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# travel

SPAN

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to Watch in 2024**

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# EDITOR'S LETTER

## Christmas Holidays - the German Way: Gliding down the slopes all morning, with new stunning winter panoramas await Indian Travellers.

- Some things about Christmas are the same everywhere: Enjoying the first snow, experiencing nature on winter walks, or writing a Christmas Wish List. Indian visitors can explore candid Christmas markets all over Germany.
- A way to bring winter sports and nature in harmony together in Germany. Germany is committed to promoting sustainability by creating eco-friendly environments throughout its various celebratory activities.



The German National Tourist Office (GNT) India is excited about the highly anticipated Christmas markets in Germany for Indian travelers this winter. With a focus on sustainability and unique experiences,

Germany offers a perfect destination for Indians seeking a memorable holiday season. Christmas markets are an integral part of German culture during the festive season. They provide a magical atmosphere, where visitors

can explore beautifully decorated stalls, indulge in traditional food and beverages, and purchase unique handcrafted gifts in cities such as Berlin, Munich, Cologne, and Frankfurt, among others.

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This year Germany is quickening its journey towards sustainability and aims to implement sustainable practices as well as to promote locally sourced, organic goods. Visitors can also venture beyond the festive villages to experience a winter wonderland committed to eco-friendly enjoyment, featuring serene snow walks, spirited torchlight hikes, and the warmth of shared Christmas traditions.

Romit Theophilus, Director of the German National Tourist Office in India, highlighted the significance of Christmas markets in Germany and encouraged Indian travelers to visit during the winter season and beyond. He said, «*Germany's Christmas markets are a true representation of German tradition and culture. The festive atmosphere, the aroma of mulled wine and gingerbread, and the beautifully lit streets create an unforgettable experience. We invite Indian travellers to explore these markets and immerse themselves in the rich history and traditions of Germany.*»

Theophilus also added "In addition to promoting the Christmas markets, GNT0 India is actively promoting sustainable initiatives that take

place during the festive period. Germany is committed to reducing its carbon footprint and offers various sustainable options for travelers. From eco-friendly accommodation to public transportation and local produce, the country aims to provide an environmentally conscious travel experience. "

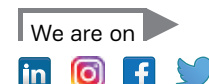
Some of the well-known Christmas markets in Germany are in its most popular cities. The Nuremberg Christkindlesmarkt (December 1-24) in Nuremberg is known for lebkuchen (gingerbread) and hosts more than 200 local businesses throughout, while Berlin's WeihnachtsZauber (November 27 to December 31) is held at the picturesque Gendarmenmarkt. Stuttgart's Wintertraum Markt (November 29 to December 23) is known for its fairy-tale appeal located on the Schlossplatz, right in front of the palace, while Munich's Christmas Market (November 27 to December 24) takes place in the scenic Marienplatz with a Christmas tree adorned with 2,500 lights. In Cologne, Heinzels Wintermärchen (November 27 to December 24) is set right outside the city's gothic cathedral and has two

sections, the old market, and new market, the latter's highlight being a huge outdoor ice rink. Lastly, the International Christmas Market in Essen (November 17 to December 23) is adorned with twinkling fairy lights, fairground rides, and crafty products from lands as far away as Peru and Brazil.

Germany, with its wintry climes and Christmas markets, is a globally popular go-to destination at this time of year. Now, as the festive season approaches, the country is inviting travelers from across India to visit and experience its myriad attractions amid scenes of Saint Nikolaus and snowflakes.



**DEVENDER GROVER**





# Turkish Airlines Expands Fleet with the Historic Airbus Order



**T**urkish Airlines, flying to more international destinations than any airline in the world, proudly announces a monumental expansion of its fleet with the acquisition of 355 state-of-the-art Airbus aircraft. This significant order comprises 250 of the best-selling A321s and 105 of the highly efficient A350 widebody aircraft, including 60 firm orders, 20 purchase right A350-900s, 15 firm order A350-1000s, and 5 firm orders and 5 purchase right A350-Freighters.

This strategic acquisition underscores Turkish Airlines' commitment to enhancing its operational efficiency, environmental stewardship, and passenger comfort. The incorporation of these next-generation aircraft aligns with the flag carrier's vision to continue leading the aviation industry while supporting sustainable growth.

In line with this significant fleet expansion, Turkish Airlines, the national flag carrier of Türkiye, plans to continue to reinforce its status as an airline with one of the world's most comprehensive flight networks. The addition of these Airbus aircraft will further enhance the airline's ability to connect Türkiye to the farthest corners of the globe, offering its passengers even more destinations and travel options while maintaining the highest standards of service and connectivity that Turkish Airlines is renowned for.

On the new order, **Turkish Airlines Chairman of the Board and the**

**Executive Committee, Prof. Dr. Ahmet Bolat** stated: "This landmark order is more than an expansion; it's a testament to our dedication to innovation, operational excellence, and a sustainable future. The addition of these advanced Airbus aircraft to our fleet will not only enhance our operational capabilities but also significantly contribute to our environmental goals. This investment is a crucial milestone in the further evolution of Türkiye's aviation industry. By modernizing our fleet with more efficient and environmentally friendly aircraft, we are reinforcing our leading position in global aviation and contributing to the nation's prominence as an aviation hub.

Furthermore, this expansion will also have a considerable positive impact on Türkiye's tourism sector. Enhanced flight operations and increased connectivity, thanks to these state-of-the-art aircraft, will attract more international tourists, boosting the tourism economy. This will not only showcase Türkiye's rich cultural heritage and natural beauty to a wider audience but also support the overall growth of the country. With our home base in Istanbul, which straddles continents, we continue our mission of bridging people from all over the world. These new aircraft are not just a step forward for Turkish Airlines but represent a leap forward for the broader aviation and tourism industries

in Türkiye, guiding us towards an even brighter future."

**Christian Scherer, Airbus Chief Commercial Officer and Head of International**, commented on the deal:

"This order for the latest generation aircraft is a demonstration of the bold vision by Turkish Airlines. The A350-900, A350-1000, A350F and A321 will all be flagship aircraft in their respective category and efficiency drivers to shape the airline's future and sustainable expansion, with more range, less fuel, noise and emissions and best cabin in class. The opening into the A350-1000 and the A350F highlights the cross-model value of the A350 family and reinforces our long-lasting partnership with Turkish Airlines and Türkiye's aviation sector overall and we are proud to accompany Türkiye's connection to the world with our state-of-the-art aircraft."

Both aircraft types incorporate advanced technologies, achieving remarkable improvements in fuel burn, operating costs, CO2 emissions, and noise reduction, underscoring Turkish Airlines' commitment to sustainability and passenger comfort.

Turkish Airlines continues to lead the way in the aviation industry, consistently delivering unparalleled service and experiences to its passengers. This historic acquisition reinforces the airline's commitment to offering the most comfortable, efficient, and environmentally friendly travel options to its valued guests.



# ATM establishes official partnership with ICCA and GBTA as global business travel spending to reach US\$1.8 trillion by 2027

- Strategic collaboration will shine a spotlight on the MICE and business travel sectors at ATM 2024
- The Middle East accounted for the highest percentage of in-person delegates (94%) according to official statistics from ICCA



**A**rabian Travel Market (ATM) has announced a strategic partnership with the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) and the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) for the upcoming edition of the event, which takes place from 6-9 May 2024 at the Dubai World Trade Centre. The renowned global organizations have been appointed as 'Knowledge Partners' for the regional trade show, providing in-depth insights and opportunities for the thriving segments of business events and travel.

According to the ICCA statistical forecast, which charts the history and performance of the International Association Meetings Industry from 1963 to 2022, 10,602 business events were recorded worldwide last year, of which 9,009 (85%) were in-person. This represented an astounding 349% increase from the previous year when only 2,007 in-person events occurred. Interestingly, the Middle East accounted for the highest percentage of in-person delegates (94%) in last year's official figures.

The business travel industry is also

experiencing significant growth, as evidenced by statistics from the 2023 GBTA Business Travel Index™ Report, which found that the global business travel industry rebounded faster than expected in 2023. Pent-up demand following the pandemic and healthier economic conditions than forecasted were highlighted as significant

contributing factors for this shift. The report also stated that global business travel spending rose by 47% to \$1.03 trillion last year and is expected to grow to nearly \$1.8 trillion globally by 2027.

**Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director, Arabian Travel Market,** said: "All of the latest research suggests that the business events and business travel sectors are going from strength to strength. These sectors have always been important verticals at ATM, and the official partnership with ICCA and GBTA for the 2024 edition will take our offering to the next level. By collaborating with these respected industry leaders, ATM aims to deliver even more value and innovation to its attendees and exhibitors. "With a focus on these two vital sectors, ATM is committed to offering a world-class event that provides a platform for networking, education, and business opportunities for professionals from around the world."

During ATM 2024, ICCA will deliver seminars covering a range of topics for the MICE industry, while GBTA will outline the prevailing trends in the business travel sector at the show.

These seminars will give the industry valuable insights into recent research, innovations, and best practices.

**Dr Senthil Gopinath, CEO of ICCA,** said: "ICCA proudly announces our collaboration with ATM as we celebrate the exciting inclusion of business events as a foundational segment in future editions. Envisaging a dynamic future, we see global business events seamlessly integrating with ATM's rich tapestry of opportunities. With ICCA joining as a Knowledge Partner for the MICE segment, we are collectively positioned to redefine the landscape of collaboration, innovation, and success in the interconnected realms of business. We look forward to working together in 2024 and beyond."

**Catherine Logan, Regional Senior Vice President of EMEA and APAC, GBTA,** added: "Although one of the smaller global business travel markets, the MEA region has huge growth potential and recovered more than any other region in 2022, reaching 95% of pre-pandemic business travel spending. Business travel spend in the region is forecast to exceed this figure in 2023 and reach USD\$30.6 million and continue its growth trajectory going forward."

The theme for the 31st edition of ATM is '**Empowering Innovation: Transforming Travel Through Entrepreneurship**'. With exhibitors from the fields of aviation, accommodation, hospitality, attractions, technology, and more, ATM 2024 will explore how innovators in the travel and tourism space are working to attract greater levels of funding to increase the sector's overall contribution to global GDP. Last year's event welcomed more than 40,000 attendees, the largest number recorded to date.



# Thailand considers expanding 4 am closing time for entertainment venues to boost the economy



*Thailand considers extending nightlife hours to 4am in select areas to boost the economy, balancing economic benefits with public safety and regulation compliance in the hospitality sector.*

In an innovative move to enhance the country's economic landscape, Thailand's Interior Minister, **Anutin Charvirakul**, has expressed openness to expanding the areas where entertainment venues are permitted to operate until 4am. This consideration, aimed at bolstering the economy, was voiced during Anutin's visit to Khao San Road's nightlife establishments.

Anutin emphasized the importance of maintaining public safety despite the extended hours, insisting on adherence to strict measures. These include prohibiting alcohol sales to excessively intoxicated customers and enforcing a ban on narcotics, weapons, underage visits, and drink driving.

The minister highlighted the potential economic benefits of such an

extension. "Extended operating hours mean increased monetary circulation, more jobs, and higher income for taxi drivers," Anutin stated. However, he underscored that any expansion must align with regulations and require cooperation from all parties involved.

In **Phuket**, Governor **Sophon Suwannarat** reported successful regulation adherence, with foreign visitors comprising a significant portion of the nightlife crowd. However, Dr. **Polathep Vichitkunakorn** from the Centre for Alcohol Studies raised concerns, citing studies linking extended alcohol sale hours to increased incidents of harassment and crime. He urged the government to demonstrate that traffic accidents haven't spiked since the extension.

Currently, about 140 entertainment venues in Bangkok are open until 4am, primarily in **Ratchadaphisek**, **Silom**, and **Royal City Avenue**. Bangkok Governor **Chadchart Sittipunt** clarified that only authorized venues are allowed these extended hours.

The new policy, which kicked off on **December 15**, encompasses select areas in **Bangkok**, **Phuket**, **Chon Buri**, **Chiang Mai**, **Koh Samui**, and registered hotels nationwide. To further boost tourism, the government allowed venues to operate until 6am on New Year's Eve.

Operators must strictly adhere to the Entertainment Places Act and the Alcoholic Beverage Control Act, including measures like blood alcohol level checks and arranging safe transportation for highly intoxicated customers.

Meanwhile, in **Chiang Mai**, there's a call for policy reevaluation. **Tanit Choosang** of the Chiang Mai Restaurant and Bistro Association pointed out that the extension benefits only a few registered venues, while many unregistered ones face legal challenges. He argued that Chiang Mai's tourism focus on natural, cultural, and culinary attractions differs from other areas and that the city's entertainment sector should be given a chance to operate legally.

The move towards extended operating hours in Thailand's entertainment sector is a complex balance between stimulating economic growth and ensuring public safety and compliance. This ongoing dialogue between government officials and industry stakeholders is crucial for developing a sustainable and inclusive approach to boosting the country's vibrant hospitality and nightlife sectors.



# A new report shows how Travel & Tourism in Africa could boost the continent's economy by US\$168BN over the next 10 years

VFS Global collaborates with WTTC on this pathbreaking report



At its Global Summit in Kigali the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), in collaboration with VFS Global, revealed that the African Travel & Tourism sector could add US\$168BN to the continent's economy and create over 18 million new jobs.

According to the report, **'Unlocking Opportunities for Travel & Tourism Growth in Africa'**,

this potential growth is dependent on three key policies to unlock annualized growth of 6.5%, reaching a contribution of more than US\$ 350BN. The report includes a policy package focused on improving Africa's growth based on air infrastructure, visa facilitation, and tourism marketing.

Travel & Tourism is a powerhouse sector in Africa, with a contribution

of more than US\$ 186BN to the region's economy in 2019, welcoming 84 million international travellers. The sector is also essential for employment, providing livelihoods to 25 million people, equating to 5.6% of all the jobs in the region.

Speaking at the global tourism body's Global Summit in Kigali today, **Julia Simpson, WTTC President & CEO**, said: "Africa's Travel & Tourism

sector has witnessed an extraordinary transformation. In just two decades, it has more than doubled in value, significantly contributing to the continent's economy. "Growth potential for Travel & Tourism in Africa is massive. It has already more than doubled since 2000, and with the right policies could unlock an additional US\$168 billion in the next decade. "Africa needs simplified visa processes, better air connectivity within the continent, and marketing campaigns to highlight the wealth of destinations in this breathtaking continent."

According to **Zubin Karkaria, Founder &**

**CEO, of VFS Global,**

"We are excited to partner with WTTC to uncover the extensive opportunities that Travel & Tourism offers in Africa." "Having established our presence in Africa since 2005 we are today the trusted partner of 38 governments who we serve across 55 cities in 35 countries in Africa. VFS Global recognizes the tremendous potential of Africa and remains deeply committed to supporting the continuing development of travel and tourism to and from the continent. "This report not only highlights the diverse prospects for economic growth,

sustainable tourism, and cross-cultural collaboration but also provides valuable insights for governments to formulate policies and offers businesses a well-defined roadmap for expansion in this thriving market."

This report delves into the historical journey of the Travel & Tourism sector in Africa. It is a story of facing challenges head-on, from the Global Financial Crisis in 2008 to the setbacks caused by disease outbreaks, and political instability. Despite all of these challenges, the Travel & Tourism sector is on a path to recovery. According to the global body, 2023

is projected to be a year of near-full recovery, only 1.9% shy of 2019 levels, as well as the creation of an additional 1.8 million jobs.

#### **Opportunities for Africa**

The report highlights the opportunities for the sector, which include strategic investments improved connectivity, streamlined visa processes, reduced carbon footprint through low-carbon energy adoption, and enhanced water efficiency. These could unlock the potential for sustainable growth, job creation, and economic development in the African Travel & Tourism sector.

## **DreamFolks Enters Malaysia, Expanding its Footprint in the Southeast Asia Market**

**D**reamFolks, India's leading airport and travel services aggregator, has announced its entry into Malaysia, marking a significant milestone in its global expansion. The company will provide its cutting-edge technology as a service to partners at three airports: Kuala Lumpur International Airport, Kota Kinabalu International Airport, and Kuching International Airport.

Passengers can avail lounge access at these locations by simply tapping or swiping their bank cards on DreamFolks EDC devices placed at these lounges for seamless transactions. Additionally, travelers can skip long queues and gain lounge access through the DreamFolks web access portal. Travelers need to enter their bank card details and generate a QR code. The QR code can be scanned at the lounge for validation of lounge access, ensuring a stress-free travel experience. This solution



will save travelers time and hassle, and will make it easier for them to track the available benefits on their bank cards.

This technology solution is expected to drive increased footfall to the lounges by increasing efficiency and improving customer experience. DreamFolks has always been committed to providing passengers with the best possible travel experience & endeavors to give passengers access

to its services at a global scale, entry into the Malaysia market is a major step in that direction.

**Ms. Liberatha Kallat, Chairperson & Managing Director of Dreamfolks Services Ltd., commented on the expansion,** "We are excited to announce our entry into Malaysia, a key market in Southeast Asia. This is a major milestone for our company, and we are confident that our technology solution will benefit all our stakeholders through which passengers will enjoy a convenient and secure airport experience, lounge operators will be able to improve footfall at the lounges, and airports will be able to improve customer experience."

Earlier this year, DreamFolks had announced its partnership with Plaza Premium Group with the inclusion of over 340+ Plaza Premium Lounges in the DreamFolks Global Lounge Network.



# DreamFolks

## enters B2C segment, launches membership program



**D**reamFolks Services has launched an exclusive membership program 'The DreamFolks Club' offering a wide range of membership packages.

Dreamfolks provides services like Lounge Access, Meet and Assist, Airport Transfers, F&B, Spa, and Transit Hotels. The company, boasting a market share of over 90% in India, aims to retain and expand its dominance by staying ahead in technology and introducing additional services.

Indian airport services aggregator DreamFolks is seeing an increase in air passenger traffic and credit card penetration. The company believes this will help further boost its growth. "Currently there is a good growth in air passenger traffic & credit card penetration. This will surely aid our

*business as well as our lounges are present in various airports. The way the industry is growing, the same way DreamFolks will also have the same growth."* said **Liberatha Kallat, CMD of DreamFolks.**

**In a recent development, DreamFolks has entered the B2C segment with the launch of "The DreamFolks Club."**

The company, boasting a market share of over 90% in India, aims to retain and expand its dominance by staying ahead in technology and introducing additional services. Liberatha said, "We have a market share of more than 90% and our focus will be to retain this and grow more. We want to be always ahead in the industry and want to become

a differentiator. We're upgrading ourselves in terms of technology and adding more services."

The membership packages are divided into four categories: the Aspire package, the Premium package, the Select package, and the Elite package, and each package will be valid for one year. Customers can buy new packages or top up their existing packages card after one year. The Aspire package provides premium travel with complimentary airport lounge access in India, the Premium package unlocks global airport lounges, discounted lounge purchases, and exclusive deals on various travel and lifestyle services. The Select package offers complimentary services while the Elite package delivers an experience with global airport lounge access, golf

courses, and a world of other lifestyle services.

"All four memberships are aimed at different kinds of travelers. While the basic membership starts from Rs 6,999 and the top membership goes all the way up to Rs 1 lakh. Our new membership is not a payment card or in competition with any of the banking cards," Kallat said.

She added that the company decided to launch a membership program because not every air

passenger carries a debit or credit card. Besides normal passengers, the company is also aiming to sell its membership to enterprises.

The company is currently present in over countries with over 1500 touch points. DreamFolks is also planning to increase its international presence. *"We've introduced meet and assist and airport services in various international markets. We are planning to introduce all services available in India to international markets in the next two*

*years,"* Kallat said.

Such a programme is being introduced in India for the first time. Post-COVID, passengers are moving towards more leisure travel and families are using lounges. As awareness is increasing, so is the penetration of lounge services in Tier II & Tier III cities, Kallat said. "Earlier also lounges were available in these pockets but awareness was low. Now, with more privatization, lounge spaces are growing," Liberatha said.

## VFS Global appointed to deliver UK Government visa and passport services across 142 countries

- VFS Global becomes the service provider for all UK Visa and Citizenship Application Centres overseas – operating across 142 countries.
- Estimated to manage 3.8 million applicants every year, VFS Global is now opening UK application centers in 84 new countries during 2024.
- New contract will also see significant investment in technology to improve the customer experience, accessibility, and security.
- The UK contract is the sixth global contract won by VFS Global during 2023.



**V**FS Global, which has been a trusted partner for the UK Government since 2003, has won the global contract for overseas UK visa and Citizenship services. This award is the latest in a long line of wins for the world's leading visa, passport and citizen services provider.

During 2024, VFS Global will deploy 240 Visa and Citizenship Application Service (VCAS) Centres for the UK in 142 countries across Africa & Middle East, the Americas, Australasia & Europe, China & Taiwan, and Asia & Asia Pacific regions. These centers will accept all categories of visa applications as well as UK passport applications in some locations. Combined, these new centers are estimated to process 3.8 million applicants every year.

Beyond the scale of the deployment,

VFS Global will invest to improve the customer journey and increase accessibility - including through new customer websites, and updated in-person experiences. And VFS Global will deploy its latest technologies to maintain robust identity checks and ensure the integrity of the visa and passport application process. The new contract is expected to deliver savings to the UK Government.

**Zubin Karkaria, Founder and CEO, VFS Global**, said, *"We are delighted to win this contract and expand our partnership with the Home Office to become their service provider for all UK visa customers overseas. We are excited to begin operations in new locations and to take the next step towards providing customers with a seamless, simple, and secure visa and passport application experience. This win is a testament to our*

*dedicated efforts to provide all our client governments with best-in-class services."*

The UK is a popular destination for travellers from across the globe with India, China, Nigeria, and Turkey being the top four application locations\*. In addition to the VCAS Centres, VFS Global will expand its network of additional paid application centers bringing the visa application process closer to home for customers through partnerships with popular hotels and resorts. VFS Global currently offers these in India, UAE, and the USA through hotel partners in those countries.

This win comes soon after VFS Global was awarded the global biometric collection service mandate with Australia and the renewal of the global visa service contract with Sweden.



# Vistara Commences daily direct services between Delhi and Bali



Vistara, India's finest full-service carrier and a joint venture of the Tata group and Singapore Airlines, inaugurated daily, non-stop flights between Delhi and Bali. The inaugural flight, operated on Vistara's A321LR aircraft, commenced from Indira Gandhi International Airport, Delhi at 00:30 Hours (IST) on 01 December 2023 and arrived at Denpasar International Airport, Bali (DPS) at 11:05 Hours (WITA). Vistara's A321LR with three-class seating configuration is distinguished for its exceptional features including contemporary interiors, in-seat power/

USB charging ports, state-of-the-art In-Flight Entertainment (IFE) system, live TV and onboard Wi-Fi to accentuate the overall in-flight experience for customers.

**Mr. Vinod Kannan, Chief Executive Officer, Vistara,** said, "Bali is one of the most coveted holiday havens for travellers in India and we are excited to be the only airline currently to launch direct connectivity between Delhi and Bali. Given the close commercial and cultural ties that India and Indonesia share, Bali has also rapidly grown to be a key destination for corporate travel and MICE. We are excited to bring the Best

Airline in India and South Asia to Bali and are confident that Vistara with its world-class product and services will be a much-preferred choice for customers travelling on this new route."

**PT Angkasa Pura I (AP1) President Director, Mr. Faik Fahmi** expressed enthusiasm and optimism regarding the opening of this route. «We welcome Vistara to Bali. After a long time, finally today Bali is connected directly with India via the inaugural flight operated by Vistara. This deserves to be recorded in the history books of AP1; this long-awaited flight route is officially operational today," said Faik Fahmi.

## SCHEDULE OF FLIGHTS BETWEEN DELHI AND BALI EFFECTIVE 01 DECEMBER 2023

Sector	Flight No.	Days of Operation	Departure	Arrival
Delhi – Bali	UK 145	Daily	00:30 hrs	11:05 hrs
Bali – Delhi	UK 146	Daily	12:10 hrs	17:45 hrs

\* All timings shown are in local time zones, exact timings may differ slightly for respective days of operations

\*\* Subject to regulatory approvals

# Vistara inaugurates Non-Stop flights between Mumbai and Doha; Bolsters presence in the Middle East

**V**istara, India's finest full-service carrier and a joint venture between the Tata group and Singapore Airlines, inaugurated direct 4x weekly flights between Mumbai and Doha. The inaugural flight, operated on Vistara's A321neo aircraft, commenced from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, Mumbai, at 18:45 Hours (IST) on 15 December 2023 and arrived at Hamad International Airport, Doha, at 20:30 Hours (local time zone).

With a consistent surge in demand for travel between India and the Middle East, Vistara has been focussing on expanding its presence in the region. The airline already offers direct connectivity to five destinations in the region, namely Abu Dhabi, Dammam, Dubai, Jeddah and Muscat.

## Mr. Vinod Kannan, Chief

**Executive Officer, Vistara,** said, "Based on the remarkable response to Vistara's Middle Eastern routes, we are confident that the launch of operations to Doha will further strengthen our footprint in the region. Doha – an essential commercial hub and home to a large Indian diaspora – is Vistara's 50th destination and the sixth in the Middle East. We are excited to bring the Best Airline in India and Southern Asia to Doha with direct connectivity from Mumbai. We firmly believe that Vistara's widely appreciated product and globally awarded service make



for just the right combination to cater to the market requirements and customers' demand."

**Ms Sujata Suri, Senior Vice President, Finance and Procurement at Hamad International Airport** said: "We are pleased to announce our new partnership with Vistara, linking Doha to Mumbai—a strategic collaboration that reinforces Hamad International Airport's commitment to expanding connectivity and offering passengers unparalleled travel experiences. As Doha becomes Vistara's 50th destination,

this collaboration signifies a shared commitment to excellence and marks a milestone of its own for Hamad International Airport, underlining our dedication to facilitating seamless and enriching journeys for travellers around the world."

Vistara accepts all eligible customers meeting visa/entry requirements in both countries, as specified by the respective government bodies. Vistara strongly encourages its customers to fully understand these guidelines before making their bookings.

## SCHEDULE OF FLIGHTS BETWEEN MUMBAI AND DOHA EFFECTIVE 15 DECEMBER 2023

Sector	Flight No.	Days of Operation	Departure	Arrival
Mumbai – Doha	UK 285	Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, Sundays	18:45 hrs	20:30 hrs
Doha – Mumbai	UK 286	Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, Sundays	21:45 hrs	4:05 hrs (+1)

\* All timings shown are in local time zones, exact timings may differ slightly for respective days of operations

\*\* (+1) indicates next-day arrival

\*\*\* Subject to regulatory approvals



# TAT celebrates the launch of MICHELIN Guide Thailand 2024

*The latest edition features 447 establishments from Bangkok, Phuket and Phangnga, Chiang Mai, Ayutthaya, Isan, and two newest additions – Ko Samui and Mainland Surat Thani.*



The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) is delighted to congratulate all establishments in the new MICHELIN Guide Thailand 2024, which continues to showcase Thailand's rich and diverse gastronomic landscape with distinctive local flavours and charming culinary traditions.

**Ms. Thapanee Kiatphaibool, TAT Governor, said** "TAT has enjoyed a fruitful strategic partnership with The MICHELIN Guide since 2018, as it has made a significant contribution and positive impact to Thailand's tourism industry. The MICHELIN Guide, an influential gastronomic reference to many people around the world, has effectively contributed to putting Thailand in the

*global spotlight as an international gastronomic destination."*

The MICHELIN Guide Thailand 2024 features 447 establishments. These include 7 two MICHELIN Stars (2 promoted from one MICHELIN Star), 28 one MICHELIN Star (3 newcomers, and 3 promoted from MICHELIN Selected), 196 Bib Gourmand (28 newcomers, and 4 moved from MICHELIN Selected), and 216 MICHELIN Selected entries (37 newcomers).

Among new additions to the Guide, 23 are from Ko Samui (4 Bib Gourmand, and 7 MICHELIN Selected entries) and Mainland Surat Thani (8 Bib Gourmand, and 4 MICHELIN Selected entries), the newly covered territories in this seventh local edition.

The latest Guide welcomes 2 new two Stars – Baan Tapa and Gaa, 6 new one Star – INDDEE, NAWA, Samrub Samrub Thai, Mia, Resonance, and Wana Yook, and one new MICHELIN Green Star – J'AIME by Jean-Michel Lorain.

This year, four award-winning chefs, personalities and venues are Ms. Chudaree 'Tam' Debhakam from Baan Tapa for the MICHELIN Young Chef Award, Mr. Witchupol "Nay" Charoensupaya, the owner of NAWA, for the MICHELIN Opening of the Year Award, Ms. Louise Bourgeois from Chef's Table for the MICHELIN Service Award, and Mr. Thanakorn 'Jay' Bottonoff from INDDEE for the MICHELIN Sommelier Award.



With the addition of Ko Samui and Mainland Surat Thani, the latest edition of the MICHELIN Guide Thailand now covers Bangkok (since 2018), Phuket and Phangnga (since 2019), Chiang Mai (since 2020), Ayutthaya (since 2022), and Isan (Nakhon Ratchasima, Khon Kaen, Ubon Ratchathani, and Udon Thani) (since 2023).

The MICHELIN Guide Thailand project corresponds with TAT's direction to promote meaningful travel experiences through experience-based tourism, where "Food" is highlighted as one of the 5F soft powers in addition to Film, Fashion, Fight, and Festival.

"A dining experience at any one of the listed restaurants or eateries in

major cities across the country, listed in the newly launched MICHELIN Guide Thailand edition, will add value to the overall travel experience of both local and foreign tourists, thus making it the experience that is not only pleasant to the palate, but also memorable and meaningful to their heart and soul," **Ms. Thapanee concluded.**





# Amadeus Travel Trends 2024: How will we travel next year?

*Amadeus unveils annual trends exploring what travelers expect in the year ahead. Influencers become agents, business class fares unbundle, artificial intelligence matures, and musical tourism drives demand, while eVTOLs prepare for take-off.*



*ecosystem to drive change for the traveler, wherever we can."*

## Music tourism

After the social isolation of the pandemic, when bands and musical artists were grounded for months, a boom in concerts and festivals has this year tapped into a desire for connection. The trend is expected to accelerate as we look toward 2024.

Taylor Swift recently announced Asia Pacific tour dates for next year, drawing fans from around the world. Amadeus's research suggests Taylor Swift's concert dates in Australia, Singapore,

and Japan for 2024 had a significant impact on travel searches and booking volumes to the countries.

During the week of the concert announcement, flight searches to Melbourne and Sydney saw a significant week-over-week growth of 44%, while bookings for these cities surged impressively by 446%. The concert announcement also had a striking impact on searches from New Zealand to both cities, resulting in a 240% week-over-week increase during the same period.

Flight searches to Singapore likewise showed an 18% week-over-week growth shortly after both **Taylor Swift** and **Coldplay** concert announcements were made.

There was a notable 32% week-

**T**ravelers never stand still for long. This is an industry of dynamic change, one always evolving and adapting to the latest innovation, fashion, or cultural shift. While it is impossible to know exactly what tomorrow will bring, **Amadeus'** position at the heart of the travel ecosystem gives unparalleled insight into the future.

Using the latest proprietary data, industry-leading insight, and expert analysis from across the organization, Amadeus here explores what might be in store next year in its annual Travel Trends research. Identified are five developments that aim to create more meaningful travel experiences for the planet, economy, and the traveler.

**Daniel Batchelor**, Vice President,

Global Corporate Marketing & Communications at Amadeus, says: *"After a period of recalibration and reassessment over the past few years, we are beginning to see a host of new ideas bear fruit across our industry.*

*"Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) will continue to exert a growing influence across the sector during 2024, while electric taxis are finally poised for take-off. Doing what we love, be it traveling to see our favorite music acts or using new tools to follow in the footsteps of digital influencers, will also drive bookings next year, while airlines continue to reshape their offering to respond to changing tastes.*

*"There is much to look forward to, and Amadeus will be working alongside our partners from across the travel*

over-week surge in international searches from neighboring countries to Tokyo. Inbound travelers from Asia Pacific countries such as Australia, Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, and Thailand demonstrated a strong preference for both short and long trips in a desire to enjoy the concert experience while also making room for leisure exploration during their visit.

### Agents of influence

Social media has become a powerful force during the inspiration phase of a trip, but a new shift is happening. Instead of influencers solely being the source of vacation inspiration for their communities, they are now facilitators of direct bookings through their varying channels. Influencers, such as Ana Hernández Sárria, travel photographer Rafael Fernandez Caballero, travel blogger the Blonde Abroad, yoga and movement coach Sjana Elise, and full-time traveler and content creator, Alyssa Ramos, are designing and hosting their own group trips.

The rise of so-called “Agents of Influence” is being facilitated by e-commerce marketplaces such as **Thatch**, **Luxury Travel Hackers** and **TrovaTrip**, which Inc. ranked number 236 out of 5,000 of the fast-growing companies in the US in 2023. This technology allows influencers using Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, for example, to share a booking link directly on their profile page and process payments.

### Electric skyways

As cities are more congested and air pollution is more prevalent, a potential solution to fossil-fuel-powered transportation will be the emergence of skyways that allow flying taxis, electric vertical take-off, and landing (eVTOL) aircraft, and other kinds of electric aircraft to provide lower emission air travel options, both within urban areas, to satellite airports, cross-country and between islands.

It may seem very futuristic but German aircraft manufacturer Volocopter is planning to provide a fleet of electric VoloCity eVTOL for the Paris

*During the week of the concert announcement, flight searches to Melbourne and Sydney saw a significant week-over-week growth of 44%, while bookings for these cities surged impressively by 446%.*

Olympics in 2024, making it one of the first electric air taxi networks. At the same time, Volocopter is expanding its reach to Asia, with plans to launch electric air taxis in Singapore by 2024, beginning with services in Marina Bay and Sentosa.

The potential expansion of these services includes cross-border air taxi trips to destinations in Malaysia and Indonesia, potentially connecting terminals in areas like Seletar and Changi to cities such as Melaka, Batam, and Bintan.

**Toff Mobility**, the first electric air company in Asia, is working toward debuting electric aircraft in 2024 in South Korea, while Surcar Airlines has selected Zeroavia to provide hydrogen-electric engines for its seaplanes in the Canary Islands.

### Intelligent concierge

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) is adding tremendous value to the online travel planning experience for consumers, as search and advice become hyper-personalized and more intuitive. Instead of selecting filters to fine-tune a search on a metasearch site or online travel agency (OTA), travelers can simply provide a brief to a chatbot in the same way you would a human advisor.

For example, a new ChatGPT plug-in from Expedia acts like a virtual travel assistant, listening to customer needs and delivering instant hotel and itinerary recommendations, with links to book.

The next generation of GAI-powered

customer service will be delivered with greater patience and empathy, reducing the workload of employees to deal with the bulk of after-sales servicing and customer review management, giving them the bandwidth to provide the human touch on more specialist issues.

### Business luxe-lite

With ever-more travelers wanting to fly at the front of the plane, there is an opportunity to offer more affordable and accessible “unbundled” business class fares.

In 2019, **Emirates** was one of the first airlines to launch “special” business class tickets, with no lounge access, restricted seat selection and no upgrade abilities. Qatar Airways followed, unveiling a Business Class Lite fare, with passengers asked to pay extra for lounge access and date or route changes, while they also earn fewer Avios/Qmiles.

With the trend gathering momentum, **Zipair** of Japan and **Finnair** began offering basic business tickets in 2021, while **Air France** and **KLM** added Business Class Light fares in 2023.

At the other end of the scale, airlines in Asia Pacific are enhancing the exclusivity of their business class offerings. This evolving trend caters to the preferences of travelers who seek a premium level of comfort and luxury during their air travel. Notable examples include Japan Airlines’ A350 business class, Air India’s business class, and Cathay Pacific ‘Aria’ business class. The upgrade from various airlines features a 1-2-1 seating layout, sliding privacy doors, wireless charging apparatus, large 4K screens, and advanced Bluetooth audio streaming options.

Evidence of this trend continuing through 2024 includes news from **Air New Zealand**, which will be adding either four or eight rows along with sliding privacy doors, a storage cabinet, a vanity mirror, and a spacious side shelf as a debut Business Premier Luxe product. Also, passengers can look forward to the integration of advanced entertainment features as part of this premium experience.





# VisitBritain

## publishes inbound tourism forecast for 2024

*VisitBritain is predicting that inbound tourism, both the number of visits and spending by international visitors, will recover to 2019 levels by early 2025.*

**V**isitBritain has published its tourism forecast for 2024 showing an increase in inbound visits and spending overall to the UK compared to 2023 levels, although with varying rates of recovery and growth across its major inbound visitor markets.

VisitBritain's overall forecast for spending by international visitors in the UK in 2024 is £34.1 billion, up 7% on the spending predicted in 2023 and up 20% on 2019, although 96% of 2019 levels when adjusted for inflation.

Looking at the number of visits to the UK, 39.5 million visits are forecast, up 5% on the 37.8 million expected in 2023 however still 3% shy of 2019 levels.

The United States (US) continues to lead tourism's recovery with record-breaking spending by American visitors in the UK in 2023, up 28% on 2019 based on latest figures even when adjusted for inflation. VisitBritain is expecting the US market to be worth £6.7 billion in 2024 with American visitors contributing almost £1 in every £5 of all inbound spending.

The pace of recovery from Europe slowed as 2023 progressed with spending, in real terms, remaining just below 2019 based on the latest data.

China, the UK's second most valuable inbound market in 2019, has continued to build back with visitor numbers increasing throughout 2023, although overall East Asia has been

relatively slower to recover. VisitBritain is expecting China to recover to a value of £1.7 billion in 2024 to be the UK's fourth most valuable inbound visitor market.

**VisitBritain CEO Patricia Yates said:** *"International visitors spend tens of billions of pounds in the UK with the money generated supporting local economies and jobs, so it has been great to see the double-digit growth in spending from the US as well as the overall growth forecast for next year in 2023.*

*"We have however seen a slow-down in the overall pace of recovery compared to the strong start seen in the first half of 2023 and we face fierce competition from our European neighbours. To drive spending to Britain our international campaigns will remain focused on those markets showing strong growth, including Australia and the US, and we'll continue to compete hard in our major European markets and the valuable Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.*

*"We also want more destinations across Britain to feel tourism's economic benefits. Our global GREAT Britain campaigns are showcasing our vibrant cities, contemporary culture, and beautiful coast and countryside, inspiring visitors to discover more of Britain, stay longer, and to come now."*

VisitBritain's GREAT Britain marketing campaigns in 2024 are set to run across Australia, France, Germany, the GCC, and the US,

inspiring visitors to 'See Things Differently' by showing fresh and exciting experiences, alongside a warm British welcome.

VisitBritain's research shows that one of the biggest drivers for visitors globally in choosing a destination is that it is a welcoming place to visit.

Its campaigns in 2024 are also harnessing the power of screen tourism to showcase Britain's regional diversity, highlighting film and TV locations, destinations, and visitor experiences to drive visits. VisitBritain's research shows that films and TV are powerful motivators for travel while **Expedia Group's** latest 'set-jetting' forecast showed that more than half of international travellers said TV shows and films inspire their travel plans. VisitBritain has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the **British Film Commission** to boost screen tourism throughout the UK's nations and regions.

As well as its global campaigns VisitBritain continues to work with partners in the market, including British Airways in the US and Wego in the GCC, to convert the interest to visit Britain into bookings now. Its work with international trade also ensures that British products and destinations are sold internationally.

Tourism is one of Britain's most successful industries, its third largest service export and a major part of British trade.

# Best of destination

## Britain on show as VisitBritain hosts trade mission to India



**B**ritish travel trade and industry suppliers are set to show why Britain is the must-go-now destination for buyers across India as VisitBritain hosts its first trade mission to the country in over three years.

Destination Britain India, taking place from 19 to 21 November in Delhi, will see dozens of British industry suppliers from across the nations and regions meet with 75 top buyers from India to do business.

The three-day trade event will see thousands of pre-scheduled one-to-one business meetings. The suppliers set to attend include hotels, retailers, visitor attractions, tour operators, transport providers, and local destinations across Britain.

**VisitBritain CEO Patricia Yates** said:

“We are delighted to again be hosting this flagship trade event to India, a timely and valuable opportunity

for British tourism suppliers and destinations to get their products in front of top buyers, driving bookings to Britain.

“India is one of our most important inbound visitor markets, also boasting strong airline connectivity including to regional destinations and we know there is pent-up demand for travel. Working with the travel trade in India is crucial to ensuring they are ready to sell Britain, as well as broadening travel itineraries to encourage visitors to explore further and stay longer.”

Delegates will also have the opportunity to meet with the wider Indian trade including at networking receptions as well as attend product seminars including from West Midlands Growth Company, Marketing Manchester, and Visit Cumbria, to hear about the latest market developments and trends. VisitBritain will also be showcasing its GREAT Britain ‘See Things Differently’ campaign promoting

the fresh and exciting experiences on offer, inspiring visitors to explore more of Britain, to travel across the seasons, and to come now.

Visitors from India spent a record £764 million in the UK in 2022, exceeding 2019 levels by 2%. This growth has continued into 2023. India is forecast to be a £1 billion inbound visitor market by 2024, making it one of the UK’s fastest-growing major tourism markets.

Airline seat capacity from India to the UK is also showing strong recovery and growth. Looking at September 2023, seat capacity was up 53% compared to the same month in 2019.

As well as its Destination Britain India trade mission, VisitBritain continues to work closely with industry and partners in the market to promote Britain’s outstanding tourism offer and experiences that visitors can only have here.





## The world's best new luxury hotels 2023 by LTI – Luxury Travel Intelligence

*LTI – Luxury Travel Intelligence is a global, members-only organisation, providing digital reporting for affluent travellers who wish to make informed travel decisions, based on honest and highly detailed intelligence.*



**L**TI – Luxury Travel Intelligence announced the 15 global arrivals that LTI rates as this year's best. Extraordinarily, three of the top four new properties come from renowned jewellers and watchmakers, **Bulgari** and **Chopard**. With three entries the UK leads the way in terms of destinations, followed by Rome with two. **Peninsula** and **Six Senses** both have two properties in this year's top 15.

Here is the best of 2023 – in reverse order:

#### 15. The Peninsula, London

With such an exceptional year in London for luxury hotel openings, the Peninsula stands out from the crowd. We noted how they took time to perfect everything before opening. Sadly this is not the case with all new luxury hotels.

#### 14. The Dolli, Athens

Since opening The Dolli has been a big hit with discerning in-the-know Athenians and it's easy to understand why. It is chic yet informal and offers guests a comprehensive choice of individually appointed rooms, suites and apartments.

#### 13. Capella, Sydney

This is just what Sydney needs. A luxurious, mid-sized property, ticking all of the boxes. The landmark heritage building has been brought alive by Capella while maintaining the heritage elements. The expansive spa also impressed us.

#### 12. Six Senses Southern Dunes, The Red Sea

Having opened in November, this Red Sea resort pays homage to Nabataean architectural heritage and majestic desert surroundings. With 36 guest rooms and suites, and a further 40 pool villas dotted among the dunes, this very special property achieves exceptional standards in sustainability and desert hospitality, as Saudi Arabia continues to drop its pin on the global luxury tourism map.

#### 11. COMO Metropolitan, Singapore

Housed in COMO Orchard on Bideford Road, this marks a debut in the brands home country. The hotel is part of an integrated, immersive experience spread over 19 floors, bringing the best of COMO hospitality, fashion, wellness and cuisine into one inspiring location in the heart of Singapore.

#### 10. The Fifth Avenue Hotel, New York City

This is such a rich, romantic and colourful new property with an old-school vibe, and we love it. There are 153 exceptionally appointed rooms and suites, each with its own personality and engaging details that make this historic mansion feel like home.

#### 9. Four Seasons The Pearl, Qatar

This is a little different to the usual Four Seasons resort, with only residential-style apartments on offer. Each comes with a large bedroom, bathroom, lounge, fully equipped kitchen and spacious terrace. There are also two and three-bedroom apartments available, creating a real home-from-home feel, Four Seasons style.

#### 8. Raffles at The OWO, London

Another superb property fashioned from a historic landmark. This is the Old War Office (OWO) and from the moment you enter and take in the grand staircase, you can sense the immense importance of this building in its former life. Now, it hosts 120 opulent rooms and suites, nine restaurants, three bars and a Guerlain spa.

#### 7. Six Senses, Rome

This is a bold project for Six Senses, creating an urban wellness-focused resort and a true oasis within Rome's chaotic and magical historic epicentre. We are pleased to report that this is a total triumph. Some guest rooms and all of the suites have terraces and the dramatic yet soothing Roman Spa sits across two floors.

#### 6. Estelle Manor, UK

This 60-acre country club and hotel nestled in Oxfordshire, perched on the Cotswolds doorstep, is billed as a 'new school club with old school values'. We love the vast choice of impressive accommodations (108 rooms and suites with more to come). Also soon to arrive – a 3000 square metre Roman-inspired bathroom and spa.





### 5. The Peninsula, Istanbul

A lavish resort-style property, with wow factor at every turn. Spread across four buildings, there are 177 rooms and suites offering multiple layouts and categories, a classic Peninsula-style lobby, an impressive spa, plus indoor and outdoor pools.

### 4. Mandarin Oriental, Costa Navarino

Mandarin Oriental is one of many luxury hotel brands we monitor daily. Recently, we named them as the World's Best Luxury Hotel Brand 2023 and this spectacular new resort demonstrates exactly why. This is a breathtaking haven, with 99 elegantly appointed suites and villas, each providing exceptional views and abundant space while seamlessly blending traditional Messenian elements with contemporary luxury.

### 3. Bulgari, Tokyo

Even though it only opened in April, this could already be Japan's most luxurious hotel. Located on the penthouse floors of the Yaesu skyscraper, from the 40th floor upwards, with 98 very spacious rooms and suites (spacious is now a Bulgari hotel trademark), a seriously lavish spa, and multiple dining and drinking options, this is a true haven, high above the city's frantiness.

### 2. 1 Place Vendôme, Paris

We have rarely witnessed such a low-key and discreet opening as this, but it did not evade our resourceful researchers. Chopard, the renowned jeweller, has quietly created this gem of a boutique Paris grand dame, with just 15 suites and rooms. Currently, even the hotel website only consists of a booking page. But, trust our judgment, it is a truly special place, particularly if

you appreciate quiet luxury.

..... and the world's best new luxury hotel 2023 is

### 1. Bulgari, Rome

Having reported on luxury hotels and brands for over 12 years, we would never have envisaged that a renowned name in fine jewellery could surpass the world's leading luxury hospitality operators to create the World's Best New Luxury Hotel. But is it so surprising? Bulgari (part of LVMH) clearly understands the needs and likes of global high-net-worth clients, so why not utilize this to create exceptional ultra-luxury hotels? With Rome, the investment in both time and money is extraordinary, and subsequently so is the property. With upcoming resorts in the Maldives, Miami Beach, and Los Angeles the continuing rise of Bulgari as a luxury hospitality operator is a potential game changer and such an enthralling watch.

# TBO.COM signs deal to acquire the online business of Jumbo Tours Group, Spain

*The DMC business of Jumbo Tours Group to remain part of Alpitour World*

This acquisition will give TBO access to great supply across Europe, the Caribbean, and North Africa, amongst other destinations along with Jumbo's extensive client portfolio across Europe. Jumboline distributes a range of products for wholesalers and tour operators through an application programming interface (API) solution that gives access to more than 120,000 hotels across Europe, the Caribbean, and North Africa.

TBO Tek Limited ("TBO") has announced that its wholly owned subsidiary, Tek Travels DMCC, has acquired 100% shareholding of Jumbonline Accommodations & Services S.L.U., which has been demerged as an online business from Jumbo Tours Group. With this acquisition, TBO intends to further increase its presence in Europe.

Jumbo Tours Group is one of the biggest international tourism operators offering a range of services and products to tourism operators and travel agencies worldwide. The Jumbonline business distributes an extensive range of products for wholesalers and tour operators all on one single platform. The advanced API solution provides access to over 120,000 hotels with 15,000 hotels directly contracted in an unbeatable response time. Complementing this business, there are two other brands, Jumbobeds, the leading online wholesaler for Travel Agencies, and Jumbotransfers which offers a wide range of transport services at great prices.



The company acquired the business for a consideration of 25 million Euros as per the draft IPO papers. TBO Tek, which has filed its draft IPO papers with SEBI also announced that Mustafa Korkmaz and Anurag Aggarwal will lead Jumboline as CEO and CFO respectively. Founded in 2006 by Co-Founders Ankush Nijhawan and Gaurav Bhatnagar, TBO connects travel suppliers such as hotels, airlines, car rental companies, and more with buyers such as travel agents and tour operators.

**Gaurav Bhatnagar, [Co-Founder & Director] of Tek Travels DMCC,** said: *"This acquisition will give us not only access to Jumbo's clientele but quality content from across prime destinations in Europe right down to the Caribbean. We continue to expand our global footprint by staying true to our commitment to simplifying global travel".*

Commenting on the announcement, **Ginés Martínez, CEO, Jumbo Tours Group,** said "We are very excited with

this partnership and look forward to leveraging TBO's strengths in travel distribution across the world, specifically Middle East & APAC. Their tech, talent and growth have been very impressive, and we are happy to be a part of the TBO family".

**Gabriele Burgio, President and CEO of Alpitour World** has commented "We strongly believe that there is a big potential in this alliance, TBO is a great technology partner and highly specialized in the online business, while Jumbo Tours Group is a great provider of operations, contracting, local knowledge and representation in the destinations, we are sure both parties will get the most out of this joint project."

This development reflects the growth plans that TBO has set globally as it continues to step up investments by constantly looking at similar partnerships to expand, hire, and improve customer experience towards its vision of simplifying and empowering the travel ecosystem.





Seven interesting things to  
know about the ancient

# Roman

culture

*Here are seven captivating aspects of  
their civilization that will transport you  
to the heart of ancient Rome.*





Roman culture has an intricate history filled with innovation, grandeur, and enduring influence. It stands as a testament to the Romans' unparalleled contributions to architecture, law, entertainment, and public health, creating a legacy that echoes through the corridors of time. From grand architectural marvels to intriguing social customs, the Romans left an indelible mark on the pages of history. Here are seven captivating aspects of their civilization that will transport you to the heart of ancient Rome.

### 1. Roman education

Education held a prominent place in Ancient Roman society, shaping the minds of both the elite and the common citizen. Roman education emphasized rhetoric, philosophy, literature, and math preparing individuals for roles in governance, law, teaching, and public life.

Getting to know what Roman numerals are can help you better understand historical documents, inscriptions, and even the foundations of the modern numeral system. Roman

numerals, with their unique symbols such as I, V, X, L, C, D, and M, were widely used in the Roman Empire and continue to leave their imprint on various aspects of education and contemporary life, from clock faces to book chapters.

The establishment of schools and the availability of education for various social classes highlight the Romans' recognition of knowledge as a cornerstone for societal progress. The legacy of Roman education endures, as the foundations they laid influenced the development of educational systems throughout history.







## 2. Architectural mastery: The Colosseum's grandeur

One cannot discuss Ancient Rome without marveling at the Colosseum, an iconic symbol of Roman engineering prowess. Built-in the 1st century AD, this colossal amphitheater could host over 50,000 spectators, showcasing gladiatorial contests and public spectacles.

Imagine the roar of the crowd and the clash of swords as you step into the grandeur of the Colosseum. In the heart of Rome, the Colosseum encapsulates the spirit of a bygone era, inviting contemporary visitors to imagine the roar of the crowds, the clash of gladiators, and the vibrant tapestry of life that unfolded within its colossal walls.

## 3. Mosaic elegance: Roman artistry unveiled

Roman artistic expression found its zenith in intricate mosaic designs that adorned the floors of affluent

homes and public spaces. These detailed artworks depicted scenes from mythology, daily life, and nature. The meticulous craftsmanship of these mosaics serves as a testament to the Romans' dedication to aesthetic beauty in both public and private domains.

In their vibrant patterns and intricate details, Roman mosaics not only showcased the artistic skill of their creators but also conveyed a deeper narrative, serving as visual narratives that communicated the values and aspirations of a people who left an indelible mark on the course of history.

## 4. Aqueducts: Engineering Triumphs

The Romans revolutionized water supply systems with their ingenious aqueducts. These colossal structures transported water from distant sources to urban centers, ensuring a steady supply of public baths, fountains, and private residences.

The sophistication of Roman aqueducts stands as a testament to their advanced engineering capabilities and their commitment to improving daily life and shaping the urban landscape with a precision that remains awe-inspiring even in the context of contemporary engineering standards.

## 5. Gladiators and the arena: A glimpse into Roman entertainment

Step into the sandals of a gladiator as we explore the blood-soaked sands of the Roman arenas. Gladiatorial combat was a central element of Roman entertainment, serving as





both a brutal sport and a reflection of societal values. Discover the gladiators' lives, their training, and the spectacle that enthralled Roman audiences for centuries.

### 6. Roman law: The backbone of governance

This law laid the foundation for modern legal systems. The concept of "jus civile" (civil law) provided a framework for justice, property rights, and personal freedoms. The Roman legal system emphasized the principles of equality before the law and the right to a fair trial, principles that continue

to influence legal systems worldwide. With legal institutions like the Senate and the development of legal codes such as the Twelve Tables, Roman law was a dynamic force that adapted to the changing needs of a growing and diverse empire.

### 7. Mythology and religion: Gods and rituals

Dive into the rich tapestry of Roman mythology, where gods and goddesses ruled the heavens, and rituals played a pivotal role in daily life. From Jupiter, the king of gods, to Venus, the goddess of love, Roman mythology shaped the

spiritual beliefs and practices of ancient society. Roman rituals are captivating windows into the heart of an ancient civilization, offering profound insights into the religious, social, and cultural dimensions of Roman life.

The Romans, with their insatiable appetite for innovation and grandeur, sculpted a civilization that reverberated through the annals of history. Whether you find yourself mesmerized by the Colosseum's grandeur or captivated by the intricacies of Roman law, each aspect contributes to a rich tapestry that has woven its influence into the fabric of modern society







# Chiang Mai's

## Luxurious five-star hotels, temples and elephant sanctuaries

*With a plenitude of cultural offerings, superlative luxury and breathtaking beauty, this Thai destination is a dream come true for travellers*

The gorgeous roads of Chiang Mai will always lead you to paradise. It could be a dreamy land covered in sakura and frangipani, or a lush forest stampeded by elephants. You could even end up in the heart of the ancient city, where the historical past of the Lanna kingdom reverberates through its legendary architecture. On the way to these heavenly spots, the modern city surrounding ancient Chiang Mai offers Thai luxury at its finest, with the country's green tourism coming alive in a host of five-star hotels and farm-to-table restaurants.

If you are planning a trip to Chiang Mai, Thailand, one of the top activities on your list should be visiting an elephant sanctuary. These sanctuaries provide a unique opportunity to interact with these majestic animals ethically and responsibly.

Let's not forget the magnificent temples throughout Chiang Mai. Visiting the temples in Chiang Mai is a beautiful cultural experience. After a fun-packed day, it's time to relax. Let's explore the top-rated hotels and hostels in Chiang Mai.

### Top-rated hotels: Comfortable and affordable accommodation

After a day of exploring the elephant sanctuaries and immersing yourself in the local culture, it's time to relax and indulge in Chiang Mai's luxurious



accommodations. The city boasts a wide array of five-star hotels that provide top-notch service, breathtaking views, and world-class amenities.

Here's a rundown of three top-rated hotels in Chiang Mai, Thailand, known for their exceptional service, comfort, and unique offerings:

### Four Seasons Resort Chiang Mai

Nestled amidst rice fields and lush greenery, the Four Seasons Resort Chiang Mai embodies luxury and tranquility. Its stunning infinity pool overlooks the mountains, offering a

serene escape. The spacious villas, adorned with traditional Thai decor, provide a blend of modern amenities and cultural immersion. Guests can indulge in world-class spa treatments, explore nearby temples, or partake in cooking classes showcasing authentic Thai cuisine.

### Anantara Chiang Mai Resort

Situated along the Mae Ping River, the Anantara Chiang Mai Resort boasts an exquisite blend of contemporary design and Thai heritage. The luxurious rooms and suites offer picturesque views





of the river or the hotel's landscaped gardens. The resort's renowned spa, offering traditional Thai massages and wellness treatments, is a highlight for guests seeking relaxation. Additionally, its dining options feature diverse culinary experiences, including riverside dining and Thai cooking classes.

### 137 Pillars House

A boutique hotel exuding colonial charm, 137 Pillars House is steeped in history. Set in a restored teak wood house, this hotel showcases spacious suites with private plunge pools and verandas. The blend of traditional decor and modern amenities creates a unique

ambiance. Guests can savor gourmet cuisine at the hotel's restaurant, enjoy personalized spa treatments, and take advantage of the hotel's complimentary tuk-tuk shuttle to explore Chiang Mai's bustling city center.

Each of these top-rated hotels in Chiang Mai offers a distinct experience, from cultural immersion to luxurious relaxation, catering to the diverse preferences of travelers visiting this enchanting city in Thailand.

With their boutique experiences, luxurious service, and grounded commitment to green tourism, hotels and resorts in Thailand epitomize Asian hospitality with easy grace. In the heart of the city, the recently opened *Meliá Chiang Mai* creates a cocoon of modish living coloured with cultural influences. Clink your glasses at Mai The Sky Bar on the rooftop, which, standing atop 22 floors, offers the highest view of the city below.

On the other hand, the spirit of







Lanna living meets Thai design at *Raya Heritage*. Locally handcrafted furniture decorates the 38 suites and open spaces here and belies the modern amenities that make for a comfortable stay. You can expect a blend of local and international flavours at all three of its dining outlets, all of which source their ingredients from the surrounding land.

#### Choosing the Right Elephant Sanctuary in Chiang Mai

With the growing interest in elephant sanctuaries in Chiang

Mai, choosing one genuinely focused on conservation and ethical practices is essential. Unfortunately, not all establishments claiming to be sanctuaries adhere to these principles. It is essential to do your research and select a sanctuary that prioritizes the welfare of the elephants above all else.

The Elephant Freedom Project in Chiang Mai is an ethical elephant sanctuary that focuses on the well-being and conservation of elephants. Unlike traditional elephant camps or attractions that exploit these

magnificent animals for entertainment, the Elephant Freedom Project emphasizes responsible tourism and ethical interactions with elephants.

#### Mission and practices:

**1. Ethical treatment:** The project prioritizes the ethical treatment of elephants, providing them with a natural and stress-free environment.

**2. Rescue and rehabilitation:** Many of the elephants at the sanctuary are rescued from exploitative industries, such as logging or tourism, and rehabilitated safely.

**3. No riding or shows:** The emphasis is on observing elephants in their natural habitat without promoting activities that exploit them, like riding or performing tricks.

**4. Education and conservation:** Visitors are educated about the plight of elephants in Thailand and the importance of conservation efforts.

#### Visitor experience

Guests at the Elephant Freedom Project can engage in various activities that prioritize the well-being of the elephants, such as:

- **Observation and interaction:**

Observing elephants in a natural setting, feeding them, and learning about their behavior and history.

- **Bathing and swimming with the elephants:** Visitors can participate in bathing the elephants and swimming in the river, allowing for more intimate and respectful interaction.

- **Guided tours:** Knowledgeable guides provide insights into the lives and behaviors of these magnificent creatures, promoting awareness and understanding.

#### Importance

Projects like the Elephant Freedom Project are crucial in changing the narrative surrounding an elephant nature park and elephant tourism in general. They emphasize the importance of ethical treatment and conservation, raising awareness about the challenges faced by these animals, and promoting responsible tourism practices.



By supporting elephant sanctuaries in Chiang Mai like The Elephant Freedom Project, visitors contribute to the well-being of the elephants and help ensure a sustainable future for these endangered animals.

Before visiting any sanctuary or project, it's essential to research and ensure their ethical practices align with genuine elephant welfare and conservation principles. Please click [here](#) for their location.

## Choosing the right temples in Chiang Mai

Chiang Mai is known for its rich cultural heritage and numerous stunning temples. Here are three of the best temples to visit in Chiang Mai:

### 1. Wat Phra That Doi Suthep

Located atop a mountain overlooking Chiang Mai, Wat Phra That Doi Suthep is one of the most revered and picturesque temples in Northern Thailand. The temple complex is architecturally impressive and holds immense spiritual significance. Visitors can climb the Naga staircase adorned with intricate serpents or take a tram to reach the temple. The golden chedi, stunning city views, and ornate details make this temple a must-visit.

### 2. Wat Chedi Luang

Dating back to the 14th century, Wat Chedi Luang is an ancient temple in the heart of Chiang Mai's old city. Its towering ruined chedi (stupa) is striking, hinting at its former glory. The temple complex houses various halls and structures, including the City Pillar shrine and the Viharn Lai Kham, with a revered Buddha image. Visitors can witness monks' daily rituals and explore the temple's historical and cultural significance.

### 3. Wat Phra Singh

Renowned for its stunning Lanna-style architecture and revered Buddha image, Wat Phra Singh is another prominent temple in Chiang Mai. The intricate detailing on the buildings, including the main hall (Viharn Lai Kam), showcases exquisite



craftsmanship. The temple houses the revered Phra Singh Buddha image, known for its beauty and spiritual significance. Visitors can appreciate the temple grounds' intricate murals, statues, and serene atmosphere.

These temples offer a glimpse into Chiang Mai's rich cultural and religious heritage, each with its unique architectural features, historical significance, and spiritual atmosphere.

## WHAT TO DO

In Chiang Mai, Thailand's drive towards ecotourism is helmed by elephants that thrive safely in the midst of tourists and locals. One of Thailand's most treasured gifts to the

tourism industry is the ability to get up and close with nature and wildlife. Immerse yourself in petting, bathing and feeding the friendly mammals at *Elephant Jungle Sanctuary* or the *Elephant Nature Park*, or explore the mahout camp perched on a ridge in the *Anantara Golden Triangle Elephant Camp and Resort* in Chiang Rai.

On the other end of the spectrum stands Kalm Village, where the ancient crafts of Chiang Mai are preserved in a contemporary setting. You can discover designers through rotating exhibitions, learn about local culture in workshops and share the love for art, food and heritage through



conversations with native artisans. MAIAM Museum of Contemporary Art in San Kamphaeng also displays a rich repository of contemporary Thai artwork collected by discerning families over the years.

At the Jim Thompson Farm, pink cosmos and luscious vegetables reign over the land. After a tour of the organic estate, tourists can go and get their hands dirty with sustainable silk production practices the Jim Thompson way.

A few kilometres from Chiang Mai, a village stands dotted with colour. This is the Bo Sang Umbrella Handicraft Village, where painted paper umbrellas have thrived as a form of handicraft for generations. At the local plant in the village, visitors can learn the secrets of making delicate umbrellas with bamboo frames and mulberry paper. With floral designs and shocking colours, they transform into a sight to behold and make for a popular Lanna souvenir to take home.

### WHERE TO EAT

To pamper your senses with the freshness of the land, gorge on local fare prepared with locally sourced produce at one of the many Bib Gourmand-recognised restaurants of Chiang Mai. Sip on housemade tea by the patio at *Baan Mon Muan*, and learn about the sustainable practices that prepare the localised cuisine at *Blackitch Artisan Kitchen*. *Khao*, which serves Thai classics with influences from the culinary traditions of indigenous highland people, calls its fermented rice cheesecake a signature, while *Favola* by Le Méridien rolls up the taste of Italy in its in-house pastas and ravioli Di Granchio.

### Conclusion

Chiang Mai is a treasure trove of experiences, blending luxury, spirituality, and natural wonders seamlessly. From the opulent comforts of five-star hotels to the serene ambiance of ancient temples and the heartwarming encounters at elephant sanctuaries, this city embodies a harmonious convergence of indulgence and cultural richness.

As you bid farewell to this enchanting city, may the memories of its grandeur, spirituality, and the gentle embrace of its majestic creatures linger, serving as a testament to the unparalleled beauty and allure of Chiang Mai.

### GETTING THERE

Since Thailand ruled out its long-standing pandemic curbs, its tourism industry has bounced back with a bang with millions thronging the country once again. Two airports in Bangkok and Phuket serve as the main entry points for international travellers. Flying from India, one can board a connecting flight to Chiang Mai and reach their destination in under 10 hours. To make the most of your journey, visit the city in the winter months (Nov-Feb) or the monsoon season (June-Oct) when the temperatures drop to a comfortable level and the air is fresh with the smell of rain.



# Exploring the world's most **luxurious** **casinos**



*Here are some of the world's most luxurious casinos that you might want to add to your travel bucket list*





For those who love both the thrill of gambling and the luxury of world-class hospitality, there's nothing quite like visiting a high-end casino. These establishments offer an experience that goes beyond the ordinary, providing not just gaming opportunities but also world-class dining, shopping, and entertainment.

Here are some of the world's most luxurious casinos that you might want to add to your travel bucket list.

Some of them you can visit virtually and join the players who are thereby placing bets on the same table, but online. For more information visit [LiveCasinoComparer.com](https://www.LiveCasinoComparer.com), more specifically the page about land-based casinos that stream roulette online.

#### **Park Hyatt Mendoza Casino, Argentina**

Located in Mendoza, Argentina, the Park Hyatt Mendoza Casino offers

all the standard games and features you would expect from a high-level gambling establishment. The casino is particularly known for the game *punto y Blanca*, a huge favorite among the locals. The hotel itself is housed in an old Spanish Colonial building, adding to its charm and appeal.

#### **Marina Bay Sands Casino, Singapore**

Singapore's Marina Bay Sands is





quickly becoming the country's most iconic and recognizable structure. Its casino boasts a total of 2,300 slots, 500 gambling tables, and other high-end features and entertainment options. If you're not feeling lucky, you can explore the Marina Bay Sands Science Museum or watch world-class productions at its grand theater.

#### **Venetian Macao Resort Hotel Casino, China**

The Venetian Macao Resort Hotel solidified Macao's claim as the "Las Vegas of Asia". Its casino offers 500 gambling tables, 2,000 slot machines,

and a huge array of entertainment choices. High-end shopping malls, world-class restaurants, and luxury boutiques dot this magnificent hotel-casino.

#### **Ibiza Gran Hotel Casino, Balearic Islands, Spain**

Known for its beaches and wild parties, Ibiza also offers a luxurious casino experience at the Ibiza Gran Hotel Casino. Overlooking the marina and the Old Town, the hotel provides a romantic setting for tourists. The hotel's casino facility features gambling tables and slot machines, and it has

been known to hold Texas hold 'em tournaments.

#### **The Ritz-Carlton, San Juan Casino, Puerto Rico**

The Ritz-Carlton, San Juan offers a luxurious casino experience along with its world-class accommodations. The casino is known for its high-end features and carries every gambling game known to man.

#### **Maxim's Casino, Kensington, London**

Maxim's Casino is one of the most luxurious and established casinos in



London that has been around since 1862. Known for its elegance and style, Maxim's offers table games only in a sophisticated setting.

### **Hippodrome Casino, Piccadilly, London**

The Hippodrome Casino is an iconic listed 1900 theatre restored to become one of the best entertainment complexes in London. It offers 80,000 feet of fun spread over seven floors. The casino features three uniquely-themed casinos within one of the grandest former theatres in London. It also houses a dedicated poker floor, a

Baccarat lounge, nine bars, and much more. The casino is a cornerstone of West End life as an admired, well-known, popular entertainment venue.

### **Grosvenor Casino, The Barracuda, London**

Another top land-based casino in the UK that you should consider is the Grosvenor Casino, The Barracuda, London. It offers a comprehensive gaming, dining, and entertainment experience right in the heart of London.

### **Portomaso Casino, Malta**

Portomaso Casino is a luxurious

casino that has been open since 2006 and has become very popular with locals and tourists alike. It is part of the stylish, leisure complex of Portomaso.

These casinos not only offer a luxurious gambling experience but also provide world-class dining, shopping, and entertainment options. They are a testament to the fact that the casino experience is about more than just the games – it's about enjoying the finer things in life. So, whether you're a seasoned gambler or just looking for a taste of the high life, these casinos are worth checking out, whether you go there in person or if you visit the roulette tables virtually.







5

stunning examples of  
**Saudi architecture**



the Red Sea, and some of the world's tallest skyscrapers.

### Kingdom Centre

One of the world's tallest buildings, Kingdom Centre tower in Riyadh is an iconic part of the Saudi capital's skyline. Designed by local architecture firm Omrania and Associates and the U.S.-based Ellerbe Becket, the modern multipurpose building features east and west wings that soar 300 meters high. The building's unique curved

shape and some of the materials used were carefully planned to keep the building cool. The narrowest ends of the building face east and west, where heat is greatest. Wrapped around the building is a reflective glass wall that is heat-resistant to Arabia's intense sun.

Opening at the top has a purpose. To build taller than the local height restriction of 30 occupied floors, the floors around the inverted arch opening are unoccupied; however, they connect at the top. Here, visitors can explore a



Featuring some of the holiest sites in Islam, Saudi architecture is undoubtedly stunning. But in addition to ornate, centuries-old mosques, the country is home to ultramodern cultural centers, historical districts built of coral limestone from





glass skybridge observation deck for breathtaking views of the city.

Afraid of heights? There's plenty more to explore inside this modern work of architecture, including a shopping mall, restaurants, a hotel, sports facilities, and even a wedding venue. *"We have planned several extraordinary weddings, as the Kingdom Tower and the Four Seasons Hotel Riyadh are the most iconic architectural oasis in Saudi Arabia,"* says **Dounia Eldorra, a wedding specialist at the Four Seasons in Kingdom Centre.**

#### Al Balad, Jeddah

A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2014, Jeddah's historical district of Al Balad was founded in the seventh century; today, the neighborhood's preserved architecture tells stories of the city's past. Here, you'll find houses built from the 16th to early 20th centuries. One reason these homes are

unique is that, unlike other regional high-rises that were constructed out of clay, Al Balad were built with coral limestone brought in from the Red Sea. The impressive woodwork adorning these structures is another striking feature. In 1869, the Suez Canal opened, and Jeddah profited along with it. Merchants began decorating Al Balad's traditional buildings with ornate wooden details around the doors and windows and carving highly decorative wooden bay windows and balconies, known as rawasheen. From the Nassif House to Al Alawi market, there's a ton to see in Al Balad.

#### King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra)

Ithra resembles a larger-than-life Zen garden. Designed by the Norwegian architecture firm Snohetta, the buildings are arranged purposefully to symbolize unity. The tallest, known as

Knowledge Tower, stands 18 stories tall and represents Saudi's future. The ground-floor pieces of this architectural work represent the present, and those underground are the past.

Covered in more than 350 kilometers of stainless steel tubes that were bent and framed over the six buildings of the complex, Ithra is a striking addition to Dhahran's skyline. In addition to following LEED certification guidelines, the center used highly compressed materials found around Saudi, including sand, clay, and gravel, to ensure that Ithra is both sound- and fireproof.

What's inside this cultural hub, gifted by Saudi Aramco, is just as impressive. "The center is a place where ideas and dreams take shape," says Ithra's former director, Ali Al Mutairi. Discover museums, exhibits, libraries, a theater, and a concert hall.

### Maraya, AlUla

In the middle of the Saudi desert sits Maraya, which translates to “mirror.” The 5,000-square-meter building’s exterior is covered in 9,740 square meters of mirrors, which reflect the desert landscapes surrounding it in AlUla. *“AlUla was at the crossroads of cultural exchange for millennia. With Maraya, we are one step further to realizing our vision to re-create a place to dream, a place that inspires and facilitates the sharing of cultures and ideas,”* says **Phillip Jones, chief destination management and marketing officer at the Royal Commission for AlUla.**

Maraya set a Guinness World Record as the largest mirrored building in 2019, though it’s more than just an impressive art installation in the desert. It’s also a cultural and entertainment hub for concerts, immersive theater, interactive exhibitions, and other events. Behind the stage, a retractable window that’s more than 800 square meters opens

up to reveal AlUla’s landscapes. In August 2020, Maraya was named an Architizer A+Awards popular choice winner. “It’s perhaps particularly gratifying to win the popular vote,” Jones says. “Visitors are truly mesmerized by Maraya’s impact and by the way it blends in so perfectly and reflects its surroundings.”

### King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center, Riyadh

Both imaginative and uber-efficient, the King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center (KAPSARC) might remind you of something you’ve seen in a science fiction movie. In truth, there’s a lot of science going on inside this sleek, solar-efficient, and LEED Platinum-certified structure. The 70,000-square-meter energy and environmental research campus serves as a nonprofit dedicated to finding the most efficient and effective uses of energy.

Sustainability was at the forefront when designing the campus’s five

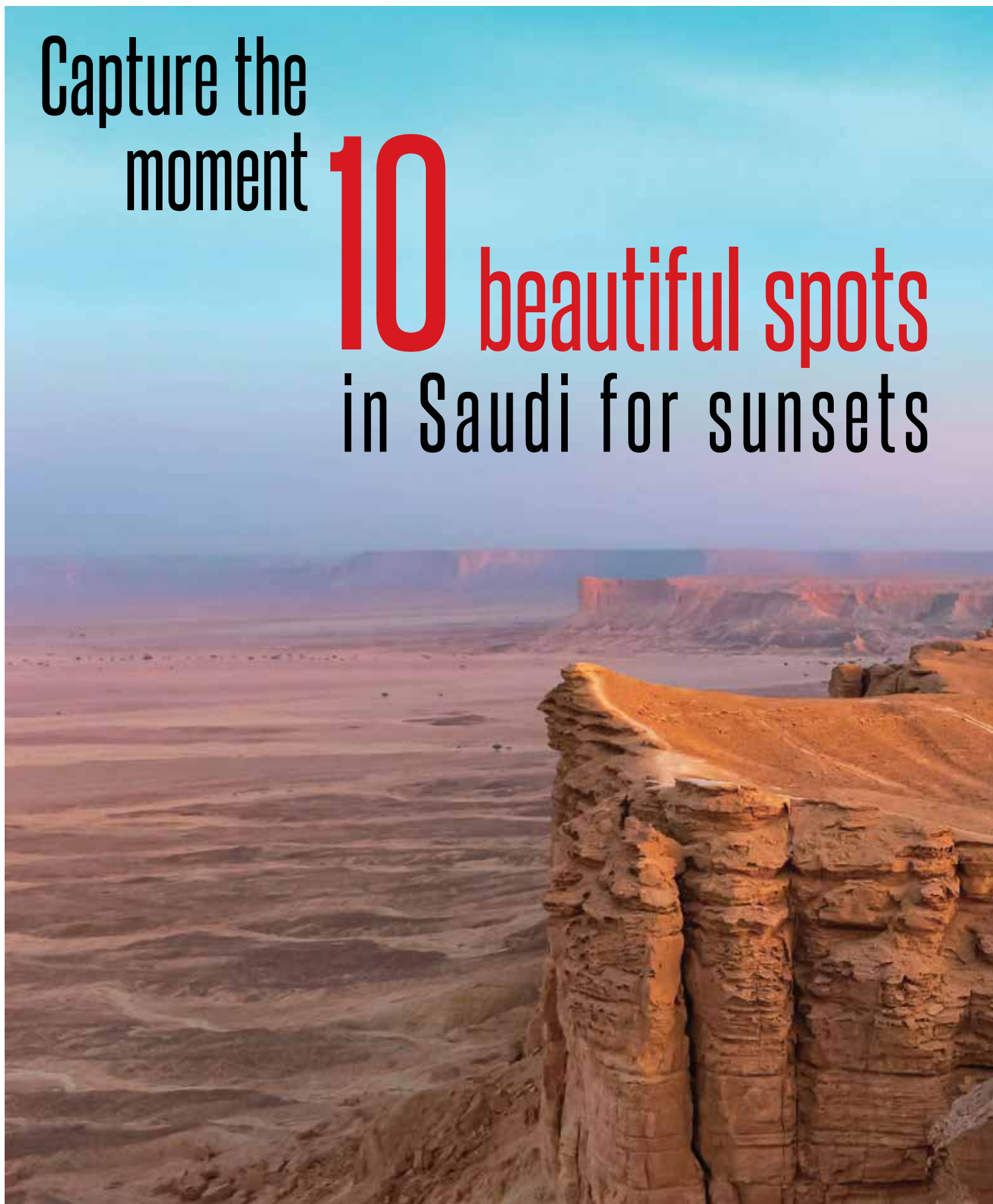
buildings, which include the Energy Knowledge Center, the Energy Computer Center, a conference center with an exhibition hall and auditorium, a research library, and a musalla for prayer and worship. The campus’s design ties the five buildings together as one space connected by public expanses. KAPSARC is one of the final projects overseen by Zaha Hadid Architects’ namesake founder, and its honeycomb structure was inspired by natural elements she observed in the desert landscape.


Those crystalline forms serve another, more practical purpose: The buildings were designed around each other in a way that created shaded, enclosed courtyards to protect against the Arabian sun and desert winds. Inside KAPSARC, the strategic architectural design — featuring offset floor plans that allow people to see floors above and below as well as common spaces — promotes interaction and idea sharing among visitors and researchers.





# Capture the moment **10** beautiful spots in Saudi for sunsets





From castles and craters to deserts and beaches, there's no shortage of picturesque spots to soak in the last of the day's light in Saudi Arabia. Here are 10 itinerary-inspiring sunset spots to enjoy (and Instagram) during your adventure.

### Edge of the World

Drive to the World's Edge, also known as Jabal Fihrayn, 120 kilometers away. Breathtaking cliffs dramatically rise out of the desert, resembling a large natural wall as they reach upward. You have a wonderful view of the sky as it





appears to blend into the desolate soil while you are standing atop the cliffs, looking toward the horizon. This escarpment northwest of Riyadh offers endless views, so look for interesting rock formations or angles that show the sheer drop to illustrate how the area lives up to its name. The abundant fossils in the area come to life at golden hour, presenting another interesting shot at sunset.

### Jeddah Corniche

While it is hard to beat a view of the sun dipping into the Red Sea, it pays to look for added interest, like the sun setting behind King Fahd Fountain, or waiting until you can combine the last sunset colors with the lit-up Mamluk Mosque Lamps on Al Andalus Street. On nights when the sunset is more pastel, it's worth seeking out the Floating Mosque, which appears to hover over the waves.

### Dhee Ayn Village

Once you have explored every nook and cranny of this 400-year-old stone settlement, head down to the road in front of the village to catch it illuminated by the last bit of the day's sun. You'll see why it's called the









Marble Village as the pale slate pops against the dark mountains.

### Asfar Lake

No matter what time of day you visit, the contrast between the blue lake and golden dunes is striking, but it comes alive at sunset. Climb up high for the best view, and be patient as the

colors change the water, sand and sky. While Asfar Lake (also known as Yellow Lake) is the star of the show, keep an eye out for interesting dune formations or little details along the shoreline.

### Al Disah Valley

Plan ahead for sunset views here — high canyon walls mean that golden





hour is earlier. Down on the ground, look for reflective pools to help show the rock formations. If you have the chance, venture up to higher ground to gain a perspective on just how magnificent Al Disah Valley is.

### Farasan Island

By the time the sun is setting, you'll probably be heading back to the main island after a day of exploring the little islands. This is the perfect time to





snap silhouettes of the many boats or even see dolphins. If you're on the main island, the area around Beit Al Refai or one of the many beaches are ideal for taking in the sunset.

### Al Wahbah Crater

The reward for scrambling back up to the edge of Al Wahbah Crater is

being able to watch the setting sun tint the white crater floor. Look for an angle where you can capture the last rays dropping below the crater's edge.

### Al Soudah

The trouble with Al Soudah is that there are almost no bad views, which means it is very popular. Head up Jabal

Sawda until you find a good vantage point, and settle in for a show. A zoom lens can help create dramatic images of the sun going down among the layers of peaks. Don't get too distracted by the view, though — the baboons are always on the prowl for leftovers!

### Tarout Castle

The area around Tarout Castle is a lovely place to watch the sunset over Tarout Island, especially the eye-catching mosque just below. Too much work to climb up? In the rainy season, the puddles are perfect for reflecting the castle and palm trees.

### Green Arts Park

This unique park in King Abdullah Economic City is full of hedges artfully trimmed into a menagerie of animal shapes. If you have already filled your camera roll with sunset dunes and mountains, this might be the place to grab some sunset selfies with a leafy camel.



# Experience Abu Dhabi

## Unveils inspiring campaign inviting visitors to Find their pace

**W**ith **Find Your Pace**, Experience Abu Dhabi ignites curiosity and encourages visitors to create their own unique journey, from the known to the unknown, through ancient heritage sites and iconic modern treasures. It showcases the pursuits, passions, and colour palettes that visitors will uncover within the destination – whether they are seeking the thrill of adventure, immersive cultural experiences, or simply a relaxing break amid natural landscapes.

With rhythm, music, and vibrant settings, Find Your Pace follows four characters as they explore Abu Dhabi for the first time, taking journeys that inspire, excite, and restore. Destination highlights include the tranquil Al Ain Oasis, Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, inspiring Qasr Al Watan, and renowned Louvre Abu Dhabi, as well as the vast Green Mubazzarah, and the Al Wathba Fossil Dunes, estimated to be over four million years old.

With travellers looking for more immersive and tailored experiences, the creative and emotive story puts Abu Dhabi in the frame as a must-visit destination where everyone is welcome to find their pace. The campaign



video has been designed to convey the feeling that visitors experience when they explore Abu Dhabi, showcasing how culture is at the heart of all the attractions and activities one can discover within the emirate.

**Find Your Pace** highlights that with the destination's three pillars of experiences, Abu Dhabi caters to the needs, interests and passion points of all categories of travellers. The destination **inspires**, educates

creatively, and enriches lives; it **restores**, allowing visitors to revive, refresh, and escape; and it **excites**, through entertainment and adventure. And it's all available year-round, just minutes apart – ready to be explored at your own pace.



# Sip your way through the Golden State on these California wine tours



If you're itching for a chance to experience the stunning beauty of the Golden State, California while indulging in some of the world's most exquisite wines, wine tourism is an absolute must-do activity! The 'Golden State' is renowned for its wine industry, and wine tourism has become an

increasingly popular choice for visitors seeking unique and relaxing vacations. The cherry on top is the mild climate of California that allows visitors to travel here year-round as every season offers something magical to discover.

There are few better places to go on a wine escapade than California. With

dreamy coastlines, enchanting redwood forests, and rolling hillsides speckled with vineyards, this is an idyllic travel destination year-round. The Golden State boasts year-round sunshine and diverse, mouthwatering cuisine, but is also a world leader in wine. With over 4,000 wineries and more than 100





different grape varieties, California wine country is hard to beat.

Whether you want to venture into the renowned regions of Napa and Sonoma, or head off-piste into Monterey and Santa Cruz, there is a wine and food experience in California sure to suit all tastes.

### **Delving into Napa: California's Golden Child - Bedrock of the Californian Wine Industry**

Located just a stone's throw north of San Francisco, the Napa Valley boasts stunning scenery, but it also offers gourmet cuisine and some of the best wine in the world. Napa is undoubtedly the superstar of California wine country, with some of the world's most iconic wine estates and more than 375 wineries and 90 tasting rooms open to explore. Napa town is a good place to get started and you can warm up your taste buds in the Be Bubbly or Complaine wine bars before hitting the wine route.

Head northwards on Highway 29 or take the more peaceful Silverado Trail to venture into the heart of Napa wine country. It's here where the iconic Napa Valley Wine Train line starts, hitting 33 wineries on its route from Yountville up to St Helena.

Just north of Napa, Stag's Leap, Oak Knoll, Yountville, and Rutherford offer a host of wine and food experiences plus some of Napa's most prized fine-dining restaurants including The French Laundry and Auberge du Soleil, which both claim Michelin stars. At the top of the main wine route of Napa are Calistoga and St Helena, where you'll find a host of fabulous eateries celebrating local cuisine, including Brasswood and Cook.

There are far too many excellent wineries to mention, but if you are looking for stunning grounds try Chateau Montelena, with its 18th-century-inspired chateau, or Quintessa for its sweeping valley views.









Mayacamas is another favourite for its age-worthy reds. If you are in the mood for something a bit spicier you can't get more kitsch than Jean Claude Boisset's Raymond Vineyards in St Helena, where mannequins in glitzy outfits and neon lights decorate the winery.

### Get seduced by Sonoma's buzzing food and wine scene

The Valley of the Moon is located just to the west of Napa Valley.

Sonoma is home to over 420+ wineries, including some of the oldest and most prestigious in the state. Guided tours of the wineries are available, providing a behind-the-scenes look at the wine-making process, as well as tasting opportunities for some of the best wines California has to offer. Some of the grape varieties available are Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Merlot, Syrah, and many more!

Sonoma is often referred to as

the younger cousin of Napa, but the coastal wine region has its charms for its more relaxed pace of life and laid-back eateries. If you are on the hunt for great wine bars, try Valley Bar + Bottle in Sonoma Plaza, which focuses on natural wines, or Sigh Champagne Bar if you want to kick off with bubbles. Healdsburg is also a hotspot for great wine bars and restaurants, including Michelin-starred Barndiva.

Sonoma's Russian River Valley is







much loved for its many wineries worth dropping into, including the Bubble Room at J Vineyards and one of the oldest growers in the valley, Rochioli Vineyards. Sebastapool is another hotspot with a great collection of tasting rooms including those of Red Car Wine and Pax Wines. You can easily hop between wineries in the morning and tasting rooms in the afternoon.

Further head further out to the coast of Sonoma to visit the biodynamic Littorai winery or the Sonoma Coast Vineyards' tasting room, right on the beautiful Bodega Bay. Stick around this picturesque fishing village to indulge in fresh oysters, crab, and lobster at the authentic fish shacks of Fisherman's Cove or Spud Point Crab Company. BYO with an unctuous Sonoma Chardonnay to pair with the local seafood and you've got a match made in heaven.

### Explore the waves and wines of Monterey and Santa Cruz

The Central Coast wineries of Monterey and Santa Cruz are also worth a detour to explore some off-the-beaten-track wine country. A good place to start – with a great panorama of Monterey and a coastal view – is the oceanside A Taste of Monterey wine bar. The nearby Carmel Valley is low-key but certainly a major hotspot for wine tasting and wineries, with some highlights including Village Wine & Tap Room The Wine House wine bars; and the wineries of Wrath Wines and Caraccioli Cellars. In Santa Cruz there are more than 75 wineries tucked amid breathtaking scenery, including Alfaro Family Vineyards, home to award-winning Pinots and Chardonnays, and Storrs Winery & Vineyards - where visitors can pull up

a seat at its tasting room housed in a vast, modern barn or enjoy drinks on the sun-soaked outdoor terrace, surrounded by swaying eucalyptus forest.

### Soak in Santa Barbara's southern vibe

Santa Barbara, just two hours north of LA, is another highlight of the Central Coast's wine country, with some 280 wineries and a growing reputation for top Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. While there are plenty of tasting rooms in Santa Barbara proper, the best place to start is Santa Ynez Valley where you can hop between over 100 wineries — including renowned Sunstone and Gainey. As well as tasting your way through the wines, make sure to try some of the excellent restaurants here, including Bells and Alisal Ranch.



Some of the well-known wineries in California are as follows:

**Bien Nacido:** The benchmark and the crown jewel of the region, Bien Nacido has sprawling 3,000 acres of land, 600 of which are dedicated to vineyards. While the estate boasts several grape varieties, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are the most popular. The resulting wines are known for their pronounced acidity, which will make your wine-tasting experience truly unique and unforgettable.

**John Sebastiano Vineyard:** John Sebastiano Vineyard's terroir is unique and contributes to the high quality of its wines. The winery offers several different tasting experiences to visitors, including a seated tasting in the vineyard's tasting room, which overlooks the stunning vineyards.

**Raymond Vineyard:** Raymond Vineyard is a family-owned winery located in the heart of Napa Valley, California. The winery also offers a "Winemaker for a Day" experience, where visitors can create their blend of wine under the guidance of Raymond Vineyard's winemaking team, providing you with a hands-on experience.

**Beringer Vineyards** is a large winery in St. Helena, California. Founded in 1876, Beringer Vineyards is "the oldest



continuously operating winery in the Napa Valley", and is listed under both the National Register of Historic Places and as a California Historical Landmark makes it a must-visit destination.

### Take the SLO CAL route to Paso Robles

The locals just call it Paso, where you get the chance to sample the SLO CAL lifestyle in a place where cowboy country meets world-class wine country. The surrounding area is home to more than 40 different grape varieties, and you'll have the pick of almost 250 tasting rooms on winding wine trails that rub shoulders with artisanal brewers, distilleries, and farm-to-table fine dining. Check into one of the ultra-modern, elevated cabins at Geneso Inn, a luxurious boutique retreat overlooking Cass Winery's glorious 145 acres in the rolling hills surrounding

Paso Robles. It has a chef's garden to complete the stellar food-and-wine experiences on offer.

### Be enchanted by the Golden State

Exhilarating cities, stunning national parks, fabulous food, and golden beaches: California does have it all. Discover why the Golden State should be top of your travel bucket list, whether it's taking a long-anticipated road trip, drinking award-winning wine in Napa, spotting celebs in Los Angeles, or walking San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge.

From the stunning scenery to the delectable cuisine, California wine tourism has something for everyone. Whether you're looking to relax, explore, or indulge, wine tourism in California is an experience that's sure to leave a lasting impression.







# Five U.S. destinations to watch in 2024

**T**he USA is home to so many incredible experiences from coast to coast and rural to urban. Travellers are invited to explore ever-changing landscapes and discover diverse communities. U.S destinations that should be on the radar for 2024 are slated below.





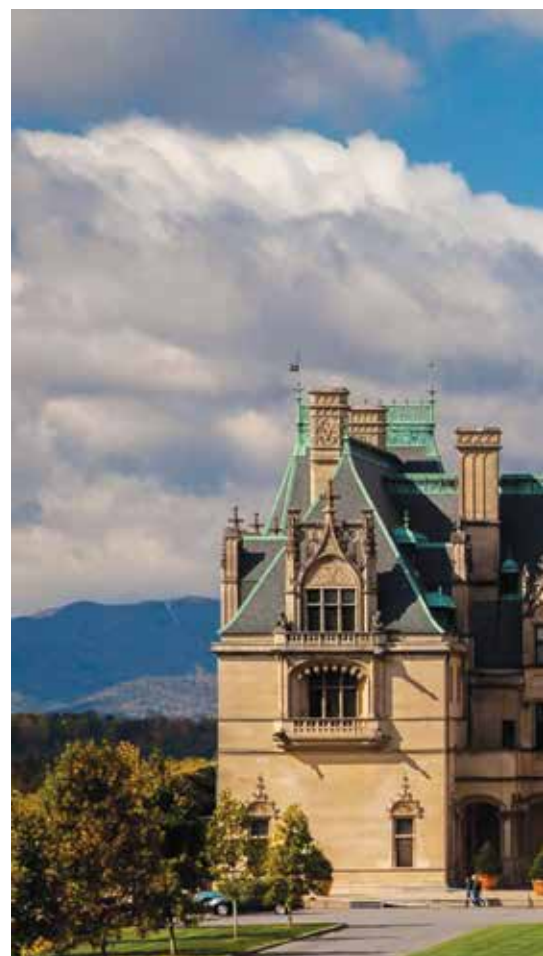
## 1 **Kansas City, Missouri:** **Swiftmania set to drive record numbers**

Kansas City is now firmly on the map thanks to one of the hottest new relationships to emerge in 2023. Queen of American pop and country music singer, Taylor Swift and *Kansas City Chiefs* tight end, Travis Kelce, have everyone rushing to the City of Fountains. Featuring over 200 water installations throughout the metro, it is a true sporting mecca, home to everything from soccer to pickleball. Preparations are underway to host Triple Crown Sports' inaugural 'PickleCon' competition this August, one of America's fastest-growing sports, as well as the hotly anticipated FIFA World Cup in 2026. The city is also set to welcome the National Women's Soccer League, *Kansas City Current*, for their debut at the new CPKC Stadium in 2024. The 11,500-seat venue will be the world's first stadium purpose-built for a women's professional sports team and is set to be the new tailgating hotspot. Off the field, visitors can enjoy the city's thriving barbecue scene, with

restaurants smoking everything from pork, beef, and chicken to jackfruit, mushrooms, and fish. For those visiting in autumn, The American Royal is the largest BBQ competition across the globe, with more than 600 teams competing and tens of thousands of spectators/tasters!

## 2 **Santa Fe, New Mexico:** **America's melting pot of creativity**

With the breathtaking backdrop of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, Santa Fe is both mystical and eclectic. The land has become renowned for its healing qualities and is a spiritual haven while its varied terrain has lured artists from all over the world. Native American, Spanish, and Anglo-American cultures seamlessly blend forming a thriving creative community. Santa Fe is home to the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum (showcasing the 'Making a Life' exhibition until March 2024) as well as the fantastical Meow Wolf – which is a completely immersive art experience called 'House of Eternal Return' which has over 70 rooms







created by local and community artists. The city is also home to eight Native American pueblos and the Santa Fe Indian Market, one of the largest and most prestigious Native American art shows in the world featuring artists from over 200 tribes (taking place on 17 - 18 August 2024). However, to truly appreciate the arts, culture, and culinary landscape, look no further than the Art + Sol winter festival.

### **3 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania:** **where old meets new**

The birthplace of the U.S. and the first World Heritage City, Philadelphia is steeped in history, yet equally exudes a contemporary and vibrant culinary and arts scene. The Michelin Green Guide hails Philly as “an open-air museum” thanks to the 600+ sculptures and statues and over 4,400 outdoor murals. In late 2024,

the Calder Gardens Museum is set to open, celebrating the impact that three generations of Calder family have had on Philadelphia. The city also has a strong culinary stake - dubbed a true epicurean's heaven - foodies can find everything from street food, markets, and fine dining to BYOB restaurants. Famed for its iconic cheesesteaks, hoagies, soft pretzels, and water ice, the roast pork sandwich





is arguably the real deal with DiNic's Roast Pork drawing a line around its Reading Terminal Market outpost (one of the oldest and largest public markets in America) every day. For those with a sweet tooth, the Philly Tastykake comes in every flavour, from butterscotch to peanut butter.

#### **4 St. Pete/Clearwater, Florida:** **From endless beaches to street art**

Tucked away on a sun-drenched peninsula between Tampa Bay and the Gulf of Mexico lies St. Pete / Clearwater - a collection of 24 communities that perfectly weaves the great outdoors with an incredible art scene. Visitors are spoilt for choice with an award-winning 35-mile stretch of coastline on which to kick back and relax including National State Parks: Honeymoon Island (ideal for nature lovers looking to spot eagles, great horned owls, and gopher



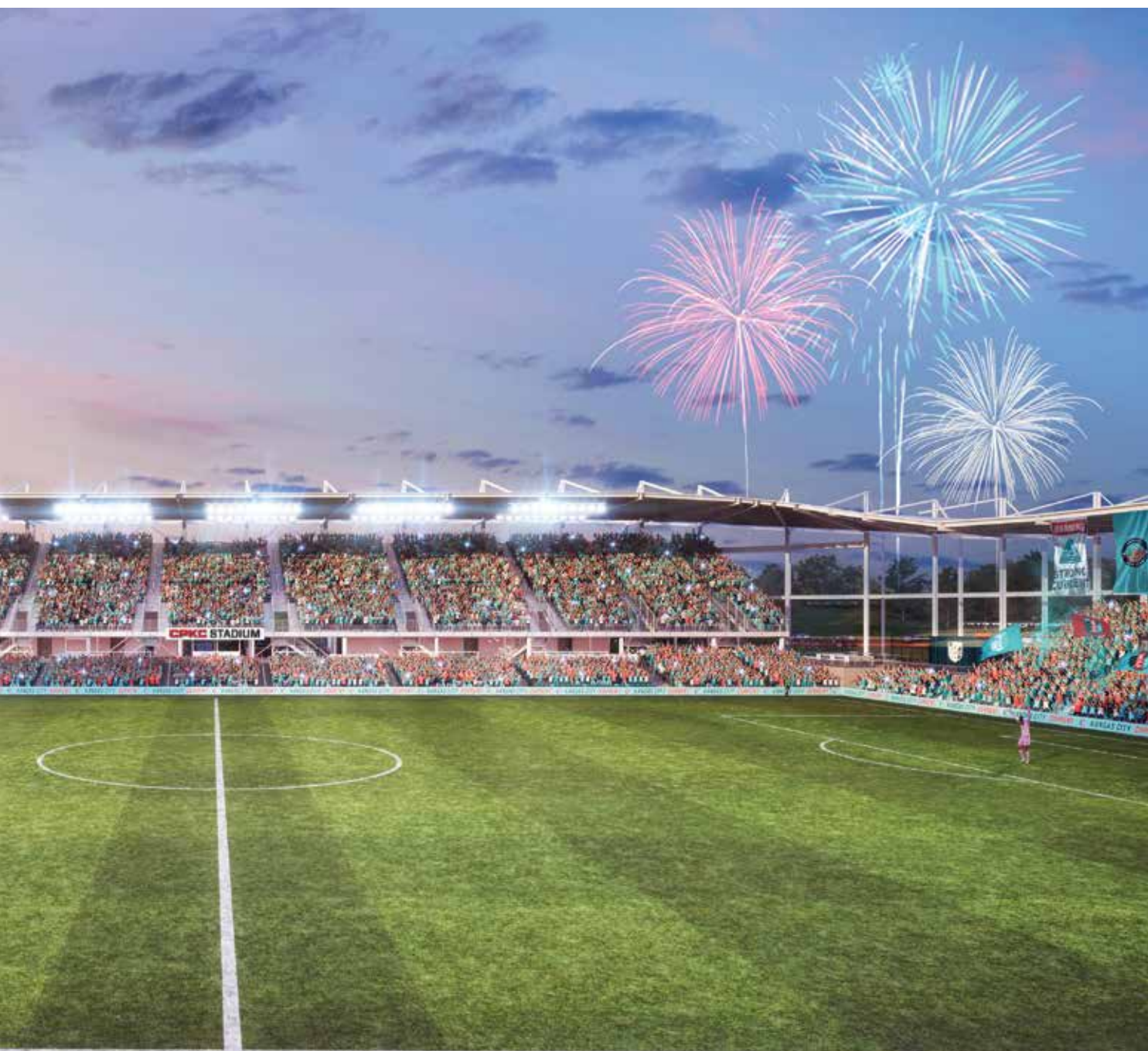


tortoises or hike the three-mile trail through one of the last remaining virgin slash pine forests) and Caladesi Island (one of the few untouched islands along the Gulf Coast and only accessible by boat). St. Pete is also an artistic enclave that is home to eight museums and 532 pieces of stunning street murals with Downtown St. Pete preparing for the 10th anniversary of the SHINE Mural Festival in October 2024. Visitors

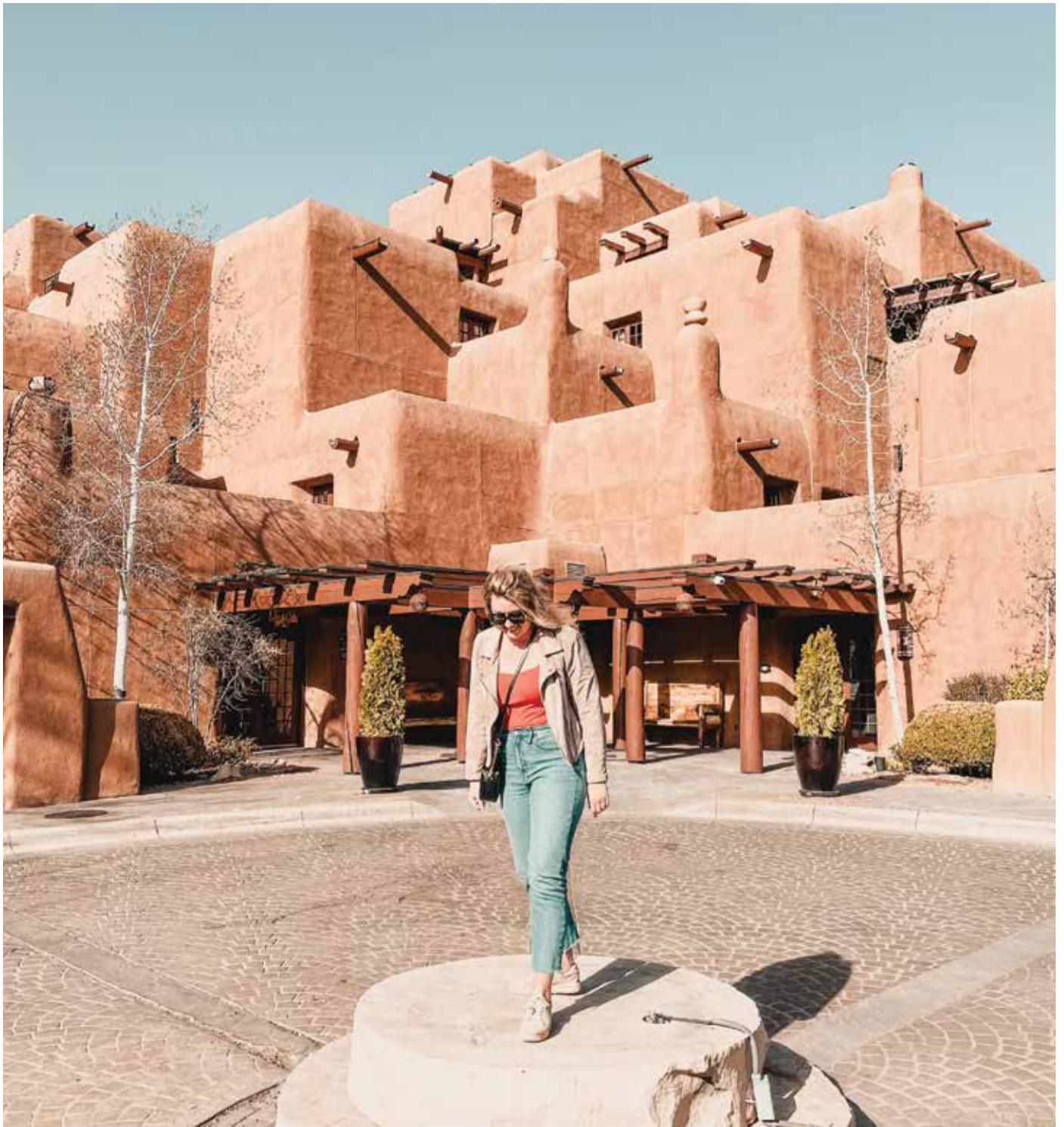
can also check out The Dali Museum's unparalleled collection of Salvador Dali's works, including the recently launched, Dali Alive 360° Dome, a multi-sensory immersive experience enveloping visitors in 360 degrees of light and sound. Another must-visit is the Imagine Museum which features contemporary glass art exhibits from around the world or the Chihuly Collection, the first installation of Dale Chihuly's art.

## **5 Asheville, North Carolina: The majestic mountainous city**

Nestled in the majestic Blue Ridge Mountains, surrounded by more than a million acres of protected wilderness and the tallest peaks in the East, Asheville prides itself on its Appalachian history and heritage. Combining music and the great outdoors, each summer, the Folk Heritage Committee invites visitors and locals alike to join in celebrations at







'Shindig on the Green', a free festival to support the preservation of traditional bluegrass music, dance, and storytelling of the Southern Appalachian Mountains. For those looking to connect with nature, the mountain city boasts spectacular hiking, biking, water rafting, and horseback riding

trails, as well as the chance to get up close with wildlife, from bird watching to foraging bears and herds of elk. This spring, guests will be able to sleep under the stars in AutoCamp's newest luxury airstream campsite, opening just 15 minutes north of town, along the banks of the French Broad River.

Spoilt for choice, campers can also check into the new LOGE Asheville, set to open its first location in the Southeast next summer. Taking over the iconic landmark roadside motel, The Mountaineer Inn, the renovated property will include outdoor fire pits and bike racks in each room.

The airline will operate on the route with four flights per week in December 2023, and will increase to a daily service from January 2024.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) hosted a special airport ceremony to welcome Air India's inaugural flight from Delhi to Phuket. The maiden flight AI378, landing at 07.10 Hrs., was welcomed with a water cannon salute as it taxied to its gate where arriving passengers were then greeted by officials and figures as well as Thai traditional dance.

**Mr. Sophon Suwannarat, Governor of Phuket, said** "As Phuket's high tourism season starts, coupled with the visa exemption, it is fantastic to welcome Air India's new flights which will allow direct air access for Indian travelers. This famous island resort is already a much-loved destination for Indian travellers with beautiful beaches and a multitude of attractions and activities, including Carnival Magic, Andamanda, and Aquaria. We look forward to welcoming more Indian travellers to Phuket."

The Governor of Phuket presided over the welcome ceremony together with officials and figures from TAT as well as Phuket's public and private sectors.

**Mrs. Patsee Permvongsene, TAT Executive Director of ASEAN, South Asia and South Pacific Region, said** "Air India's nonstop service will provide a convenient connection between Delhi and the world-famous resort island of Phuket, which is well-established as a favourite destination for Indian travellers. Now especially is an opportune time for Indian travellers to visit Thailand to take advantage of the temporary tourist visa exemption which is available until 10 May 2024."

Starting from 15 December 2023, Air India will operate on the Delhi-Phuket route with four flights per week every Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday. From January 2024, the service will become a daily operation.

The flight will be operated with an A320 neo aircraft offering 162 seats comprising 150 in Economy and 12 in Business Class. Flight AI 378 will depart from Delhi at 01.10 Hrs. to arrive in Phuket the same day at 07.10 Hrs. The return flight AI 379 will take off from Phuket at 08.10 Hrs and land in Delhi at 10.50 Hrs. on the same day.



## TAT welcomes Air India's inaugural Delhi-Phuket flight



Air India currently operates 26 flights to Bangkok per weeks with daily nonstop flights from Delhi and Mumbai and six flights per week from Kolkata. The new Delhi-Phuket service will provide a convenient air link between the two cities for tourism and trade, while further bolstering Air India's expansion plans in East Asia and Southeast Asia.

Air India's latest connection between Delhi and Phuket is part of the 2,438,043 air-seat capacity between Thailand and India in 2023, representing a 77% rebound over the pre-pandemic year in 2019. Specifically, during the six-month visa exemption period (November 2023-May 2024), the number of flights between the two nations will increase by 3.4% to 6,263 flights, while the number of seats will grow about 1.27% to 1,312,649 seats.

TAT expects the visa exemption will stimulate Indian travellers to travel more to Thailand and has rolled out

promotional activities to boost interest. From now until 31 March 2024, TAT New Delhi Office offers a customised subsidy for corporate and incentive groups as well as weddings and celebrations. Meanwhile, TAT Mumbai Office will promote special tour packages with partners for revisits and golfers, and at the same time launch various publicity projects to increase the market awareness of Thailand as a wedding destination.

From 1 January to 10 December 2023, Thailand recorded 1,506,287 arrivals from India, making it the fourth largest source of visitors. The number already surpassed TAT's 'best case' scenario projected at 1,425,000 visitors for the entire year.

Fuelled by the visa exemption, TAT expects the number of Indian tourists between November and December 2023 to increase by 4.3% or 70,000 travellers, bringing the total number for the entire year to 1,664,483.



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