.

As we navigate this promising era, I encourage our readers to approach India's tourism story with renewed purpose. Let us champion practices that prioritise environmental responsibility, community



welfare, and operational excellence. Let us move beyond spectacle and towards substance—ensuring that every visitor experience is both exceptional and ethically anchored.

On behalf of Travel Heights, I would like to extend my gratitude to our partners, contributors, and industry leaders who support this collective vision. Together, we are poised to craft a future in which Indian tourism sets benchmarks not only for growth but also for global leadership in sustainability and inclusive development.

With best wishes for a transformative season ahead.

Happy Reading!

Richa Jain
Editor-in-Chief

TEAM RJ

EDITOR & PUBLISHER

Richa Jain

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Simran Rao

MARKETING & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Vivek Jain
Richa Jain

ART DIRECTOR

Krishna Mohan

CIRCULATION

Neha Rastogi

IT SUPPORT TEAM

Abhishek Pawan
Aakash Mehta

ACCOUNTS

Puneet Sachdeva

ADVISORY BOARD

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Chander Mansharamani
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Prem Narain
Anupam Jain
Avik Mitra
R Thakur
Zacharia Daniel Ayyaneth

REGISTERED OFFICE



RJ Associates

#39, Ankur Apartments,
7 IP Extension
Patparganj, New Delhi- 110092
Telefax: +91 (11) 42440759
Email: richa.rjassociates@gmail.com



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HIMACHAL HOTELS' ASSOCIATION SEEKS PM'S HELP FOR TOURISM REVIVAL

Himachal Pradesh's hotels and hospitality sector are reeling from the effects of a devastating monsoon season, and the Federation of Himachal Hotels & Restaurant Association has sought urgent intervention from Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The association has appealed for the strict enforcement of RBI and MSME restructuring norms, a moratorium on loan payments, interest subventions, and long-term (20-year) loans for the hotel industry. They argue that despite widespread

financial distress, many operators have been subject to SARFAESI proceedings even though they qualify as MSMEs. The state experienced 41% excess rainfall between June 20 and September 25, resulting in severe damage caused by cloudbursts, flash floods, and landslides. Estimated losses exceed ₹4,861 crores, and the region is fighting to protect the tourism-dependent economy and prevent further closures or financial collapse of small and medium operators.



SIKKIM TO OPEN DOKA-LA AND CHO-LA BATTLEFIELDS FOR DOMESTIC TOURISTS FROM OCTOBER 1

From October 1, the Sikkim state government will open the high-altitude sites of Doka-La and Cho-La to domestic tourists under the Bharat Ranbhoomi Darshan initiative. These battlefield locations,



situated near the tri-junction of India, Bhutan, and China, had been restricted until now. Indian nationals with voter identity cards may visit, subject to permits issued via registered tour operators or travel agencies. Entry will be tightly controlled, with only 25 vehicles and 25 bikes permitted per day, staggered departures, and mandatory homestay bookings along the Silk Route. The authorities will enforce stringent security and environmental safeguards. The initiative aims to enable Indian travellers to explore scenic and historically significant areas while ensuring proper regulation.

MEGHALAYA CM LAUNCHES TOURISM INITIATIVES TO CREATE 50,000 JOBS

On World Tourism Day 2025, Meghalaya's Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma unveiled a suite of tourism initiatives aimed at generating 50,000 jobs. Central among these is "OneConnect," a tourism helpline and new website to streamline visitor support. He also announced the Meghalaya Homestay Mission Scheme and a community-led infrastructure scheme, both designed to promote inclusive and sustainable tourism. So far, domestic tourist arrivals in the state have reached 1.6 million. To support growth, the government is backing 210 ongoing projects valued at ₹3,625 crores. It has also secured an additional ₹260 crores from the DoNER Ministry to develop key destinations, such as Sohra (Cherrapunji). The state plans to overcome an accommodation shortfall by targeting eight new 5-star hotels by 2030 (including one in Tura) and by expanding Umroi Airport to enable direct flights from major cities by 2027.



NETFLIX PARTNERS WITH THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM TO SHOWCASE INDIAN DESTINATIONS

Netflix and India's Ministry of Tourism have launched a pioneering collaboration to integrate Indian travel destinations into Netflix's original content. The partnership aims to weave India's cultural landscapes and natural diversity into storylines, enhancing both domestic and global interest in tourism. Through this tie-up, locations such as the Nilgiri forests (featured in *The Elephant Whisperers*), the Andaman Islands (in *Kaala Paani*),



Rajasthan (in *Mismatched*), Punjab, and Kalimpong will receive renewed attention. V. Vidyavathi, Secretary, Ministry

of Tourism, calls it a reflection of "our shared commitment to showcasing India's cultural richness and diversity." Monika Shergill, VP Content, Netflix India, adds that the aim is to celebrate India's diversity "through the very soul of India, its diversity, its people, and its voices." Netflix has established its first direct partnership with a tourism authority in South Asia, indicating a new strategy for promoting tourism through storytelling.

MADHYA PRADESH LAUNCHES INNOVATIVE HELICOPTER SERVICES TO BOOST TOURISM AND CONNECTIVITY

The Madhya Pradesh government has unveiled an ambitious helicopter service plan under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model to boost tourism and regional connectivity across the state. The network will link key cultural, religious, wildlife, and commercial destinations under three sectors, with Indore positioned as a central aviation hub. The first sector includes routes such as Indore-Ujjain-Omkareshwar-Mandu and other heritage circuits; the second links Bhopal to pilgrimage and heritage sites like Sanchi, Gwalior, and Datia; and the third connects Bhopal/Indore to eastern and central MP, including Kanha, Panna, Khajuraho, and Rewa. Officials expect the initiative to reduce travel time



to remote destinations, stimulate tourism footfall, and catalyse economic growth in underconnected regions. By leveraging private sector efficiency, the scheme is seen as a transformative step toward integrating aviation into the state's broader development agenda.

RAPIDO PARTNERS WITH THE TELANGANA GOVERNMENT FOR THE HERITAGE CAPTAINS INITIATIVE

Rapido, a central urban ride-sharing platform, has signed an MoU with the Telangana Government's Department of Youth Advancement, Tourism and Culture to launch the "Heritage Captains" initiative. We will train selected Rapido Captains as

cultural ambassadors, equipping them with knowledge about Telangana's heritage sites, history, and culture to enhance riders' experiences. In the pilot phase, this service will start in Hyderabad, with plans to expand to other heritage cities in the state. The Rapido app will introduce a "Heritage Captain" badge, enabling riders to select Captains who provide guided insights during rides. It will also include geo-notifications and heritage circuit suggestions to encourage exploration. Pavan Guntupalli, Rapido's co-founder, emphasised how mobility can carry not just people but stories, while the state believes this will enhance tourism experiences and create livelihoods through skilled engagement.



INDIA'S NEW FIVE-YEAR TOURISM ACTION PLAN UNVEILED

India's Ministry of Tourism is developing a new 2026-2030 action plan aimed at reimagining the "Incredible India" brand and enhancing inbound tourism. The approach emphasises country-specific strategies rather than one-size-fits-all marketing, recognising that travellers from Germany, Spain, and other countries have different preferences. Key pillars include culture, nature-based tourism, digital tools, and joint promotions by central/state agencies, airlines, hotels, and missions abroad. A National Tourism Data & Intelligence Hub and a Unified Tourism Interface, linking UPI, DigiYatra, DigiLocker, and ONDC, are in development to streamline the visitor experience. The target is to build a tourism economy worth USD 3 trillion by 2047 and increase tourism's share of GDP to 10%. The Ministry plans to circulate the draft for stakeholder feedback before finalisation.



FHRAI URGES RESTORATION OF ITC TO SAFEGUARD AFFORDABILITY IN HOSPITALITY

The Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) has renewed its appeal to the government for the restoration of Input Tax Credit (ITC) under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) framework. The association argues that the absence of ITC has increased operational costs, adversely impacting affordability and competitiveness in the hospitality sector.

FHRAI emphasised that reinstating ITC would help maintain price stability, promote domestic tourism, and encourage reinvestment in infrastructure and employment. The body also highlighted that high taxation without credit benefits is undermining the industry's momentum for post-pandemic recovery. FHRAI has urged policymakers to consider the measure as vital for sustaining long-term growth and inclusivity in India's tourism and hospitality ecosystem.



NAVI MUMBAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT RECEIVES **AERODROME LICENCE FROM DGCA**

Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA) has been granted its Aerodrome Licence by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, moving it closer to becoming fully operational. This licence is a mandatory regulatory approval, awarded once an airport meets stringent safety, infrastructure, and compliance benchmarks. With this, NMIA takes an essential step in its development roadmap, enhancing both domestic and international connectivity options. The new airport aims to ease pressure on Mumbai's current facility, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, by providing travellers with better



access and increased capacity. Aviation stakeholders are closely watching the licence milestone as a key development in India's evolving aviation infrastructure.

AIR INDIA EXPANDS FLIGHT OPERATIONS AT **NAVI MUMBAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**



The Air India Group has unveiled ambitious plans to launch commercial flight operations from Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA). In its first phase, Air India Express will operate 20 daily departures (40 ATMs) connecting NMIA to over 15 Indian cities. By mid-2026, the airline plans to expand its schedule to 55 daily departures, which will include some international flights. By the winter 2026 schedule, it aims to increase this number to 60 daily services. The initiative seeks to transform Mumbai into a "twin airport" city, alleviating congestion and enhancing both domestic and international connectivity. The development of NMIA unfolds in multiple phases. In the initial phase, it will accommodate 20 million passengers annually and manage 0.5 million metric tons of cargo. Ultimately, it will scale up to serve 90 million passengers and handle 3.2 million tons of cargo.

INDIGO ADDS NEW DOMESTIC ROUTES IN OCTOBER TO STRENGTHEN REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

IndiGo has announced the addition of multiple new domestic routes starting in October under its winter schedule, aimed at enhancing connectivity among Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. The new routes include Jaipur, Guwahati, Jaipur, Imphal (via Guwahati), Varanasi, Durgapur, Varanasi, Bhubaneswar (via Durgapur), and a seasonal Bengaluru,

Jaisalmer service. According to IndiGo, the expansion will improve flexibility for both leisure and business travellers and catalyse regional growth through enhanced trade and tourism. The airline's move aligns with national goals of strengthening intra-regional connectivity, particularly in underserved markets.



AIR INDIA EXPRESS EXPANDS NETWORK TO 60 DESTINATIONS, **ADDS JODHPUR AND UDAIPUR**

Air India Express is adding Jodhpur and Udaipur to its network, increasing its total destinations to 60. From November 1 2025, the carrier will launch daily direct services between each city and Delhi and Bengaluru. The expansion strengthens connectivity to Rajasthan's cultural and tourism hubs, potentially boosting local tourism and economic activity. The airline

has already expanded its operations to cities such as Ahmedabad, Chandigarh, Dehradun, Dimapur, Hindon, Kathmandu, North Goa, Patna, and Phuket. A fleet of 115 aircraft backs the growing network. The expansion is part of Air India Express's broader strategy to deepen its reach into regional and secondary markets.



NOIDA AIRPORT LIKELY TO START COMMERCIAL FLIGHTS AFTER DIWALI

Officials will inaugurate Noida International Airport (Jewar) on October 30, 2025, and they plan to commence commercial flights shortly after Diwali. The airport will feature a CAT-III compliant runway, enabling flights even under low visibility conditions such as thick fog. IndiGo will serve as the launch carrier, and Akasa Air plans to operate from the airport as well. The first operational phase features a single runway and terminal with a capacity of 12 million passengers per year. Final technical installations and regulatory clearances are underway; once the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) issues the aerodrome licence, regular operations can commence. The



developers are building the airport in four phases, and upon completion, it could become India's largest aviation hub by 2050.

AKASA AIR LAUNCHES DAILY BENGALURU-PHUKET FLIGHTS TO EXPAND THAILAND NETWORK

Akasa Air has launched daily non-stop flights between Bengaluru and Phuket, starting October 1, 2025, marking its second India-Thailand link after its earlier Mumbai-Phuket route. The new service, scheduled to depart from Kempegowda International Airport at 06:25 IST and arrive in Phuket around 12:40 ICT, is designed to stimulate leisure and business traffic between southern India and Thailand. Given

that Indian nationals enjoy visa-free access to Thailand, the airline expects enhanced demand on this route. Officials and leadership from Akasa Air commemorated the inauguration with a lamp-lighting ceremony at Bengaluru airport. The move aligns with Akasa's strategy to expand its international footprint by directly linking Indian metro cities to high-demand regional destinations.



INDIGO EXPANDS DELHI HUB WITH NEW INTERNATIONAL ROUTES AND DOMESTIC ENHANCEMENT

IndiGo is significantly bolstering its operations at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport, reinforcing the city's status as a vital aviation hub. From October 24, the airline will commence daily service to Denpasar (Bali), add four weekly flights to Krabi from October 26, and launch a Manchester route (four times weekly) starting November

15. Additionally, the Delhi-Bangkok connection will be increased to twice daily starting from October 26. On the domestic front, IndiGo will introduce or enhance non-stop flights from Delhi to ten cities, including Rajkot, Vadodara, Patna, Goa (Dabolim Airport), Shirdi, Nagpur, Nashik, Jabalpur, Raipur, and a brand-new service to Purnea. The long-

ONE REP GLOBAL PARTNERS WITH MOUNTAIN VOYAGE MOROCCO TO STRENGTHEN INDIA OUTREACH

One Rep Global, a sales and marketing agency specialising in luxury travel brands, has signed a partnership with Mountain Voyage Morocco (a luxury destination management company) to deepen Morocco's appeal among Indian travellers. Under this collaboration, One Rep Global will drive Morocco's marketing and visibility in India's rapidly growing outbound travel market. Mountain Voyage Morocco, renowned for its sustainable luxury experiences and strong presence in the Virtuoso network, aims to promote curated, high-end itineraries to Indian audiences. Hemant Mediratta, CEO of One Rep Global, said India's evolving traveller seeks authenticity and meaningful experiences—qualities Morocco offers in abundance. This initiative aims to strengthen trade partnerships, engage influencers, and enhance luxury outreach in India, positioning Morocco as a key destination in Indian luxury travel portfolios.



haul route to Manchester will be operated with the Boeing 787-9, while the new and regional international routes will use A320 family aircraft. The expanded network underscores IndiGo's ambition to integrate domestic and international connectivity via Delhi and to further its goal of becoming a global aviation leader by 2030.

THOMAS COOK INDIA PARTNERS WITH THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM FOR A DESTINATION FEEDBACK INITIATIVE

Thomas Cook (India) has entered into a three-year MoU with India's Ministry of Tourism to collect real-time traveler feedback and enhance destination management across the country. Through this agreement, Thomas Cook will deploy a co-branded feedback form across its physical and digital platforms to capture traveller views on cleanliness, safety, accessibility, service standards, and overall visitor experience. The anonymised and

aggregated data will be shared with the Ministry to help recognise high-performing destinations and identify areas needing improvement. Officials say this data-driven approach will allow targeted interventions in infrastructure, services, and visitor amenities at key sites. The collaboration reflects efforts to modernise tourism governance, align with traveller expectations, and ensure that the quality of India's tourism offerings remains competitive.



SWIGGY & TOURISM WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S QUOKKA CAMPAIGN IN INDIA

Swiggy has partnered with Tourism Western Australia to launch a Quokka-themed digital campaign in India, running until October 11, 2025, targeting major metropolitan cities, including Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Pune, Chennai, and Kochi. The Quokka, nicknamed "the world's happiest animal," is integrated into Swiggy's user interface—on order-tracking maps, banners, and Instamart promos—to spark interest in Western

Australia travel. A "Find the Quokka" game invites users to locate hidden Quokka icons across a digital map of WA; winners may receive return tickets for two. WA's tourism leadership views India as a rapidly growing outbound market, and this campaign leverages Swiggy's extensive reach to convert everyday app users into travel aspirants. The initiative reflects a creative blend of digital engagement and destination marketing.

STARCRUISES CONFIRMS STAR VOYAGER'S RETURN TO SOUTHEAST ASIA

StarCruises has announced that Star Voyager will resume Southeast Asia sailings from November 20 2025, through February 5 2026. The ship will operate 3-night and 4-night cruises from Singapore and Port Klang (Kuala Lumpur) to destinations including Phuket, Penang, Pulau Bintan, and Singapore. The season begins and ends with repositioning voyages from/to Hong Kong. Booking opens October 3 2025. The deployment is designed for

flexibility, offering weekend escapes and midweek options that cater to travellers in Singapore and Malaysia seeking short regional getaways. Michael Goh, President of StarDream Cruises, noted that the dual-embarkation strategy and multiple itinerary lengths enhance convenience and choice. The cruises connect cultural, leisure, and beach destinations across Southeast Asia, reinforcing the region's appeal for cruise tourism.

JUMPIN HEIGHTS LAUNCHES INDIA'S FIRST CUT-CORD BUNGY IN RISHIKESH

Adventure sports provider Jumpin Heights has introduced India's first Cut Cord Bungy alongside the Running Valley Rope Jump in Rishikesh's Mohanchatti valley, marking a new frontier in extreme tourism. In the Cut Cord Bungy, participants jump from a seated position 270 feet above the Hall River. They cut a single cord in midair to start the descent, ensuring that several safety redundancies are in place. The Running Valley Rope Jump adds a twist: jumpers take a running launch off a bridge into the valley below. Niharika Nigam, MD of Jumpin Heights, explained that these additions follow over a decade of operations in Rishikesh and aim to push the envelope of thrill experiences. The move aims to strengthen Rishikesh's reputation as a global adventure hub, drive tourism growth in Uttarakhand, and provide new attractions for both domestic and international thrill-seekers.



NORWEGIAN CRUISE LINE HOLDINGS LAUNCHES CROSS-BRAND LOYALTY RECOGNITION

Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings (NCLH) has introduced its Loyalty Status Honouring Program, allowing loyalty status sharing across its three brands: Norwegian Cruise Line, Oceania Cruises, and Regent Seven

Seas Cruises. Under the new scheme, members of Latitudes Rewards, Oceania Club, and Seven Seas Society can have their loyalty tiers recognised across any of the other brands on a per-cruise

basis. The program launches for sailings departing from October 15 2025. This cross-brand recognition encourages passengers to explore different cruise styles—be it Norwegian's expansive itineraries, Oceania's culinary focus, or Regent's luxury all-inclusive offerings—without losing the benefits they've already earned. Harry Sommer, NCLH's CEO, described the move as part of the "Charting the Course" strategy to deepen guest loyalty and motivate brand exploration. Guests can request status recognition starting September 29 2025, ahead of eligible sailings.



PRIDE HOTELS FILES DRHP WITH SEBI FOR ₹260 CRORE IPO

Pride Hotels has filed a Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to raise ₹260 crore through an initial public offering (IPO). The proposed issue will include both a fresh share sale and an

offer for sale by existing shareholders. We anticipate using the funds to expand the hotel, repay debts, and address general corporate needs.

The IPO plan aligns with the group's growth strategy amid India's buoyant hospitality and travel market. With the domestic tourism sector rebounding strongly, Pride Hotels aims to strengthen its position across key metro and tier-II cities. The filing marks another entry into the capital markets for the hospitality sector, following increased investor interest in the travel and tourism industry.



STARHOTELS TO LAUNCH TEATRO LUXURY APARTMENTS IN FLORENCE



Italy's Starhotels Group has announced plans to open Teatro Luxury Apartments in Florence, marking its foray into the luxury serviced-apartment segment. The project will combine residential comfort with premium hotel-style amenities, catering to long-stay guests seeking privacy, space, and bespoke service in the heart of the city.

The new development reflects Starhotels' strategy to diversify its portfolio and respond to evolving guest preferences for flexible luxury accommodation. Positioned near Florence's cultural landmarks, Teatro Luxury Apartments will elevate the city's hospitality landscape by merging timeless Italian design with modern hospitality standards.

THE FERN HOTELS & RESORTS EXPANDS IN MUMBAI WITH GALAXY BEACON HOTEL

The Fern Hotels & Resorts has expanded its presence in Mumbai with the opening of Galaxy Beacon Hotel, located in Santacruz. The new property features 70 contemporary rooms, a multi-cuisine restaurant "Golden Wave," and three banquet and meeting spaces designed for both business and social gatherings. The launch underscores The Fern's commitment to growth in major Indian cities, where demand for eco-sensitive, business-friendly accommodations is increasing. With this addition, The Fern now operates 12 properties in Mumbai and nearly 40 across Maharashtra. The company



continues to strengthen its position as one of India's fastest-growing environmentally responsible hospitality brands.

Disclaimer: This information has been collected through secondary research and Travel Heights is not responsible for any errors in the same.

MINISTRY OF TOURISM MARKS WORLD TOURISM DAY 2025 WITH A FOCUS ON

"TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION"



embed sustainability at the heart of tourism.

The event was graced by Shri Suman Bery, Vice Chairperson of NITI Aayog, as the Chief Guest. Shri Suresh Gopi, Minister of State for Tourism, Petroleum & Natural Gas, presided over the function, while Shri Suman Billa, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, delivered the welcome address. Reflecting the UN World Tourism Organisation's global theme, the event placed India's tourism narrative within the larger national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047—a future-ready, inclusive, and sustainable India.

In his keynote, Shri Bery underscored the transformative power of

The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, commemorated World Tourism Day 2025 on Saturday, September 27, with a resounding focus on the theme "Tourism and Sustainable Transformation." The celebration gathered distinguished stakeholders from government, industry, academia, and civil society, reaffirming India's pledge to foster cultural exchange, accelerate economic growth, and

THE MINISTRY SIGNED MOUS WITH NETFLIX, ATITHI FOUNDATION, AND OTAS. NETFLIX WILL PROMOTE INDIAN DESTINATIONS THROUGH CINEMATIC STORYTELLING, WHILE OTAS AND THE ATITHI FOUNDATION WILL SUPPORT RESEARCH, INNOVATION, AND POST-TRAVEL FEEDBACK TO INFORM DATA-DRIVEN POLICY.



A "GUIDE TO MUDRA LOANS FOR HOMESTAYS" WAS RELEASED, PROVIDING STEP-BY-STEP SUPPORT FOR SMALL ENTREPRENEURS VIA THE JAN SAMARTH PORTAL, ALIGNING WITH INDIA'S VISION OF INCLUSIVE, COMMUNITY-DRIVEN TOURISM.

tourism beyond leisure, calling it "a powerful instrument for economic transformation, environmental stewardship, and social inclusion." He noted that across the world, sustainable tourism models have both preserved biodiversity and generated livelihoods. For India to fully realise its potential, sustainability must become central rather than peripheral. He emphasised the need for convergence across transport, urban development, digital technology, and infrastructure, noting that seamless connectivity through road, rail, air, and waterways could reduce pressures on overcrowded sites while spreading benefits to lesser-known destinations. He

called for greater public-private collaboration, which, he said, "links industry investment with community participation and environmental safeguards."

Shri Suresh Gopi, Minister of State for Tourism, highlighted how India has embedded sustainability in its core tourism initiatives, citing schemes such as Swadesh Darshan 2.0 and PRASHAD, which focus on eco-friendly accommodations, rural circuits, and cultural tourism. He outlined how revamped digital platforms and online services are enabling more thoughtful planning and management, while also empowering smaller tourism stakeholders. He also reiterated that

tourism cannot thrive in isolation but depends on robust linkages with transportation, infrastructure, and allied services.

The Minister drew attention to transformative infrastructure programs such as UDAN, which has improved last-mile connectivity, and the integration of multimodal transport hubs that are making India's destinations more accessible and inclusive. Investments in airports, highways, rail corridors, and inland waterways, he said, are creating seamless travel experiences for both domestic and international visitors, thereby positioning tourism as a driver of comprehensive regional development.

A highlight of the celebration was the signing of strategic MoUs with Netflix, Atithi Foundation, and leading Online Travel Agencies (OTAs). The Netflix partnership will promote Indian destinations through cinematic storytelling, producing curated trailers and global outreach campaigns to showcase India's landscapes and heritage on a world stage. The MoUs with Atithi Foundation and OTAs aim to strengthen research, innovation, and capacity-building while introducing mechanisms for collecting post-travel visitor feedback, enabling more data-driven policy decisions at both the state and national levels.

The Ministry also launched the Project Management Information System (PMIS), a digital platform designed to track tourism infrastructure projects in real time. This system will enhance efficiency, improve transparency, and enable stakeholders to monitor the progress of critical projects more effectively. Additionally, the 66th Edition of the India Tourism Data Compendium highlights historic milestones, including record-breaking domestic and international tourist arrivals, a rise in job creation, and a significant contribution of tourism to the national economy. India now ranks 20th globally in international tourist arrivals, underscoring its growing role on the global tourism map.



Another noteworthy release was the booklet "Guide to MUDRA Loans for Homestays", offering a step-by-step resource for homestay operators to apply for financial support through the Jan Samarth portal. This initiative aims to empower small-scale tourism entrepreneurs and rural households, aligning with the government's vision of making tourism more community-driven and inclusive.

The celebration also featured high-level dialogues and case studies. A panel on transportation and connectivity brought together senior officials from the ministries of road, aviation, railways, and shipping, who emphasised the critical role of multimodal linkages in sustainable tourism growth. Thematic sessions showcased flagship examples of destination management, such as the Mahakumbh 2025 and the Statue of Unity, offering insights into crowd management, infrastructure planning, and community engagement. Discussions also highlighted the emerging role of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) and the potential of advanced technologies,

THE NEW PROJECT MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (PMIS) WILL ENABLE REAL-TIME MONITORING OF TOURISM PROJECTS, BOOSTING TRANSPARENCY. THE 66TH INDIA TOURISM DATA COMPENDIUM RECORDED A RECORD-BREAKING NUMBER OF ARRIVALS AND PLACED INDIA AT 20TH GLOBALLY IN TERMS OF INTERNATIONAL TOURIST ARRIVALS.

such as AI, AR/VR, and digital twins, to revolutionise visitor experiences and planning.

Through these initiatives and dialogues, the event confirmed India's commitment to making tourism a people-centric movement that balances prosperity with preservation. It highlighted the central role of communities as

beneficiaries, ensuring that tourism revenues uplift local livelihoods while safeguarding cultural and natural heritage.

As India journeys toward Viksit Bharat 2047, the vision is clear: to build a tourism sector that is green, inclusive, and future-ready. From cinematic partnerships and digital project monitoring to improved connectivity and community empowerment, the Ministry of Tourism has outlined a blueprint for sustainable transformation. The World Tourism Day 2025 celebrations thus stood not just as an annual observance but as a declaration of India's leadership in shaping global tourism—anchored in innovation, partnerships, and sustainability.

With the world watching, India has made it clear that its tourism story is not only about attracting visitors, but also about creating a movement where travel fuels economic growth, celebrates cultural richness, empowers communities, and safeguards the environment for future generations. ■



MADHYA PRADESH

Where Every Journey Becomes a Celebration

Close your eyes and imagine a land where music echoes through medieval forts, where dancers move in the glow of moonlit temples, where rivers and forests become your companions, and where every season feels like a festival. That land is Madhya Pradesh, the heart of Incredible India, unfolding as a festival for the world. This festive season, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board invites you not just to witness, but to belong, to step into a celebration where every note, every colour, every journey is yours to experience.

Where the Wild Beckons, Draped in Luxury



At **Gandhi Sagar Forest Retreat** (12 September), water greets you at sunrise, lapping softly against your tent as though composing its own welcome. Hours drift into kayaking and sailing, until night gathers everyone around the bonfire, where tribal rhythms rise with the sparks, and the wilderness itself feels like a stage.



By 5 October, the journey takes you to **Kuno Forest Retreat**, where cheetahs, after seven decades, once again roam the wild grasslands. Safaris blur into dreams here, and nights are spent under star-filled skies with gourmet feasts laid out like rituals.



At **Chanderi Eco Retreat** (25 October), the town itself becomes a festival. Vintage cars glide past medieval gateways, hot-air balloons drift above ancient forts, and twilight step-wells shimmer with the glow of performances. Days are filled with workshops and bustling craft bazaars, while evenings unfold in music and dance, carrying with them the delicate grace of Chanderi's timeless weave and regal heritage.

Music that Transcends Centuries

In December, as winter descends, Gwalior awakens with the **Tansen Samaroh** (14–19 December), a gathering where maestros and disciples alike transform the city into a sanctum of sound. It is more than music; it is memory. Sitting within the fort city, a raga unfurls into the night sky, each note rising not just from an instrument but from the very soul of this land.

Dance Carved in Time

When February arrives, Khajuraho becomes a temple of light and movement. As the **Khajuraho Dance Festival** (20–26 February) begins, dancers perform against UNESCO-listed temples bathed in moonlight. The chime of anklets echoes the rhythm carved in stone centuries ago. It transcends performance, unfolding instead as communion—with art that breathes, with history that endures, and with spirit that binds.

One Season, A Thousand Celebrations

The Madhya Pradesh Travel Festival is not a calendar; it is a tapestry. Each thread is a festival, a retreat, an encounter waiting for you.

Beyond the iconic retreats and flagship festivals lie treasures waiting to be discovered:

November

Skydiving Festival, Ujjain (November) – courage meets clouds as you leap from 10,000 feet with the sacred city below.



Dec-Jan

Jal Mahotsav, Hanuwantiya (Dec-Jan) – Asia's largest water carnival, where the backwaters of the Narmada come alive with houseboats, hot air balloons, parasailing, speed-boating, and island camping, turning winter into a season of adventure and celebration.

January

Lokrang Festival, Bhopal (26–30 January) – a vibrant celebration of folk and tribal arts, where music, dance, crafts, and cuisines from across India transform Bhopal into a living canvas of cultural diversity.

This is your season to be part of something extraordinary. Plan your journey with Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board. Madhya Pradesh awaits, where every journey is not travel, but a celebration.



WHEN CELEBRATION MEETS CONVENTION

THE POWER DUO OF INDIAN WEDDINGS & MICE TOURISM

India has long been known for its grand weddings – colourful, lavish, deeply cultural affairs that unite not just families, but entire communities. In recent years, however, weddings are doing double duty: they are increasingly weaving into the fabric of MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism. What was once seen purely as a celebration is now evolving into an engine of economic, infrastructural, and experiential growth for destinations, hospitality providers, and service-ecosystems alike.

From Vows to Value: Weddings as Economic Catalysts

The economic pull of weddings in India is formidable. With over 10 million weddings each year, the wedding industry in India is valued at approximately USD 50 billion, growing at a rate of 20-25% annually in recent years. Wedding tourism encompasses more than just the ceremony; it also includes lodging, catering, transportation, décor, entertainment, and additional services.

Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat has emphasised the substantial overlap between wedding infrastructure and MICE potential. He suggests that investments made for weddings – such as venues, décor, and hospitality capacity – can be leveraged year-round for conferences, incentive travel, seminars, and exhibitions.

In hotels with substantial banquet space or convention centres, weddings often represent a significant share of revenue. For example, many premium properties report weddings contributing 50-70% of their food & beverage and banqueting income in high-season months. While MICE (corporate) events fill gaps during off-peak wedding periods, the two segments now primarily feed off the same amenities.

Destinations & Infrastructure: Setting the Stage

Regions such as Kerala, Jammu & Kashmir (Bhaderwah), and others are aggressively positioning themselves

as wedding + MICE hubs. Host state governments are investing in infrastructure – including roads, airports, hospitality, and standby logistics – to make destinations more accessible, attractive, and competitive.

The Wedding & MICE Conclave in Kochi (August 2025) is a prime example. Over 400 registered buyers and 65 sellers (resorts, planners, convention centres, service providers) took part. The conclave combined networking sessions, seminars on global event trends, venue tours across Kochi, Munnar, Kumarakom, Kovalam, Wayanad-Bekal, plus training workshops on logistics, marketing and event technologies.

Building wedding-linked infrastructure (venues, service providers, décor specialists, and event technology) doesn't just serve a few weeks of the wedding season; it can support MICE events throughout the calendar year, reducing seasonality for resorts and banquet hotels and increasing return on investment.

Trends Driving the Confluence

Several trends are accelerating the blend of weddings and MICE:

Destination Weddings & Experiential Venues

Couples increasingly choose scenic destinations (heritage palaces, hill stations, backwaters, luxury resorts) for weddings. These same venues, when equipped, become natural choices for corporate retreats, incentive trips, or product launches. Kerala's natural beauty, for example, helps sell both wedding packages and corporate off-sites.

Hybrid Events & Technology

As virtual and hybrid formats continue their rise (a legacy of the pandemic), event tech, from registration platforms to virtual networking, is now standard. These tools are just as relevant to MICE events as they are for large weddings (e.g. livestreaming, virtual attendance).

Sustainability & Localisation

Eco-friendly décor, farm-to-table catering, carbon-offset travel, the use of local artisans, and venues that minimise environmental impact are becoming increasingly important for both couples and corporate event organisers. These align with global standards, adding appeal for international MICE clients.

Government and Policy Support

The Indian government's push through schemes, tourism nodal policies, and promotion of niche tourism segments has raised visibility and funding for this integrated segment. Also, regulators recognising the need to treat weddings + MICE as a niche segment rather than a subset of general tourism—as suggested in recent conclaves.

Challenges & Opportunities

However, merging weddings and MICE isn't without its difficulties:

Seasonality is still real. Wedding seasons cluster around traditional auspicious months; off-peak periods are lean. MICE can help fill those gaps, but require consistent marketing and calendar planning.

Infrastructure Gaps in many tier-2 / rural destinations transport connectivity, reliable power, high-quality banquet/meeting spaces, and lodging at scale need investment.

Standards & Professionalism

Corporate MICE organisers tend to have strict expectations for audiovisuals, connectivity, hygiene, safety, and service levels. Wedding planners may meet these requirements for weddings, but scaling up to MICE often demands higher standards, consistency, and trained staff.

Regulatory Complexity & Cost

Permits, taxes (GST), licensing, environmental approvals, and labour costs add up. Clearer regulations, incentives for infrastructure development, and subsidies or grants could help.

What's Next: Strategies for Growth

To maximise the benefits of combining weddings and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism, stakeholders should take the following factors into account:

Dual-use Infrastructure

Build or adapt venues that serve both weddings and MICE events, with modular design, technological enabling (AV, broadband, hybrid setups), and flexible staffing models.

Destination Branding emphasises this dual strength

Markets must promote not just that they are beautiful wedding venues, but also that they are capable of hosting conferences, incentives,

product launches, and more. Cohesive branding across tourism boards, hotel chains, and local governments matters.

Training & Certification

Support for professional training of service providers (planners, caterers, AV suppliers) and perhaps certification for venues that meet both wedding and MICE standards to build trust, especially for corporate clients or international visitors.

Calendar & Yield Management

Hotels/resorts can manage pricing and availability to accommodate weddings during high season and diversify with MICE events during off-peak seasons. Incentivise weekday usage, shorter-term conference bookings, corporate retreats, etc.

Sustainability & Local Integration

Emphasising local culture, artisans, food, and the environment not only reduces costs and supports communities but also adds authenticity—a key value now for both bride/groom clients and corporate organisers.

Conclusion

The overlap between Indian weddings and MICE tourism is no longer incidental—it is becoming an intentional strategy. As weddings demand high-end venues, rich experiences, and large guest flows, they are prime destinations for the requirements of corporate events and conventions. When destinations, hospitality players, and policymakers capitalise on this collaboration—through improved infrastructure, targeted marketing, established standards, and a focus on sustainability—the result promises higher revenue, more consistent demand throughout the year, and greater economic benefits for local economies.

The wedding season is not just a festivity. It's a blueprint. It's an avenue through which the business events industry can innovate, expand and stabilise. And as India's tourism story continues to soar, when celebration meets convention, everyone wins. ■

BY MERGING DESTINATION WEDDINGS WITH MICE CAPABILITIES, INDIA IS CREATING A NEW TOURISM MODEL – ONE THAT BLENDS EMOTION WITH ENTERPRISE, CULTURE WITH COMMERCE, AND CELEBRATION WITH CONVENTION.

High on vision and grounded in heritage, Madhya Pradesh is scripting a new chapter in Indian tourism. From spiritual corridors that blend faith with storytelling to eco-luxury tent cities, air cruises, and community-run homestays, the state is reimagining travel as an experience that is both soulful and sustainable. At the helm of this transformation stands Shri Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Additional Chief Secretary for Tourism, Culture, Home, and Religious Trusts & Endowments, and Managing Director of the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board.

In an exclusive conversation with Travel Heights ahead of the upcoming Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart (MPTM), he shares how the "Heart of Incredible India" is evolving into a global model—where heritage meets innovation, communities drive growth, and every traveler finds a reason to return.



SHAPING THE HEART OF INCREDIBLE INDIA

Congratulations on your recent promotion to Additional Chief Secretary. How do you see this expanded role shaping your vision and priorities for Madhya Pradesh's tourism and culture sectors?

SS This role allows me to align tourism and culture more closely, ensuring Madhya Pradesh grows as both authentic and inclusive. Our focus is clear: community empowerment, responsible tourism, and positioning the state as the offbeat destination of choice.

Recent recognitions like the Best State Tourism Board Award 2025 and the Golden Banyan Award for Heritage Tourism, along with strong participation at ITB Berlin, WTM London, and FITUR Madrid, reflect our expanding global footprint. Projects such as Mahakal Lok in Ujjain, retreats at Kuno and Gandhi Sagar, and tent cities at Chanderi are diversifying experiences, while intra-state air services and India's first interstate cruise are transforming connectivity.

Communities are embracing people-centric growth by training over 10,000 women in tourism services and

establishing more than 300 active homestays, demonstrating their role as true stakeholders. In the future, our priorities remain sustainability, safety, and inclusivity—creating a destination where spirituality, wildlife, heritage, and modern luxury coexist seamlessly.

With your new responsibilities, will we see a shift in strategy for Madhya Pradesh Tourism?

SS Tourism evolves constantly. Progress lies in continuity with innovation. We remain committed to sustainability, inclusivity, and community empowerment, and we

have refined our strategies to better align with global trends and traveler aspirations.

Projects like Mahakal Lok, intra-state air services, interstate cruises, and strengthened digital engagement are not shifts but natural progressions. Madhya Pradesh Tourism is a dynamic ecosystem—rooted in heritage yet forward-looking—ensuring we remain the offbeat destination of choice for discerning travelers worldwide.

Madhya Pradesh is at the cusp of becoming a tourism powerhouse. How will you leverage this to make tourism a key pillar of the state's economy?

SS Tourism is poised to become a central pillar of the economy. Platforms like the Global Investors Summit (GIS) and Regional Tourism Conclaves (RTCs) reflect growing investor confidence. The latest GIS drew proposals worth ₹4,468 crore, while RTCs in Rewa and Gwalior attracted over ₹6,500 crore across heritage reuse, luxury hospitality, and eco-tourism.

The upcoming Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart (MPTM) will build on this momentum. Past editions have hosted over 200 buyers, 100 exhibitors, and delegates from more than 30 countries. This year promises even greater participation, reinforcing MP's place as a hub for global collaboration.

Through these platforms, tourism is becoming a driver of GDP, employment, and sustainable livelihoods.'

You are now leading not just tourism but also culture and religious trusts. How do you envision integrating these domains?

SS Tourism, culture, and religious trusts are interconnected dimensions of the visitor experience. Our vision is to integrate them seamlessly.

Cultural initiatives—like the Khajuraho Dance Festival, Tansen Samaroh, and the International Music Museum—celebrate living traditions. Initiatives like CraftGroom and Art Ichol empower artisans, taking their work global. Spiritually, Mahakal Lok, Ekatm Dham, and Ravidas Lok are redefining pilgrimage through storytelling.

We are also introducing QR-coded monuments, multilingual guides, and immersive technology. Our collaboration with Finland's V Real brings UNESCO World Heritage sites and tribal museums alive through virtual tourism. This integration ensures Madhya Pradesh offers travelers a holistic experience—where tradition meets innovation.

Which flagship projects should stakeholders and travelers watch for this year?

SS The Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart (MPTM) takes centre stage, strengthening global partnerships and placing MP firmly on the world tourism map.

On the ground, tent cities at Gandhi Sagar, Kuno, and Chanderi offer immersive eco-luxury stays. Revitalisation efforts are transforming adventure and leisure hubs like Hanuwantiya, Mandu, Orchha, and Tamia. At the same time, festivals such as the Khajuraho Dance Festival and Tansen Samaroh actively celebrate the region's artistic heritage. Together, they provide a year-round mix of cultural, leisure, and experiential tourism.

What are the biggest challenges in scaling tourism, and how does your new role help address them?

SS Connectivity is the key challenge. We are upgrading Indore and Bhopal airports as international hubs, and strengthening regional hubs at Jabalpur, Gwalior, Khajuraho, and Rewa. India's first intra-state air service—PM Shri Vayu Paryatan Sewa—

along with ropeways, heli-tourism, and river cruises, is expanding access.

Equally important is community empowerment. With over 332 homestays, artisan initiatives, and landmarks like Mahakal Lok, growth is inclusive. Tourist arrivals surged from 8.9 crore in 2019 to 13.41 crore in 2025, reflecting the success of this holistic approach.

The convergence of tourism, culture, and religious trusts enables us to act with greater speed and scale—cementing Madhya Pradesh as the "Heart of Incredible India."

With oversight of Home and Religious Trusts, how will you balance governance with community participation?

SS This alignment demonstrates a convergence rather than a diversion. In Madhya Pradesh, governance, faith, and tourism closely intertwine.

The Home Department strengthens safety and infrastructure, while Religious Trusts safeguard sanctity. Tourism ensures destinations are visitor-friendly. When developers create a spiritual corridor, these three elements work together to provide an experience that is secure, inclusive, and spiritually enriching.

As Additional Chief Secretary, what legacy would you like to leave?

SS If we have a legacy, it should be collective. Our goal is not just to increase arrivals but to build an ecosystem that safeguards heritage, helps communities thrive, and ensures that travelers leave with authentic experiences.

From women-run homestays to eco-sensitive wildlife circuits, and from world-class festivals to heritage conservation, each initiative reflects inclusivity and teamwork.

If Madhya Pradesh continues to embody sustainable growth, cultural vibrancy, and warm hospitality, that shared achievement will be the most meaningful legacy of all. ■

MADHYA PRADESH IS THE OFFBEAT DESTINATION OF FIRST CHOICE—WHERE SPIRITUALITY, WILDLIFE, HERITAGE, AND MODERN LUXURY CONVERGE SEAMLESSLY.

REDEFINING LUXURY WITH THE JOY OF GIVING

ATMOSPHERE HOTELS & RESORTS EXPANDS IN INDIA

Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts, the largest luxury hospitality operator in the Maldives, is bringing its celebrated "Joy of Giving" philosophy to India. Since 2013, the brand has successfully managed nine ultra-luxury resorts in the Maldives and is now making bold strides into South Asia, with India as its primary hub of growth. In this exclusive interview with Travel Heights for the October 2025 Edition, Mr Souvagya Mohapatra, Managing Director, Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts, India, shares insights on the group's ambitious expansion, the upcoming flagship in Kolkata, sustainability initiatives, and his vision to position Atmosphere as a leading hospitality brand in India.



What is your vision for Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts in India?

SM After successfully managing nine ultra-luxury resorts in the Maldives since 2013, we are now expanding into South Asia, with India as our primary focus. As the largest operator in the Maldives, we have already signed 20 hotels in India and one in Nepal, and we are confident of achieving our goal of 25 management contracts by the end of 2025.

We are highly selective when it comes to new properties, prioritising the unique strengths of each destination—whether it be tourism potential, connectivity, or cultural heritage. To support this growth, we have established a strong India-based team dedicated to development, operations, and human resource management.

How will the new Kolkata property reflect the brand's identity and values?

SM We are excited to announce the upcoming launch of OZEN MANSION KOLKATA, which will become the flagship property for Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts in India, representing our ultra-luxury brand, The Ozen Collection (TOC).

Following the notable successes of OZEN RESERVE BOLIFUSHI and OZEN LIFE MAADHOO in the Maldives, we expect OZEN MANSION KOLKATA to emerge as one of India's premier hospitality destinations.

With 235 all-suite accommodations, a 100,000 sq. ft. banqueting area, and eight world-class dining outlets, OZEN MANSION KOLKATA will redefine luxury in Kolkata and set new benchmarks for the eastern region's hospitality landscape.

What differentiates Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts from other luxury hospitality brands in India?

SM Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts stands apart through its multi-brand structure under Atmosphere Core, offering distinct identities such as By Atmosphere (charming getaways), An Atmosphere Experience (cultural immersion), A Signature Atmosphere (iconic elegance), Elements of Nature

(wellness retreats), and Heritage by Atmosphere (historic properties).

This flexibility enables each property to showcase its unique character while upholding our hallmark standards of luxury and service. Guided by authenticity, sustainability, and our philosophy of the "Joy of Giving", we ensure every guest enjoys not just a stay, but an experience deeply rooted in the culture, history, and environment of the destination.

How do you define the guest experience at Atmosphere properties?

SM Our guiding philosophy is simple yet profound: the "Joy of Giving." To give joyfully means pouring heart and soul into every act of kindness—an approach that shapes everything we do for our guests, colleagues, and partners.

This philosophy comes alive through tailored holiday experiences designed to fulfil every dream and allow guests to savour each moment without worry. At its core, our approach is human-centred, rooted in genuine hospitality that rejuvenates the body and uplifts the mind.

OUR GOAL IS TO SIGN 25 HOTELS BY THE END OF 2025, AND I HAVE EVERY CONFIDENCE THAT WE WILL ACHIEVE THIS TARGET.

We are committed not just to meeting but to exceeding expectations. Empowered at every level, our team ensures every guest leaves with memories of a truly exceptional stay.

What sustainable practices are being implemented across Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts, especially in India?

SM In the Maldives, we have long been leaders in sustainability—working with local architects, using biodegradable materials, harnessing solar power, conserving coral reefs, and utilising biofuel energy. All our properties proudly hold Green Globe certification, one of the world's most respected benchmarks for sustainable practices.

We are bringing the same commitment to India with measures

OZEN MANSION KOLKATA WILL BE ONE OF THE PREMIER HOTEL DESTINATIONS IN INDIA, REDEFINING LUXURY IN THE EASTERN REGION.



such as a complete ban on plastics, on-site bottling plants for glass-bottled mineral water, and the use of locally sourced biodegradable materials for guest amenities. In addition, our hotels are being equipped with energy- and water-saving systems and enriched with extensive greenery, reinforcing our pledge to responsible tourism and environmental stewardship.

How is technology being used to enhance operations and guest satisfaction at your properties?

SM We equip all of our properties with the latest technology to enhance the guest experience. From advanced property management, global distribution, and reputation management systems, we ensure visibility and seamless service throughout the entire booking journey.

To deliver efficiency, we have introduced fast check-in and check-out processes, along with mobile applications that allow guests to access amenities, explore menus, and place orders directly from their devices. Throughout their stay, we actively monitor feedback in real time through reputation management tools, enabling us to address concerns promptly and exceed expectations.

By leveraging the right technology at the right time, we ensure guests enjoy effortless access to our facilities—bringing to life our core philosophy, the "Joy of Giving."

What role do wellness and experiential travel play in Atmosphere's offerings?

SM Wellness and experiential travel are at the heart of our philosophy. Our award-winning wellness brand, Elements of Nature (EleNA), has earned international recognition for delivering far more than traditional spa experiences. Each EleNA spa is guided by expert doctors and skilled therapists, offering specialised therapies that enhance overall well-being.



THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE JOY OF GIVING IS NOT JUST ABOUT SERVICE—IT'S ABOUT HEARTFELT, AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES THAT CONNECT GUESTS TO THE SOUL OF EACH DESTINATION.

We use only organic treatments and healing practices inspired by local culture, ensuring every guest leaves feeling rejuvenated in body, mind, and spirit. Looking ahead, we are committed to establishing EleNA Wellness Centres across all our South Asia properties, with a key focus on India, bringing our holistic approach to wellness to an even wider audience.

How do you plan to expand Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts' presence in India beyond Kolkata?

SM We are committed to establishing a strong presence in India by opening 25 hotels by 2025. So far, we have signed 20 properties in India and one in Nepal. Our journey began with Sadar Manzil Heritage by Atmosphere, Bhopal, launched in February 2025, followed this year by our flagship OZEN MANSION KOLKATA.

Several new properties will open in Coorg, Jaipur, Guwahati, Kurseong, Bhubaneswar, Bangalore, Jaisalmer, Chandragiri, and Banepa (Nepal). Looking ahead, our vision is to expand into more exotic destinations across India and the Asia Pacific, creating authentic experiences rooted in the Joy of Giving.

What strategies are in place to build strong brand recognition in the Indian market?

SM Over the past decade, Atmosphere Core has established a

robust portfolio and garnered global recognition. We operate through three distinguished brands: The Ozen Collection (ultra-luxury), Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts (five-star deluxe), and Colours of Oblu (entry-level five-star).

In India, our focus is on expanding The Ozen Collection and Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts, given the strong demand for luxury travel. Our corporate sales and marketing teams have already launched impactful brand-building initiatives, ranging from high-profile announcements to strategic campaigns, with more planned for the near future. These efforts are steadily positioning us as a leading luxury hospitality brand in India.

Where do you see Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts in India five years from now?

SM I am privileged to lead a passionate team dedicated to driving the company's growth and success. We are focused on signing new properties, bringing existing ones into operation, and building motivated teams to manage them.

With strong corporate support, we are on track to operate 25 properties across South Asia within the next five years. This expansion goes beyond numbers—it reflects our core philosophy, the "Joy of Giving," and our commitment to authentic, heartfelt hospitality. ■

IS TRAVEL BUSINESS PROTECTION THE SAFETY NET AGENCIES CAN'T AFFORD TO IGNORE?

In the evolving travel industry, travel trade partners are navigating a landscape that is not only competitive but increasingly fraught with risk. Minor mistakes and errors by them often carry heavy financial and legal repercussions. According to industry data, claims related to travel service errors and cyber incidents have risen by nearly 40% in the past three years, reflecting the heightened scrutiny and accountability faced by travel operators.

The consequences can be stark. A single error in a passenger's name on an air ticket resulted in a loss of ₹85,000 for one travel trade partner. Another company faced the entire burden of rebooking costs when a missed flight caused a trip cancellation for an elderly couple. More alarmingly, a recent Supreme Court ruling upheld a compensation order of ₹13.5 lakh plus costs against a leading OTA when a customer was left unattended during a medical emergency on a European tour. The risks extend beyond service lapses: in 2022, a forex operator disappeared with client funds in Delhi, and in 2023, a Goa-based travel firm suffered a cyberattack that leaked sensitive customer data. Even partner arrangements can expose businesses to liability, as seen when a solo traveller in Leh sued a company for negligence after an unsafe homestay experience.

These incidents highlight the reality that travel businesses today are accountable not just for their own actions, but also for those of their partners, vendors, and staff. They manage sensitive customer data, financial transactions, and life-critical situations – and any lapse can damage both their reputation and balance sheets.

Recognising these challenges, ASEGO has introduced Travel Business Protect, a first-of-its-kind product designed exclusively for travel agencies and tour operators in India. This solution targets travel trade partners and delivers comprehensive coverage for both operational and legal risks. It provides legal defence and compensation support, covering lawyer fees, court expenses and payouts if a client wins a case. It also protects against unintentional service errors and omissions by staff, and safeguards important client documents such as passports. The cover extends to third-party bodily injury and property damage involving third parties, as well as claims arising from negligence or unsatisfactory services. We include incidents such as slips, falls, and transportation-related accidents, and we cover medical costs, including first aid and emergency expenses, during tours. Addressing modern challenges, it protects against cybercrime, phishing, identity theft and employee fraud, as well as coverage for losses from supplier defaults or delayed payments.

Additionally, Travel Business Protect also includes emergency travel assistance, including tele-assistance.

This comprehensive suite ensures travel trade partners are protected on every front – from day-to-day operations to unforeseen crises. By combining industry-specific covers with robust assistance, ASEGO helps them build resilience in an increasingly demanding environment.

For travel trade partners, the message is clear: the cost of inaction is rising. A single oversight can spiral into

legal disputes, customer claims, or reputational harm. Travel Business Protect is more than an insurance product – it's a business sustainability strategy. With a safety net covering them, travel trade partners can focus on what they do best: creating memorable journeys for their clients, with the confidence that their own future is secure.

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COMMENTING ON THE LAUNCH, MR. DEV KARVAT, FOUNDER AND CEO OF ASEGO, SAID:

"TRAVEL TRADE PARTNERS TODAY ARE AT THE FRONTLINES OF CUSTOMER TRUST. THEY ARE NO LONGER JUST BOOKING OPERATORS; THEY ARE SERVICE PROVIDERS, FINANCIAL CUSTODIANS, AND CRISIS MANAGERS. WE CREATED TRAVEL BUSINESS PROTECT BECAUSE WE SAW A GAP – TRAVEL BUSINESSES NEEDED A SOLUTION THAT UNDERSTOOD THEIR WORLD AND PROTECTED THEM AT EVERY LEVEL. THIS OFFERING IS ABOUT ENSURING THEIR HARD WORK AND REPUTATION ARE SECURED, NO MATTER WHAT CHALLENGES COME THEIR WAY."



The heart of
Incredible India

FROM HIDDEN VALLEYS TO FLOATING FESTIVALS MP'S NEW TOURISM STORY

Madhya Pradesh, often referred to as the "Heart of India," is a land of remarkable diversity, boasting 11 National Parks, 24 Wildlife Sanctuaries, 9 Tiger Reserves, 18 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and vibrant spiritual hubs. Yet beyond these famed landmarks, a new tourism narrative is emerging—one that celebrates unexplored landscapes, cultural revival, and immersive experiences, from mystical Satpura valleys to shimmering water festivals.

PATALKOT - THE HIDDEN VALLEY OF HEALING

Nestled in Chhindwara's Satpura ranges, Patalkot—literally the "hidden world"—is home to the Bharia and Gond tribes, traditional healers, and over 200 rare medicinal herbs. Spread across quaint villages and serene hamlets, the valley offers scenic treks, river trails, waterfalls, and authentic cultural encounters, from tribal cuisine to folk dances.

With eco-tourism circuits, homestays, and wellness retreats emerging, Patalkot is becoming a living museum of tribal heritage and ancient healing wisdom.



GANDHI SAGAR - THE RISE OF FLOATING FESTIVALS

In the Mandsaur-Neemuch region, Gandhi Sagar reservoir is transforming into a hub for water-based adventure and eco-tourism. Visitors can enjoy floating camps, kayaking, jet skiing, birding trails, and vibrant water festivals. At the Gandhi Sagar Forest Retreat, mornings greet travellers with serene waterscapes, afternoons brim with adventure, and evenings gather everyone around bonfires to the rhythm of tribal music—creating an immersive wilderness experience like no other.

MANDU - WHERE HERITAGE MEETS CELEBRATION

Famed for its Afghan-era architecture and romantic legends, Mandu is now a vibrant festival capital. The annual Mandu Festival brings the city to life with live music, folk and classical dance, heritage walks, hot air balloon rides, cycling tours, and local culinary delights. Amid ancient ruins, Mandu is carving a niche as a cultural magnet, offering a unique Malwa flavour that blends history, art, and celebration.

OMKARESHWAR - SPIRITUALITY WITH A NEW DIMENSION

Omkareshwar, one of the 12 Jyotirlingas, is blending traditional pilgrimage with modern wellness experiences, offering yoga, meditation, and Ayurveda retreats along the sacred Narmada. Central to this vision is Ekatma Dham, a global centre for spiritual learning celebrating oneness, Sanatana Dharma, and the legacy of Adi Shankaracharya. Part of 26 new 'Lok' spiritual destinations, Omkareshwar invites seekers from across the globe to rejuvenate body, mind, and soul.

"Madhya Pradesh aims to be the offbeat, multi-speciality destination of first choice for travellers. Our vision is to create clean, green, and safe destinations that empower local communities, showcase living traditions, and offer immersive journeys across hidden valleys, vibrant festivals, sacred circuits, and cultural heritage. Every initiative is designed not just to attract visitors, but to generate livelihoods, foster sustainable tourism, and share the true spirit of Madhya Pradesh with the world."

— **Shri Sheo Shekhar Shukla**,
Additional Chief Secretary, Tourism, Culture, Home, and Religious Trusts & Endowments, and
Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board



A FUTURE BEYOND THE FAMILIAR

Together, these destinations—Pataalkot's tribal mystique, Gandhi Sagar's floating festivals, Mandu's cultural revival, and Omkareshwar's wellness transformation—form the backbone of Madhya Pradesh's evolving tourism story. Travelers are discovering previously overlooked locales as symbols of sustainable, community-driven, and offbeat tourism potential.

The Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart (MPTM), scheduled for October 11-13, 2025, in Bhopal, will bring together buyers, sellers, hoteliers, tour operators, travel agents, and international stakeholders under one roof. More than an exhibition, it is a gateway to connect, collaborate, and curate innovative tourism experiences. With tourist arrivals reaching 13.41 crore in 2024—a remarkable 526% rise over pre-pandemic levels—Madhya Pradesh's tourism sector is not just reviving; it is setting new benchmarks, proving that the state's future shines as brightly as its illustrious past.



INDIA BETS ON TRAVEL MARTS

India is at an inflexion point in its tourism journey. For decades, global tour operators, along with established circuits like the Golden Triangle, Goa, and Kerala, have shaped the inbound tourism pipeline through their efforts and occasional roadshows. However, across India, state tourism boards are now experimenting with a sharper instrument: travel marts—curated B2B marketplaces where international buyers meet Indian sellers, alongside airlines, hotel chains, and investors.

The attraction is straightforward. Unlike generic expos or roadshows, travel marts compress deal-making into a few intense days. They deliver opportunity density, allow precise product-market alignment (whether in wellness, wildlife, weddings, or MICE), and generate storylines that global operators can take back home and actually sell.

Yet, as any seasoned buyer or tourism policymaker will tell you, the market is just the opening move. The real game lies in what happens after the lights dim: are there enough seats on planes, enough rooms on the ground, and enough policy consistency to sustain global interest? If not, the mart becomes a showy conference rather than a growth engine.

This cover story examines how India's leading states are deploying the mart model, what early numbers suggest, and whether this format—borrowed from international leaders like Thailand and Dubai—can actually help India sustainably expand its inbound share.

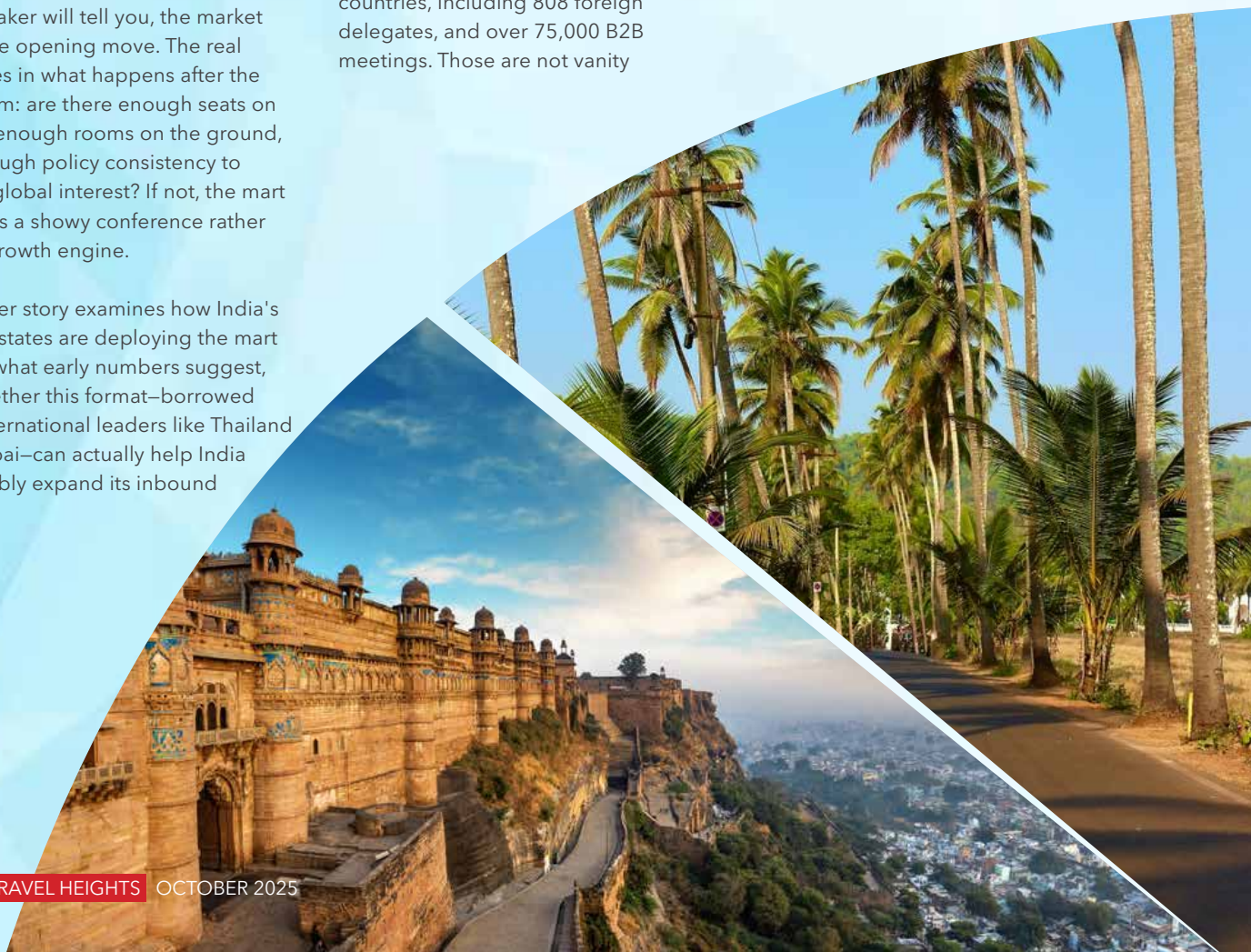
KERALA: PROOF-OF-CONCEPT AT SCALE

Kerala remains the benchmark for how a state-led mart can evolve from a local showcase into an international flywheel. The Kerala Travel Mart (KTM), launched in 2000, has steadily built a reputation as one of Asia's most influential buyer-seller marketplaces.

The 2024 Edition was record-breaking: 2,839 buyers from 76 countries, including 808 foreign delegates, and over 75,000 B2B meetings. Those are not vanity

statistics—they reflect structured matchmaking, appointment-setting apps, and a seriousness about buyer curation that many other states are still catching up to.

Tourism Minister P. A. Mohamed Riyas, in his 2024 address, stressed the role of KTM as an instrument of resilience. Kerala has faced floods, the COVID-19 pandemic, and even landslides in



Wayanad in 2024, but KTM provided a consistent global platform to relaunch the state's story each time.

The government's post-event communiqué was explicit: KTM "has always given a boost" during crises, helping reassure international operators that the state remains open for business. The official Kerala Tourism newsletter emphasised sustainability, highlighting a paperless scheduling app, waste-reduction protocols, and community inclusion—all factors that global buyers increasingly look for when evaluating destinations.

Why it matters

Kerala's success lies in its clarity of product. By consistently framing Ayurveda & wellness, the backwaters, soft adventure, and responsible tourism as a cohesive inbound narrative, KTM has allowed global operators to market Kerala as a standalone product. In many markets, travellers now view Kerala as a distinct destination rather than just a "module" within a pan-India itinerary.

RAJASTHAN: HERITAGE AS HIGH-VALUE INBOUND DEMAND

If Kerala is about wellness and resilience, Rajasthan's mart strategy is about heritage, luxury, and policy theatre.

The Rajasthan Domestic Travel Mart (RDTM) aimed initially to boost domestic tourism. However, it is now also impacting inbound tourism, particularly in areas such as weddings, luxury circuits, and MICE events.

At the 2023 Edition, Principal Secretary (Tourism) Gayatri Rathore described RDTM as "a perfect PPP model to synergise efforts of the public and private sector." That public-private framing is deliberate: Rajasthan's inbound strategy relies heavily on private operators—from heritage hotels and palace owners to event companies—that require policy certainty to make long-cycle bets.

At the same event, FHTR President Apurv Kumar brought sustainability into focus: "Sustainable Tourism is becoming increasingly important... There is a risk of natural resources being depleted and local communities being negatively impacted." The 2025 Edition was still largely domestically oriented, with around 1,200 buyers.

But the infrastructure is in place to scale inbound. Rajasthan's market is less about raw numbers and more about the policy stage it provides. We are announcing restoration incentives, facilitating film projects, approving charters, and implementing heritage conservation schemes to signal long-term reliability to our global partners.

Why it matters

For international operators, the most significant risk in selling India's heritage circuits isn't demand—it's execution. Weddings in palaces, MICE buyouts, and long-duration heritage tours require predictable policy frameworks and permissions. By using RDTM as a stage for such announcements, Rajasthan reduces buyer risk and turns curiosity into actual contracts.

MADHYA PRADESH: REPOSITIONING WILDLIFE FOR THE WORLD

The next state to watch is Madhya Pradesh, which is attempting to transform its Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart (MPTM) into a flagship inbound

MADHYA PRADESH IS LEVERAGING ITS STATUS AS INDIA'S "TIGER STATE" WITH HELICOPTER LINKS BETWEEN BANDHAVGARH, KANHA, AND PENCH. FOR GLOBAL SAFARI-GOERS, COMPRESSED TRAVEL TIME TURNS CURIOSITY INTO BOOKABLE ITINERARIES.





GOA'S NEXT CHAPTER LIES BEYOND THE SHORELINE – IN VILLAGES, FESTIVALS, AND WELLNESS TRAILS THAT INVITE THE WORLD TO STAY LONGER, NOT JUST ARRIVE SOONER.

Tourism Minister Dharmendra Singh Lodhi has framed MPTM not just as an inbound play but as a driver of jobs and local benefits, positioning tourism as a socio-economic engine.

Madhya Pradesh also leans heavily on its identity as the "Tiger State." The 2023 tiger census reaffirmed its dominance, giving the state an authentic anchor for its inbound wildlife brand. Pairing this with B2B opportunity density at MPTM, MP now has a credible case to rival African safari itineraries as part of a multi-destination package.

Why it matters

Wildlife is one of India's most exportable tourism niches. By aligning product (tiger reserves), accessibility (helicopter links), and B2B density (MPTM), MP is building a platform that can genuinely shift inbound flows.

GOA: PIVOTING BEYOND THE BEACH

Goa's tourism story is at a crossroads. Once the undisputed magnet for inbound leisure travellers, it now faces challenges: price competitiveness, overcrowding, and an overdependence on its beaches.

Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte has been candid about the need for course correction. In July 2025, he told the Assembly: "We are on the right path," citing a steady rise in arrivals and a strategy to diversify Goa's global brand.

Unlike Kerala or MP, Goa is not yet running a large-scale mart. Instead, it has chosen a more surgical approach: international roadshows. In September 2025, a roadshow in Tashkent was hailed by Khaunte as having "opened new avenues for collaboration."

The pivot is clear: Goa wants to position itself as "vibrant, diverse, and sustainable... far beyond its beaches." The goal is to promote eco-friendly accommodations in rural areas, along with festivals, wellness retreats, and long-term tourism.

Why it matters

Goa shows how states can blend domestic-heavy platforms with targeted international outreach. By experimenting with niche inbound propositions—such as festivals, eco-tourism, and wellness—Goa is laying the groundwork for a future marketing strategy, informed by honest buyer feedback.

NORTHEAST INDIA: A REGIONAL MART AS UNIFIER

The Northeast region proudly holds the title of India's "last frontier" for inbound tourism. Rich in culture, biodiversity,

and cross-border linkages, it has also faced challenges in its perception abroad.

Enter the International Tourism Mart (ITM), organised by the Union Ministry of Tourism and rotated across the Northeast states. The 2023 Edition in Shillong framed the region as an "untapped" tourism powerhouse, with a sustainability-first narrative. Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma played a prominent role, signalling strong political ownership.

Tourism is becoming a serious economic driver for the region. During the 2024 Cherry Blossom Festival, Sangma reported that tourism numbers had doubled year-on-year. Against this backdrop, ITM serves as a rallying point to present the Northeast not as fragmented states but as a cohesive, sellable region.

In mid-2025, authorities issued an adverse travel advisory, and Sangma publicly opposed it, calling it "incorrect and misleading." Consistent B2B signalling is essential; international operators need clarity and confidence to invest in the Northeast's narrative.

Why it matters

A regional marketplace reduces brand dilution and empowers foreign buyers to confidently curate multi-state itineraries focused on eco-tourism, culture, and adventure. For the Northeast, ITM is not just a trade show; it's an exercise in image management and collective positioning.

LEARNING FROM GLOBAL LEADERS

India's market experiment is not unique. Globally, travel marts have long been the backbone of inbound growth strategies.

- **Arabian Travel Market (ATM), Dubai:** The 2024 Edition hosted over 46,000 attendees and 2,600 exhibitors, providing hard evidence that concentrated B2B marketplaces drive large-scale deal flow.
- **Thailand Travel Mart Plus (TTM+):** Thailand is centralising

its inbound push by hosting TTM+ 2025 in Chiang Mai. This deliberate decision aims to extend the benefits of tourism beyond Bangkok and Phuket.

- **WTM London and PATA Travel Mart:** India actively participates in these global platforms. At WTM 2024, tender specifications for India's pavilion explicitly mandated layouts "conducive for buyer-seller meetings," underscoring the B2B-first intent.
- **India's twist:** India's federal model enables states to develop distinct tourism focuses: Kerala promotes wellness, Madhya Pradesh showcases wildlife, Rajasthan highlights heritage, and Goa celebrates festivals. Unlike Thailand or Dubai, where authorities

centralise tourism efforts, the Centre actively supports tourism on the global stage. Decentralisation can be a strength when teams coordinate their calendars and avoid buyer fatigue.

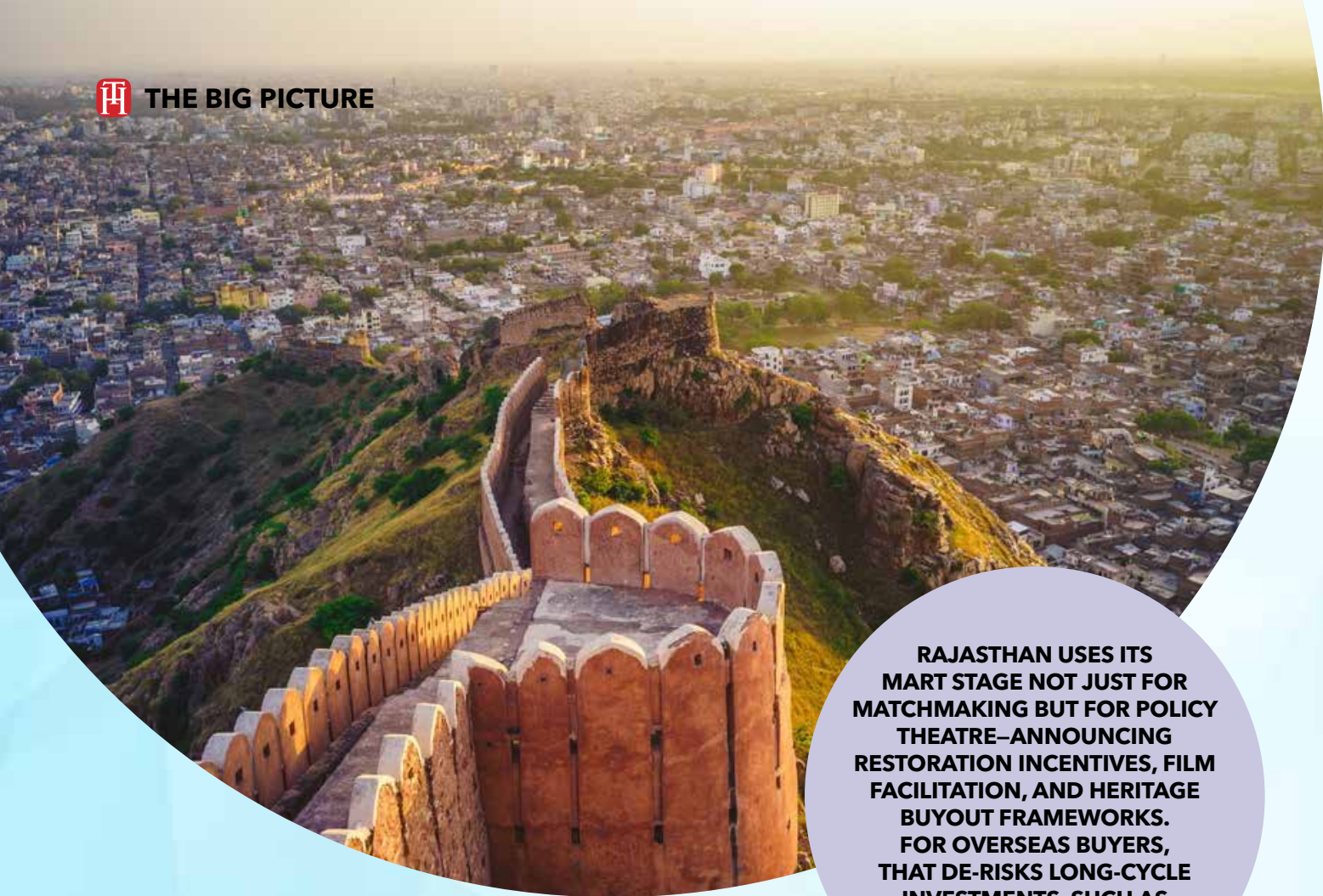
WILL THIS LIFT INBOUND NUMBERS?

Why the numbers should move:

- **Opportunity density:** Kerala's 2024 mart alone delivered 75,000+ meetings. Even modest conversion ratios translate into meaningful arrivals.
- **Segment fit:** Kerala (wellness), MP (wildlife), Rajasthan (weddings/heritage), Goa (festivals/long-stays)—these are high-value, exportable niches.
- **Policy signalling:** Announcements made at markets—such as charters, restoration schemes, and sustainability protocols—reduce global buyer uncertainty.

KERALA'S 2024 TRAVEL MART LOGGED 75,000+ B2B MEETINGS. EVEN IF ONLY A SMALL FRACTION CONVERTS, THAT'S ENOUGH TO SHIFT REAL INBOUND NUMBERS—PROOF THAT CONCENTRATED MARKETPLACES CAN OUTPERFORM SCATTERSHOT ROADSHOWS.





RAJASTHAN USES ITS MART STAGE NOT JUST FOR MATCHMAKING BUT FOR POLICY THEATRE—ANNOUNCING RESTORATION INCENTIVES, FILM FACILITATION, AND HERITAGE BUYOUT FRAMEWORKS. FOR OVERSEAS BUYERS, THAT DE-RISKS LONG-CYCLE INVESTMENTS, SUCH AS WEDDINGS AND PALACE CHARTERS.

WHERE IT COULD STALL:

- **Buyer fatigue:** Too many state-level marts clustered in one quarter could split attendance. Differentiation and calendar coordination are crucial.
- **Airlift & last-mile issues:** Demand is meaningless without supply. Uttar Pradesh's own estimate—5 lakh more hotel rooms needed—illustrates the gap.
- **Lead nurturing:** Conversions often take 12–24 months. Without structured follow-ups, early interest can fizzle. Kerala's strategy of year-round conclaves (like the 2025 Wedding & MICE Conclave) shows how to keep momentum alive.

HOW TO MAKE MARTS ACTUALLY CONVERT

- **Differentiate by theme:** Kerala (wellness/MICE), MP (wildlife), Rajasthan (heritage/weddings), Goa (festivals/long-stays).
- **Coordinate the calendar:** Organises state marts in sequence to enhance participation from India's WTM/ PATA, maximising buyer trips and benefits for FAM (Familiarisation) trips.

- **Match supply with demand:** Ensure that hotel capacity and airlift grow in tandem with market-driven interest.
- **Operationalise follow-ups:** Adopt ATM's model—structured hosted-buyer programs, appointment scheduling, and CRM-driven post-show engagement.
- **Track meaningful KPIs:** Beyond footfalls, measure itinerary inclusion, ADR growth, long-stay ratios, and dispersal beyond gateway cities.

VERDICT: A STRONG LEVER—IF STATES FINISH THE LAST MILE

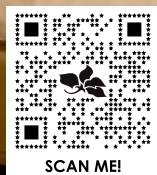
Travel marts are not a magic wand, but neither are they empty spectacles. Kerala's KTM has already demonstrated how concentrated B2B density, product clarity, and follow-through can yield real inbound growth. Rajasthan is

demonstrating how to utilise markets as policy stages, while Madhya Pradesh is positioning wildlife as a globally competitive niche. Goa is testing the waters with targeted international pushes, while the Northeast is utilising ITM to unify its fragmented brands.

The stakes are high. India's inbound ambition depends not just on sparking global interest but on converting that interest into bookable, well-connected itineraries. Travel marts are where that interest concentrates. The aftercare—seats on planes, rooms on the ground, and relentless engagement with buyers—is where interest turns into arrivals. ■



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VEDIC VILLAGE SPA RESORT

REDEFINING BIOPHILIC LUXURY IN KOLKATA

Nestled on the outskirts of Kolkata, Vedic Village Spa Resort offers a harmonious blend of nature, wellness, and luxury. With its sprawling 150 acres of landscaped greenery, indigenous architecture, and holistic experiences, the property has become synonymous with biophilic hospitality in Eastern India. As it enters its 19th year of successful operations, Travel Heights engages in an exclusive conversation with Rajib Roy Choudhury, Associate Vice President, Vedic Village Spa Resort, who shares the journey, vision, and evolving offerings of this celebrated destination.

Could you take us through the journey of Vedic Village Spa Resort since its inception?

RRC Our journey has been one of steady growth and evolution. Over the past three years in particular, we have witnessed significant momentum, with increasing demand for wellness retreats, weddings, corporate events, and outdoor activities. To meet this demand, we expanded our accommodation portfolio with new rooms, villas, and banquet spaces, welcoming a broader spectrum of guests and events.

These expansions have positioned us as a premier hospitality destination in Eastern India. Looking ahead, our



focus is on embracing sustainable practices and integrating cutting-edge technology to enhance every facet of the guest experience.

How does your property distinguish itself in terms of luxury offerings and guest experiences?

RRC We aim to create an atmosphere where luxury and nature coexist. Guests can indulge in state-of-the-art rooms and ethnic villas, designed for individuals, families, and large corporate groups. On the culinary front, we offer multi-cuisine dining at Yagna and a unique Bengali gourmet experience at Bhoomi, which celebrates the region's heritage flavours.

Wellness is another cornerstone of our property. The Vedic Wellness Ayurvedic Centre offers a comprehensive range of Ayurveda, Naturopathy, and Western therapies. Guests also enjoy access to swimming pools, e-cycle trekking trails, farmer's market visits, and curated day excursions to the Sundarbans. For business travelers, our 14 banqueting venues, including the newly built Utsav Convention Centre, cater seamlessly to corporate events, weddings, and large gatherings.

What would you highlight as the unique strengths of Vedic Village Spa Resort?

RRC Our uniqueness lies in being a true biophilic luxury destination, spread across 150 acres of gardens, lakes, and natural landscapes, just a short drive from Netaji Subhas

Chandra Bose International Airport. The architectural philosophy of our resort integrates indigenous design with modern aesthetics, employing eco-friendly materials such as bamboo and thatch in our banquet spaces.

In addition, we offer a vibrant array of team-building activities, wellness programs, and outdoor sports, ensuring there is something for everyone – whether it's leisure travelers, wedding parties, or corporate groups.

Wellness has become a global priority. How does your resort reflect this in its offerings?

RRC Wellness is truly at the heart of our philosophy. Our holistic wellness packages integrate traditional Indian healing with modern therapies. In Ayurveda, practitioners highly seek treatments like Shirodhara, Abhyanga, and Panchakarma.. From the Naturopathy side, mud baths and Colon Hydrotherapy are popular, while our Western therapies include Swedish and deep tissue massages.

We also emphasise customised wellness programs, tailored to suit the needs of both corporate teams and individual guests. Yoga and meditation sessions enhance these practices by restoring balance and rejuvenating both the mind and body.

Which therapies and treatments are most popular among your guests?

RRC Among our wellness therapies, Ayurvedic treatments such as Abhyangam and Shirodhara remain the most in demand. In Naturopathy, mud baths and hydrotherapy are favourites, while yoga and meditation sessions enjoy strong participation. The growing interest in holistic health ensures that these offerings remain central to the guest experience.

West Bengal is known for its rich culinary heritage. How does Vedic Village Spa Resort promote the region's cuisine?

SPREAD ACROSS 150 ACRES OF NATURAL LANDSCAPES AND DESIGNED WITH INDIGENOUS, SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS, VEDIC VILLAGE SPA RESORT IS TRULY EASTERN INDIA'S PREMIER BIOPHILIC LUXURY DESTINATION.

We take great pride in showcasing Bengal's rich and diverse flavours. Our signature restaurant, Bhoomi, is a celebration of Bengal's culinary traditions, with dishes prepared using fresh, locally sourced ingredients. Beyond the plate, we bring culture alive through themed dinners and curated cultural evenings that highlight regional art, music, and traditions. This immersive approach ensures that our guests don't just taste Bengal, but truly experience it.

How has the resort performed in the current period, and what lies ahead?

RRC We are proud to share that we are currently celebrating our 19th year of operations, marked by continued growth and positive guest feedback. Our Net Promoter Score (NPS) stands at an impressive 87%, reflecting high levels of satisfaction. We maintain an occupancy rate of 72%, an average room rate of ₹6,500, and an average per cover of ₹1,800, with a substantial gross operating profit of 35%.

In parallel, we are undergoing extensive upgrades to rooms, landscaping, and event venues, with sustainability at the core of our plans. Our vision is to solidify further our identity as Eastern India's premier biophilic luxury destination, offering guests a sustainable indulgence experience complemented by world-class hospitality.

With its unique blend of luxury, nature, wellness, and cultural richness, Vedic Village Spa Resort stands as a testament to Kolkata's evolving hospitality landscape – redefining what it means to escape, rejuvenate, and reconnect. ■

WELLNESS IS AT THE HEART OF OUR PHILOSOPHY – FROM SHIRODHARA AND ABHYANGAM TO YOGA, MEDITATION, AND PERSONALISED NATUROPATHIC THERAPIES, WE OFFER HOLISTIC EXPERIENCES THAT REJUVENATE MIND AND BODY.

ALILA JABAL AKHDAR A GREEN HAVEN IN OMAN'S HIGHLANDS

Where luxury, wellness, and sustainability come together in the heart of the Al Hajar Mountains

Alila Jabal Akhdar sits 2,000 metres above sea level, offering breathtaking views of the Al Hajar Mountains. How are you positioning the property to attract high-end Indian travellers today?

PS India is one of our most important markets, as Indian travellers value authenticity, exclusivity, and wellness. Our approach is multi-dimensional—building awareness through trusted luxury travel advisors, strengthening partnerships with lifestyle and travel media, and hosting influencers who inspire aspirational journeys.

We also design targeted campaigns around long weekends, festive breaks, and the summer season, when our mountain sanctuary offers temperatures up to 15 degrees cooler than the plains. For Indian travellers,

High above the desert plains, where rugged cliffs meet endless skies, lies a sanctuary that whispers the language of stillness—Alila Jabal Akhdar. Perched 2,000 metres above sea level, this ultra-luxury retreat redefines soulful travel in Oman's Green Mountain. Exclusively featured in the October 2025 Edition of Travel Heights, Puneet Singh, General Manager, shares how the property blends raw nature, refined luxury, and the timeless warmth of Omani hospitality to craft journeys that are both restorative and unforgettable.



we focus on meaningful luxury—private villas for family bonding, culinary journeys that weave Omani and Indian flavours, and curated adventure activities for all generations. It's about creating experiences that resonate with their lifestyle and values.

What would you say are the unique selling propositions of Alila Jabal Akhdar?

PS Four defining elements set us apart:

Location & Landscape

A cliff-top retreat at 2,000 metres, offering panoramic views of the rugged Al Hajar range, dramatic sunsets, and star-strewn skies.

Architecture & Design

Built from local stone, blending seamlessly into its natural surroundings, with interiors celebrating Omani artistry and contemporary elegance.

Experiential Journeys

From rose harvesting and pomegranate picking to Via Ferrata climbs and cultural village trails, each activity tells a local story.

Wellness & Sustainability

As the only Gold EarthCheck-certified resort in the region, we lead the way in eco-practices, including solar energy, food waste composting, an in-house water bottling plant, and a hydroponic farm that supplies fresh produce.

Together, these elements deliver an experience that is luxurious, sustainable, and deeply authentic.

With travellers increasingly seeking experiences over popular destinations, how does the resort cater to this trend?

ALILA JABAL AKHDAR IS PERCHED 2,000 METRES ABOVE SEA LEVEL, OFFERING UNRIVALLED VIEWS OF OMAN'S GREEN MOUNTAIN AND THE RUGGED AL HAJAR RANGE.

PS We embrace this shift wholeheartedly. At Alila Jabal Akhdar, enrichment comes from depth, not breadth. Guided walks through abandoned villages reveal stories of a bygone era, while intimate picnics set against dramatic cliffs showcase Omani flavours. Evenings beneath starry skies blend mythology with astronomy for a genuinely memorable connection.

Our goal is to craft moments that go beyond activities—immersive encounters that invite guests to be part of the mountain's living story.

Omani hospitality is often described as one-of-a-kind in the Arab world. How is this reflected in the guest experience at Alila Jabal Akhdar?

PS Our hospitality is rooted in generosity and authenticity. Many of our colleagues hail from Jabal Akhdar and Nizwa, carrying forward traditions with pride. Guests are personally welcomed with local drinks, dates, and honey, and invited to participate in cultural rituals, such as the distillation of rose water.

The ethos is simple yet profound—hospitality that feels like home. It's discreet, heartfelt, and deeply personal, leaving guests with warmth that lingers.

Wellness is an integral part of the luxury travel experience. What therapies and treatments does Spa Alila offer, and which ones are especially popular with guests?

PS At Spa Alila, we connect wellness directly to our environment. Our treatments draw inspiration from the surrounding mountains, local flora, and the tranquil atmosphere.

Guest favourites include the Jabal Akhdar Revitalising Massage, a blend of Balinese, Lomi-Lomi, and Swedish techniques enhanced with Thai stretches and frankincense oil. Another highlight is the "Into the Heart of the Mountain Journey," which begins with a mindful garden walk, followed by an open-air cliffside massage, and concludes with a custom rose-and-lemon scrub.

AS THE ONLY GOLD EARTHCHECK-CERTIFIED RESORT IN THE REGION, WE COMBINE ECO-CONSCIOUS PRACTICES WITH AUTHENTIC OMANI HOSPITALITY.

For something truly unique, the Spa Harbour offers alfresco treatments perched on the canyon edge—such as the Harmony Four Hands Massage or the Serenity Flow, which combines yoga, meditation, and massage. Complementary rituals, such as sunrise yoga and sound baths, further enrich the healing experience.

How significant is the Indian MICE market for your property, and what facilities do you offer for such travellers?

PS The Indian MICE segment is experiencing rapid growth, and our property provides a unique setting for luxury incentives and leadership retreats. Our boardroom and meeting spaces cater to intimate, high-level gatherings, while panoramic outdoor decks host private dinners, launches, and wellness interludes.

With direct flights from major Indian cities to Muscat and the exclusivity of our location, we're an ideal choice for corporates seeking privacy, inspiration, and distinction.

Adventure is a key draw for the modern traveller. What experiences and activities can guests look forward to at Alila Jabal Akhdar?

PS Adventure is the heartbeat of our destination. Guests can take on the exhilarating Via Ferrata climbing route, trek through dramatic canyons, or explore ancient villages across the Saiq Plateau. Cycling trails, stargazing under pristine skies, and archery add variety, while our Butterfly Trail offers immersive nature walks.

Each activity is designed not just for thrills but to foster connections—with nature, history, and oneself. ■



HYATT CENTRIC BALLYGUNGE KOLKATA

LUXURY WITH A LOCAL SOUL

In the heart of Ballygunge, one of Kolkata's most vibrant neighbourhoods, a new address has redefined what it means to experience luxury. Hyatt Centric Ballygunge Kolkata is more than just a hotel—it is a cultural gateway that blends contemporary hospitality with the city's timeless charm. With design elements inspired by Kolkata's artistic heritage, menus that celebrate both global innovation and traditional Bengali flavours, and experiences that lead guests to the city's hidden gems, the property stands apart as a true lifestyle destination.

At the helm is Glen Dsouza, General Manager, who envisions the hotel not only as a space for refined stays but also as a hub where locals and travellers alike can engage, discover, and celebrate Kolkata's evolving spirit. In this exclusive conversation, he shares insights into the property's journey so far, its growth strategies, and how Hyatt Centric Ballygunge aims to carve out its niche in the city's luxury hospitality landscape.

Looking back at 2025, how would you describe the year for Hyatt Centric Ballygunge Kolkata and the Hyatt group overall?

GD The year 2025 has been one of growth, optimism, and renewed energy. Travel sentiments in India have bounced back significantly, and

Kolkata has become an increasingly attractive destination for both cultural exploration and business travel. For Hyatt Centric Ballygunge

Kolkata, this year has brought high occupancies, strong F&B patronage, and the success of curated lifestyle events that resonate with both locals and international guests. It has been a year of consolidating our identity as a lifestyle-led luxury hotel that truly mirrors the spirit of Kolkata.

As a relatively new entrant in the city's luxury landscape, how are you designing strategies to attract domestic leisure travellers and MICE business?

GD For domestic leisure travellers, our focus is on hyperlocal experiences that allow them to experience Kolkata more unconventionally. From curated neighbourhood trails and food walks to intimate culinary workshops, we bring the city closer to our guests. We focus on personalisation and innovation to enhance the experience for MICE travellers. We design events that combine seamless execution with our signature dining experiences, ensuring every gathering feels elevated, memorable, and unique.

What is your unique differentiator in Kolkata's competitive luxury hospitality market, and how do you plan to evolve in the coming years?

GD Hyatt Centric Ballygunge Kolkata is not a conventional luxury property. We are a lifestyle-driven hotel that brings the city's culture, art, and vibrancy to life. Our design reflects

WE ARE NOT JUST A HOTEL—WE ARE A LIFESTYLE-DRIVEN DESTINATION THAT REFLECTS KOLKATA'S CULTURE, ART, AND VIBRANCY.

Kolkata's heritage. Our food and beverage offerings combine global innovation with authentic Bengali flavours, and our associates act as "local insiders", guiding guests to hidden cultural gems.

Looking ahead, we plan to expand our cultural tie-ups, offer elevated rooftop experiences, and strengthen our positioning as a hub for leisure, social, and cultural gatherings in the city.

Where do you see Hyatt Centric Ballygunge positioned within the larger state luxury and lifestyle hospitality ecosystem?

GD We are proud to stand out as one of Kolkata's most distinctive lifestyle hotels. While premium properties abound, what makes us unique is that we don't just provide accommodation—we give a sense of discovery. Guests stay with us not only to unwind, but also to immerse themselves in Kolkata's cultural essence. This positioning appeals not only to international travellers seeking authentic experiences, but

also to residents who look to us for elevated dining and social events.

Hospitality is a future-focused business. What is your vision for Hyatt Centric Ballygunge two years from now?

GD In two years, I envision Hyatt Centric Ballygunge Kolkata solidifying its position as a must-visit lifestyle destination in the city. Our focus will be on expanding our MICE presence, enhancing experiential programs, and innovating continuously in the F&B vertical. With Kolkata emerging as a strong hub for both business and leisure, our property will play an even more influential role in reshaping the city's hospitality narrative.

How has the guest mix evolved at your property, and what are your future targets?

GD Last year, our guest profile was predominantly domestic, accounting for nearly 70-75%, driven by strong inflows from metro cities. The remaining share was made up of international travellers, many of whom came to explore Kolkata's cultural richness or for business commitments. With improved connectivity and growing global interest, we aim to attract stronger international footfalls while nurturing the domestic market that continues to sustain our occupancy.

Revenue growth and food and beverage (F&B) have become crucial performance indicators for luxury properties. How has Hyatt Centric Ballygunge fared on these fronts?

GD The past year has been very encouraging, with steady growth in occupancy and average daily rates, reflecting a strong revival of traveller confidence. Our food and beverage vertical has been a standout performer, thanks to curated dining concepts and festive promotions that struck a chord with both locals and guests. While I cannot disclose exact figures, our growth trajectory has exceeded expectations, and with our distinct positioning, we are confident of sustaining this momentum. ■

OUR VISION IS TO CEMENT HYATT CENTRIC BALLYGUNGE AS KOLKATA'S MUST-VISIT LIFESTYLE HUB, WHERE GLOBAL LUXURY MEETS LOCAL DISCOVERY.



SADAR MANZIL HERITAGE

ROMANCE, ROYALTY & MALWA FLAVOURS



Where regal history meets contemporary luxury, Sadar Manzil Heritage by Atmosphere in Bhopal stands as a living tribute to the Begums of Bhopal, now reborn as a couples-only retreat. In this exclusive feature for Travel Heights, Palace Manager Aarti Tuli highlights how the team has transformed the 19th-century Durbar Hall into a boutique heritage haven. They celebrate the royal flavours of Malwa by offering vegetarian fine dining and providing intimate, personalised service through an all-women team in anticipation of the Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart (MPTM).

Sadar Manzil Heritage is a symbol of Bhopal's royal past. What kind of regal luxury awaits discerning travellers at your property?

AT Our property is more than a stay—it's a journey into history. The 19th-century mansion, which once served as the Durbar Hall of the Begums, has been lovingly restored to blend heritage with modern luxury seamlessly. Ideally located between Bhopal's Old City and New City, it offers guests a rare blend of immersive tradition and contemporary convenience.

Exclusively designed for couples, Sadar Manzil creates an enchanting



atmosphere for romantic getaways, honeymoons, and intimate celebrations—all enhanced by a dedicated team of women employees. Each accommodation showcases vintage styling, antique furnishings, regal colour palettes, and expansive windows that flood rooms with natural light. Our culinary philosophy celebrates vegetarian cuisine with a global twist. At the same time, the ambience—steeped in history with frescoes, antiques, and courtyards—embodies Atmosphere Core's "Joy of Giving" philosophy, creating an unparalleled romantic heritage experience.

Could you tell us about the different categories of heritage rooms available?

AT We offer 22 heritage rooms and suites, each designed to provide unique experiences.

Heritage Room (9 rooms)

Cosy retreats with king-sized beds, seating areas, minibars, and spacious bathrooms with bathtubs—ideal for intimate stays.

SADAR MANZIL HERITAGE BY ATMOSPHERE IS CENTRAL INDIA'S ONLY COUPLES-ONLY HERITAGE RETREAT, BLENDING REGAL CHARM WITH INTIMATE, VEGETARIAN FINE DINING.

Heritage Grand Room (10 rooms)

Larger rooms with elevated views of the Grand Courtyard or the historic Moti Mahal corridor.

Heritage Terrace Room (2 rooms)

Featuring private terraces with views of the courtyard and pool—perfect for privacy and outdoor leisure.

Heritage Grand Suite (1 suite)

A lavish option with separate living and sleeping areas, outdoor dining, and unmatched opulence.

All rooms exude heritage charm while ensuring modern comforts, seamlessly combining antique furniture with restored architecture and soothing design themes.

The hotel emphasises vegetarian cuisine and personalised service. Could you elaborate on this,

especially the Malwa culinary influence?

AT At Sadar Manzil, vegetarianism is not just a dining choice—it's our culinary identity. Dining is exclusively by reservation, tailored for couples, with venues including the Diwan-e-Khas (frescoed dining hall), the Charbagh Courtyard for al fresco meals, the Maikhana wine cellar, and the Madhushala Bar, which serves vegetarian tapas.

Our menus celebrate Malwa's rich culinary traditions—Dal Bafla, Bhutte ka Kees, Chakki ki Shaak, Sabudana Khichdi, Poha with Jalebi, Palak Poori with Aloo Sabzi—as well as desserts like Mawa Bati, Malpua, and Jalebi. Chefs create inventive vegetarian gourmet dishes that blend local flavours with global finesse. A personalised butler service and

FACE TO FACE

curated performances further elevate the dining experience, making every meal regal and unforgettable.

Do you face competition from other luxury hotels in Bhopal?

AT Yes, but our positioning is distinct. Unlike other luxury properties, Sadar Manzil is a couples-only, vegetarian retreat entirely serviced by an all-women team. With just 22 rooms, the Atmosphere remains intimate and personalised, complemented by exclusive offerings like the Begum's Plan, which includes accommodation, gourmet dining, spa treatments, and entertainment. Our focus on authenticity, heritage restoration, and storytelling sets us apart, making us a boutique jewel rather than a conventional hotel.

What strategies are you adopting to position Sadar Manzil as a preferred destination for luxury seekers?

We are focusing on five pillars:

Service Excellence: Anticipating guest needs, with our women-led team delivering refined, thoughtful hospitality.

Immersive Heritage: Incorporating storytelling into every touchpoint—heritage tours, curated cultural evenings, and guided architectural experiences.

Culinary Distinction: Vegetarian fine dining with regional ingredients, wine pairings, and exclusive tastings.

Romance & Exclusivity: Tailor-made packages for honeymoons, anniversaries, and proposals with private dining and décor.

Wellness Retreats: Yoga, Ayurveda, and detox experiences for luxury travellers seeking balance with indulgence.

Through creative branding and strategic marketing, we aim to position Sadar Manzil as India's most romantic boutique heritage retreat.



EVERY ELEMENT—FROM AN ALL-WOMEN HOSPITALITY TEAM TO CURATED MALWA FLAVOURS—EMBODIES ATMOSPHERE'S PHILOSOPHY OF THE 'JOY OF GIVING.'



How do you see your property's relevance for corporate or MICE travellers?

We are very clear in our positioning. Sadar Manzil does not cater to MICE travellers. Instead, we embrace our identity as a couple-only luxury retreat, focusing entirely on leisure getaways, romantic occasions, and private celebrations. That said, we do welcome full property buyouts for intimate gatherings, ensuring exclusivity and privacy.

What are your plans for this heritage property?

We are proud to have launched Sadar Manzil Heritage by Atmosphere-Bhopal, inaugurated by Hon'ble Chief Minister Dr Mohan Yadav, with full support from the state government. Looking ahead, Atmosphere Core is working with several state governments to identify and restore historic buildings across India. Our vision is to convert heritage treasures into luxury boutique hotels, preserving history while offering exceptional experiences.

Sadar Manzil is just the beginning—we aspire to make heritage living accessible to discerning travellers across the country. ■

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TOURISM FOR TOMORROW

VOICES SHAPING A SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE FUTURE

World Tourism Day has always been a celebration of movement, discovery, and connection. But in 2025, it is more than just a symbolic date on the calendar – it is a global call to reimagine tourism as a catalyst for cultural exchange, sustainability, innovation, and empowerment. As the travel sector continues to evolve in a post-pandemic landscape, the question is no longer whether tourism can adapt, but how it can thrive while serving as a force for good.

Industry leaders worldwide are united in their conviction: tourism is about much more than simply moving from one place to another. It is about shaping perspectives, fueling economies, preserving heritage, and creating shared responsibility.

TOURISM AS A CULTURAL CONNECTOR

The philosopher St. Augustine once said, "The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only one page." In many ways, this timeless sentiment captures the essence of tourism as a cultural bridge.

Louis D'Souza, Managing Partner at Tamarind Global, believes that Travel is the most outstanding cultural exchange program there is. "Every itinerary we design goes beyond sightseeing – it is about experiencing the soul of a destination with respect, authenticity, and appreciation."

This spirit of cultural immersion is at the heart of modern Travel. Whether it is discovering ancient rituals, savouring local cuisine, or learning traditions

passed down through generations, tourism offers a rare chance to build empathy and respect across borders.



TECHNOLOGY AND PERSONALISATION: REDEFINING JOURNEYS

In the digital age, technology has transformed how we plan and experience Travel. What was once defined by maps and guidebooks is now characterised by data-driven insights, AI-powered personalisation, and seamless booking tools.



"Our mission at SKIL Travel is to bring web technology and humanisation together, meaning every trip feels uniquely designed for you," explains Vikash Kejriwal, CEO of SKIL. "Personalisation is no longer a luxury; it is an expectation."

This shift is redefining the traveler's journey. AI can anticipate preferences, recommend sustainable routes, and create tailored itineraries – all while offering a level of convenience that allows travelers to focus on meaning rather than logistics.

RESPONSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY: BEYOND TREND TO NECESSITY

The urgency of climate change has brought sustainability to the very core of tourism. No longer a marketing buzzword, it is a non-negotiable.



"At Plan B, we integrate sustainability into every decision we make – from the partners we

select to the itineraries we create," says Rana Abu Alhala, CEO, Plan B Tourism. "Tourism should not just leave behind memories but a positive impact on the planet."

Travel today carries a responsibility: to reduce carbon footprints, conserve resources, and ensure that host communities benefit alongside travelers. The sustainable tourism market's projected growth – from USD 2.73 trillion in 2023 to USD 9.17 trillion by 2032 – underscores how sustainability is shaping global travel models.

INNOVATION AND PROGRESS: PUSHING BOUNDARIES

Travel thrives on discovery, and innovation fuels that discovery in fresh ways.



"At Mannai Holidays, we live to push boundaries and set new standards for delivery in travel," says N.M. Shafiq, GM, Mannai Travel Group, Qatar. "Our objective is always to innovate so that our guests are always experiencing progressive travel."

From more innovative booking systems to immersive cultural experiences powered by augmented reality, innovation ensures that the spirit of Travel remains dynamic and inspiring.

RESILIENCE AND AUTHENTICITY: HOLDING ON TO WHAT MATTERS

The pandemic reminded the world of tourism's fragility, but also its resilience. For many in the industry, the lesson was clear: adaptability must never come at the cost of authenticity.



"Unique Lanka Travels remains authentic," notes Charith De Alwis, CEO. "Resilience is transforming or adjusting to challenges while also keeping the authenticity of our destination intact. That is what creates meaning in Travel."

By anchoring in local heritage and values, destinations can remain true to themselves even while adapting to global disruptions.

SUSTAINABLE ISLAND TOURISM: A FRAGILE BALANCE

For island nations, tourism is both a lifeline and a delicate balancing act.



"Travel Lounge is dedicated to supporting sustainable island tourism," shares Leena Jhugroo, Managing Director. "Our experiences respect the ecosystem and livelihood of the locals, and we want our island to be exceptional for generations."

With rising sea levels and ecological pressures, islands embody the urgency of sustainable tourism. They are also proof that Travel, when done responsibly, can preserve rather than exploit the environment.

EMPOWERMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Tourism's most significant potential lies in its ability to empower.



"At Thang Long Tours and Travels, we aim to create opportunities for local communities to experience and share, offering the world their unique culture, cuisine, and crafts," says Emma Le, Inbound Director. "The purpose of tourism is to uplift and empower people, celebrate heritage, and create meaningful connections that enrich both visitors and hosts."

The involvement of communities ensures that tourism is not extractive but collaborative, creating opportunities for cultural pride, income generation, and intergenerational continuity.

NURTURING YOUNG AMBASSADORS

For the future of tourism, education and awareness are essential.



"World Tourism Day is a reminder that travel isn't just about places – it's about shaping perspectives," says Tarandeep Singh Sekhon, Chief Business Officer, KidZania India.

At KidZania's Madhya Pradesh Tourism Experience Centre, children and parents explore virtual jungles, rivers, and tiger reserves through playful, educational modules. "We're not just sparking

curiosity – we're raising India's youngest ambassadors for responsible tourism and proving that true exploration begins with conservation," Sekhon adds.

By engaging young travellers, the industry is planting seeds of responsibility and awareness early, ensuring a generation that values conservation as much as exploration.

INDIA'S ROLE IN GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

Tourism contributes nearly 5% to India's GDP, positioning the country to take a crucial role in promoting sustainable Travel.



"True progress in sustainable tourism requires alignment across public policy, private investment, and grassroots stakeholders," asserts Vikram Dhawan, Chief Strategy Officer, Ebix Travel - Delphi World Money Ltd. "India must define and track meaningful success metrics, such as per-visitor carbon footprint, local economic retention, and circular waste management, that can serve as benchmarks for the global industry."

This alignment could not only strengthen India's tourism infrastructure but also help it emerge as a global leader in regenerative travel models.

EXPLORING ISRAEL THROUGH SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

As the UN spotlights tourism and sustainable transformation, Israel is reimagining travel experiences that nourish both the planet and the spirit.

ECO-CONSCIOUS LIVING

The Negev desert offers some of Israel's most innovative sustainable experiences. At Neot Smadar, visitors can explore organic farming, take vineyard tours, and stay in mud-brick guesthouses. At Kibbutz Lotan, travellers stay in solar-powered mud domes, sip tea at the Solar Tea House, and learn permaculture. Meanwhile, Desert Days Eco-Lodge, situated near Tzukurim, offers rustic, solar-powered cabins designed for slow and mindful retreats.

FARM-TO-TABLE EXPERIENCES

Northern Israel is redefining gastronomy through the concept of agritourism. The Mizpe Hayamim resort near Safed operates its own organic farm and orchards, while Rom Farm Bistro in the Galilee pairs seasonal menus with glamping. Even urban hubs like Tel Aviv are embracing farm-to-table dining through pioneers like Meshek Barzilay and Ra'anana's Makom BaLev, which integrates vertical farming directly into its kitchen.





A LEAF FOR SLOW TRAVEL

These initiatives reflect more than trends; they demonstrate how Israel is aligning with global sustainability goals while honouring its traditions of agriculture and community. For the slow traveller, Israel offers journeys that invite guests to linger longer, eat fresher, and tread lighter.

GLOBAL TOURISM TRENDS: A WIDER LENS

Three broad trends are also shaping the future of tourism:

- **Regenerative Travel** – moving beyond "do not harm" to actively restoring ecosystems and communities. Resorts and operators worldwide are incorporating practices such as coral reef restoration, rewilding programs, and community-led conservation initiatives.
- **Decarbonisation of Tourism** – aviation remains a challenge, but innovations in sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), rail expansion, and carbon offset programs are becoming mainstream.
- **Wellness and Mindful Travel** – travellers are increasingly seeking experiences that nurture body, mind, and soul. Wellness retreats, forest bathing, and spiritual journeys are rapidly growing segments of the tourism industry.

TOURISM IS NO LONGER JUST ABOUT WHERE WE GO – IT'S ABOUT HOW WE GO, AND WHY. THE JOURNEYS OF TOMORROW MUST SERVE PEOPLE, PLANET, AND PURPOSE IN EQUAL MEASURE.

TOURISM, STORYTELLING, AND THE HUMAN SPIRIT

At its heart, tourism is about storytelling. Every traveller becomes a storyteller, carrying home experiences that ripple outward into communities. Destinations, too, through authentic representation, can share their narratives with the world.

The rise of social media has made storytelling immediate and global, but it also places responsibility on travellers to be mindful ambassadors. Ethical content creation – respecting privacy, culture, and environment – is becoming a crucial part of responsible tourism.

COLLECTIVE ACTION

The tourism industry cannot transform in isolation. Governments must enact policies that protect natural resources. Businesses must innovate responsibly.

We must engage communities as equal partners in the decision-making process. And travellers must embrace conscious choices – from the destinations they select to the habits they practice on the road.

World Tourism Day 2025 is not only a celebration but a reminder that our journeys carry weight. Each flight booked, each meal eaten, each photograph shared is part of a bigger narrative.

CONCLUSION: TOURISM AS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

The collective voices of global tourism leaders converge on a single truth: Travel is no longer just an act of movement – it is a shared responsibility.

From the desert eco-lodges of Israel to the cultural hubs of India, from the islands of the Indian Ocean to the heritage of Sri Lanka, tourism is being redefined. Innovation, sustainability, authenticity, and empowerment are no longer optional – they are essential pillars of progress.

On World Tourism Day 2025, the message is clear: if tourism is to remain a force for good, it must serve people, planet, and prosperity in equal measure. The journey ahead is not only about where we travel, but how we travel – and why. ■

COUNTRY CLUB HOSPITALITY EXPANDS HORIZONS WITH NORTH-EAST INVESTMENT



By Swaati Chaudhury

Hyderabad's most exclusive leisure brand, Country Club Hospitality and Holidays Pvt. Ltd., is setting ambitious growth plans into motion. Armed with over two million members and a novel blend of holidays, clubbing, fitness, and entertainment, the club has not only overcome a ₹600 crore debt burden but also emerged stronger, debt-free, and poised for expansion.

The company is investing ₹100 crore in India's North-East over the next three to four years, marking a significant milestone in its journey since its inception in 1989. "We are expanding our horizons and are all set to kick off the 'Chalo Gangtok' campaign," said Y. Rajeev Reddy, Chairman and Managing Director. "We are committed to delivering global-standard hospitality in Gangtok and have tied up with Valley Vista Resort to offer our members unforgettable Himalayan views."

COUNTRY CLUB HOSPITALITY, NOW DEBT-FREE AND BACKED BY 2 MILLION MEMBERS, IS INVESTING ₹100 CRORE TO EXPAND INTO NORTH-EAST INDIA WITH ITS SIGNATURE BLEND OF CLUBBING, HOLIDAYS, FITNESS, AND ENTERTAINMENT.

A Unique Membership Model
The Country Club experience revolves around four key pillars: we offer clubbing, holidays, fitness, and entertainment activities. Members enjoy lifetime privileges with fees ranging between ₹1 lakh and ₹2.5 lakh. Each membership includes a complimentary one-week holiday stay at any of the 75 luxury properties in the network, comprising 35 owned properties and the remainder franchised. Dining and other experiences come at additional cost, ensuring a balance of exclusivity and value.

Growth & Premium Experiences
Country Club has introduced its VIP Gold Membership Card, providing privileged access and personalised experiences. Some of its signature properties include Country Club Indore, Country Club Faridabad, and the Bandipur retreat in Karnataka.

Recently, the group launched Suvi Retreat on Bengaluru's Bannerghatta Road—an adventure hotspot featuring go-karting, paintball, rock climbing, archery, and more.

Tourism & Employment Potential
"Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries, and if prioritised well, it can generate immense employment opportunities," Reddy emphasised. With this expansion, Country Club is not just strengthening its footprint but also driving sustainable growth for the hospitality sector.

From humble beginnings to Guinness World Records recognition, Country Club Hospitality has redefined leisure in India. Its North-East expansion is poised to unlock new experiences, create jobs, and establish a fresh benchmark in family entertainment and lifestyle. ■

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WINGS OF GROWTH

HOW AVIATION IS POWERING INDIA'S TOURISM STORY



Many people consider tourism to be the lifeblood of India's cultural economy. From the snow-laden peaks of the Himalayas to the tiger reserves of central India, from heritage towns to spiritual hubs, the country's diverse landscapes thrive on visitor flows. Yet, behind this vibrant movement of people lies a silent but powerful driver – the aviation sector.

In recent years, aviation has emerged as the key enabler of tourism in India, knitting together geographies, reducing travel times, and making heritage and leisure destinations more accessible than ever before. Nowhere is this more evident than in Madhya Pradesh, often referred to as the "Heart of India," where enhanced air connectivity is transforming the tourism and creating new opportunities for both travelers and local communities.

Air Travel: Shrinking Distances, Expanding Horizons

The role of aviation in tourism begins with accessibility. For decades, long train journeys or road trips limited travel to many of India's hidden gems. Today, with domestic passenger traffic exceeding 1,100 lakh travelers between January and August 2025 (DGCA data), India's skies are busier than ever.

The rise of low-cost carriers like IndiGo and Akasa, alongside the resurgence of Air India, has widened the travel map. Cities beyond metropolitan areas are now expanding their routes into national networks, with tier-2 and tier-3 towns playing a significant role. This decentralisation has a direct tourism

impact – opening up smaller cities as gateway airports to nearby heritage and natural attractions.

For tourists, the ability to fly directly into Indore, Bhopal, Jabalpur, Khajuraho, or Gwalior means reducing travel time and adding more meaningful experiences to their itineraries. A wildlife enthusiast can now reach Kanha or Bandhavgarh faster; a heritage lover can land at Khajuraho without enduring overnight journeys.

Strengthening Regional Tourism in Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh showcases some of India's most valuable cultural and natural treasures. You can explore the erotic sculptures of Khajuraho, visit the Buddhist stupas at Sanchi, and admire the stunning Mughal and Rajput architecture in Orchha and Mandu. The state also features tiger reserves that rank among the best in the world. Yet for years, one of the state's most significant challenges was accessibility.

That equation is now changing. With better domestic aviation links, MP is seeing a surge in tourist footfalls. For instance:

Indore, now a fast-growing aviation hub, connects not just business travelers but also leisure seekers to Western MP's cultural circuits.

Jabalpur Airport is positioning itself as the primary gateway for wildlife tourism in central India.

Khajuraho Airport, although seasonal in operations, has gained importance due to new flight schedules aligned with the demand for heritage tourism.

The upcoming MP Travel Mart 2025 will further spotlight how aviation is enabling the state's vision of positioning itself as a world-class

INDIA'S AVIATION SECTOR IS NO LONGER JUST A TRANSPORT NETWORK; IT IS THE LIFELINE OF TOURISM – SHRINKING DISTANCES, CONNECTING CULTURES, AND POWERING LOCAL ECONOMIES ACROSS THE NATION.





tourism destination. Delegates, buyers, and travelers attending the mart rely almost exclusively on air travel – a reminder that without aviation, tourism's full potential cannot be realised.

Aviation as a Catalyst for Events & Festivals

In India, the tourism calendar closely aligns with various festivals and events. From October to December, in particular, is the peak travel period, coinciding with Navratri, Diwali, Christmas, and New Year celebrations. Airlines anticipate this demand surge and often scale up seasonal frequencies, enabling travelers to explore spiritual centres like Ujjain, leisure cities like Indore, or wildlife safaris in the Satpuras.

For tourism boards and event organisers, aviation acts as the enabler of scale. The MP Travel Mart, for instance, attracts international tour operators, domestic agents, hoteliers, and media – none of whom would be able to converge at Bhopal or Indore without efficient air links.

Economic Multiplier Effect

The connection between aviation and tourism is not just about moving people; it is also about multiplying economic benefits. Each new flight to a city like Khajuraho or Jabalpur creates ripple effects across the local economy. Hotels experience higher occupancy rates, restaurants thrive, guides and transportation operators earn more, and handicraft sellers find larger markets.

According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTTC), every direct

WITH ENHANCED AIR CONNECTIVITY LINKING INDORE, BHOPAL, JABALPUR, AND KHAJURAH, MADHYA PRADESH IS TRANSFORMING INTO A WORLD-CLASS TOURISM HUB WHERE ACCESSIBILITY MEETS EXPERIENCE.

job in aviation supports nearly 24 jobs in tourism and allied industries. For a tourism-driven state like Madhya Pradesh, aviation expansion is therefore closely tied to economic empowerment.

Reliability and Service as Tourism Enablers

Connectivity alone is not enough. Tourists, especially international visitors, value punctuality, safety, and seamless service. The DGCA's August 2025 report highlights how airlines are faring:

IndiGo achieved a remarkable 90.6% on-time performance, which is crucial for travelers planning multi-city trips. Akasa Air, with its youthful fleet, achieved a 91% load factor, demonstrating strong demand on its new routes.

The Air India Group achieved its highest market share this year, at 27.3%, signalling an operational recovery.

For tourism, these metrics matter. A delayed flight in Delhi can mean a

missed safari in Kanha or a missed evening show at Khajuraho's temples. Airlines that deliver consistent service enhance the overall tourism experience and build destination loyalty.

Sustainability: Aviation Meets Responsible Tourism

With the global conversation shifting towards sustainability, aviation is also aligning itself with eco-friendly goals. New-generation aircraft are more fuel-efficient, airlines are investing in carbon offset programs, and airports are adopting green infrastructure.

For Madhya Pradesh, which promotes eco-tourism in reserves such as Satpura and Panna, the collaboration between aviation and sustainability enhances the state's appeal to environmentally conscious travelers.

Conclusion: Aviation as Tourism's Lifeline

India's aviation sector is no longer just a transport network; it is the lifeline of tourism. By shrinking distances, boosting regional connectivity, supporting local events, and expanding economic opportunities, airlines are redefining the travel experience for travelers.

For Madhya Pradesh, this transformation is particularly significant. The success of its tourism vision – from showcasing Khajuraho's art to Kanha's wildlife – is inseparable from the strength of India's skies. As MP hosts its Travel Mart this year, one message stands out clearly: tourism takes flight when aviation soars. ■

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