

LUXURY AND LIFESTYLE TRAVEL MAGAZINE

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Saudi Arabia
Unveils \$933
Million Investment
in 17 Al-Ahsa
Tourism Projects

**TAFI
Convention
2025**

to Take Place
in Ninh Binh,
Vietnam, Focused
on Sustainable
Tourism

Napa Valley

Named North America's Top
Honeymoon Destination in
2024 World Travel Awards

British Airways

Unveils New First Class Seat
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EDITOR'S LETTER

Ayodhya Prepares for Historic Surge in Visitors: Millions Expected Amid New Year, Ram Mandir Anniversary, and Maha Kumbh 2025

Ayodhya, one of India's most revered religious cities, is bracing for an unprecedented influx of tourists and devotees as three major events—New Year celebrations, the first anniversary of the Ram Mandir consecration, and the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj—coincide in 2025. Authorities are expecting millions of visitors during this period and have implemented extensive measures to manage the crowds and ensure a smooth experience for pilgrims.

A Year of Milestones for Ayodhya

January 2025 will mark a momentous occasion for Ayodhya. On January 22, the Ram Mandir will commemorate its first anniversary since the historic consecration ceremony. This milestone coincides with the Maha Kumbh in

Prayagraj, an event that attracts millions of pilgrims from around the world. Together with the New Year festivities, these occasions are set to transform Ayodhya into a bustling spiritual hub.

Massive Footfall Anticipated

The Ayodhya Municipal Corporation has estimated that 2.5 crore devotees will visit the city between January 13 and February 12, 2025. On New Year's Day alone, authorities anticipate a turnout of 300,000 to 500,000 visitors. This surge reflects Ayodhya's growing stature as a key religious and cultural destination, particularly with the Ram Mandir at its heart.

Extended Darshan Hours and Crowd Management

To accommodate the massive

crowd, the Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust has announced extended darshan timings. The initiative aims to ensure that every devotee can visit the temple and offer their prayers, despite the heavy foot traffic. In addition, advanced crowd management systems, heightened security, and volunteer support have been put in place to maintain order and enhance the visitor experience.

"We are committed to making the darshan experience as smooth and fulfilling as possible for every devotee," said a representative from the Ram Mandir Trust.

Accommodation and Local Readiness

As the number of visitors spikes, Ayodhya and neighboring Faizabad's

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accommodations are fully booked. Local hotels, guesthouses, and homestays report high demand for rooms during this peak period. Ankit Mishra, a local hotelier, said, “We are ready to welcome devotees this New Year. All our rooms are booked until January 15.”

For those unable to secure accommodation within the city, nearby towns and temporary lodging facilities are available to ensure that no visitor is left without a place to stay.

Spiritual and Cultural Significance

The alignment of these significant events highlights Ayodhya’s role as a spiritual epicenter. The Ram Mandir, a symbol of devotion and cultural pride, continues to attract pilgrims seeking spiritual solace, while the Maha Kumbh, one of the world’s largest religious gatherings, adds to the city’s cultural vibrancy. The confluence of these events is a rare opportunity for both spiritual enrichment and cultural immersion.

Infrastructure Upgrades and Safety Measures

To ensure the safety and convenience of visitors, the Ayodhya Municipal Corporation, in coordination with local and state authorities, has undertaken several infrastructure improvements. These include widening

roads, enhancing public transportation, and deploying additional security personnel.

The use of advanced surveillance technology and real-time crowd monitoring will further enhance safety. These efforts aim to manage the crowd effectively and maintain order, particularly during peak hours at the Ram Mandir.

Local Economy Set to Benefit

The expected surge in visitors will provide a significant boost to Ayodhya’s local economy. Increased demand for accommodations, food services, and religious souvenirs will benefit local businesses. Additionally, the influx of tourists highlights Ayodhya’s potential to become a year-round destination, encouraging investment in the city’s hospitality and tourism sectors.

Tips for Visitors

Visitors planning to attend the festivities are encouraged to:

- **Plan Ahead:** Book accommodations and transportation well in advance to avoid last-minute hassles.
- **Stay Updated:** Follow information from the Ram Mandir Trust and local authorities about darshan timings and safety protocols.
- **Arrive Early:** To avoid long queues, visit the temple early in the day.

• **Respect Local Norms:** Adhere to the guidelines set by authorities and maintain decorum during the visit.

Conclusion

As Ayodhya prepares to host millions of pilgrims and tourists in 2025, the city stands as a beacon of faith and unity. The convergence of the New Year, Ram Mandir anniversary, and Maha Kumbh presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for spiritual exploration and cultural discovery. Whether seeking blessings or immersing oneself in India’s rich traditions, Ayodhya promises an unforgettable experience for all who visit.



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United Airlines to Launch Hourly Shuttle Service on Newark-Washington Reagan Route

Boosting Tourism in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, and St. Louis



United Airlines is set to make significant changes to its Newark to Washington Reagan route starting in May 2025, dramatically increasing flight frequency and offering more travel flexibility for passengers. As part of these changes, the airline will expand the number of daily flights from 7 to 17, implementing an hourly shuttle service to better accommodate business travelers and other passengers seeking more frequent departures.

These changes mark a pivotal moment for the airline's regional operations, which have seen a steady

growth in demand for convenient and efficient travel options between these two major metropolitan hubs. The expanded shuttle service will operate on a schedule designed to provide passengers with a flight option nearly every hour, offering greater flexibility and reducing wait times for travelers.

The new flights will be operated by GoJet Airlines, a regional affiliate of United Airlines, using CRJ550 aircraft, a smaller regional jet designed for shorter flights. The CRJ550 is a modern and efficient aircraft equipped with comfortable seating, advanced

amenities, and ample space for passengers' needs. These aircraft will provide the perfect balance between efficiency and comfort for passengers traveling on this busy domestic route.

Flight Schedule Details

The new flight schedule for the **Newark-Washington Reagan** route is as follows, with departures every hour from early morning to late evening:

Newark (EWR) to Washington Reagan (DCA)

- **UA4184:** EWR 0600 – 0719 DCA

- **UA4434:** EWR 0700 – 0819 DCA
- **UA4500:** EWR 0800 – 0919 DCA
- **UA4444:** EWR 0900 – 1029 DCA
- **UA4417:** EWR 1000 – 1125 DCA
- **UA4435:** EWR 1030 – 1153 DCA
- **UA4172:** EWR 1100 – 1219 DCA
- **UA4431:** EWR 1200 – 1319 DCA
- **UA4499:** EWR 1300 – 1418 DCA
- **UA4433:** EWR 1400 – 1518 DCA
- **UA4464:** EWR 1430 – 1553 DCA
- **UA4486:** EWR 1500 – 1623 DCA
- **UA4443:** EWR 1600 – 1723 DCA
- **UA4485:** EWR 1800 – 1933 DCA
- **UA4432:** EWR 1800 – 1933 DCA
- **UA4587:** EWR 1900 – 2038 DCA
- **UA4457:** EWR 2100 – 2231 DCA

Washington Reagan (DCA) to Newark (EWR)

- **UA4167:** DCA 0600 – 0720 EWR
- **UA4515:** DCA 0700 – 0820 EWR
- **UA4430:** DCA 0800 – 0920 EWR
- **UA4591:** DCA 0900 – 1020 EWR
- **UA4408:** DCA 1000 – 1120 EWR
- **UA4446:** DCA 1100 – 1220 EWR
- **UA4193:** DCA 1200 – 1320 EWR
- **UA4186:** DCA 1230 – 1351 EWR
- **UA4442:** DCA 1300 – 1420 EWR
- **UA4411:** DCA 1400 – 1520 EWR
- **UA4560:** DCA 1500 – 1620 EWR
- **UA4413:** DCA 1600 – 1730 EWR
- **UA4401:** DCA 1630 – 1805 EWR
- **UA4414:** DCA 1700 – 1829 EWR
- **UA4180:** DCA 1800 – 1930 EWR
- **UA4602:** DCA 1900 – 2029 EWR
- **UA4174:** DCA 2000 – 2130 EWR

This expansion aims to meet increasing demand for quick, efficient, and frequent service between two of the most popular business travel destinations in the United States. United's new service schedule will make it easier for passengers to schedule meetings and connect to onward flights throughout the region, ensuring seamless travel for both business and leisure customers.

Impact on Business Travelers and Corporate Travel

The introduction of hourly shuttle service will be particularly beneficial to **business travelers**, many of whom frequently commute between New York/New Jersey and Washington D.C.

The ability to catch a flight almost every hour gives corporate passengers more flexibility to plan their meetings and attend events without worrying about the availability of a flight. Additionally, the increased number of flights will help ensure that more travelers can find convenient departure times that fit into their schedules.

For corporate travel managers, this change offers an opportunity to optimize their travel policies. With more flights available, companies can better control costs by offering employees a greater variety of flight options. The hourly service also helps avoid the need for last-minute bookings, reducing the likelihood of premium charges for less flexible flight times.

United Airlines' decision to increase its service on this route is a direct response to the growing demand for reliable, on-time travel options between the **New York metropolitan area** and the **nation's capital**.

GoJet Airlines and the CRJ550 Aircraft

The increased service will be operated by **GoJet Airlines**, a regional carrier that has been working with United Airlines since its inception. GoJet operates a fleet of **CRJ550** aircraft, which are ideally suited to regional routes like Newark to Washington Reagan. These planes are equipped with 50 seats and are configured to provide a comfortable, efficient flying experience with amenities such as:

- **Premium seating** for business travelers.
- **Ample overhead space** for carry-on luggage.
- **Free in-flight entertainment** options.
- **Wi-Fi availability** for productivity on the go.

The **CRJ550** is a modern regional aircraft that was developed to meet the growing demand for faster, more flexible travel while offering a comfortable ride for shorter flights. With its sleek design and advanced onboard services, it ensures that

passengers enjoy the same high standards of comfort and service typically associated with larger jets.

The Growing Trend of Regional Shuttle Services

United's expansion of its Newark-Washington Reagan service highlights a growing trend in the aviation industry where major airlines are increasing their regional shuttle services to cater to business and commuter traffic. Similar shuttle services are already in place in other key U.S. markets, such as between **San Francisco** and **Los Angeles**, and between **Chicago** and **St. Louis**.

As business travelers increasingly seek efficient, frequent travel options that minimize the time spent waiting at airports, airlines like United are looking to meet this demand by offering faster, more frequent service. These routes are designed to allow for greater flexibility and convenience, both for frequent flyers and those with specific scheduling needs.

Why the Newark to Washington Reagan Route Matters

The **Newark to Washington Reagan** route is a critical corridor for business travelers in the United States. Both cities are major hubs for governmental, corporate, and financial institutions. The New York/New Jersey metropolitan area is home to several Fortune 500 companies, while Washington D.C. remains the seat of the federal government. This route, connecting two key power centers, sees significant daily traffic, with business professionals and government officials frequently traveling between the two cities for meetings, conferences, and legislative activities.

As **Washington D.C.** continues to grow as a center of influence for policy and international relations, and as the **New York metropolitan area** remains one of the largest business and financial hubs in the world, United Airlines' decision to enhance connectivity on this route is a strategic move designed to meet the demands of these thriving markets.

Etihad Airways unveiled plans to launch ten new destinations starting in 2025



- For the first time Etihad unveils 10 new routes in a single day
- Exciting and diverse destinations across the globe including Algiers, Atlanta, Chiang Mai, Hanoi, Krabi, Phnom Penh, Taipei and Tunis
- Expanded network set to bring huge boost in visitor numbers to Abu Dhabi

Etihad Airways, the national carrier of the United Arab Emirates, has unveiled plans to launch ten new destinations starting in 2025 as part of its ambitious expansion strategy. This move underscores the airline's commitment to offering a route network that meets the growing demands of travelers, with convenient

connections and frequencies tailored to their needs. The expansion also strengthens Abu Dhabi's position as a premier global hub for both tourism and business, welcoming more visitors to experience the city's renowned hospitality.

Antonoaldo Neves, Etihad's Chief Executive Officer, said: "This

expansion reflects our commitment to listening to our valued guests. We've carefully chosen cities that embody the experiences, adventures, and opportunities that matter to them. Whether seeking inspiring landscapes, vibrant cultural experiences, reuniting with family and friends, pursuing business growth, or educational

journeys, our new routes will help make their travel dreams a reality.

“This moment is not just about expanding our network; it’s about sharing Abu Dhabi with the world. With its endless sunshine, diverse cuisine, rich culture, exhilarating family theme parks, and safe, beautiful beaches, Abu Dhabi offers something for everyone. Our expanded network will make it easier than ever for guests to experience everything our home city has to offer.

“Launching ten new destinations in a single day underscores our unwavering commitment to growing our airline with a fantastic route network and world-class, customer-focused service. This incredible milestone would not have been possible without the extraordinary efforts of our team and the ongoing support of our guests.”

The ten routes announced today will complement Etihad’s previously revealed new destinations for 2025: Prague, Warsaw, and Al Alamein.

Etihad’s expansion is set to bring tens of thousands of new visitors directly to Abu Dhabi, boosting its

position as a premier destination for leisure, business, and cultural tourism. The move aligns with the UAE capital’s efforts to attract international travellers and reinforces its reputation as a hub of connectivity, innovation, and hospitality.

“The launch of these ten destinations is supported by our impressive hub, Zayed International Airport, which boasts the ‘wow’ factor and ample space to accommodate our rapid growth, further enhancing the exceptional guest experience,” said Neves.

Additionally, it offers more guests the chance to take advantage of Etihad’s free stopover offer, in collaboration with the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi. Travellers booking flights with Etihad can easily add a stopover and choose a complimentary hotel stay for one or two nights from a selection of premier hotels across the city.

Neves added: “2025 marks a pivotal year for Etihad, with more than 90 destinations in over 50 countries, a fleet of more than 110 aircraft –

including our amazing new A321LRs – welcoming over 20 million guests onboard. Most importantly, it will support us in bringing over a million visitors to Abu Dhabi to enjoy our home.”

As the airline accelerates its growth, Etihad Guest, its award-winning loyalty programme, will also expand its reach, offering more guests the opportunity to earn and redeem miles while unlocking exclusive benefits.

New Destinations:

- **Algiers:** The capital of Algeria, Algiers, boasts a stunning blend of French historic architecture and traditional Islamic influences. The Casbah’s narrow streets offer a glimpse into its rich history, while the Mediterranean coastline provides beautiful views and a relaxing atmosphere.

- **Atlanta:** The state capital of Georgia, Atlanta, is a bustling metropolis and a major business and transportation hub. Known for its Southern hospitality, Atlanta boasts a thriving tech scene, professional



sports teams, craft breweries, and dining spots. The state of Georgia is also famous for its charming small towns, historic plantations, and rich agricultural heritage.

- **Chiang Mai:** Located in northern Thailand, Chiang Mai is the country's cultural heart, renowned for its ancient temples, vibrant night markets, and lush mountainous surroundings. The city's Old Town is a cultural treasure trove with historic walls and moats.

- **Hanoi:** The capital of Vietnam, Hanoi, is known for its centuries-old architecture and rich culture influenced by Southeast Asian, Chinese, and French traditions. The bustling Old Quarter and serene Hoan Kiem Lake are central to the city's charm.

- **Hong Kong:** A dynamic city where East meets West, Hong Kong offers

a stunning skyline, bustling markets, and a rich culinary scene. Victoria Peak provides breathtaking views of the harbour and skyscrapers.

- **Krabi:** Located in southern Thailand, Krabi is famous for its stunning limestone cliffs, clear waters, and beautiful beaches like Railay and Ao Nang. The area is a haven for outdoor activities such as rock climbing, snorkeling, and island hopping.

- **Medan:** The vibrant gateway to island of Sumatra, Indonesia, offering rich cultural diversity, colonial-era architecture, and a thriving food scene renowned for its local delicacies like rendang and durian. It provides easy access to breathtaking natural wonders, including Lake Toba and the orangutans of Bukit Lawang.

- **Phnom Penh:** The vibrant capital

of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, blends historic charm with modern energy, featuring stunning landmarks like the Royal Palace, Silver Pagoda, and the poignant Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. Its riverside promenade, lively markets, and emerging culinary scene make it a captivating destination for history enthusiasts and cultural explorers.

- **Taipei** is a bustling metropolis known for its modern skyline dominated by Taipei 101, as well as its lively night markets and historic temples. The city's blend of traditional and contemporary culture makes it a fascinating destination.

- **Tunis:** The vibrant capital of Tunisia, Tunis, is known for its bustling medina, a UNESCO World Heritage site filled with souks, mosques, and historic buildings. The nearby ruins of Carthage offer a fascinating journey into ancient history.

| Start Date | Frequency | Departure Airport | Departure Time | Arrival Airport | Arrival Time | Aircraft Type |
|------------|--------------------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|
| 2-Jul-25 | Mon, Wed, Fri, Sun | Abu Dhabi | 9:30 | Atlanta | 16:30 | A350 |
| 2-Jul-25 | Mon, Wed, Fri, Sun | Atlanta | 22:00 | Abu Dhabi | 19:30 | A350 |
| 7-Sep-25 | Daily | Abu Dhabi | 21:45 | Taipei | 9:50 | 787 |
| 8-Sep-25 | Daily | Taipei | 19:35 | Abu Dhabi | 0:15 | 787 |
| 2-Oct-25 | Tue, Thu, Sat | Abu Dhabi | 21:10 | Medan | 7:10 | A321LR |
| 3-Oct-25 | Wed, Fri, Sun | Medan | 9:05 | Abu Dhabi | 13:00 | A321LR |
| 3-Oct-25 | Mon, Wed, Thu*, Fri, Sun | Abu Dhabi | 21:10 | Phnom Penh | 7:20 | A321LR |
| 4-Oct-25 | Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri,* Sat | Phnom Penh | 8:40 | Abu Dhabi | 13:00 | A321LR |
| 9-Oct-25 | Daily | Abu Dhabi | 8:50 | Krabi | 18:40 | A321LR |
| 9-Oct-25 | Daily | Krabi | 20:40 | Abu Dhabi | 0:30 | A321LR |
| 1-Nov-25 | Tue, Thu, Sat | Abu Dhabi | 2:50 | Tunis | 6:50 | A321LR |
| 1-Nov-25 | Tue, Thu, Sat | Tunis | 10:20 | Abu Dhabi | 19:10 | A321LR |
| 3-Nov-25 | Mon, Wed, Fri, Sun | Abu Dhabi | 21:10 | Chiang Mai | 5:55 | A321LR |
| 4-Nov-25 | Mon, Tue, Thu, Sat | Chiang Mai | 8:45 | Abu Dhabi | 13:00 | A321LR |
| 3-Nov-25 | Daily | Abu Dhabi | 8:50 | Hanoi | 18:10 | A321LR |
| 3-Nov-25 | Daily | Hanoi | 19:25 | Abu Dhabi | 0:30 | A321LR |
| 3-Nov-25 | Daily except Tue and Sat | Abu Dhabi | 21:45 | Hong Kong | 8:40 | 787 |
| 4-Nov-25 | Daily except Wed and Sun | Hong Kong | 19:25 | Abu Dhabi | 0:15 | 787 |
| 7-Nov-25 | Mon, Wed, Fri, Sun | Abu Dhabi | 2:50 | Algiers | 7:40 | A321LR |
| 7-Nov-25 | Mon, Wed, Fri, Sun | Algiers | 9:40 | Abu Dhabi | 19:10 | A321LR |

SriLankan Airlines Wins 2025 APEX Best Entertainment Award for Central/Southern Asia

Recognition for Excellence in Inflight Entertainment

SriLankan Airlines has been awarded the prestigious 2025 APEX Best Entertainment Award for the Central/Southern Asia region. The award was presented at the FTE APEX Asia Expo, held on 20 November 2024 in Singapore. This honor recognizes the airline's exceptional inflight entertainment offerings, as rated by passengers.

The APEX awards are based on certified passenger feedback, evaluating over one million flights across 600 airlines on key experience metrics, including seat comfort, cabin service, inflight entertainment, and meals. SriLankan Airlines' ability to excel in these areas earned it the top spot in the region.

A Record of Excellence

In addition to the Best Entertainment Award, SriLankan Airlines retained its 'Four Star Major Airline' status in the 2025 APEX Official Airline Ratings™, marking its eighth consecutive year of receiving this distinction.

Maria Sathasivam, Manager of Product Development at SriLankan Airlines, expressed her gratitude for the recognition, saying, "We are thrilled that passengers have rated SriLankan Airlines as the leader in inflight entertainment for this region. Entertainment is a vital component of the travel experience, significantly enhancing satisfaction and reducing perceived travel time."

Immersive Inflight Experience

SriLankan Airlines has invested heavily in its inflights entertainment (IFE) system, offering a broad selection of content to ensure passengers enjoy



a dynamic travel experience. The system features:

- Hollywood blockbusters and the latest global releases
- Regional cinema from South Asia and Sri Lanka, offering a diverse array of genres, including action, drama, comedy, adventure, and animation
- TV shows and over 100 audio albums, ranging from global hits to local classics, catering to all music preferences

This carefully curated content is designed to keep passengers engaged and entertained throughout their journey, enhancing the overall travel experience.

Continued Recognition for Excellence

The 2025 APEX Best Entertainment Award is just one of many accolades

SriLankan Airlines has earned for its superior passenger service. Recent honors include:

- 2022 APEX Passenger Choice Awards for Best Cabin Service and Best Wi-Fi in Central/Southern Asia
- 2023 APEX Passenger Choice Awards for Best Food & Beverage and Best Seat Comfort in Central/Southern Asia
- 2024 IFSA Best Inflight Food or Beverage Innovation Award for the "SriLankan Flavours" menu
- 2024 APEX Passenger Choice Award for Best Wi-Fi in Central/Southern Asia

These accolades reaffirm SriLankan Airlines' commitment to delivering an exceptional travel experience, combining luxury, comfort, and entertainment to ensure every flight is memorable.

IndiGo Wins CAPA's '2024 Airline of the Year' Award, Celebrated for Transformative Growth and Global Impact



Wins CAPA's prestigious '2024 Airline of the Year' award, celebrated for its transformative growth, global impact, and commitment to aviation excellence.

IndiGo, the preferred carrier of millions in India, has achieved a monumental milestone by being named the '**2024 Airline of the Year**' by the prestigious **CAPA – Centre for Aviation** at its **Global Aviation Awards for Excellence**. The recognition was revealed at a

prestigious ceremony held in Belgrade, Serbia, on November 21, 2024, during the CAPA Airlines Leader Summit World event.

This award highlights IndiGo's revolutionary impact on Indian aviation, its strides in global connectivity, and its commitment to sustainability. The honor underscores IndiGo's transformation into a global leader in the aviation industry, recognized for making air travel affordable and accessible to millions in India and beyond.

Why IndiGo Was Chosen for the CAPA Airline of the Year Award

CAPA, a highly regarded aviation market intelligence provider and a division of the Aviation Week Network, annually recognizes airlines and airports that exhibit **strategic excellence** in adapting to evolving environments. The awards are based on meticulous research conducted by an international panel of judges and CAPA analysts.

IndiGo's recognition as the '**2024 Airline of the Year**' is attributed to several factors:

1. Transformative Growth in Indian Aviation:

IndiGo has been a driving force behind India's aviation boom. By establishing the country's largest domestic network, the airline has brought air travel to regions previously underserved, making it accessible and affordable for countless first-time flyers.

2. Strategic Global Expansion:

While rooted in India, IndiGo has successfully ventured into international markets, connecting India to key global destinations. This move aligns with its goal of enhancing connectivity while boosting India's position on the global aviation map.

3. Commitment to Sustainability:

IndiGo has demonstrated a strong focus on sustainability, adopting innovative practices to minimize its carbon footprint and ensuring long-term environmental stewardship. These efforts position the airline as a responsible leader in the aviation sector.

4. Exemplary Operational Excellence:

Known for its punctuality, efficiency, and customer-centric approach, IndiGo has consistently maintained high standards of service, earning the trust of millions of passengers each year.

CAPA – Centre for Aviation, Head of Research, Simon Elsegood said, "It is CAPA's honour to announce IndiGo Airlines as the CAPA Airline of the Year. The impact of IndiGo's bringing accessible air travel to millions cannot be understated. With ambitions to lead Indian aviation and extensive plans already in place, the future for the airline could hardly be brighter".

A Prestigious Moment for IndiGo and Indian Aviation

The award was presented to **Neha Narain**, Vice President of Strategy and CEO's Office at IndiGo, who received it on behalf of the airline. The ceremony brought together leaders from across the aviation and travel industries, celebrating innovations and achievements in the sector.

Pieter Elbers, Chief Executive Officer, IndiGo said, "On behalf of all my colleagues at IndiGo, it's a real honour to receive CAPA's prestigious 'Airline of the Year' award. IndiGo's journey since inception, just 18 years ago, has been nothing short of incredible. To receive this award, amidst some of the world's biggest and brightest airlines, is truly encouraging and a source of pride. IndiGo's commitment to our purpose of 'Giving wings to the nation' offering air travel to annually 100+ million customers, of which many first-time flyers remain at the core of our strategy. Deeply rooted in India we are expanding our wings now also globally."

IndiGo's Achievements: A Transformative Journey in Aviation

1. Revolutionizing Domestic Aviation

Since its inception 18 years ago, IndiGo has played a pivotal role in transforming India's aviation landscape. By offering affordable and reliable air travel options, it has connected major cities and remote regions, fostering economic growth and accessibility.

2. International Expansion

IndiGo's strategic focus on international connectivity has significantly expanded its reach. With flights to key global destinations across Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, the airline is becoming a preferred choice for travelers seeking convenience and affordability.

3. Sustainability Leadership

IndiGo's commitment to sustainability is evident in its adoption of fuel-efficient aircraft and eco-friendly operations. Its long-term vision emphasizes reducing carbon emissions and implementing green initiatives to ensure responsible growth.

4. Operational Efficiency and Customer Satisfaction

IndiGo's reputation for punctuality, exceptional service, and seamless operations has earned it unwavering loyalty from passengers. Its ability to consistently deliver a high-quality travel experience has been instrumental in its success.

A Global Milestone for Indian Aviation

IndiGo's recognition by CAPA is not just a triumph for the airline but also a milestone for the Indian aviation industry. As the country's largest airline by market share and fleet size, IndiGo has played a crucial role in positioning India as a significant player in the global aviation sector.

By offering affordable air travel to millions of passengers, IndiGo has opened new opportunities for businesses, tourism, and personal travel, contributing to India's socio-economic development. Its focus on expanding international routes further strengthens India's connectivity with the world.

Looking Ahead: IndiGo's Vision for the Future

With this award, IndiGo is poised to continue its upward trajectory, driven by a vision to:

• Expand International Routes:

IndiGo aims to increase its global footprint, connecting India to more destinations across Europe, Asia, and beyond.

• Enhance Sustainability

Practices: The airline is committed to adopting advanced technologies and sustainable practices to minimize its environmental impact.

• Leverage Innovation:

IndiGo plans to integrate cutting-edge technologies to improve customer experiences and operational efficiency.

• Strengthen Domestic

Connectivity: Continuing its focus on underserved regions, IndiGo will further enhance domestic connectivity, ensuring that affordable air travel is accessible to all.

CAPA's Recognition: What It Means for IndiGo

Winning the '2024 Airline of the Year' award from CAPA is a testament to IndiGo's relentless dedication to excellence, innovation, and inclusivity. It validates the airline's role as a transformative force in aviation, setting new benchmarks for growth and sustainability.

British Airways

Unveils New First Class Seat Design for A380 Superjumbos



British Airways has revealed a fresh design for its first class seats on the Airbus A380, set to debut in 2026. The revamped seats aim to elevate the luxury experience aboard the world's largest passenger aircraft, offering even more space and privacy for travelers. This announcement signals a renewed commitment to the superjumbo, which some airlines had considered phasing out just a few years ago in response to shifting market dynamics.

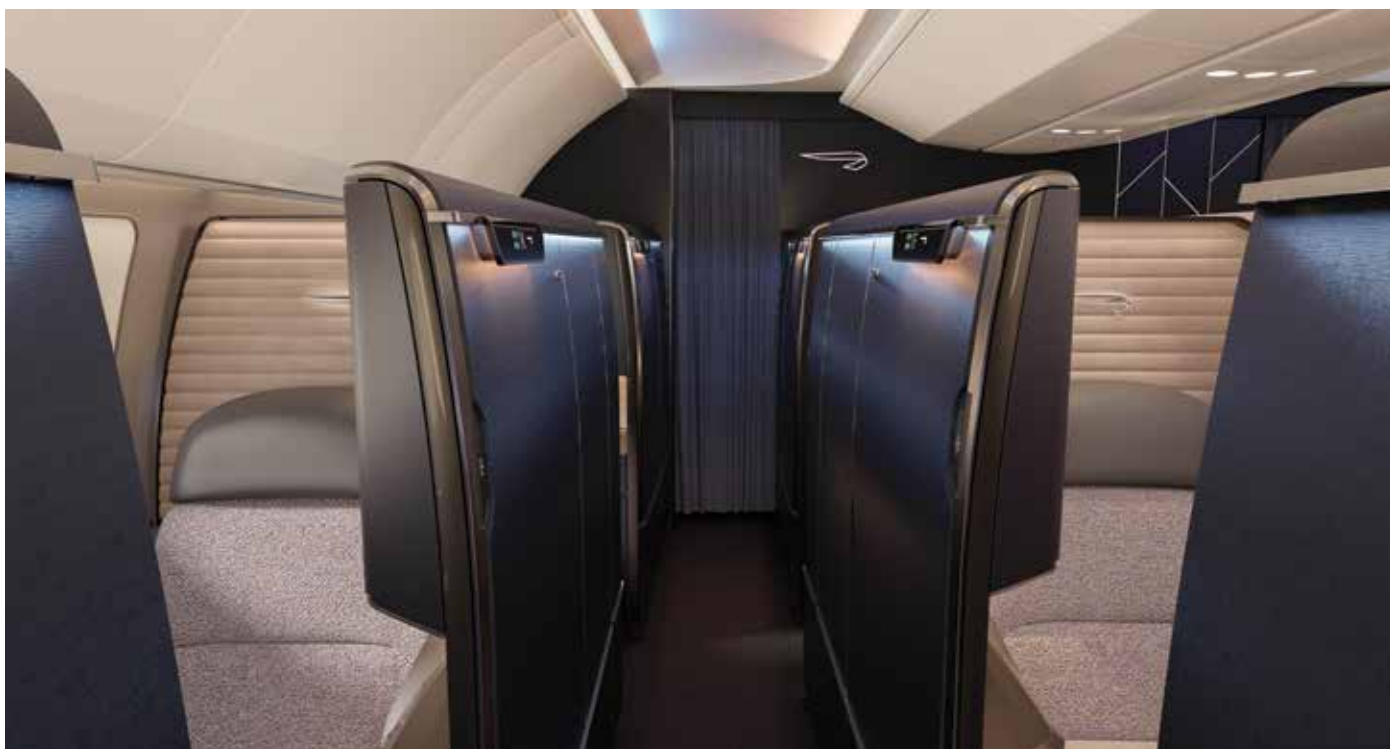
The redesigned first class seats are notable for their expansive dimensions.

Each seat measures a generous 36.5 inches in width and extends into a full lie-flat bed, offering 79 inches (2 meters) of length. The seats resemble a small sofa or armchair, comfortably accommodating one passenger but spacious enough for two.

In addition to the enhanced seating, the new design includes various storage options, such as an external wardrobe large enough to fit a small suitcase, as well as several internal compartments. This wardrobe eliminates the need for overhead bins, which are notably absent from the new first class cabins.

A sliding door offers added privacy, and a "do not disturb" button ensures passengers can rest undisturbed. Flight attendants can also adjust seats from outside the suite, eliminating the need to lean over passengers during the flight.

Calum Laming, British Airways' chief customer officer, explained that the design process involved input from cabin crew, frequent flyers, and engineers to create a product that meets the needs of both customers and crew. "We involved everyone in the design process," Laming said,



emphasizing the value of insights from flight attendants who work in the cabin daily.

The new seats will be arranged in a 12-seat configuration, down from the current 14-seat setup on the A380. British Airways notes that the curved walls of the cabin echo the sleek design of the Concorde supersonic jet, though the new seats are significantly larger than those on the iconic aircraft.

Each first class suite will feature a 32-inch 4K personal entertainment screen, as well as adjustable mood lighting, including a “cinema” mode. The design also facilitates “buddy dining,” where one passenger can sit on the ottoman at the end of the suite while dining with a companion. For those sitting in the center seats, the divider can be lifted to create a shared space, making the suite ideal for couples or families.

British Airways is bucking a trend seen at other airlines, such as American Airlines and United Airlines, which have reduced their first class offerings in favor of enhancing business class. Laming explained that first class remains a vital part of the airline’s



strategy. “There’s a market—both for business travel and premium leisure travel,” he said. “We’re proud to offer it, and it remains an important part of our network.”

While the new design may not rival the ultra-luxurious private suites on Singapore Airlines’ A380s or the onboard shower facilities offered by Emirates and Etihad, it represents a significant shift for British Airways. The airline is also focusing on the overall experience, recently introducing “uber

training” for cabin crew to enhance their service skills.

The first retrofitted A380, featuring the new first class seat design, is scheduled to enter service in early 2026, following an upgrade starting in late 2025. While British Airways has not confirmed the initial route for the revamped aircraft, it is likely to serve destinations such as Johannesburg, Miami, Singapore, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Boston, all of which currently operate A380 flights.

IBTM World 2024 Achieves Remarkable 10% Attendance Surge with Over 73,000 Business Meetings

The 2024 edition of IBTM World surpassed its previous milestones, celebrating the remarkable potential of human connection in the global events industry. This year's event facilitated over 73,000 pre-scheduled business meetings, marking a 19% increase compared to 2023. Additionally, countless spontaneous networking moments unfolded across the exhibition floor.

Visitor attendance soared by 10% compared to last year, while the event welcomed 18% more Hosted Buyers from over 120 countries. More

than 2,350 exhibitors engaged with attendees, underscoring the dynamic growth and reach of IBTM World.

Sue Baimbridge, Chief Commercial Officer, RIHGA Royal Hotel Osaka, commented: "This is our first year exhibiting at IBTM World as part of our strategy to grow our business pipeline for 2025 when we become part of the Vignette Collection from IHG Hotels & Resorts. With 56 meeting rooms and over 7,000sqm of meeting space, the business events market is crucial for our business.

"The quality of buyers and volume of meetings over the past three days at

IBTM has been brilliant. I'm returning to Osaka with eight solid leads and another five or six business leads to follow up on in the next few weeks. The meeting booking system and support I've received from the IBTM team have been excellent and I'm looking forward to returning next year!"

A Celebration of People Power

With its 2024 theme, *Championing People Power Potential*, IBTM World highlighted the profound achievements made possible when cutting-edge technology is combined with the collective effort of event professionals.





The event showcased the central belief that drives the industry forward: success is built on collaboration and the strength of human connections.

Shaping the Future Through Insight and Advocacy

The conference programme emphasized themes such as Insight, Innovation, Social Responsibility, and Advocacy, aiming to foster collaboration and shared learning. The lineup featured three standout keynote speakers:

- **Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson**, a five-time Paralympic medalist, opened the Main Stage with an inspiring discussion on empowering individuals, cultivating team spirit, and embracing inclusivity.

- **Simone Heng**, a specialist in human connection, delivered a compelling address on the value of meaningful relationships in the evolving AI landscape.

- On the final day, **Julius Solaris**, founder of Boldpush, joined experts from Buro Happold and Seen Presents Ltd to explore ways to create authentic, human-centric event experiences in a tech-driven world.

Innovative Features and Programmes

IBTM World 2024 introduced several groundbreaking initiatives designed to

fuel innovation and collaboration:

- **Exceptional Experiences Programme:** Tailored for in-house event professionals and marketers, this programme focused on creating impactful experiences to drive business growth. Speakers from Amazon, TikTok, and Canva were among the highlights.

- **The Hotel Pavilion:** A new platform for independent and boutique hotels debuted, offering them a dedicated space to showcase their unique offerings.

- **Forum for Advocacy:** Bringing together policymakers, industry leaders, and academics, this forum addressed critical issues, including over-tourism, climate change, and the economic impact of business events.

Insights and Industry Trends

The event also launched two major industry reports:

1. **Trends Report 2024:** Authored by Alistair Turner, this report emphasized the growing importance of talent and highlighted the emergence of a new breed of event professionals tailored to meet the sector's evolving needs.

2. **Global Destination Report:** Published by *The Business of Events*, the report revealed positive budget stability trends in developed regions while addressing ongoing disparities in economic benefits and staffing challenges.

Revolutionizing Event Technology

IBTM World 2024 showcased its status as a leader in event technology with advanced tools designed to enhance both exhibitor and attendee experiences:

- **Lead Booster and Lead Manager App:** These tools empowered exhibitors to target the right leads and manage them in real time.

- **Colleqt QR Technology:** This feature allowed visitors to seamlessly gather exhibitor information via QR codes, eliminating the need for physical brochures while ensuring no lead went unrecorded.

A Vision for the Future

IBTM World 2024 not only celebrated the achievements of the past but also set a clear direction for the future of the global events industry. By combining innovation, advocacy, and the power of human connection, the event reinforced its position as a cornerstone of progress and collaboration in the sector.

Leading the way

Claudia Hall, IBTM World Exhibition Director, said: "It's been an absolutely thrilling three days, not least because we were celebrating a very special 20th anniversary in Barcelona, which only enhanced the feeling of camaraderie and togetherness.

"As they do every year, our wonderful IBTM World community arrived with a thirst for knowledge, a hunger for opportunities, and an enthusiasm to make connections that will take the global events industry from strength to strength.

"Our show didn't disappoint. Between the phenomenal speakers with their captivating insights and ideas, our passionate exhibitors eager to engage, and the imaginative new initiatives designed to provide targeted and tangible support, it's been an incredible gathering that reminds me just what a community we are in the events industry and how much we have to offer the world as a sector."



TAFI Convention 2025 to Take Place in Ninh Binh, Vietnam, Focused on Sustainable Tourism

Ninh Binh to Host TAFI's 2025 Convention from January 17-20

The 2025 TAFI (Travel Agents Federation of India) Convention is set to take place in the scenic Ninh Binh province of northern Vietnam from January 17-20, 2025. This year's theme, *"Tourism for Tomorrow: Protecting the Planet,"* underscores the event's focus on sustainability and responsible tourism practices. Delegates will have the opportunity to explore this hidden gem of Vietnam,

which is increasingly popular among Indian travelers yet remains relatively undiscovered by tourists.

TAFI's Vision for Responsible Tourism

Ajay Prakash, President of TAFI, explained the rationale behind choosing Ninh Binh and the convention's sustainability theme. "Indian tourism is experiencing remarkable growth, with outbound and domestic tourism at new highs,"

Prakash said. *"As an industry deeply connected to the planet's natural beauty, it is our responsibility to protect it. Sustainability is no longer a buzzword—it is the critical issue facing our sector. We must adopt business models that prioritize sustainability over profit."* He added, *"Vietnam is becoming an increasingly sought-after destination for Indian travelers, and Ninh Binh, though relatively unexplored by our tourists, offers a perfect example of responsible tourism."*



Unveiling Vietnam's Lesser-Known Treasures

Prakash emphasized TAFI's commitment to introducing members to new and lesser-known destinations, moving beyond traditional tourist hotspots. The convention will provide attendees with the opportunity to explore not just Ninh Binh but also other stunning locations, including Da Nang, Bana Hills, Halong Bay, and Ho Tram through post-convention tours.

Affordable and Value-Driven Convention Packages

TAFI aims to offer excellent value for attendees, with a three-night convention package priced at just INR 15,999 per person on twin sharing.

Anil Kalsi, Vice President of TAFI, praised the support from local authorities, saying, "The Ninh Binh

government and Department of Tourism have been incredibly welcoming and have rolled out the red carpet for TAFI delegates. Our members can expect an unforgettable experience."

Smooth Travel Arrangements for Delegates

Abbas Moiz, National General Secretary of TAFI, highlighted the convenience of the convention's travel arrangements. "We've secured shuttle services from Hanoi airport to Ninh Binh, ensuring seamless travel for delegates arriving on different flights," Moiz stated. "Delegates can also benefit from discounted rates for pre- and post-convention tours through Destination Management Companies (DMCs)." He added that delegates can choose from several airlines offering direct and connecting flights to Vietnam.

Exciting Post-Convention Tourism Options

Seeraj Sabharwal, Chairman of the Convention Committee, outlined several exciting post-convention tourism options. "Delegates can enjoy a variety of experiences, including visits to

Da Nang, Bana Hills, Halong Bay cruises, or a relaxing beach retreat in Ho Tram. We promise a convention filled with engaging sessions, local cuisine, and thrilling entertainment," he said.

Limited Availability and Early Bird Registration

Participation in the 2025 TAFI Convention is open exclusively to official agency representatives and their spouses, with a limited number of 400 delegates. Early bird registration will close on December 6, 2024.

With a strong focus on sustainability and an exciting lineup of tourism options, the 2025 TAFI Convention in Ninh Binh is set to be a must-attend event for India's travel industry leaders.



FITUR 2025 Highlights Global Best Practices in Sustainable and Inclusive Tourism

Empowering Professionals to Shape a Responsible Future



As international tourism reaches record levels in 2024 with 790 million tourists generating USD 3.4 trillion in direct economic impact, the sector stands at a critical juncture. FITUR 2025, the International Tourism Trade Fair organized by **IFEMA MADRID** from January 22 to 26, is set to address the industry's pressing challenges while championing sustainable growth, inclusive practices, and responsible tourism.

A Global Platform for Tourism Excellence

FITUR has established itself as a premier global tourism event, bringing together over 250,000 attendees and 9,000 companies from 152 countries during its last edition. This year, the event reaffirms its commitment to fostering responsible tourism practices that create lasting value for people and the planet. By placing sustainability at the heart of its program, FITUR aims to

inspire professionals to adopt innovative strategies that enhance tourism's economic and social contributions while protecting natural and cultural heritage.

FITURNEXT Observatory: Promoting Global Best Practices

One of FITUR's flagship initiatives, the **FITURNEXT Observatory**, has become a hub for identifying and promoting best practices in tourism. This year, the observatory focused



on the 2025 Challenge: exploring how tourism can contribute to **sustainable food management**. After evaluating nearly 300 global proposals, three initiatives emerged as winners:

- **Sustainable Gastronomic Routes of Extremadura (Spain):**

This initiative combines culinary tourism with sustainable practices, offering visitors the chance to explore the region's rich gastronomic heritage while supporting local producers and reducing food waste.

- **Hurtigruten Cruises (Norway):**

A pioneer in sustainable tourism, Hurtigruten integrates eco-friendly practices, such as sourcing local, sustainable food for onboard dining and reducing environmental footprints across its operations.

- **Too Good To Go (Denmark):**

Leveraging technology, this app connects consumers with restaurants and shops to rescue surplus food, preventing waste while fostering community engagement.

These projects exemplify how tourism can lead the way in promoting responsible consumption and fostering innovation that benefits both people and the planet.

FITUR 4all: Championing Inclusive Tourism

For the second consecutive year, **FITUR 4all** will shine a spotlight on inclusive tourism, ensuring that destinations and services are accessible to everyone. This initiative recognizes the importance of making tourism experiences available to people with accessibility needs, enabling broader participation and inclusivity within the sector.

As part of its commitment to accessibility, FITUR 4all will also debut the **Guide to Best Practices in Accessibility** in 2025. This groundbreaking guide will serve as a resource for tourism professionals to implement and promote accessible practices, setting a benchmark for the global industry.

Tourism as a Catalyst for Economic and Social Growth

FITUR 2025 underscores the broader economic and social significance of tourism, which extends beyond direct revenue generation. The sector plays a vital role in:

- **Employment Creation:** Tourism supports millions of jobs worldwide, offering opportunities across various

skill levels.

- **Cultural Preservation:** By showcasing local traditions, arts, and heritage, tourism helps preserve cultural diversity and fosters a sense of pride within communities.

- **Infrastructure Development:** Investments in transportation, accommodations, and public services driven by tourism benefit both travelers and local residents.

- **Global Cooperation:** Tourism creates spaces for cultural exchange and understanding, contributing to peace and international collaboration.

Orgullosos. Somos Turismo – Celebrating Tourism's Positive Impact

Under the theme “**Orgullosos. Somos Turismo**” (**Proud. We Are Tourism**), FITUR 2025 encourages participants to celebrate their role in an industry that generates economic opportunities, enriches societies, and fosters global connections. This year's slogan emphasizes the collective responsibility of tourism professionals to lead by example, inspiring a transformative shift towards a more sustainable and inclusive future.

WTTC urges 65 billion USD annual investment to protect coastal and marine tourism at COP29 in Baku



Addressing world leaders during Ocean Action Day at *COP29* in Baku today, the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) called for urgent climate investment in coastal and marine tourism to protect it from escalating climate risks.

To achieve necessary mitigation, WTTC says that coastal and marine tourism will require annual investments of \$30 billion for direct emissions reduction, with total needs reaching as high as \$65 billion when including climate adaptation efforts.

Developed in collaboration with Iberostar Group and Oxford Economics, the soon to be released report *Climate and Ocean: Quantifying Coastal and Marine Tourism and Protecting Destinations* underscores the dual need for climate action and resilience-building.

In 2023, coastal and marine tourism

directly generated US\$1.5 trillion and supported 52 million jobs globally. It also accounted for approximately 50% of all tourists' spending globally, generating \$820 billion in direct tax revenue.

Despite its economic importance, the environmental footprint from coastal and marine tourism calls for rapid mitigation and adaptation measures.

The report highlights that coastal and marine tourism directly contributed 0.8% of global GHG emissions in 2023, equating to 390 million tonnes of CO₂.

Coastal destinations worldwide, especially those in vulnerable regions, face mounting threats from climate change, including rising sea levels, extreme weather, and coastal erosion.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Pacific coastal areas in particular, are under severe strain, with

rising climate-related displacement and economic losses posing urgent challenges.

This makes clear that investments in climate action are not just essential but urgent.

This report was developed to support the Coastal Tourism Breakthrough under the leadership of the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action, and the UN High Level Climate Champions, which, since COP22 in 2016, have been instrumental in mobilising non-state actors to advance the Paris Agreement's objectives.

The Ocean Breakthroughs are transformative pathways covering five key ocean sectors: Marine Conservation, Shipping, Ocean Renewable Energy, Aquatic Food and Coastal Tourism.

Accelerated action and investments

in these sectors could deliver a reduction in GHG emissions of up to 35% and contribute to a resilient, nature-positive and net-zero future by 2050.

Julia Simpson, President & CEO WTTC, said: "Coastal and marine tourism is a lifeline for millions globally, generating US\$1.5 trillion to the world's economy. But it's on the frontline of climate change.

"Protecting our coast and marine life isn't just an environmental necessity; it's a social imperative. Our report quantifies the scale of the challenge.

Reducing the environmental impact of coastal and marine tourism could cost US\$ 65 billion every year.

"Given the economic and social value of coastal tourism we are calling on governments, development organisations and Travel & Tourism businesses to act now to safeguard these vital natural resources."

Gloria Fluxa, Vice-Chairman and Chief Sustainability Officer for Iberostar Group and Chair of WTTC's Sustainability Committee, said: "It is never too late to act.

To safeguard our industry, its people, and the ecosystems we rely

on, we must focus on mitigating our operations, transforming supply chains, and investing in nature with nature-based solutions for climate adaptation.

Decarbonization and adaptation are essential investments to building a resilient, nature-positive tourism model.

"We support the Ocean and Climate Platform's call for bold investments in coastal resilience.

The Coastal Tourism Breakthrough under the Marrakesh Partnership offers a clear roadmap to cut emissions by up to 35%. Now is the time for decisive action to ensure our destinations thrive for generations."

Loreley Picourt, Executive Director of the Ocean and Climate Platform said: "These findings were developed in support of the Coastal Tourism Breakthrough, one of the five pillars of the Ocean Breakthroughs developed under the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action to deliver for Climate, Nature and People.

"Since COP22 in 2016, the Marrakech Partnership has been instrumental in bringing civil society together to drive ambition towards

achieving the Paris Agreement's objectives.

The Ocean Breakthroughs, which cover Marine Conservation, Shipping, Ocean Renewable Energy, Aquatic Food, and Coastal Tourism, highlight where accelerated action and investment could yield up to a 35% reduction in global GHG emissions.

Together, they offer a powerful blueprint toward a resilient, nature-positive, net-zero future by 2050."

The report highlights climate solutions which are proving to have a positive impact, such as Visit Scotland, which has invested heavily in renewable energy and low-carbon infrastructure to cut emissions.

In Thailand, the Mangrove Action Project in Nai Nang shows how mangrove restoration can protect coastlines and build resilience.

WTTC urges governments, businesses, and communities to unite to protect coastal and marine tourism destinations.

With dedicated investment in mitigation and adaptation, these unique regions can continue to thrive economically while preserving their natural beauty for future generations.



Tourism @2047-Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India 54th Annual Convention

Set to Shape the Future of India's Hospitality and Growth in The Tourism Industry

What You Need to Know



The Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) is all set to host its 54th Annual Convention from October 16 to 18, 2024, at Taj Cidade de Goa, Horizon. This event will be inaugurated by the Hon'ble Minister for Tourism, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, and aims to bring together industry leaders to explore the theme, *"Tourism @2047: Incredible to Inevitable India – Driving Growth and Sustainability in a Mission Mode."* The focus will be on steering sustainable growth and fostering innovation in India's tourism sector.

As the largest hospitality association in the world, FHRAI is expecting to welcome around 800 delegates from various parts of India. This convention is an opportunity to discuss strategies that can help shape the future of the Indian tourism industry, with a vision aligned to the country's developmental goals for 2047, when India aspires to become a developed nation.

Vision 2047: Tourism as a Key Driver of Growth

Pradeep Shetty, President of FHRAI, emphasized the significance of this year's theme and the long-term vision it embodies. He remarked, "The 54th FHRAI Annual Convention in Goa is a pivotal event where the brightest minds in the industry gather to strategize and innovate for the future. Our theme, 'Tourism @2047,' encapsulates our aim of transforming India into a US\$3 trillion tourism economy by the year 2047. This convention will set the foundation for that journey, highlighting the critical importance of sustainability and innovation in the tourism sector."

Shetty further added, "Tourism has the potential to serve as a key engine for India's economic growth, and we hope this event will inspire new ideas, initiatives, and collaborations that will define the future of Indian tourism. We are privileged to have the support of the Hon'ble Minister for Tourism and other esteemed dignitaries who

are instrumental in shaping this industry."

High-Profile Attendees and Sessions

The convention will feature several prominent figures, including Nitin Gadkari, Minister of Road Transport and Highways; Dr. Pramod Sawant, Chief Minister of Goa; Shripad Yeso Naik, Minister of State for Power, New & Renewable Energy; Suman Billa, Additional Secretary at the Ministry of Tourism; and Mugdha Sinha, Director General, Ministry of Tourism. In addition to key government officials, legendary South African cricketer Jonty Rhodes and other tourism industry stalwarts will also grace the event.

Business sessions will take center stage at the convention, offering insights from industry leaders on topics such as sustainable tourism practices, innovation, and growth strategies for the Indian tourism industry. The event will also host cultural performances that showcase Goa's rich heritage, a Hospitality Exhibition, and the prestigious FHRAI Hospitality Excellence Awards. Attendees will have the chance to explore Goa's natural beauty and cultural vibrancy throughout the event.

The 54th FHRAI Annual Convention is expected to serve as a vital platform for thought leadership, offering valuable insights and forging partnerships that will help propel the Indian tourism sector to new heights. As the tourism industry faces new challenges and opportunities, this event aims to highlight innovative solutions that will drive the sector's sustainable growth and success in the coming decades.

IRCC to update application fees on December 1

Canada to hike application fees for temporary residents on December 1

Synopsis

Canada is increasing application and processing fees for temporary resident applications like visitor visas, work permits, and study permits starting December 1. Applications submitted before the deadline with the old fees will be processed accordingly. However, the exact updated fee structure is yet to be released by IRCC.

Starting December 1, Canada will raise application and processing fees for various temporary resident applications, affecting visitors, workers, and students seeking to enter or extend their stay in Canada.

The fee increases will apply to several types of applications, including those for the restoration of temporary resident status, authorization to return to Canada, criminal

rehabilitation for serious criminality, and Temporary Resident Permits (TRPs).

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has not yet released the updated application fees.

What if I paid the old application fee?

Applicants submitting complete applications to IRCC before a fee increase will generally not be affected by the change. Online applications are confirmed immediately, while mailed submissions may experience a delay. As long as the applicant paid the old fee, submitted a complete application, and mailed it before the fee change, the application will not be rejected. If additional payment is required, IRCC will provide instructions.

How to pay the

Current fees

According to a CIC News report, the current fees are as follows:

| Application type | Current application fees (CAD) |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Restoration of visitor status | \$ 229.00 |
| Restoration of student status | \$ 379.00 |
| Restoration of worker status | \$ 384.00 |
| Authorization to return to Canada | \$ 459.55 |
| Inadmissible on grounds of criminality | \$ 229.77 |
| Inadmissible on grounds of serious criminality | \$ 1,148.87 |
| Temporary Resident Permit (TRP) | \$ 229.77 |



difference on an IRCC application after an application fee change

In some cases when an applicant applies on paper, if they have paid the old fee for their application prior to a fee change, they will be asked to pay the difference and will receive instructions on how to submit the receipt after doing so.

How to obtain a receipt

• Calculate the Fee Difference

The applicant must calculate the difference between the old fee and the new fee. This includes paying the difference for any changed fees applicable to family members.

• Make the Payment

o The applicant should

use the Make an additional payment or pay other fees category in IRCC's online payment tool.

o Under "Quantity," the total fee difference should be entered (new fee minus old fee).

o One receipt will be issued for each payment. Payments can be made in a single transaction or repeated for multiple receipts.

o To complete the payment, the applicant must create an IRCC account or sign in to an existing one.

• Submit the Receipt

o The applicant must follow the instructions provided in the initial fee request sent to them by IRCC on how to submit the receipt.

IRCTC Enhances Mahakumbh 2025 Experience with World-Class Luxury at Iconic Tent City in Prayagraj



IRCTC is creating “Maha Kumbh Gram,” a premium tent city in Prayagraj for the 2025 Mahakumbh Mela. This initiative aims to offer luxurious accommodations alongside enriching cultural experiences, blending modern amenities with the spiritual essence of the event. By celebrating India’s diverse traditions and heritage, the project promises to elevate the pilgrimage, redefining how visitors engage with the sacred Kumbh Mela.

The Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) is preparing to establish a luxurious tent city in Prayagraj for the upcoming Mahakumbh Mela in 2025. According to Sanjay Kumar Jain, Chairman and

Managing Director of IRCTC, the “Maha Kumbh Gram” will revolutionize the pilgrimage experience by offering premium accommodations paired with culturally immersive activities. This initiative aims to honor India’s rich spiritual heritage while enhancing the tourism and pilgrimage landscape.

The company, a public sector enterprise under the Ministry of Railways, highlighted its extensive expertise in large-scale pilgrimage tourism and nationwide hospitality services. With a proven track record of catering to over 6.5 lakh customers through the Aastha and Bharat Gaurav Trains, it has demonstrated its capability in managing seamless travel

experiences across the country’s rail network.

IRCTC announced that the “Maha Kumbh Gram Tent City” in Prayagraj will cater to guests through direct bookings as well as through IRCTC’s Rail Tour Packages and Bharat Gaurav Trains.

Rahul Himalian, Director of Tourism and Marketing at IRCTC, shared that the tent city will feature deluxe and premium camps outfitted with modern amenities, offering guests a luxurious and comfortable stay amidst the spiritual atmosphere of Mahakumbh 2025.

Tariffs start at INR 6,000 per person per night on a double occupancy basis, inclusive of breakfast, plus applicable taxes.

The Golden Chariot Luxury Train Resumes Operations with New South India Itineraries



A Lavish Journey Through Karnataka and South India

The **Golden Chariot**, South India's most luxurious train, has resumed operations in December 2023, offering travelers a chance to experience unparalleled comfort and cultural exploration through Karnataka and neighboring regions. With a host of world-class amenities onboard, including fine dining restaurants, a bar, and an Ayurvedic spa centre, the train provides a truly opulent way to explore Southern India.

Choose from Three Exclusive Itineraries

The **Golden Chariot** offers three distinct itineraries for guests to choose from, each designed to showcase the rich heritage, scenic beauty, and cultural treasures of the region:

- **Pride of Karnataka:** A 5-night/6-day journey that takes passengers through Bengaluru, Bandipur, Mysore,

Halebidu, Chikmagalur, Hampi, and Goa.

- **Jewels of South:** A 5-night/6-day journey covering Bengaluru, Mysore, Hampi, Mahabalipuram, Thanjavur, Chettinad, and Cochin.

- **Glimpses of Karnataka:** A 3-night/4-day journey exploring Bengaluru, Bandipur, Mysore, and Hampi.

Onboard Comforts and Cultural Immersion

Each of the train's 40 luxurious cabins offers the perfect blend of comfort and style, equipped with modern amenities and Wi-Fi-enabled entertainment. Guests can indulge in gourmet meals at the fine dining restaurants, unwind at the spa with Ayurvedic treatments, or relax at the bar after a day of exploration. The package includes all meals, guided tours, and entry fees to monuments and attractions along the journey, making it a truly all-inclusive experience.

Promoting Luxury and Cultural Tourism in Karnataka

The relaunch of **The Golden Chariot** is part of a broader effort to position Karnataka as a leading destination for high-end tourism, offering a unique blend of luxury travel and cultural immersion. The luxury train experience aims to attract affluent travelers seeking both comfort and an authentic taste of South India's rich cultural heritage.

Pricing and Availability

Prices for the **Golden Chariot** vary based on the itinerary and cabin type. The cost for a Deluxe Cabin on the "**Glimpses of Karnataka**" journey starts at approximately **\$3,160 USD**.

For those seeking an unforgettable luxury travel experience, **The Golden Chariot** offers an exceptional way to explore the best of Karnataka and South India, all while indulging in lavish accommodations and world-class amenities.

Tripura to Host 11-Day Tourism Festival Aimed at Boosting Footfalls by 50%



Inaugural Tripura Tourism Promo Fest Set to Begin December 3

The 11-day Tripura Tourism Promo Fest-2024 will kick off on December 3, with a grand opening ceremony in Gomati district, as the state aims to boost tourist footfall by 30-50%. Chief Minister Manik Saha is set to inaugurate the event, marking the first

major tourism promotion festival in Tripura.

A Celebration of Culture, Heritage, and Nature

The festival, which will run until December 14, is designed to showcase the cultural heritage, natural beauty, and diverse traditions of Tripura. State

Tourism Minister Sushant Chowdhury confirmed that the event will span multiple locations across the state, including four key tourist destinations. "The main goal is to promote Tripura's tourism, culture, and heritage both nationally and internationally," Chowdhury said, emphasizing the focus on increasing tourism by 39-50%



through the festival's varied activities.

Highlighting Local Music, Food, and Traditions

The fest will feature an array of cultural events, including musical concerts by local bands, a traditional costume show celebrating the state's tribal culture, and an indigenous

food festival. Special attractions are planned at Neermahal Water Palace in Sepahijala on December 9, followed by an event at Jampui Hill in North Tripura on December 11.

The grand finale will be held at Vivekananda Ground in Agartala from December 12 to 14, where the festival will host performances by Bollywood

playback singer Shreya Ghoshal on December 14.

Promoting Indigenous Heritage

The festival's programming will spotlight Tripura's 19 indigenous tribes, offering visitors a unique opportunity to engage with the state's rich cultural diversity. "This is a chance to experience Tripura's deep-rooted traditions and the beauty of its landscapes," said Prashanta Badal Negi, Director of the Tripura Tourism Department.

Tourism Operators and Special Events

Around 40 leading tourist operators from across India will be invited to the event, ensuring that the festival has a far-reaching impact on the national tourism market. In addition to the cultural events, a special program will take place to discuss various aspects of Tripura's tourism sector with the participation of operators from outside the state.

Festival Lineup and Dates

The festival will commence with an evening cultural program at Rajghat, Neermahal on December 1, featuring renowned singer Niharika Nath and other prominent local artists. The opening ceremony on December 3 will take place at Narikelkunj at Dumbur Lake, where Chief Minister Saha will inaugurate a newly constructed bridge and new homestays at Dumbur Lake, further enhancing the state's tourism infrastructure.

A Promising Future for Tripura Tourism

Organized by the Tripura Tourism Department in collaboration with the Tripura Tourism Development Corporation Limited, the Tripura Tourism Promo Fest-2024 aims to attract both domestic and international tourists, shining a spotlight on the state's rich culture and natural beauty. With its diverse events and cultural showcases, the festival promises to be a significant step toward placing Tripura on the map as a top tourism destination.



Soul-Stirring Views and Insider Tips for Year-End Detox

As the year winds down, it's the perfect time to reflect, unwind, and rejuvenate. Few things compare to sinking into a refreshing pool with a cocktail in hand, all while taking in stunning views that inspire relaxation. Whether nestled in the Himalayas or on a tropical island, these must-visit destinations offer an ideal



escape for those seeking tranquility and renewal before the new year.

Punakha Valley, Bhutan: Tranquility in the Himalayas

Tucked away in the Punakha Valley, Bhutan's Pemako Punakha provides an idyllic setting for a peaceful year-end detox. The luxury tented villas,

each featuring a private temperature-controlled pool overlooking the river and rolling hills, offer unparalleled comfort and serene views. Inside, copper fixtures and vintage bathtubs add a touch of elegance to the rustic Bhutanese aesthetic.

Insider Tip: Hike through pine forests to Jiligang Monastery, where you can enjoy breathtaking views of the river below, accompanied by the sounds of chirping birds and the fresh, earthy scents of the forest.

Krabi, Thailand: Slow Down by the Andaman Sea

After the festive season's frenzy, Krabi in Thailand invites you to relax on its white sands. Stay at the Reserve Villa with a private pool at Phulay Bay, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve. Enjoy the infinity pool overlooking Phang Nga Bay, or indulge in a Batik painting or Thai cooking class at this 3-Michelin Keys resort.

Insider Tip: Join yoga and wellness sessions with Himani Pal or Daria Gudkova, a spiritual expert specializing in sound therapy and chakra activation, set against the backdrop of Krabi's stunning limestone mountains.

Shangri-La Al Husn Muscat, Oman: Detox with Sea Views

For a serene year-end getaway, Shangri-La Al Husn Muscat offers an adults-only escape perched atop a dramatic clifftop. With an exclusive infinity pool overlooking the Sea of Oman, this retreat is ideal for unwinding in luxury. Yoga sessions, luxurious Omani-inspired spa treatments, and a menu of wholesome cuisine await to rejuvenate your mind and body.

Insider Tip: Start your day with sunrise yoga on the cliff or a guided aerial yoga session before indulging in a soothing spa treatment featuring locally sourced luban essential oils.

Lunuganga, Sri Lanka: Design Meets Zen

For a truly relaxing and inspiring experience, the Geoffrey Bawa Suite at Teardrop Hotels' Lunuganga offers

an escape surrounded by lush gardens and a private plunge pool. This design-focused suite features original artwork and a library dedicated to Bawa's work, providing the perfect setting for quiet reflection.

Insider Tip: Explore the whimsical gardens of Lunuganga on a guided tour, learning about Geoffrey Bawa's architectural legacy as you meander through this living masterpiece—a perfect way to clear your mind and spark inspiration.

Seychelles: Island Bliss at Waldorf Astoria

The Waldorf Astoria on Platte Island in Seychelles offers the ultimate private getaway, where days are spent surrounded by the ocean's beauty. Each villa features a private pool under towering palms and direct access to the pristine beach. At night, guests can gaze at the Milky Way in the quiet solitude of their outdoor space.

Insider Tip: Indulge in an Ayur-Abhyanga treatment, an ancient therapy using rhythmic strokes and herbal oils to relieve stress and balance the body and mind.

Ras Al Khaimah: A Relaxed Beach Vibe

For a quick beach escape, head to Ras Al Khaimah on Al Marjan Island. The Mövenpick Resort offers beachfront chalets with private pools, perfect for unwinding after the holiday rush. Enjoy the tranquil Gulf views and relax in your secluded oasis.

Insider Tip: For a truly laid-back experience, visit Ula, a restaurant offering a perfect blend of brunch, shimmering sunsets, and late-night beats—a great spot to relax and enjoy the moment.

As the year comes to a close, these destinations provide the perfect backdrop for reflection, relaxation, and rejuvenation. Whether you're unwinding in the Himalayas, on a tropical beach, or surrounded by stunning natural beauty, a year-end detox in any of these serene locations promises to leave you feeling refreshed and ready for the year ahead.



India's potential as a top wedding destination globally

India's growing wedding tourism: Our country is becoming a global hotspot for destination weddings, with a mix of cultural heritage, luxury venues, and customised services

attracting couples from India and abroad. In a recent convention which brought together hoteliers, restaurateurs, and experts to explore topics ranging from sustainability





to new-age restaurant trends, **Mugdha Sinha, Director General of Tourism, Ministry of Tourism**, rightfully opined that:

- India should rethink its approach to attracting international wedding tourism by offering a seamless experience for foreign guests.
- Direct flight connectivity, simplified visa processes, and curated, unique itineraries will make India the ultimate wedding destination.
- This market, second only to China,

presents immense opportunities for growth.

- Weddings in India are not just events but cultural showcases.

Key takeaways include:

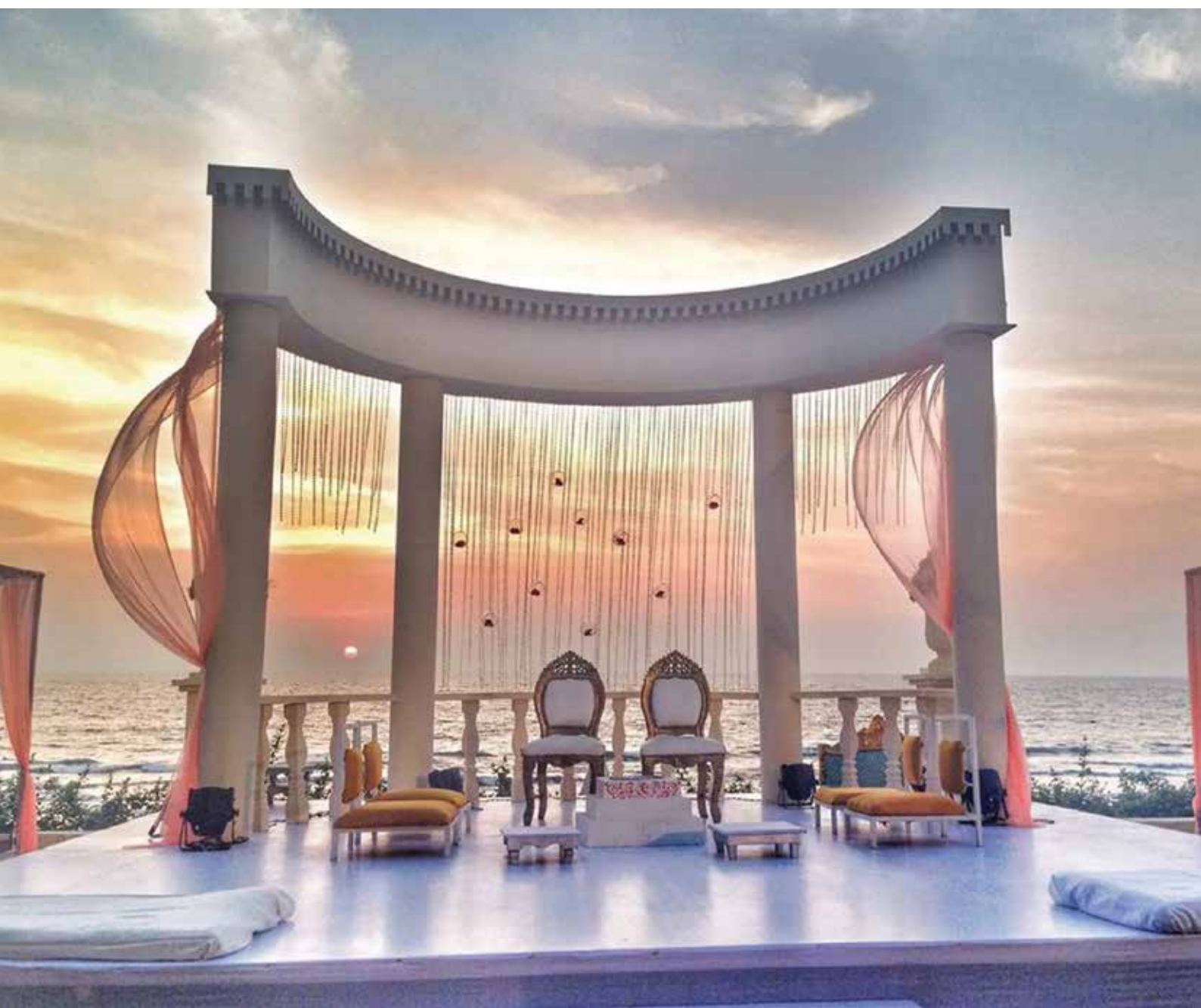
- India aims to become a premier wedding destination, capitalising on the growing demand for luxury wedding venues.
- The Indian wedding industry is a significant economic force, with 54 per cent of people spending over INR 1

million on weddings.

- Simplifying visa processes, offering curated itineraries, and improving flight connectivity can attract more international wedding tourism.

- Emerging trends in restaurants, including innovative dining experiences and technology-driven customer engagement, were also explored.

- Luxury wedding venues offer significant revenue opportunities for hotels.



Taiwan Launches Global Branding Campaign to Boost Post-Pandemic Tourism

The Taiwan Tourism Administration (TTA) has unveiled a new global branding campaign titled “*Taiwan – Waves of Wonder*”, aimed at revitalizing the island’s tourism industry. With a refreshed logo, Version 3.0, and an accompanying series of animated shorts and a tourism anthem, the campaign seeks to attract international travelers and showcase Taiwan’s diverse offerings across all seasons.

Targeting 10 Million International Visitors in 2024

As part of its ambitious post-pandemic recovery strategy, Taiwan is aiming to increase international arrivals to 10 million visitors in 2024, a significant jump from last year’s 6.48 million. The “*Waves of Wonder*” campaign highlights Taiwan’s scenic landscapes, vibrant culture, and modern infrastructure, positioning the island as an attractive destination for all types of travelers.

New Logo Symbolizes Taiwan’s Natural Beauty and Connectivity

The new logo features a wave-like design, reflecting Taiwan’s iconic mountains, oceans, highways, and railways. This dynamic imagery represents the



island’s diverse and changing beauty throughout the year, emphasizing its accessibility and unique geographical features. The updated color palette of sunrise orange complements the logo, symbolizing vitality, warmth, and a promising future for Taiwan’s tourism sector.

A Year-Round Destination for Every Type of Traveler

Taiwan is presented as a versatile year-round destination offering a mix of modern infrastructure, outdoor adventures, and

rich cultural heritage. The campaign invites travelers to explore Taiwan’s culinary delights, lively nightlife, bustling shopping districts, and its vibrant arts, music, and festival scenes. With something for everyone, “*Waves of Wonder*” aims to position Taiwan as an all-encompassing, must-visit destination in Asia.

Animated Shorts and Anthem Amplify the New Brand Identity

To support the campaign, TTA has introduced a series of animated shorts that showcase the island’s varied

experiences, from scenic views to cultural festivals. A newly created tourism anthem further enhances the campaign’s emotional appeal, encouraging travelers to engage with Taiwan and discover the wonders it has to offer.

Taiwan’s “*Waves of Wonder*” campaign sets the stage for a post-pandemic tourism revival, inviting the world to experience the island’s exceptional beauty and dynamic culture. With bold goals and a refreshed brand, Taiwan is ready to welcome back international travelers in 2024.

SriLankan Airlines

eyes more Indian tourists with Ramayana Trail package

SriLankan Airlines CEO Richard Nuttall said growth in the number of tourists from India has been stellar this year but still below the pre-Covid numbers

Seeing India as a place that offers “enormous growth” opportunities, SriLankan Airlines aims to increase flights to the country as well as attract more tourists, including with the Ramayana Trail package, according to a top airline official.

The Ramayana Trail will help people connect with 20 significant locations in Sri Lanka that are linked to the Ramayana story.

SriLankan Airlines CEO Richard Nuttall said growth in the number of tourists from India has been stellar this year but still below the pre-Covid numbers.

He was speaking at a function in the national capital for the launch of the Ramayana Trail package on Saturday evening. High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to India Kshenuka Senewiratne was also present.

Till the end of October this year,

around 20 percent of the tourists who came to Sri Lanka were from India.

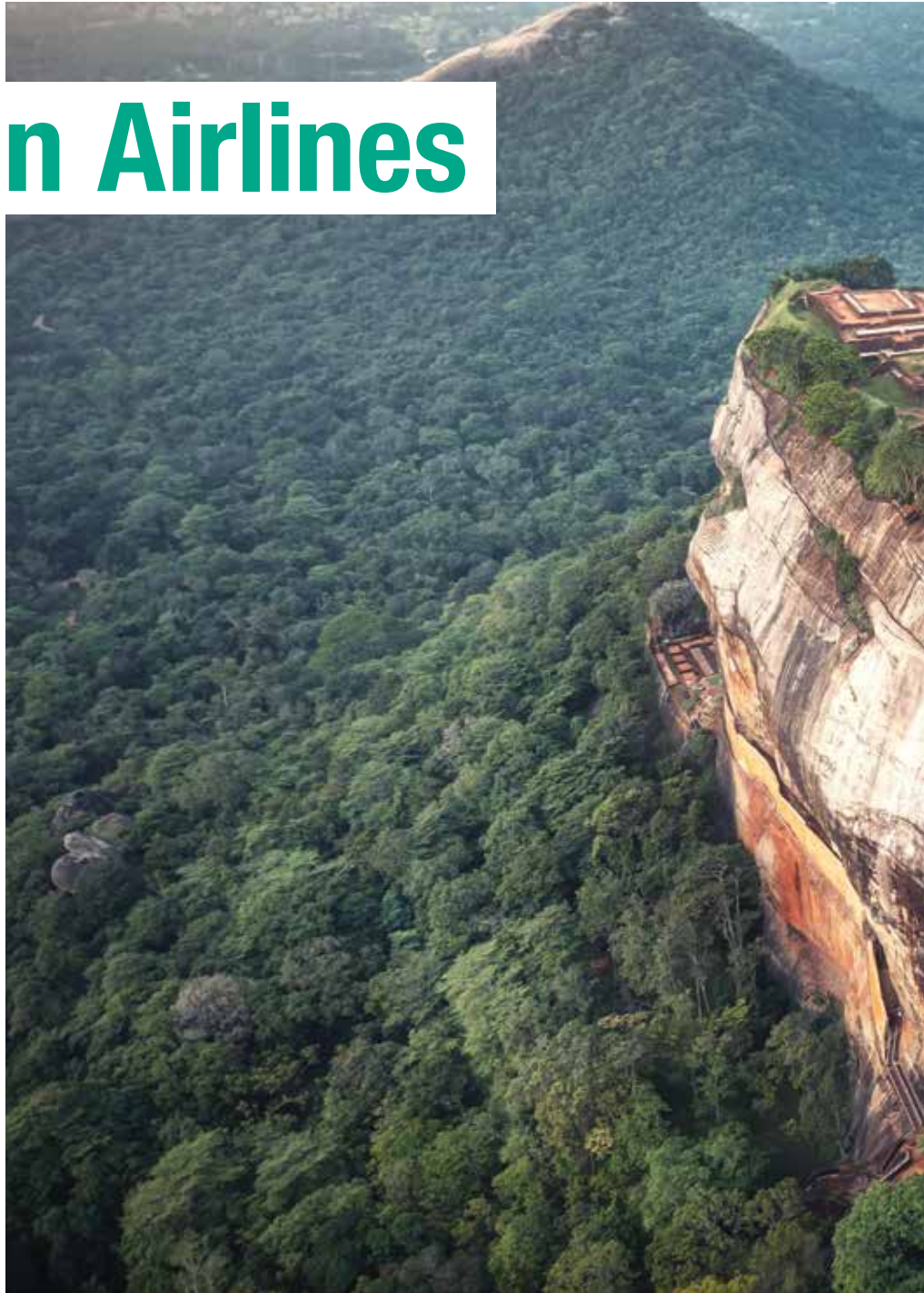
“We have been looking at how to lift and rejuvenate tourism from India to Sri Lanka to the next level,” he said while mentioning the Ramayana Trail and added that it was time to do something different.

Currently, the airline operates 88 flights a week to nine destinations in

India -- Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kochi, Trivandrum, Chennai, Trichy and Madurai.

Emphasising that the airline sees India as a place of “enormous growth and possibilities”, Nuttall said it wants to be part of that growth and is working with its Indian partners.

He said the airline aims to have more frequencies to the Indian cities





that it already operates and offer more flights at convenient times.

In due course, he said the carrier will look to add more destinations.

Kshenuka Senewiratne said Ramayana is not merely a story, it is a tapestry encapsulating culture, spirituality and heritage. "For centuries it has been a source of inspiration and guidance fostering connections

between India and Sri Lanka through mythology, traditions and values in which people to people's ties have always been at the core," she said.

Through the Ramayana Trail package, she said SriLankan Airlines is not only offering an opportunity to redefine the significant locations but also to celebrate the country's rich cultural and natural heritage.

As part of the trail, "visit Seetha Amman Temple, where Sita is said to have prayed during her captivity, and stand in awe of Rumassala Hill, where a piece of the Himalayas is believed to have landed, dropped by Hanuman. Every stop is a connection to your spiritual heritage, bringing the stories of the Ramayana alive," the airline release said.

Saudi Arabia Takes Center Stage at COP29 Tourism Day in Baku

Driving Climate Action and Sustainable Development through Innovative Tourism Initiatives

In Baku, Azerbaijan, at the COP29 climate change conference, a significant event was hosted under the theme of *Tourism, Climate Action, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. This event, which took place at Saudi Arabia's National Pavilion, was part of a broader Ministerial Meeting on Enhanced Climate Action in Tourism. At this gathering, Ageel Alshaibani, the Deputy Minister of Strategic Planning & Monitoring at Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Tourism, emphasized the urgent need to integrate sustainable practices into the global tourism sector. Alshaibani's remarks were a call to action, underscoring the importance of aligning tourism policies with climate and sustainability goals. His address highlighted Saudi Arabia's ambitious vision to lead the way in promoting sustainable tourism on a global scale.

Transforming Tourism for a Sustainable Future

Alshaibani focused on how the tourism sector can significantly contribute to environmental preservation, economic growth, and community development. He stated that tourism has a unique opportunity to drive positive change, aligning it with climate action goals and the broader global sustainability agenda. The initiative at the core of Saudi Arabia's sustainable tourism vision is the *Sustainable Tourism Global Center (STGC)*, which aims to revolutionize the industry by fostering collaborations among governments, businesses, academic institutions, and civil society.

The STGC, headquartered in Riyadh, will serve as a pivotal organization in advancing sustainable tourism practices globally. This initiative is



not just about minimizing tourism's environmental footprint but also about creating a model that supports local communities and promotes responsible, inclusive growth. As part of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, the STGC is set to become a key player in reshaping the global tourism landscape, with a focus on preserving biodiversity and ensuring that tourism brings benefits to those most dependent on the industry.

Saudi Arabia's Role in Shaping Sustainable Tourism

In his address, Alshaibani also spotlighted several groundbreaking Saudi projects that serve as examples of how sustainability can be integrated into tourism and infrastructure development. Among the most notable projects discussed were *Neom*, a zero-carbon megacity, and *Red Sea Global*, a massive development committed

to carbon neutrality and zero waste to landfills. These projects are part of Saudi Arabia's broader strategy to set new global standards for sustainable tourism, aligning with the Kingdom's long-term vision for a greener, more responsible future.

In addition, the upcoming *King Salman International Airport* was presented as another milestone, designed to meet the prestigious LEED Platinum standards, reinforcing the country's commitment to environmental stewardship in large-scale infrastructure projects. These initiatives underscore the Kingdom's proactive role in advancing sustainable tourism and infrastructure that will provide global benchmarks.

A Global Platform for Sustainable Tourism

One of the major points of

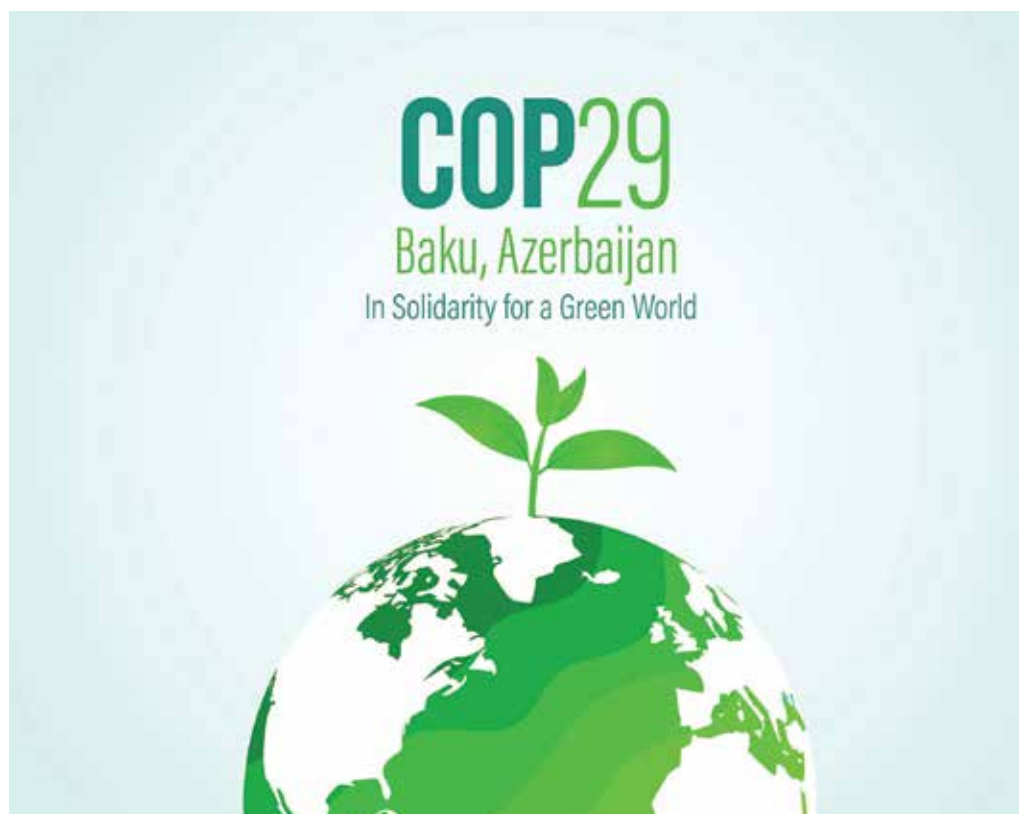
discussion was the role of STGC as a unifying platform to bring together diverse stakeholders from around the world. Alshaibani explained that the Center's work would not be limited to domestic projects but would aim to support a global movement toward sustainability in tourism. With resources, partnerships, and tools, STGC seeks to assist countries and organizations in minimizing tourism's environmental impact while promoting long-term sustainable practices.

Furthermore, Alshaibani discussed the significant economic impact that sustainable tourism can have, not just in environmental terms but also in economic resilience and job creation. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) projects that tourism will contribute \$11.1 trillion to the global economy in 2024, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. A key feature of the sustainable tourism agenda is its potential to empower communities, particularly through small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and workforce inclusivity, with women making up approximately 40% of the tourism industry workforce.

The Road Ahead for Sustainable Tourism

As the STGC moves forward, it is clear that it will become a key force in shaping the future of the global tourism industry. Alshaibani stressed that now more than ever, the need for coordinated, global action is crucial, as tourism continues to play a central role in achieving the SDGs. By fostering collaboration and innovation, the STGC is positioned to drive measurable improvements in the tourism sector, ensuring that it contributes positively to both people and the planet.

The importance of sustainability in tourism has never been clearer, and as countries and organizations begin to embrace the principles of responsible tourism, the industry will undergo a significant transformation. Alshaibani's concluding remarks reinforced the collective responsibility to act now, as the future of tourism



depends on the actions taken today.

Key Points from the Ministerial Meeting and STGC Initiative:

- **Global Collaboration:** The STGC aims to unite governments, businesses, and civil society to advance sustainable tourism practices.

- **Saudi Arabia's Leadership:** Projects like *Neom* and *Red Sea Global* showcase the country's commitment to sustainability in tourism and infrastructure.

- **Economic Impact:** Sustainable tourism is projected to contribute \$11.1 trillion to the global economy in 2024, with a focus on inclusive growth and empowerment for women and SMEs.

- **Vision 2030:** Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 sets ambitious targets for sustainable tourism development, positioning the Kingdom as a leader in the global movement.

Global Implications for the Travel Industry

The growing shift towards sustainable tourism will have wide-reaching effects on travelers and

the travel industry. As governments, companies, and organizations adopt greener practices, travelers will experience more environmentally-conscious options, from accommodations to transportation. The focus on sustainability may lead to new travel trends, including eco-friendly destinations, tours, and experiences, appealing to the rising number of conscientious travelers. Additionally, the increased collaboration and sharing of best practices could lead to more affordable, sustainable travel options for tourists globally.

As sustainable tourism continues to gain traction, industry players across the globe will likely feel the ripple effects. This shift will not only change how destinations are marketed but also how they are developed, with a greater emphasis on protecting local environments and communities while offering enriching experiences to tourists. For the long term, these changes are set to benefit both the tourism sector and the planet, making sustainable travel the new standard for the global industry.

Saudi Arabia Unveils \$933 Million Investment in 17 Al-Ahsa Tourism Projects

Adding 1,800 Hotel Rooms and Expanding Regional Travel Under Vision 2030



As part of Saudi Arabia Vision 2030 and its ongoing efforts to transform the Kingdom into a global tourism hub, His Excellency Ahmed Al-Khateeb, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Tourism, has announced support for 17 unique tourism projects in the Al-Ahsa Governorate, collectively valued at over SAR 3.5 billion (\$933 million). These projects aim to position Al-Ahsa as a leading tourist destination in the region, leveraging its unique cultural, historical, and natural attractions.

The announcement came during the minister's visit to Al-Ahsa, which forms part of his tour across various regions and governorates in Saudi Arabia. The visit coincides with the Saudi winter events calendar, a series of tourism-focused activities designed to highlight the Kingdom's diverse

offerings. Minister Al-Khateeb met with investors, entrepreneurs, and stakeholders to discuss the future of Saudi Arabia's tourism sector and explore the investment opportunities available in Al-Ahsa.

Investment Opportunities in Al-Ahsa Tourism

During the meeting with local investors, His Excellency Ahmed Al-Khateeb, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Tourism emphasized the Ministry of Tourism's commitment to providing comprehensive services, facilities, and incentives to attract private-sector participation in the tourism industry. The government's goal is to create a dynamic tourism ecosystem that supports sustainable development while ensuring alignment with Saudi Vision 2030.

The minister highlighted the investment potential in Al-Ahsa, a region with exceptional natural beauty and a rich cultural heritage. The 17 tourism projects, valued at over SAR 3.5 billion, include the development of 1,800 new hotel rooms, significantly boosting the region's accommodation capacity. These projects will create numerous job opportunities and cater to the growing demand for tourism in Saudi Arabia.

Key Tourism Projects in Al-Ahsa

Among the notable initiatives supported by the Tourism Development Fund is the Radisson Blu Hotel, located in the heart of Al-Ahsa Governorate. This flagship project, built over an area of 10,000 square meters, represents an investment of over SAR 200 million (\$53 million). The hotel features 180

luxurious rooms, blending international hospitality standards with authentic local experiences.

The Radisson Blu Al-Ahsa is more than just a place to stay—it's designed to serve as a model tourist destination that reflects the unique charm of Al-Ahsa. Combining international luxury with local authenticity, the hotel is expected to attract both domestic and international travelers, further boosting the region's appeal as a premier destination for leisure and business tourism.

Other projects in Al-Ahsa aim to enhance the visitor experience by leveraging the region's iconic features. These include historical landmarks, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, lush oases, and traditional handicrafts. The government plans to integrate these assets into the tourism sector, creating a comprehensive and immersive experience for visitors.

Al-Ahsa: A Major Tourist Destination

Al-Ahsa's strategic location, cultural richness, and natural beauty make it a standout destination in Saudi Arabia's tourism development strategy. Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Al-Ahsa is home to one of the world's largest natural oases, offering visitors a unique blend of history, tradition, and breathtaking landscapes.

The region is famous for its date palm groves, hot springs, and historic forts. Attractions such as the Qasr Ibrahim Palace, the ancient Al-Qarah Mountain, and traditional souks draw tourists year-round. Al-Ahsa also serves as a gateway for eco-tourism, with opportunities for hiking, camping, and exploring its vast desert landscapes.

With these new investments, Al-Ahsa is poised to become a major hub for domestic and international tourism, contributing significantly to Saudi Arabia's broader economic diversification goals.

Supporting Saudi Vision 2030

The development of Al-Ahsa's tourism sector aligns with Saudi Vision

2030, a transformative plan to reduce the Kingdom's dependency on oil revenues by developing other sectors, including tourism. Vision 2030 aims to attract 100 million annual visitors to Saudi Arabia by 2030, positioning the country as a top global tourist destination.

His Excellency Ahmed Al-Khateeb, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Tourism emphasized the government's role in enabling this vision, stating, "The Ministry of Tourism is dedicated to creating an attractive and sustainable tourism ecosystem. By investing in key regions like Al-Ahsa, we are laying the foundation for a prosperous future for Saudi tourism."

The projects in Al-Ahsa underscore the Kingdom's commitment to fostering public-private partnerships (PPPs) and leveraging international expertise to create world-class tourism infrastructure. These efforts are supported by the Tourism Development Fund, which provides financial and advisory support to tourism-related ventures across the Kingdom.

Boost to the Hospitality Industry

The significant investment in Al-Ahsa's tourism sector is expected to provide a major boost to the hospitality industry. With the addition of 1,800 new hotel rooms, the region will be better equipped to cater to the needs of tourists, business travelers, and attendees of cultural and entertainment events.

The Radisson Blu Al-Ahsa is a prime example of how luxury hospitality can coexist with local culture, offering visitors a unique experience that highlights the best of both worlds. Similar projects are in the pipeline, with a focus on creating sustainable, high-quality accommodations that enhance the visitor experience while preserving the region's cultural and environmental integrity.

Engaging the Private Sector

A key component of Saudi Arabia's tourism development strategy is engaging the private sector. During his visit, His Excellency Ahmed Al-Khateeb, Saudi Arabia's Minister of

Tourism met with local entrepreneurs and investors to discuss opportunities in Al-Ahsa and across the Kingdom. The Ministry of Tourism is actively working to reduce barriers to entry for private investors by offering financial incentives, streamlining regulations, and providing comprehensive support for tourism-related ventures.

Private-sector participation is seen as essential for achieving the Kingdom's ambitious tourism goals. By fostering collaboration between the government and private enterprises, Saudi Arabia aims to create a dynamic and competitive tourism industry that benefits both local communities and the national economy.

Economic and Cultural Impact

The investment in Al-Ahsa's tourism sector is expected to have a significant economic and cultural impact. Beyond generating revenue and creating jobs, the projects will help preserve and promote Al-Ahsa's rich heritage, ensuring that its cultural and natural assets are passed down to future generations.

For tourists, Al-Ahsa offers an authentic Saudi experience, blending modern amenities with traditional charm. The region's unique attractions, combined with its growing infrastructure, make it a must-visit destination for anyone exploring Saudi Arabia.

The announcement of 17 new tourism projects in Al-Ahsa, valued at over **\$933 million**, marks a major milestone in Saudi Arabia's efforts to develop its tourism sector. With a focus on sustainability, authenticity, and innovation, these projects will transform Al-Ahsa into a leading tourist destination, showcasing the best of Saudi Arabia to the world.

As part of Saudi Vision 2030, this initiative highlights the Kingdom's commitment to economic diversification, cultural preservation, and global connectivity. For travelers, Al-Ahsa offers an unparalleled opportunity to explore Saudi Arabia's rich heritage and breathtaking landscapes, making it a destination unlike any other.

Saudi Arabia Gaining Popularity Among Indian Travelers: From Riyadh's Vibrant Streets to Jeddah's Coastal Beauty and Al-Ula's Ancient Wonders



Saudi Arabia has long been known for its role as a key player in the global energy sector, but beyond its economic stature, it offers an array of travel experiences waiting to be discovered. The kingdom, home to eight UNESCO World Heritage Sites and more than 10,000 archaeological sites, boasts a wealth of cultural and natural beauty. From bustling cities to vast deserts and sparkling seas, Saudi Arabia presents a unique destination for those seeking heritage, adventure, and serenity. Indian travelers, in particular, have easy access to this fascinating country with several visa options available, including eVisas and stopover visas for those flying with Saudia Airlines. Below are four must-visit destinations in Saudi Arabia that are bound to offer an unforgettable experience.

Riyadh: The Heart of Saudi Culture

Riyadh, the capital city, is a bustling metropolis that blends modernity with deep-rooted history. At the heart of this vibrant city is At-Turaif, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that served as the first capital of Saudi Arabia. This area is considered the cradle of Saudi culture, with its rich heritage reflected in its historical structures. Visitors to Riyadh can explore the bustling souqs, where they can shop for traditional goods, spices, and crafts, or visit the Al-Faisal Museum for Arab-Islamic Art to delve deeper into the region's cultural history. One of Riyadh's highlights is the Al Faisaliah Tower, which offers stunning panoramic views of the city, making it a perfect spot for capturing the cityscape. Riyadh's culinary scene is equally enticing, with dishes like chicken kabsa, sambosas, and taheena

salads at the Najd Village restaurant, offering a delightful introduction to the flavors of the region.

AlUla: Nature and Ancient Architecture Collide

AlUla, located in northwestern Saudi Arabia, is a destination where natural beauty and ancient history coexist in harmony. Known for its dramatic desert landscapes, AlUla is home to Elephant Rock, a natural wonder shaped by millions of years of wind and erosion. Visitors can view this striking formation from the ground or take to the skies with a helicopter ride for a breathtaking aerial view. AlUla is also home to Maraya, the world's largest glass building, which blends seamlessly into its surroundings, making it a marvel of modern architecture



amidst the desert. The open-air library in Jabal Ikma, surrounded by centuries-old rocks adorned with ancient inscriptions, provides a perfect spot for those looking to immerse themselves in the history and culture of the region. Whether staying in

luxurious desert resorts or tented villas, AlUla offers a serene getaway with plenty to explore.

The Red Sea: A Haven for Nature Lovers and Adventurers

The Red Sea is one of Saudi

Arabia's most treasured natural assets, boasting the world's fourth-largest reef system. Stretching over 28,000 square kilometers and home to 90 untouched islands, the Red Sea offers numerous opportunities for eco-tourism and adventure. For travelers seeking a unique dive experience, the Yanbu Coral Reef is home to a resilient ecosystem that has withstood changes in temperature and salinity for decades. The pristine waters of Umluj, often referred to as the "Maldives of the Red Sea," are perfect for diving and swimming, offering crystal-clear waters and vibrant marine life. The region's hiking trails also offer spectacular views, making it an ideal destination for both adventure seekers and nature lovers.

Jeddah: A Blend of History, Culture, and Coastal Charm

Jeddah, once the main port for pilgrims traveling to Mecca and Medina, has evolved into a cosmopolitan hub that attracts both tourists and business travelers alike. The city's old town, with its centuries-old houses and narrow alleys lined with shops selling spices and perfumes, provides a glimpse into Jeddah's rich history. Beyond the historical sites, Jeddah boasts a scenic waterfront at the Jeddah Corniche, where visitors can stroll along the sea while enjoying the fresh breeze and stunning views. The city's thriving culinary scene is another highlight, with long-standing restaurants like Albasali serving freshly-caught seafood with a unique blend of spices. Jeddah's fusion of culture, history, and modernity makes it a fascinating destination for travelers seeking both relaxation and exploration.

Easy Access for Indian Travelers

Saudi Arabia is easily accessible for Indian travelers, with several visa options available to suit different needs. Indian citizens can apply for a tourist visa at one of the VFS Tasheel offices located in major cities or opt for an eVisa or visa-on-arrival if they hold a valid tourist or business visa for the US, UK, or a Schengen country.





For those flying with Saudia Airlines, there is also the option to apply for a stopover visa, which is valid for up to 96 hours and can be obtained through the Saudia Airline website. These flexible visa options make Saudi Arabia an attractive destination for Indian travelers looking for a short getaway or a longer vacation in the kingdom.

Impact on the Travel Industry

The introduction of easy access to Saudi Arabia, especially through flexible visa options, is expected to significantly boost tourism in the

region. Indian travelers, who are increasingly looking for destinations beyond the usual options, are likely to take advantage of these offerings. The country's rich heritage, natural beauty, and modern amenities are poised to make it a popular choice for travelers seeking unique experiences, whether for cultural exploration, adventure, or relaxation.

Key Highlights:

- **Riyadh:** Explore the UNESCO-listed At-Turaif, souqs, and cultural landmarks.

- **AlUla:** Witness Elephant Rock, Maraya, and Jabal Ikma's ancient inscriptions.

- **Red Sea:** Dive into crystal-clear waters and hike through scenic trails.

- **Jeddah:** Discover a blend of historic charm, modern culture, and coastal beauty.

With its diverse offerings and growing accessibility, Saudi Arabia is quickly becoming a must-visit destination for global travelers, especially those from India, looking to explore a rich tapestry of history, culture, and nature.



Napa Valley Named North America's Top Honeymoon Destination in 2024 World Travel Awards

California's renowned Napa Valley has been crowned the top honeymoon destination in North America for 2024, according to the prestigious World Travel Awards. The region's picturesque vineyards, rolling landscapes, and world-class wineries made it the ideal choice for newlyweds seeking a peaceful, romantic retreat.

Napa Valley Triumphs Over Popular Honeymoon Hotspots

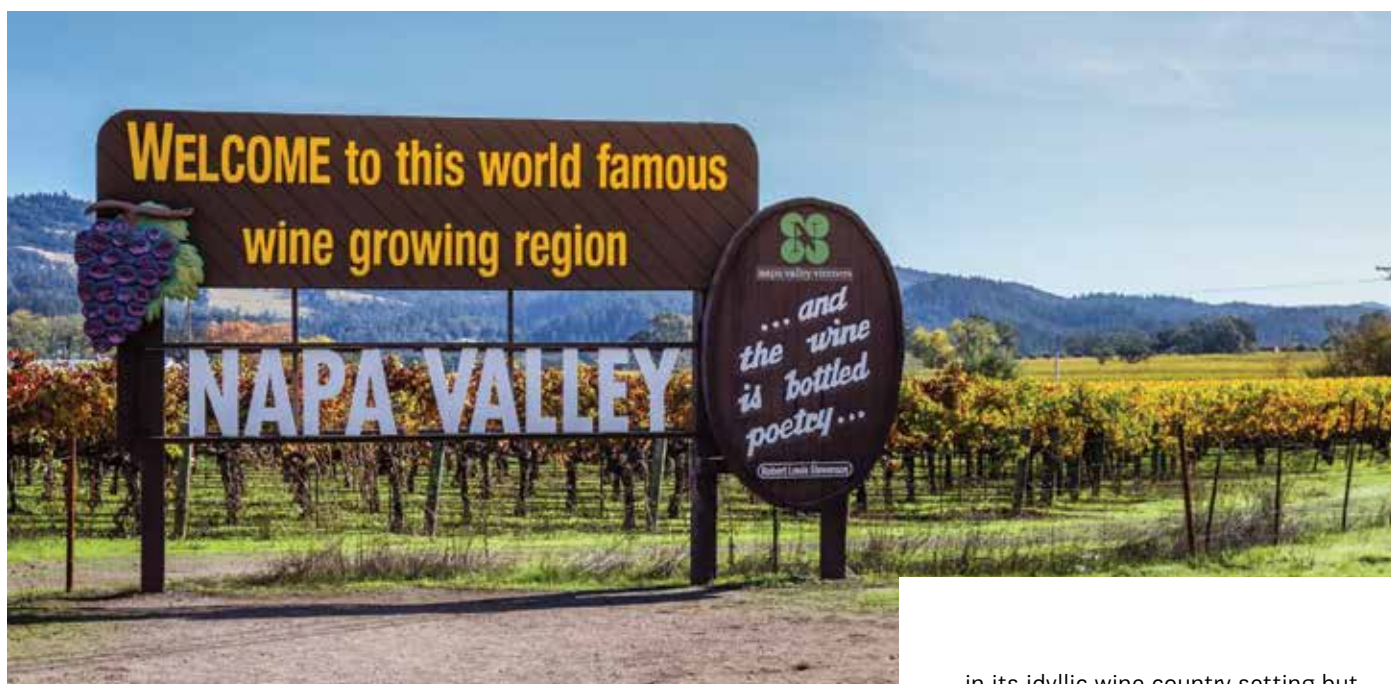
Napa secured the top spot, outshining other celebrated honeymoon destinations such as Las Vegas, Maui,

Miami Beach, and Niagara Falls. This marks Napa Valley's return to the prestigious title after a decade-long hiatus, having previously won the award in 2014 and 2015. While Napa was also nominated for Best Honeymoon Destination in the World and Best Wine Tourism Region, the global title went to St. Lucia and the wine tourism accolade was claimed by Bordeaux, France.

A Perfect Blend of Romance and Indulgence

Napa Valley's appeal lies not only





in its idyllic wine country setting but also in its ability to offer couples a rich blend of relaxation and indulgence. From private vineyard tours and luxury spa experiences to exquisite fine dining and vibrant art galleries, Napa provides a wealth of intimate experiences perfect for a post-wedding escape.

Creating Lasting Memories in Napa's Serene Landscape

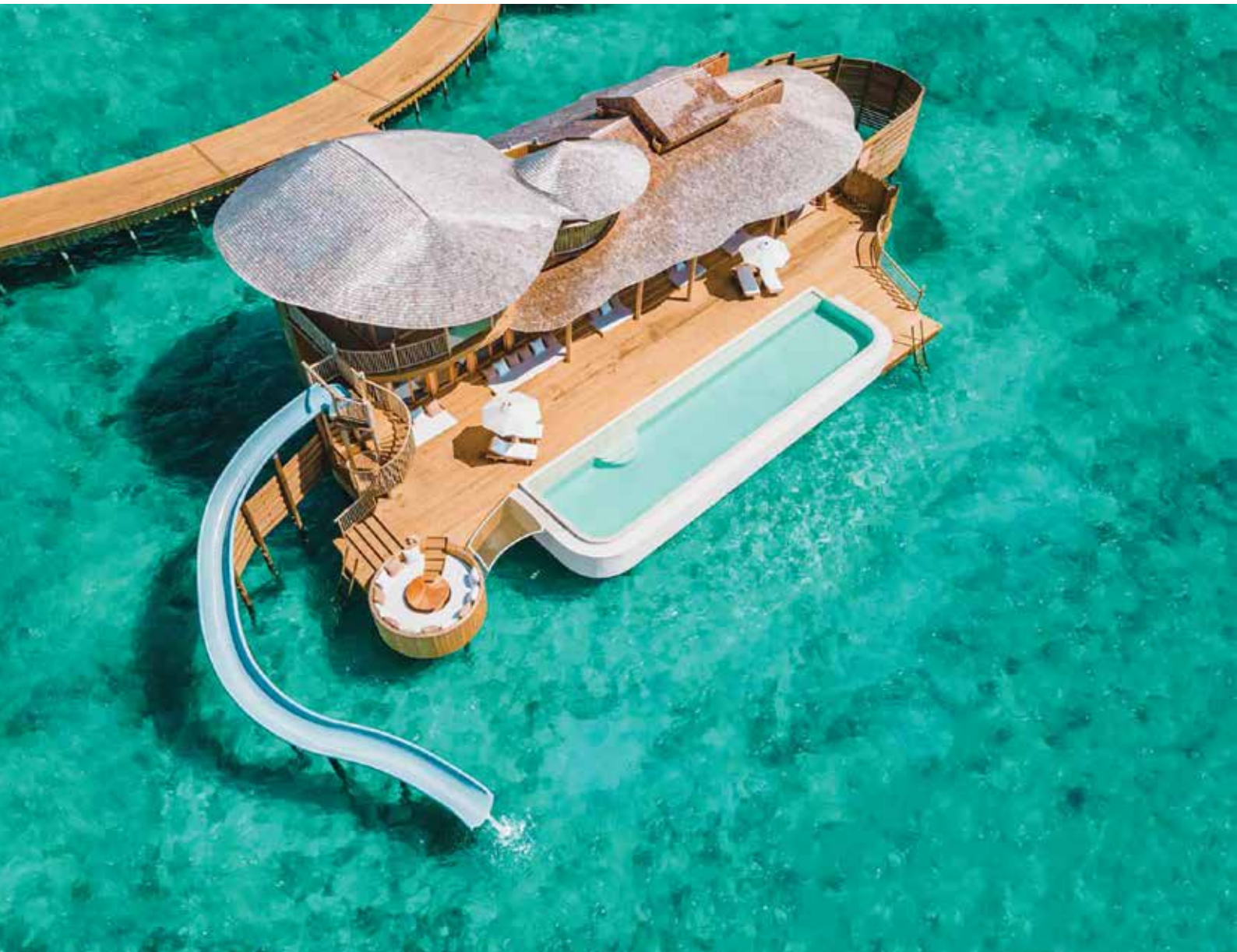
Whether couples are enjoying a glass of wine on a private terrace, taking in the beauty of the countryside on a scenic hike, or savoring the region's culinary delights, Napa Valley offers a serene, romantic atmosphere that enhances every moment. The region's temperate climate and exceptional wines make it the perfect place for newlyweds to unwind and celebrate their love.

Napa Valley: A Honeymoon Destination Like No Other

For couples seeking luxury, natural beauty, and intimate experiences, Napa Valley is an unmatched honeymoon destination. No passport is required to enjoy its charm, making it an easy and unforgettable escape for newlyweds looking to start their journey together. With its timeless appeal, Napa promises a honeymoon filled with romance, fine wine, and memories to cherish for a lifetime.

Maldives

Increases Departure Taxes:
A Pricey Change for Travelers



Tourists Face Steep Rise in Exit Fees Starting December 1

The Maldives is raising its departure taxes, adding to the already expensive experience of visiting the tropical paradise. From **December 1, 2024**, all non-Maldivian travelers will face significantly higher exit fees, with the cost of leaving the country set to rise by as much as **400%**. Here's what you need to know:

Increased Departure Taxes Across All Classes

The new departure tax, announced by the **Maldivian Inland Revenue Authority (MIRA)** in November, will affect travelers departing from **Velana International Airport (MLE)**, the nation's primary international transit hub. The revised fees apply to all non-Maldivians, regardless of nationality or age, and will be added directly to the price of airline tickets.

- **Economy Class** passengers will now pay **\$50** (Rs 4,221), up from the previous fee of **\$30** (Rs 2,553).
- **Business Class** passengers will see their fees increase to **\$120** (Rs 10,132), up from **\$60** (Rs 5,061).
- **First Class** fares will jump to **\$240** (Rs 20,264), compared to the previous **\$90** (Rs 7,599).
- **Private Jet** passengers will face a dramatic rise to **\$480** (Rs 40,528), up from **\$120** (Rs 10,132).

The exit fee increase is set to apply regardless of the length of stay, whether a visitor stays for a few hours or several days. This policy is part of the Maldives' broader efforts to generate funds for the maintenance and development of its infrastructure, particularly the Velana International Airport.

Additional Tax Hikes on the Horizon

While the departure tax increase is a major change, it's not the only tax hike coming to the Maldives. Starting **January 2025**, the Maldives will double its **green tax** on tourists. The new rates are as follows:

- Resorts with **more than 50 rooms** will see the green tax rise from

\$6 (Rs 500) per tourist per day to **\$12** (Rs 1,000).

- For **smaller resorts** with fewer than 50 rooms, the green tax will increase from **\$3** (Rs 250) to **\$6** (Rs 500).
- Children under the age of two will be **exempt** from the green tax.

Looking further ahead, **from July 2025**, the Maldives will also increase its **Goods and Services Tax (GST)** from **16% to 17%**, as per changes passed by the **Maldivian Parliament** in October 2024.

Context: Economic Pressures and Foreign Exchange Crisis

These tax hikes come amidst growing financial pressure on the Maldives, which is facing a **foreign exchange crisis**. In a bid to combat this, the Maldives has imposed **currency exchange controls** and is mandating that all foreign currency earned by the tourism sector be deposited in local banks. The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** has warned of a potential **debt crisis** for the island nation, with its **foreign reserves** dropping significantly over the past year. According to **Fitch Ratings**, the Maldives' **external debt obligations** could reach up to **\$1 billion by 2026**.

The new departure tax, announced by the Maldivian Inland Revenue Authority (MIRA) in November, will affect travelers departing from Velana International Airport (MLE), the nation's primary international transit hub.

While the government argues that these tax hikes will help stabilize the country's finances, some in the tourism industry are voicing concerns. A **local business owner** warned that these increased taxes could have a **devastating impact** on the industry. An **international hotel chain CEO** expressed concern about the timing, calling for a delay to allow the industry time to adjust to the new changes.

Government's Revenue Expectations and Industry Pushback

Despite the backlash, the **Ministry of Finance** expects the tax increases to raise **Rs 8 billion** in revenue. This additional income will be invested in the country's **Sovereign Development Fund** to support future development initiatives. However, the local tourism sector remains worried about the long-term effects of these increased costs on their operations.

In response to these changes, tourism stakeholders are urging the government to reconsider the timing of the tax hikes, noting that many businesses have long-term contracts that may not reflect the new fees. While they do not oppose the tax increase itself, they seek a delay to ensure the Maldives tourism industry can adjust to these new financial burdens.

Key Takeaways:

- The Maldives is raising **departure taxes** by as much as **400%** starting **December 1, 2024**.
- The increase affects all non-Maldivian travelers, with higher fees based on travel class and mode of transport.
- **Green taxes** on tourists will also rise in January 2025, with some resorts seeing **doubling of fees**.
- The Maldives' **economic crisis** and growing **external debt** are driving these tax hikes, which have sparked concern in the tourism sector.

As the Maldives grapples with its financial challenges, travelers and industry professionals alike are adjusting to the new costs that come with visiting this island paradise.

Baku's COP29 Tourism Day Unveils Global Climate Initiatives Focused on Decarbonization and Sustainable Tourism Financing

Tourism Day at COP29, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, on November 20, 2024, brought global leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders together to discuss the integral role of tourism in addressing climate change. With participation from nearly 30 states, the event underscored the importance of sustainable tourism practices in achieving global climate goals and featured pivotal announcements and initiatives.

Strengthening Global Commitments

The highlight of the event was the signing of a Letter of Intent between the State Tourism Agency of Azerbaijan and the United Nations World Tourism

Organization (UNWTO). This agreement solidifies collaboration under the Enhanced Climate Initiative for Tourism, establishing a global platform to promote low-carbon, sustainable tourism. The initiative aims to provide frameworks and partnerships to ensure tourism aligns with broader climate strategies.

During the event, Azerbaijan announced its official endorsement of the Glasgow Declaration Initiative on Climate Action in Tourism. By doing so, the country has committed to developing comprehensive climate action plans emphasizing decarbonization and regeneration. These efforts align with international climate goals and reinforce Azerbaijan's

leadership role in promoting sustainable tourism practices.

The COP29 Declaration on Enhanced Climate Action in Tourism

Azerbaijan's efforts dovetail with the COP29 Declaration on Enhanced Climate Action in Tourism, a key document endorsed by more than 50 countries and eight non-state actors. This declaration offers a structured framework for integrating tourism into global climate strategies. It emphasizes four key areas: policy enhancement, science-based metrics, decarbonization, and global partnerships.

Fuad Nagiyev, Chairman of the



State Tourism Agency of Azerbaijan, expressed optimism about the future of sustainable tourism. In his closing remarks, he stated, *"Tourism's role in addressing climate change is now widely recognized. I am confident this legacy will inspire greater action at future COP events and drive more countries to join this global effort."*

Launch of the Net Zero Roadmap: Second Edition

Another major milestone at Tourism Day was the release of the *Net Zero Roadmap: Second Edition* by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC). The report highlighted a 27% increase in the number of businesses setting climate targets over the past three years. It also showcased advancements in Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and provided practical guidance for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to secure green financing and meet sustainability benchmarks.

Thematic Roundtables on Key Issues

Tourism Day also featured three high-level thematic roundtables, fostering collaborative dialogue on critical issues:

1. Measurement and Decarbonization:

This session focused on implementing science-based metrics to measure tourism's environmental impact and strategies to achieve net-zero emissions. Discussions emphasized the importance of data-driven approaches in shaping sustainable policies.

2. Regeneration and Adaptation:

Participants explored how tourism can contribute to environmental regeneration, including restoration of natural habitats and adaptation strategies to mitigate climate impacts on tourism infrastructure.

3. Finance and Innovative Solutions:

This roundtable highlighted the need for increased investment in green projects. Experts shared best practices on leveraging innovative financing mechanisms to fund sustainability initiatives across the tourism sector.

Azerbaijan's Leadership in Sustainable Tourism

Azerbaijan's participation in COP29 further cements its position

as a global advocate for sustainable tourism. By integrating tourism into its climate strategies, the country is not only addressing environmental challenges but also creating pathways for economic growth and cultural preservation. Its endorsement of the Glasgow Declaration and proactive role in the Enhanced Climate Initiative for Tourism demonstrate its commitment to leading by example.

A Call to Action for the Tourism Industry

Tourism Day at COP29 concluded with a call to action for governments, businesses, and stakeholders to collaborate more effectively. The shared vision of integrating tourism into climate strategies highlights the sector's potential to drive transformative change. The event showcased actionable solutions and partnerships that can inspire similar initiatives worldwide.

As COP29's legacy unfolds, it is expected to leave a lasting impact on the tourism sector. By aligning with global climate goals, the industry can become a powerful force for environmental stewardship and sustainable development.

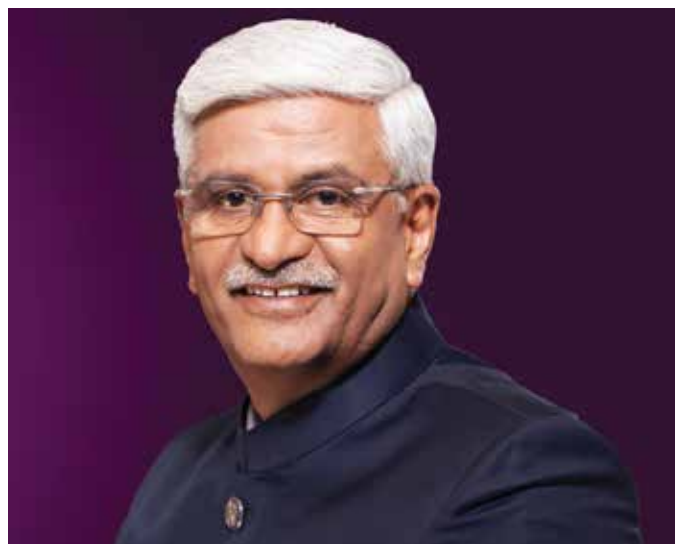
TRENDS

Tourism to power India's economy by 2047

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, India's Minister of Culture and Tourism, is quite optimistic about the future of the tourism sector. He believes it will evolve into a three trillion-dollar industry by 2047. This vision is part of the government's plan to make tourism and hospitality key drivers of India's economy.

Shekhawat's strategy focuses on sustainable tourism, digitalisation, skills development, and destination management. He also emphasises the importance of green tourism, with initiatives like the Travel for LiFE program, which promotes environmental sustainability through tourism.

The minister is confident that India's tourism sector will continue to grow, driven by the increasing aspirations of the middle class and the government's efforts to improve infrastructure and promote niche tourism areas like adventure, wedding, and wildlife tourism.



“Sustainable X Digital”: Taiwan unveils a new sustainable tourism strategy



Taiwan’s “Sustainable X Digital” strategy enhances tourism with eco-friendly transport, community-focused travel, and cultural preservation, boosting visitor experiences.

Taiwan has launched a comprehensive new tourism strategy with a focus on “**Sustainable X Digital**” transformation. This forward-thinking approach aims to enhance visitor experiences while safeguarding the island’s rich natural and cultural heritage, in line with its 2030 vision.

As global trends shift towards sustainability, Taiwan is embracing green, innovative, and community-focused travel experiences. This approach not only helps preserve the island’s resources but also channels tourism revenue back into local communities, supporting a sustainable industry. In the **UK**, interest in Taiwan is on the rise, with a 33% increase in visitor numbers, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. To build on this momentum, Taiwan has launched the ‘**Waves of Wonder**’ campaign, showcasing its natural beauty, diverse culture, and vibrant hospitality with an energetic orange wave symbol.

The core of Taiwan’s strategy is finding harmony between tourism growth and environmental protection. Popular scenic spots are monitored with real-time crowd control and eco-friendly transport options to reduce environmental impacts. Protected areas, such as Turtle Island, maintain controlled access to ensure ecosystem preservation.

Hotels are adopting sustainable practices as well, with a ban on single-use amenities planned by 2025, backed by government support for eco-certifications. Initiatives like the ‘Gold Quality Hospitality B&B’ program also encourage environmentally responsible accommodations.

To promote green travel, Taiwan is improving public transportation, including the **Taiwan Tourist Shuttle**, which connects major hubs to scenic spots, helping reduce the need for private cars. Travel agencies are receiving training and incentives to adopt sustainable practices, ensuring tourism fosters community

development while protecting the environment.

A key focus of the strategy is empowering local communities to develop unique tourism experiences. This ensures a larger share of tourism revenue stays within the community, supporting local growth and offering visitors authentic, immersive cultural experiences.

British travellers, increasingly drawn to eco-conscious destinations, will find Taiwan’s green-certified hotels, eco-friendly transport, and responsible travel options appealing. With its stunning scenery, vibrant culture, and innovative sustainability practices, Taiwan offers a perfect mix of comfort and conscientious travel.

“*Taiwan is a treasure trove of unique experiences for travellers,*” said **Linda Lin**, Director of the Taiwan Tourism Administration London Office. “*We’re thrilled by the growth in UK interest and believe our new strategy will attract travellers seeking authentic adventures with a minimal environmental footprint.*”

With direct flights from London Heathrow to **Taipei** via **China Airlines**, and a strong commitment to sustainability and cultural preservation, now is the perfect time to explore Taiwan’s breathtaking landscapes and rich traditions responsibly.

Taiwan highlights MICE excellence at ITB Asia 2024 with “Waves of Wonder”

Taiwan Promotes MICE Tourism at ITB Asia 2024, Capturing Global Attention with Immersive Experiences

Taiwan Showcases Business Tourism Potential at ITB Asia 2024

From October 23 to 25, 2024, Taiwan’s Tourism Administration, alongside the Taipei City Government and six domestic MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) partners, took center stage at ITB Asia in Singapore to promote Taiwan’s growing business tourism sector. The Taiwan Pavilion, built around the country’s new tourism brand, “Waves of Wonder,” drew significant attention, with its sleek design inspired by Taiwan’s diverse landscapes, positioning the island as an attractive global tourism destination.

Interactive Technology and Cultural Immersion Engage Global Visitors

During the three-day event, Taiwan’s pavilion became a hub of activity, hosting over 100 business meetings, primarily with buyers from the Asia-Pacific region. The design, which reflected Taiwan’s natural beauty, successfully captured the attention of global tourism professionals. A key highlight was the integration of interactive technology games and Taiwanese snacks, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the island’s

rich culture. Attendees not only enjoyed digital experiences that showcased Taiwan’s heritage but also sampled popular Taiwanese dishes, creating an engaging and memorable experience.

Promoting Taiwan’s MICE Infrastructure and Incentive Policies

Aligned with the theme of ITB Asia 2024—“Innovating for Tomorrow: Strengthening Future Resilience in Travel and Tourism”—Taiwan emphasized how the island is adapting to evolving global tourism trends. In particular,

the Taiwan Pavilion highlighted the country’s conference infrastructure, efficient transportation network, and diverse tourism offerings. This strategic focus on Taiwan’s MICE environment, combined with the government’s latest incentive policies, was well-received by international buyers, many of whom expressed interest in future partnerships.

Boosting Taiwan’s Global Visibility in the MICE Market

Taiwan’s participation

at ITB Asia successfully raised international awareness of its MICE sector and reinforced the country’s competitive edge in the global tourism market. By leveraging innovative experiences and promoting its tourism resources, Taiwan has solidified its position as a leading destination for international business events. Looking forward, the nation is committed to expanding its tourism footprint and enhancing its influence in the global travel industry.



Himalayan Hotels

Elevates Luxury With New Wellness Retreat

VILEEN Rishikesh Offers a Blend of Ayurveda, Yoga, and Modern Luxury

Himalayan Hotels unveils *VILEEN Rishikesh*, a luxury wellness retreat blending Ayurveda, spiritual tranquility, and stunning views above the River Ganges.

Himalayan Hotels has introduced *VILEEN Rishikesh*, a luxurious wellness retreat perched 170 meters above the serene River Ganges. Designed as a haven for rejuvenation, this retreat offers a unique blend of opulent accommodations, holistic wellness practices, and spiritual tranquility. Building on the success of its predecessor, *ONENESS Rishikesh*, the retreat aims to provide a transformative experience for guests seeking inner peace and revitalization.

At the heart of *VILEEN Rishikesh* is the renowned

Samagra Spa, offering an array of therapies rooted in traditional Ayurvedic principles. These treatments are designed to harmonize the mind, body, and spirit, leaving guests feeling refreshed and balanced. Complementing the spa experience, daily yoga and meditation sessions provide an opportunity for guests to deepen their physical and spiritual well-being in an environment of unparalleled tranquility.

The retreat features 14 meticulously designed luxury suites and duplexes, each offering panoramic views of the surrounding Himalayan landscape. Guests can immerse themselves in the natural beauty of the region from the comfort of their elegant accommodations, where every detail is crafted to enhance relaxation and comfort. Evenings at *VILEEN*



Rishikesh are marked by the sacred *Ganga Aarti* ceremony, a spiritual ritual that provides a serene and uplifting conclusion to each day.

Catering to a wide range of guests, the retreat is equipped with modern amenities to suit all ages. From a state-of-the-art gym and invigorating morning



yoga classes to a dedicated children's playroom, *VILEEN Rishikesh* ensures that every guest feels welcome and cared for. The seamless integration of wellness

activities and family-friendly facilities makes this retreat a perfect destination for relaxation and connection.

As part of Himalayan Hotels, the parent company

of the esteemed Ganga Kinare Hotels and Resorts, *VILEEN Rishikesh* represents a commitment to redefining luxury wellness travel. With its unparalleled combination

of Ayurvedic healing, spiritual serenity, and thoughtful hospitality, the retreat sets a new standard for holistic rejuvenation in the heart of Rishikesh.





BarQat

Mumbai's New Al Fresco Dining Destination at JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar

timeless dishes prepared with age-old techniques and authentic spices. Highlights include the smoky **Bhatti Ka Jheenga**, the aromatic depth of **Noor Mahal Biryani**, and the melt-in-your-mouth tenderness of **Gosht Nihari**. Each dish is meticulously crafted to deliver a sensory experience, immersing diners in the heart of India's gastronomic traditions.

A Culinary Celebration at BarQat

According to **Kunal Chauhan**, General Manager of JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar, "BarQat is more than just a restaurant – it's a celebration of the soul of Indian cuisine." The immersive dining experience promises to transport guests to the royal kitchens of India while adding a luxurious, modern twist.

A Royal Experience in the Heart of Mumbai

Chef Prakash Chettiyyar, Director of

Culinary at JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar, is excited to offer guests a truly regal dining experience at BarQat. "Where tradition meets luxury under the stars, we aim to deliver a memorable experience that elevates both the food and the ambiance," says Chef Chettiyyar.

Setting a New Standard for Mumbai's Dining Scene

With its grand opening, **BarQat** is poised to redefine Mumbai's culinary landscape. It offers more than just a meal – it provides an unforgettable experience where guests can indulge in exquisite North Indian flavors while enjoying a stunning poolside view.

For food enthusiasts and those seeking a unique dining adventure, **BarQat** is a must-visit destination in Mumbai, where tradition, luxury, and unforgettable flavours come together for a truly special night out.

A Gastronomic Journey Under the Stars

Mumbai is about to experience a dining revolution with the opening of **BarQat**, the newest al fresco restaurant at **JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar**. Set against the enchanting backdrop of a moonlit poolside, BarQat offers a

fresh and exciting take on traditional North Indian cuisine, blending authentic flavors with contemporary flair.

Timeless Indian Flavours with a Modern Twist

BarQat's menu is a tribute to India's rich culinary heritage, featuring

VFS Global

processes its 300 millionth application

The company processed approximately 1,00,000 applications a day between January and May 2024



VFS Global, an outsourcing and technology service specialist for governments and diplomatic missions worldwide, has crossed the 300 million applications milestone. Notably, the last 100 million applications have been achieved in the past five years despite the pandemic-driven travel slowdown between 2020 and 2022. In 2023 alone, the company processed 24.1 million applications, 35% more than in 2022, and between January and May 2024, it processed approximately 1,00,000 applications a day.

Zubin Karkaria, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of VFS Global Group, said, "We are very pleased and honoured with the achievement of this milestone,

which is a testament to the trust 69 governments have in VFS Global and a testament to the reliable, secure, and innovative services we provide across 153 countries. We are also deeply grateful to all visa applicants for using our services. Over the past year, we are honoured to have won several important contracts, including becoming the exclusive overseas visa outsourcing partner for UK visas and DHA Australia and contracts with Germany, Finland, Portugal, and Japan, who have renewed their trust in us. We remain deeply committed to continuing investments in technology and human capital development to ensure continuous enhancement of our services."

From managing 60 client

governments in 2019, VFS Global is the trusted partner of 69 governments, comprising long-term partnerships with 25 governments for over 15 years. Last year, VFS Global was honoured to have won a record seven global visa outsourcing contracts—for the UK, Australia, Norway, Sweden, Latvia, Iceland, and Austria—further cementing client governments' trust in the organisation's highly secure, efficient, and innovative solutions and its overall value proposition.

Innovation and technology are a founding pillar for VFS Global, a company that conceptualised and created the business segment of outsourced visa services with its inception in 2001. For instance, the company has introduced 16 unique digital solutions and built robust end-to-end eVisa platforms for 12 sovereign governments. Likewise, it pioneered biometric capabilities, another stellar example of innovation and adapting to changing market dynamics. VFS Global has efficiently processed more than 140 million biometric enrolments since 2007. As more governments look to integrate biometric enrollment in their visa application process, VFS Global has further developed its capabilities with Multi-Mission Model (MMM) biometric kits.

Currently, the organisation is strategically focused on leveraging GenAI-led capabilities to bring more efficiency to the customer journey. After partnering with the *Responsible AI Institute* to ensure responsible and ethical use of AI, the marker leader has set up an AI hub in Mumbai and Dubai, with one more in Berlin in the pipeline.

Finland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs awards VFS Global the contract to provide visa and resident permit services in 32 countries

Since 2010, VFS Global has handled more than 8.5 million visa applications on behalf of the Government of Finland



VFS Global has worked with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland since 2010 and, under the new agreement, will continue to provide Schengen short-term visa services and residence permit services including biometric enrolment in 32 countries (including India) across 10 regions.

Since 2010, VFS Global has handled more than 8.5 million visa applications on behalf of the Government of Finland.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland said, "We anticipate a seamless and professional collaboration with VFS Global. In our tender, we especially highlighted the global coverage of outsourced services, quality of biometrics and technical capacity, quality control, risk management, and customer service. The external service provider receives applications, collects biometric data and application fees and forwards them to the missions. It does not make visa decisions. Visa decisions continue to be the responsibility of Foreign Ministry officials."

Jiten Vyas, Chief Commercial Officer and Head of Business Development of VFS Global, said, "VFS Global is delighted that we will continue to serve the Government of Finland as their trusted service provider. We have enjoyed a strong partnership with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and welcome the opportunity to renew our services. We look forward to offering visa applicants best-in-class visa solutions and a seamless application process across 10 regions globally."

JW Marriott Chandigarh welcomes Ashish Ray as Director of Sales and Marketing

Ashish is set to boost the hotel's market presence with his expertise in sales strategy, market analysis, team management, and client engagement

JW Marriott Chandigarh has appointed Ashish Ray as the new Director of Sales and Marketing. With over 15 years of experience in the luxury hospitality industry, Ashish brings a wealth of expertise, innovative strategies, and proven leadership to his new role.

Ashish's illustrious career includes leadership roles at globally renowned hospitality brands such as The Leela, Hyatt, Accor, and Taj. His expertise in sales strategy, market analysis, team

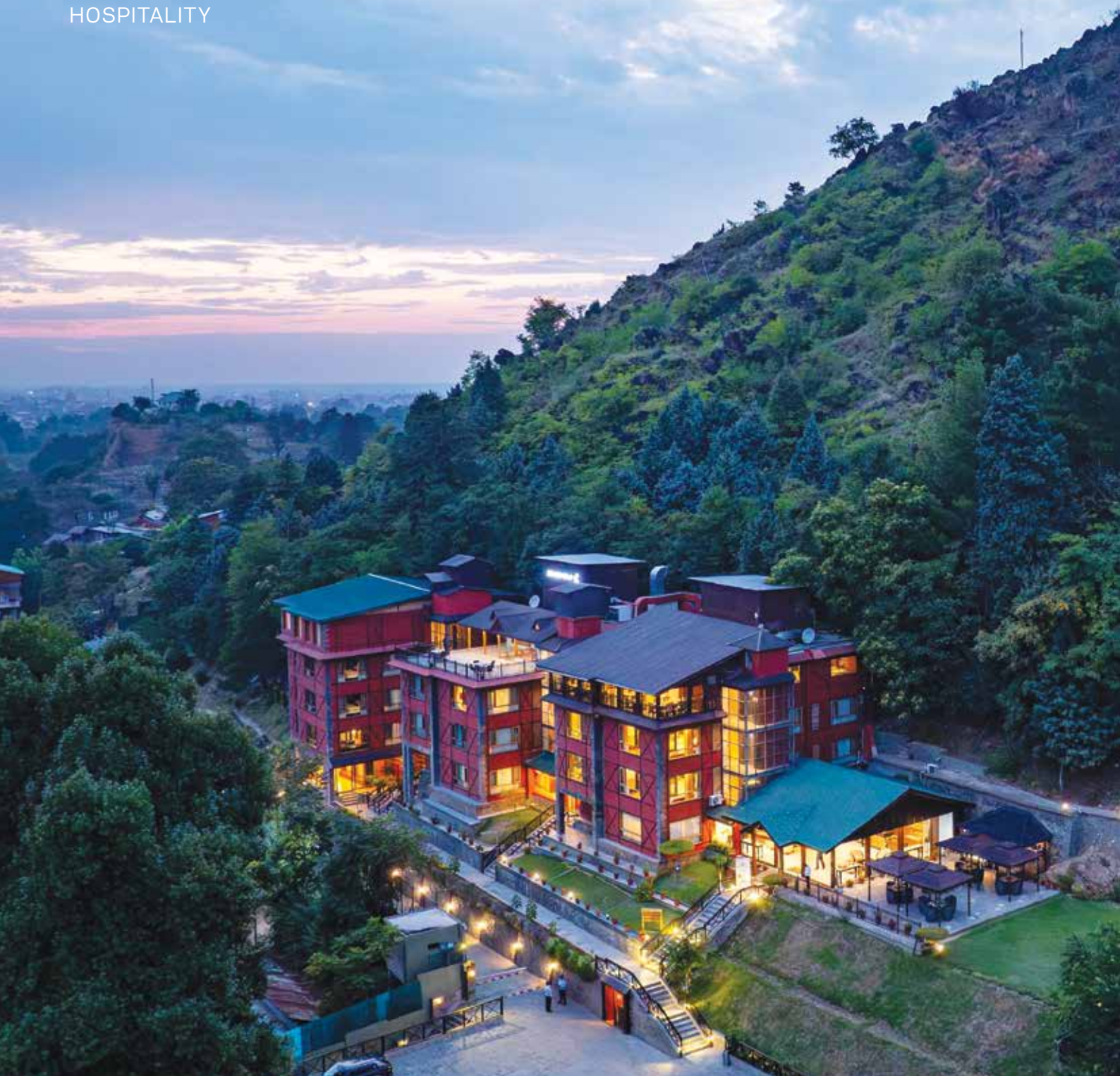
management, and client engagement has consistently driven revenue growth and strengthened brand presence.

Commenting on his appointment, Ashish shared, "I am excited to join JW Marriott Chandigarh, a property celebrated for its iconic presence and exceptional service. I look forward to collaborating with the talented team to drive growth and deliver outstanding results."

Vishal Singh, General Manager of JW Marriott Chandigarh, said, "We



are thrilled to welcome Ashish Ray to our leadership team. His extensive experience and innovative approach make him an invaluable addition. We are confident his expertise will propel the property to new heights of success and further enhance our brand's market leadership."



Golden Tulip Srinagar

A Luxurious Retreat
Amidst Kashmir's Majestic Beauty



cuisines. The hotel's wellness facilities, including a spa and Turkish Hamam, offer guests an opportunity to rejuvenate after a day of exploration. Whether visiting for business or leisure, Golden Tulip Srinagar guarantees a memorable experience in the heart of Kashmir.

Nestled within the picturesque valley of Srinagar, often referred to as "Heaven on Earth," the Golden Tulip hotel, Srinagar offers an unparalleled blend of luxury, comfort, and modern amenities. Surrounded by the awe-inspiring Himalayas, this 4-star hotel is more than just a place to stay—it is an immersive experience that brings together the beauty of the region and the best of hospitality.

A Journey to the Heart of Srinagar

Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, is a city renowned for its enchanting lakes, lush gardens, and the timeless beauty of Dal Lake, often called the "Jewel in the crown of Kashmir." A unique aspect of the city is its position on both banks of the Jhelum River, also known as Vyath in the local dialect. The river snakes its way through Srinagar, forming the lifeblood of the city, while the surrounding Himalayan peaks create

Synopsis:

Golden Tulip Srinagar offers an exquisite blend of luxury and traditional Kashmiri charm, set amidst the breathtaking beauty of the Himalayan mountains. This 4-star hotel provides a serene retreat for both business and leisure travelers, combining world-class hospitality with modern amenities. Located near iconic attractions such as Dal Lake, the Shankaracharya

Temple, and the Mughal Gardens, the hotel allows guests to immerse themselves in the cultural and natural wonders of Srinagar. With luxurious accommodations, including Deluxe Rooms, Premium Rooms, and Executive Suites, each designed with thoughtful attention to comfort and style, Golden Tulip ensures a relaxing stay. Dining options cater to diverse tastes, offering local Kashmiri flavors and international



a serene backdrop. Srinagar's mix of cultural heritage, scenic beauty, and hospitable warmth make it a prime destination for both business and leisure travelers.

The Golden Tulip Srinagar is a testament to this seamless blend of traditional beauty and modern luxury. Located in close proximity to the spectacular views of the region's natural wonders, this hotel provides the perfect haven for those looking to experience the soul of Kashmir.

Accommodations Fit for Royalty

The hotel's 51 rooms and suites are designed with a keen eye for detail and luxury. Each room at Golden Tulip Srinagar features contemporary design elements combined with traditional Kashmiri touches, making them the epitome of comfort and elegance. Wooden flooring, air-conditioning, and plush furnishings make every room a peaceful retreat. All rooms come equipped with a work desk, Wi-Fi, a flat-screen TV, tea/coffee maker, and 24-hour room service, ensuring that every need is met.

• Deluxe Rooms: Modern Comfort with Thoughtful Amenities

The Deluxe Rooms at Golden Tulip Srinagar offer 260 square feet of contemporary design, equipped with modern amenities to enhance guest comfort. Each room features high-speed internet access, a separate shower cubicle with a rain shower, and complimentary tea and coffee amenities, along with bottled water. For added convenience, a minibar is available upon request, and an iron board is provided for guests' use.

• Premium Rooms: Spacious Comfort with Enhanced Features

The Premium Rooms at Golden Tulip Srinagar offer a generous 320 square feet of space, slightly larger than the Deluxe Rooms, and are designed to provide guests with superior comfort. These rooms boast expansive views, along with enhanced amenities such as a spacious wardrobe, a large work desk, and access to a minibar (available upon request). The luxurious bathroom features a separate shower cubicle and a rain shower, ensuring a refreshing experience for every guest.

• Executive Suites: A Luxurious Retreat

The Executive Suites at Golden Tulip Srinagar offer an expansive 550-square-foot space designed with

contemporary flair. Featuring elegant wooden flooring, the suite is furnished with a plush bed, a spacious wardrobe, and a dedicated work desk, ensuring both comfort and functionality. Guests can enjoy a private terrace, perfect for unwinding while taking in the scenic views. The suite also includes high-speed internet access and a minibar (available upon request). The modern bathroom is equipped with a separate shower cubicle, a rain shower, and a Jacuzzi, offering a luxurious retreat. Additional amenities include a complimentary local newspaper, tea and coffee facilities, bottled water, and an iron and ironing board for added convenience.

Dining and Culinary Delights at Golden Tulip

Golden Tulip Srinagar is home to a variety of dining experiences designed to cater to every palate. The hotel boasts three distinct Food and Beverage outlets that showcase both local Kashmiri cuisine and international flavors.

• Sheesha Coffee Shop: The ideal spot for casual dining, Sheesha Coffee Shop offers a selection of exotic dishes, blending global flavors with local



ingredients. Whether you're enjoying a hot cup of Kashmiri chai or indulging in world-class delicacies, this is a perfect place to relax and unwind.

• **Takht-E-Sulaiman Restaurant:**
All-Day Dining: A Culinary Journey with Scenic Views

The multi-cuisine All-Day Dining restaurant at Golden Tulip Srinagar offers a seating capacity for 62 guests, serving a delectable array of renowned Wazwan Kashmiri delicacies alongside popular Indian and global dishes. Guests can indulge in a rich culinary experience while soaking in breathtaking views of the majestic mountains, making it one of the top dining experiences. A diverse menu prepared by skilled chefs from around the world ensures a truly memorable meal in a sophisticated environment.

• **Karak Chai Tea Lounge:** A nod to the rich tea culture of Kashmir, Karak Chai offers a delightful variety of teas and accompanying snacks. Savor traditional Kashmiri Girda or indulge in buttery Parathas, all while enjoying the serene ambiance of the lounge.

Wellness and Leisure: A Holistic Experience

After a day of sightseeing or business meetings, guests can rejuvenate at the Golden Tulip's world-class spa, salon, and Turkish Hamam. The hotel's wellness center offers a sanctuary for the mind and body, with treatments designed to pamper and relax. Whether you prefer a soothing massage or a revitalizing facial, the spa

ensures an unforgettable experience that leaves you feeling refreshed and recharged for the next day's travel.

Meetings and Events: Modern Spaces for Every Occasion

Golden Tulip Srinagar is also the perfect destination for corporate travelers. The hotel features spacious banquet halls equipped with the latest technology, including high-speed Wi-Fi, overhead projectors, and advanced audio-visual systems. Whether you're hosting a large conference, a social gathering, or a small business meeting, the hotel's dedicated banqueting team ensures every event is executed flawlessly.

• **Private Dining Rooms:** For intimate gatherings, the hotel also offers private dining spaces ideal for corporate luncheons or personal celebrations, accommodating up to 10 guests.

Exploring Srinagar: Attractions at Your Doorstep

Golden Tulip Srinagar is strategically located near some of the city's most iconic attractions. Guests can easily explore the natural beauty and rich history of Srinagar, all just a stone's throw away from the hotel.

• **Dal Lake:** A visit to Srinagar is incomplete without a trip to Dal Lake. Known for its iconic houseboats, floating markets, and shimmering waters, Dal Lake remains one of the most photographed and revered landmarks in Kashmir.

• **Shankaracharya Temple:**

Perched high on a hill, this ancient temple offers panoramic views of Srinagar and Dal Lake. Dedicated to Lord Shiva, it is a site of spiritual significance and architectural grandeur.

• **Mughal Gardens:** Srinagar is home to several stunning Mughal gardens, including Nishat Bagh, Shalimar Bagh, and Chashme Shahi. These gardens, with their intricate terraced designs, offer a glimpse into the opulence of Mughal horticulture.

• **Tulip Garden:** The largest tulip garden in Asia, located on the foothills of Zabarwan Range, offers a burst of color during the spring months. The sight of vibrant tulips against the backdrop of Dal Lake is nothing short of mesmerizing.

• **Hazratbal Shrine:** For those seeking spiritual solace, the Hazratbal Shrine is a revered Muslim shrine housing a relic believed to be the hair of Prophet Muhammad. It offers tranquility and reverence amidst the hustle of the city.

• Other nearby places include - **Pari Mahal or The Angels' Abode** is a seven terraced garden located at the top of Zabarwan mountain range overlooking city of Srinagar and south-west of Dal Lake. The architecture depicts an example of Islamic architecture and patronage of art during the reign of the then Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. It is a five-minute drive from Cheshmashahi, Srinagar.

Gulmarg literally means "Meadow of flowers". Gulmarg is located 60

KMs away from Srinagar which is an hour and half journey by car. Gulmarg has attracted millions of tourists throughout its existence with the scenic beauty of the Himalayan Mountains in the backdrop. One of the main attractions in Gulmarg is the Gulmarg Gondola, the Highest Cable Car in the world. The 1st phase of the Gondola takes tourists to the height of 8530 ft to Kongdori Station and the second stage of the Gondola goes up to the height of 12293 ft. Gulmarg in winter is a magnificent experience, fully covered in a white blanket of Snow which turns it into a skiers paradise.

Sonamarg - Situated at an altitude of 2730 m, Sonamarg is a mesmerizing hill station in the Ganderbal district of Jammu and Kashmir. Sonamarg literally means 'the meadow of gold' and with snow-capped mountains set against a spectacular blue sky, it is as close to heaven as it can get. The Sindh River flows through the valley. Ponies can be hired for the trip up to Thajiwas glacier, which is a major local attraction during summer.

Pahalgam is a town and a notified area committee in Anantnag district of the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir. It is a popular tourist destination and hill station. It is located 45 kilometres (28 mi) from Anantnag on the banks of Lidder River at an altitude of 7,200 feet (2,200 m). Pahalgam is the headquarters of one of the five tehsils of Anantnag district. Pahalgam is associated with the annual Amarnath Yatra. Chandanwari, located 16 kilometres (9.9 mi) from Pahalgam is the starting point of the yatra that takes place every year in the months of July-August

The Golden Tulip Experience: Unmatched Luxury in Srinagar

Whether you are visiting for business or leisure, the Golden Tulip Srinagar provides an oasis of luxury and serenity. With its blend of modern comforts, exquisite dining, state-of-the-art wellness facilities, and proximity to Srinagar's most iconic attractions, Golden Tulip is the ultimate destination for travelers seeking a refined, yet

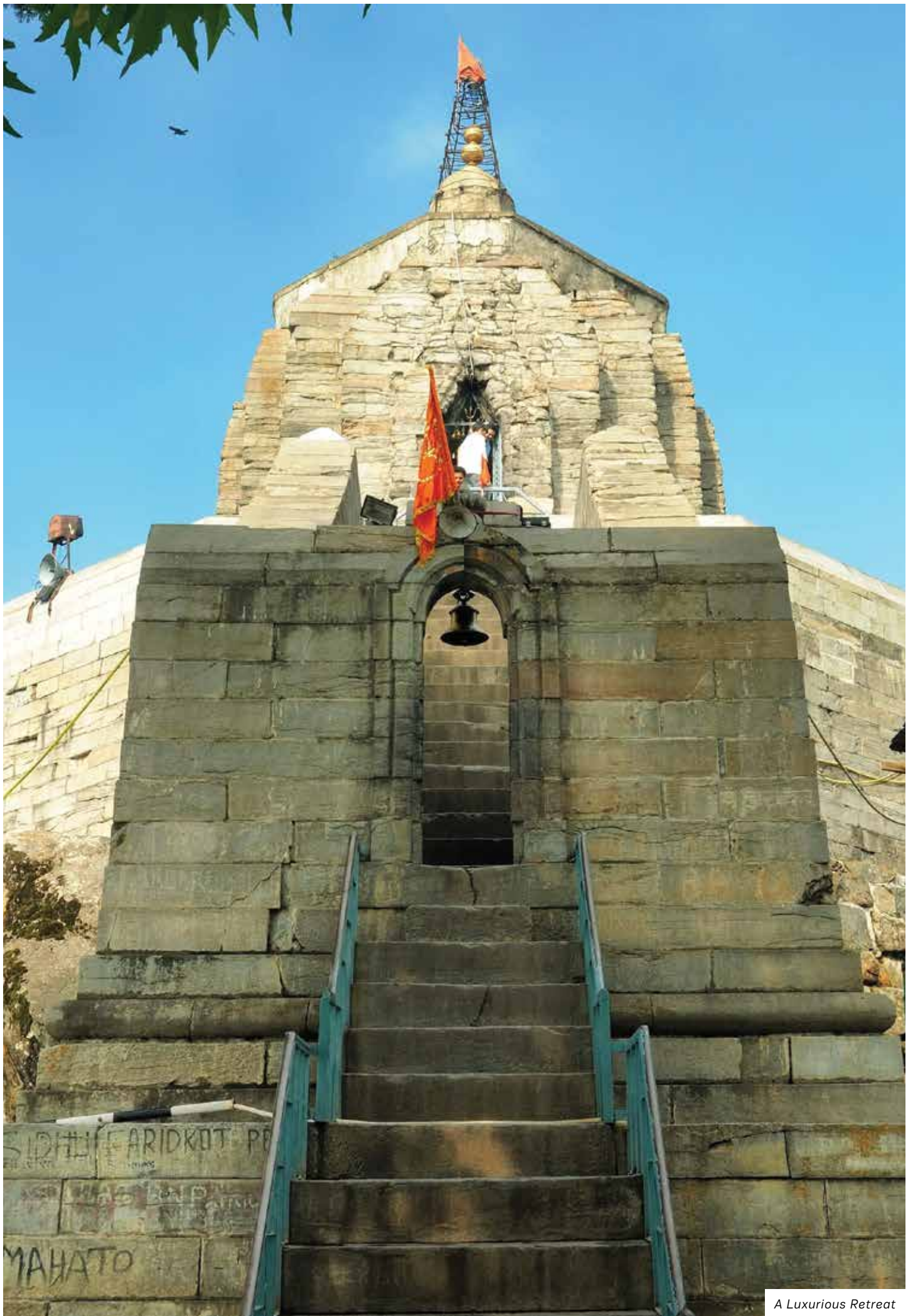
immersive, experience in Kashmir.

A stay here promises not only world-class hospitality but also the chance to truly experience the enchanting spirit of Srinagar. The hotel staff is quite cheerful and welcoming and ready to assist at all times.

Conclusion:

Golden Tulip Srinagar is a sanctuary that effortlessly combines luxury, comfort, and the rich cultural heritage of Kashmir. Whether you are looking to unwind in its opulent suites, indulge in exquisite dining, or explore the natural beauty of the region, this hotel caters to every need with impeccable service. Its close proximity to some of Srinagar's most iconic landmarks ensures that guests can easily explore the city while enjoying the finest hospitality. For those seeking a blend of relaxation, adventure, and cultural immersion, Golden Tulip Srinagar stands out as the perfect destination, promising an unforgettable stay in one of the world's most picturesque locations.





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