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LUXURY AND LIFESTYLE TRAVEL MAGAZINE

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Volume 24 | Issue 12 | January 2025 | ₹500 / \$12 US

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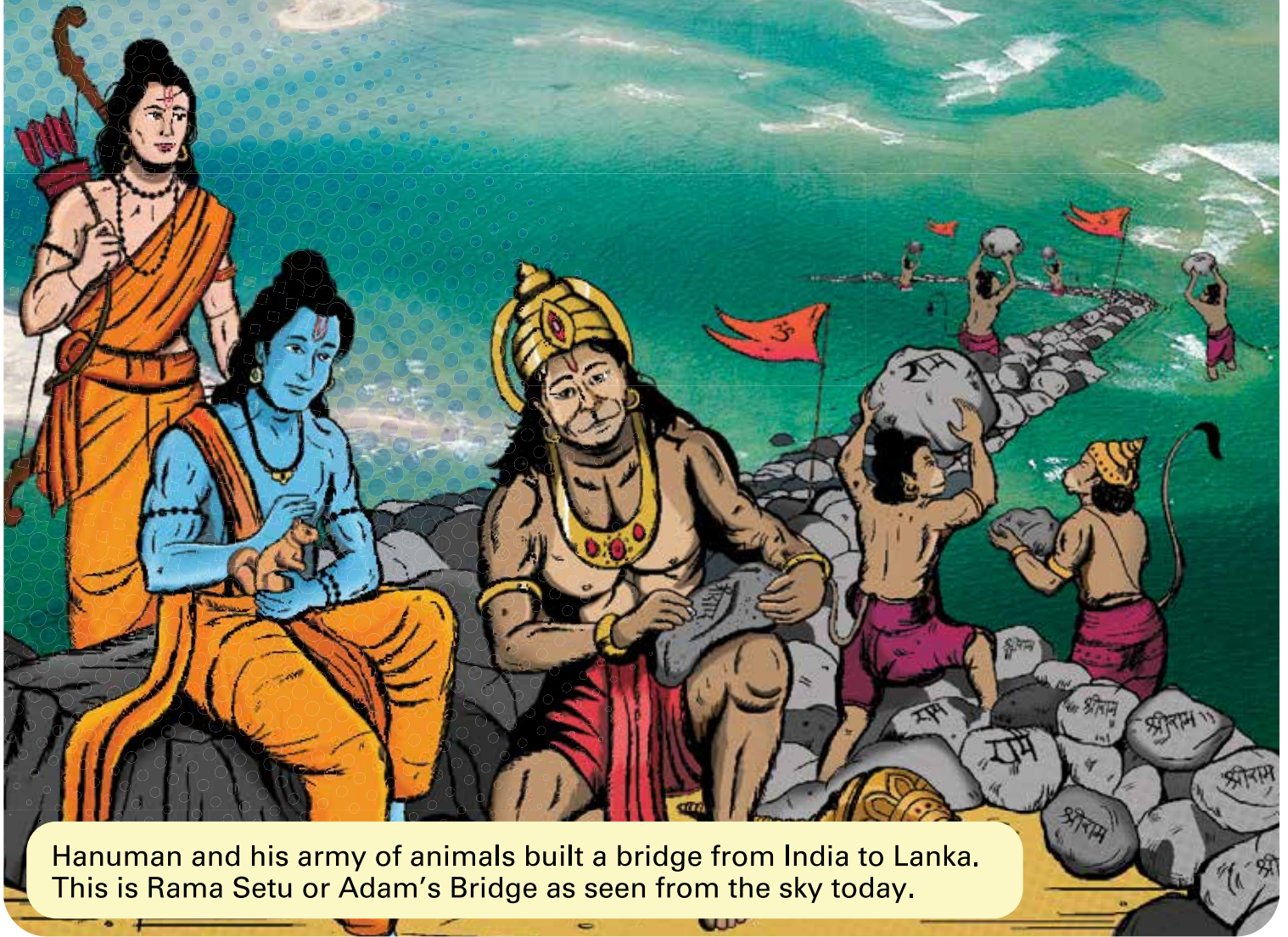
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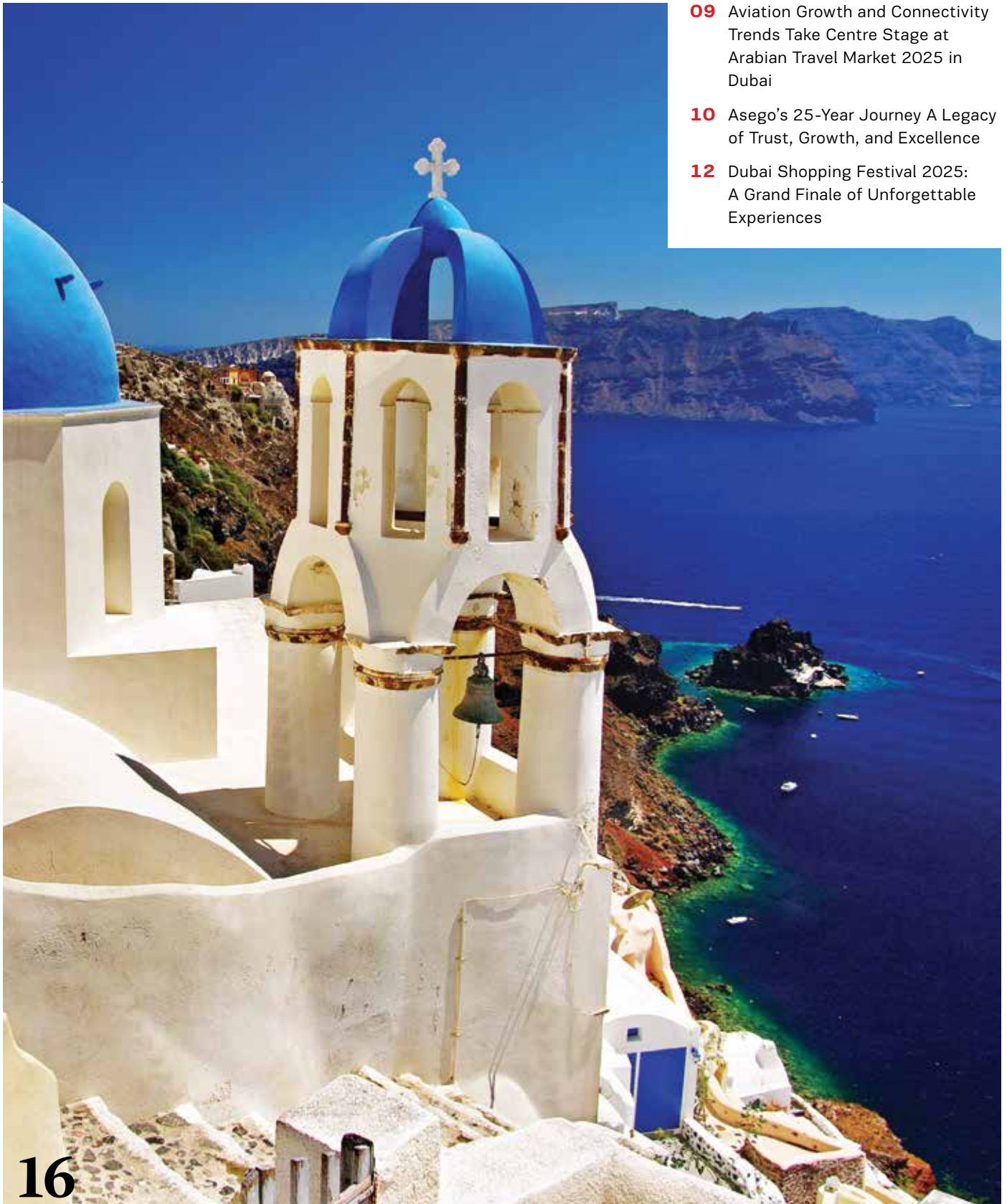




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# EDITOR'S LETTER

## ITB Berlin Convention 2025: Comprehensive programme with exciting innovations to guide a travel industry in transition

*ITB Berlin 2025 will feature 400+ experts, 200+ sessions, and 17 tracks on tourism industry trends, sustainability, and innovation.*

This year, **ITB Berlin** will once again present an extensive programme with renowned experts, top-class presentations and exciting debates. Under the motto “*The Power of Transition lives here*”, participants will explore ideas and insights for a travel industry in transition from March 4 to 6.

For convention participants from around the world, the Berlin Exhibition Grounds will once again serve as an essential platform for knowledge transfer and exchange of experiences. More than 400 international experts and speakers will provide insights into

current projects, analyse key trends, and discuss various future scenarios in over 200 sessions across 17 theme tracks. The programme, along with details on additional tracks, is now available online at the *ITB Berlin 2025 Convention Programme*.

To help navigate the extensive offerings, four stages will host the numerous sessions, which can be attended onsite or, for the first time, streamed live via the *ITB Navigator*.

Later, they will also be available on ITB Berlin's YouTube channel. The *ITB Navigator*, as the central event platform, offers detailed information on

the exhibitor list, convention and event programmes, and hall maps. Access to the ITB Berlin Convention is included with exhibitor, trade visitor, and media accreditation tickets for ITB Berlin.

### **17 theme tracks address current issues in the global tourism industry**

On the Orange Stage in Hall 7.1, speakers will explore developments in marketing and sales as well as the long-term sustainability of the industry. The **WTCF (World Tourism Cities Federation)** is Stage Sponsor of the Orange Stage. *The Future Track, Marketing & Distribution Track, and Responsible Tourism Track* offer valuable insights on topics like sustainability and climate impact

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Address changes and subscription order to [travelspan@gmail.com](mailto:travelspan@gmail.com)  
Registered with Registrar of Newspapers of India under RNI No. DEL/ENG/2000/03308

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### **PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY**

Profiles Media Network Pvt Ltd., C-59, Defence Colony, Chetna Marg, New Delhi 110024, India  
Tel - +91 (124) 4111182, Mob- +91 99999 97607, Website: [www.travelspan.in](http://www.travelspan.in)

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### **PRINTED BY**

STUDIO 9 PRODUCTIONS, C-59, Defence Colony, Chetna Marg, New Delhi 110024, India  
Volume 24, Issue 11, January 2025

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**RNI No. DEL/ENG/2000/03308** Travel Span is Printed Published Edited and Owned by **Devender Grover**. Printed at G S Graphic Arts. A-18, Naraina Industrial Area, New Delhi - 110028

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assessments. Highlights include presentations by **Mitra Sorrells** (Senior Vice President Content, **Phocuswright**) and **Zoritsa Urosevic** (Executive Director, **UN Tourism**). **Microsoft Advertising** is Track Sponsor of the Future Track, **Google** is Track Sponsor of the Marketing &

Distribution Track, and **Studiosus** is Session Sponsor of the Responsible Tourism Track.

Also in **Hall 7.1**, the Blue Stage provides a vital platform for tour operators, airlines, tourist boards, cruise companies, hoteliers, and other industry players. Tracks such as the

Tour Operator & Travel Sales Track, Carrier & Cruise Track, Destination Track, and Hospitality Track deliver diverse perspectives and strategies. Among the featured speakers are **Dimitrios Buhalis** (**Bournemouth University**) and **Vicki Miller** (**Visit Scotland**), who will discuss the role of AI in destination marketing. The **German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development** (BMZ) is Partner of the Destination Track.

The Green Stage in Hall 3.1 focuses on specific target groups and special interest offerings. The ITB Masterclass, Diversity & Inclusion Track, MICE Track, Youth, Adventure & Outdoor Track, and Business Travel Track examine trends across various travel segments. **Sebastian Gonzalez** (Associate Director Europe, **Business Events Sydney**) and **Jan Christensen** (Project Manager MICE, **HA Hessen Agentur**) will discuss new developments in destination marketing. For the first time, the Green Stage will also include the new Corporate Culture Clash Track, addressing challenges in workplace culture and corporate environments.

In Hall 6.1, the red eTravel Stage centers on the digitalization of marketing and sales. Tracks such as the eTravel Track, Hospitality Tech Track, Tours & Activities Track, AI Track, and Destination Travel Track offer deep dives into technological advancements and challenges, covering topics like AI, the metaverse, hyper-personalization, Web3, and blockchain technology. Notable speakers include **Ann-Kathrin Harms** (Head of the CEO's Division, **German National Tourism Board, DZT**) and **Leah Rankin** (Chief Product Officer, **SiteMinder**).

For the first time, the new convention format *ITB Transition Lab* will offer concise, high-value information. Marketing experts from the destinations and hospitality sectors will present data-driven recommendations in 90 minutes. Participants will gain twenty essential insights along with a selection of important tips and advice.

# Aviation Growth and Connectivity Trends Take Centre Stage at Arabian Travel Market 2025 in Dubai

The 2025 edition of the Arabian Travel Market (ATM), set to take place from April 28 to May 1 at the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC), promises to be a landmark event for the aviation industry. Under the theme “Global Travel: Developing Tomorrow’s Tourism Through Enhanced Connectivity,” ATM will bring together industry leaders to explore the key trends transforming air travel.

A major focus of the event will be sustainable aviation fuels (SAF), which are expected to play a pivotal role in the sector’s efforts to reduce carbon emissions. According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), SAF production is projected to more than double by 2025, reaching 2.1 million tonnes. Airlines such as Emirates and Etihad have already implemented SAF on flights to destinations like Singapore, Amsterdam, London, and Japan, making it a critical element in the drive toward greener aviation.

Advancements in technology will also take centre stage, particularly the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) in the aviation sector. From streamlining air traffic control to predictive maintenance and optimizing flight routes, AI is reshaping how airports and airlines operate. London Heathrow’s pilot AI-assisted air traffic control system and Gatwick Airport’s AI-driven turnaround management technology showcase the transformative power of AI in boosting operational efficiency and enhancing the customer experience.

Business travel, a key pillar of the aviation sector, will be another focal point of ATM 2025. The introduction of the IBTM@ATM feature will spotlight the resurgence of corporate travel. Research indicates that 40% of businesses plan to increase their travel budgets in 2025, a positive signal for

the industry. This surge in business travel will contribute to the projected growth of the global aviation sector, with revenues expected to surpass \$1 trillion and passenger numbers set to exceed 5 billion for the first time in 2025.

One of the most exciting trends at ATM 2025 will be the rise of the “gate escape,” driven by Gen Z and millennial travelers who view airports as destinations in their own right. Research shows that 43% of these younger travelers prioritize airport amenities such as sleep pods, spas, and fine dining when planning their trips. Middle Eastern airports are leading the way in this shift, transforming traditional travel hubs into luxury destinations that offer a richer, more indulgent passenger experience.

ATM 2025 will feature leading aviation companies, including Emirates, flydubai, flynas, and Air Charter Service. The event’s *Global Stage* sessions will explore how the aviation, cruise, and rail sectors can collaborate to enhance connectivity and create integrated travel networks. These discussions will highlight the role of sustainability and technological innovation in driving forward the future of global tourism.

The broader implications of these trends are far-reaching. The growth of SAF production, coupled with AI’s role in operational optimization, sets a powerful precedent for other industries to embrace sustainable and efficient practices. Meanwhile, the growing demand for luxury and entertainment at airports reflects changing consumer expectations and a broader shift in the passenger experience.

As Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME at ATM, pointed out, “The intersection of technology and sustainability will define the future of aviation, offering long-term benefits for both the industry

and travelers.” With its strategic focus on collaboration, innovation, and sustainability, ATM 2025 will serve as a critical platform for shaping the next era of global connectivity and tourism.

## Key Takeaways:

- Sustainable aviation fuels are projected to reach 2.1 million tonnes in 2025, more than double the levels in 2024.
- AI technologies are revolutionizing aviation operations, from air traffic control to baggage management.
- Business travel is on the rise, with industry revenues expected to surpass \$1 trillion in 2025.
- Younger travelers are driving demand for luxury and entertainment at airports, reshaping the passenger experience.

Arabian Travel Market 2025 will not only highlight these emerging trends but will also serve as a catalyst for collaboration across the global tourism and aviation sectors, paving the way for a more connected, sustainable future.



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# Asego's 25-Year Journey

**A Legacy  
of Trust,  
Growth,  
and  
Excellence**

**A**s Asego celebrates 25 remarkable years in the Indian Travel Trade, the company stands as a beacon of excellence in the travel assistance and insurance sector, trusted by both travelers and industry partners alike. This milestone marks not only a period of growth but also a reflection of the company's dedication to reshaping the travel assistance landscape.

On this momentous occasion, Mr. Dev Karvat, the visionary leader behind Asego's success, shared his heartfelt appreciation: *"I extend my deepest gratitude to our esteemed clients, partners, and every member of the Asego family. Your support, trust, and belief in our vision have been instrumental in shaping Asego into what it is today. This milestone and success are as much yours as they are ours."*

Since its founding, Asego has remained committed to more than just providing world-class travel assistance and insurance solutions. The company has focused on driving the growth of its agent partners, fostering mutual success across the travel ecosystem.

As we celebrate this significant achievement, we extend our congratulations to Mr. Dev Karvat and the entire Asego team. Their unwavering dedication to the Indian travel trade has earned them the trust and confidence of the industry, making this 25-year journey a true testament to their enduring commitment to excellence.





# Dubai Shopping Festival 2025: A Grand Finale of Unforgettable Experiences





**A**s the Dubai Shopping Festival (DSF) reaches its thrilling conclusion, excitement in the city is at an all-time high. The 30th edition of the iconic festival, which has been captivating visitors since December 6, 2024, is gearing up for a spectacular grand finale. With a star-studded lineup of performances, dazzling fireworks, and exclusive experiences, the closing days promise an unforgettable celebration that will leave residents and visitors with lasting memories. The festivities culminate on January 12, 2025, offering one last chance to partake in this monumental event.

### **DSF Closing Weekend: A Celebration Like No Other**

The final days of DSF are packed with exhilarating events, showcasing the best of Dubai's entertainment, shopping, and cultural offerings. From January 10 to 12, the city will come alive with concerts, light shows, and cultural spectacles that blend tradition with modernity. Here's a closer look at the key events you won't want to miss:

#### **Dubai Police Carnival (January 10-12, 2025) | City Walk**

For the first time, the Dubai Police Carnival, in collaboration with the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism, is set to take place at City Walk. Visitors can enjoy live performances by the Dubai Police band, mesmerizing horse shows, a military parade, and even the graduation ceremony of police candidates. The carnival promises a vibrant display of national pride, energy, and excitement.

#### **talabat DineOut Deals (Until January 12, 2025) | Citywide**

Food lovers are in for a treat with the talabat DineOut Deals, offering up to 50% off dining bills across Dubai. Talabat Pro members enjoy even greater discounts, with additional rewards for payments made via the ADCB x talabat Credit Card. This is the perfect opportunity to savor a variety of dishes at top restaurants around the city.



#### **Majid Al Muhandis and Assala (January 10, 2025) | Coca-Cola Arena**

Two of the Arab world's most beloved music icons, Majid Al Muhandis and Assala Nasri, will perform at the Coca-Cola Arena on January 10. This concert promises an unforgettable night of sensational music, captivating performances, and an electrifying atmosphere for fans of Arabic music.

#### **Majid Razavi (January 11, 2025) | Zabeel Theatre**

On January 11, Iranian music sensation Majid Razavi returned to Dubai for a highly anticipated performance at Zabeel Theatre. After a year-long wait, Razavi will bring his incredible vocal talent to the stage, offering fans an unforgettable evening of music. Tickets for this event are available from AED 299.

#### **DSF Neon Run (January 11, 2025) | Dubai Design District (D3)**

The DSF Neon Run, powered by SKECHERS, will light up Dubai's skyline with a vibrant night race. Participants can choose from 3km, 5km, or 10km routes through Dubai

Design District, ending with a lively celebration near e& MOTB. Neon-themed giveaways, glowing outfits, and upbeat music will create an unforgettable atmosphere.

#### **Dubai Marathon (January 12, 2025) | Umm Suqeim**

One of the region's most prestigious athletic events, the Dubai Marathon, returns on January 12. Athletes from around the world will race through scenic routes past iconic landmarks such as the Burj Al Arab, Madinat Jumeirah, and Jumeirah Beach Road. The marathon is expected to attract thousands of participants and spectators.

#### **Transformers 40 x Vincent Faudemer (Until January 12, 2025) | e& MOTB**

Fans of the legendary Transformers franchise can experience an immersive art installation at e& MOTB, created by artist Vincent Faudemer. The Transformers 40 x Faudemer Hologram Experience celebrates 40 years of the franchise with captivating holograms and interactive artworks that bring the iconic characters to life.





### Free Daily Fireworks (Until January 12, 2025) | Dubai Festival City Mall

Every evening, the sky above Dubai Festival City Mall will be illuminated by spectacular fireworks displays, marking the grand finale of DSF's 30th edition. Presented by Al Zarooni Group, these daily shows are a must-see for anyone visiting the mall.

### Twice-Daily Drone Shows (Until January 12, 2025) | Bluewaters Island and The Beach, JBR

A highlight of DSF, the drone shows at Bluewaters Island and The Beach, JBR, offer a mesmerizing visual spectacle. With 1,000 drones lighting up the night sky at 8 pm and 10 pm, these shows combine cutting-edge technology and artistic expression. On January 11, a fusion of drones and fireworks will elevate the experience even further.

### Dubai Lights (Until January 12, 2025) | Various Locations

Dubai Lights installations are scattered across seven key locations, bringing the city's streets and public spaces to life with vibrant, interactive artworks. Created by global artists, the installations reflect themes such as water, air, fire, energy, and connection, creating an immersive experience for visitors.

### Exclusive Experiences and Final Shopping Deals

As DSF draws to a close, there are still plenty of exclusive experiences to enjoy. Highlights include serene outdoor experiences at The Uncommon x DSF, trendy food pop-ups at e& MOTB, and unbeatable shopping deals. DSF's final weekend is sure to create an electrifying atmosphere with fireworks, drone shows, and IMAGINE shows

lighting up the night sky.

Additionally, visitors can take part in a wide array of raffles and prize draws, with life-changing rewards such as AED 100,000 in ENOC's daily prizes, the DSF Mega Raffle, and more.

### Conclusion: Don't Miss the Grand Finale

As the Dubai Shopping Festival 2025 enters its final days, there's still time to experience the magic of this historic celebration. From world-class performances and exciting races to dazzling light shows and exclusive shopping deals, the grand finale promises to be an unforgettable end to the festival's 30th edition. Whether you're a resident or a visitor, make sure to seize the opportunity to be part of this extraordinary event before it concludes on January 12, 2025.



# Abu Dhabi Sees 26% Increase in International Visitors in 2024



Abu Dhabi has reported a significant rise in international tourism, with 4.8 million visitors recorded from January to October 2024, marking a 26% increase compared to the previous year. The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) revealed that the emirate welcomed tourists from 26 key markets, including major sources such as India, China, Russia, the UK, and Saudi Arabia.

Cultural attractions also saw notable growth, with museums and heritage sites drawing 3.9 million visitors—up 21% from 2023. This surge in tourism underscores the effectiveness of the emirate's tourism strategy, which aims

to attract 39.3 million visitors annually by 2030, create 178,000 jobs, and contribute AED 90 billion to the GDP.

Recent developments have bolstered Abu Dhabi's tourism infrastructure, including enhanced connectivity through Zayed International Airport and the launch of 10 new Etihad Airways routes. Looking ahead, upcoming projects such as the Saadiyat Cultural District, Hudayriyat Island, and Harry Potter World at Warner Bros. Abu Dhabi are expected to further elevate the city's appeal.

DCT Abu Dhabi's Tourism Strategy 2030 continues to focus on sustainable growth, positioning the emirate as a leading global cultural hub.







# Greece's Tourism

## Sector Soars to New Heights in 2024, Achieving Record-Breaking Success

**G**reece's tourism industry has achieved a historic milestone in 2024, with the sector surpassing previous records in both revenue and visitor numbers. According to recent data from the Greek Tourism Confederation's research body, the country has experienced an exceptional growth trajectory that underscores its status as one of the world's top travel destinations.

### **Tourism Revenue Reaches Record Levels**

By the end of October 2024, tourism revenue in Greece had already exceeded the total earnings for all of 2023, reaching a remarkable 20.9 billion euros. With projections estimating a final tally of 22 billion euros by the year's end, the country is poised for a significant increase from the 20.5 billion euros generated in 2023. This growth not only highlights Greece's enduring popularity but also signals its resilience as a major player in the global tourism market.

### **Visitor Arrivals Surge to Unprecedented Numbers**

Greece welcomed a record-breaking 36.9 million international visitors between January and November









2024, marking a substantial increase in arrivals compared to previous years. Air travel accounted for the lion's share, with 25.5 million visitors arriving by plane, while road arrivals reached 11.4 million. According to the Hellenic Civil Aviation Authority and Athens International Airport, these numbers represent a strong year-on-year growth, reflecting the country's continued allure.

October and November were particularly successful months, with October seeing 2.3 million air arrivals—a 10.9 percent increase from the previous year. November followed suit with a 14.7 percent rise, registering 613,000 arrivals.

#### **Popular Destinations See Significant Growth**

Greece's major tourist destinations also saw considerable growth, with islands like Rhodes and Crete leading the way in terms of increased arrivals. Athens International Airport reported a 12.6 percent year-on-year increase, welcoming 7.5 million international visitors. Airports in Heraklion and

Chania also posted impressive results, with arrivals up by 6.8 percent and 8.3 percent, respectively. In addition, smaller, less well-known destinations across Greece achieved exceptional growth, with some areas experiencing a surge in arrivals exceeding 40 percent.

#### **Record Growth in Road Arrivals**

Greece's international road arrivals have also seen substantial growth in 2024, reaching 11.4 million, a 15 percent increase compared to the same period in 2023. Notably, this surge in road traffic has surpassed pre-pandemic levels, with November alone experiencing a 39.4 percent increase. Neighboring countries such as Bulgaria, Turkey, North Macedonia, and Albania have all contributed to this growth, with Turkey leading the charge, showing a 29.5 percent increase in arrivals.

#### **Key Revenue Markets Drive Success**

Germany has remained Greece's top revenue-generating market, contributing a substantial 3.6 billion

euros to the country's tourism earnings. The United Kingdom followed closely behind, with receipts of 3.2 billion euros, while the United States saw a notable 10.1 percent increase in revenue, totaling 1.4 billion euros. Italy also recorded a 15.7 percent rise in revenue. However, France, traditionally a strong market for Greece, experienced a decline of 10 percent in tourism receipts.

#### **Conclusion: Greece's Tourism Sector Poised for Continued Success**

The outstanding performance of Greece's tourism industry in 2024 reflects not only the country's growing appeal but also the successful strategies implemented to extend the tourist season and attract a diverse range of visitors. With record-breaking revenue and arrivals, Greece is firmly establishing itself as a leading global travel destination. As 2024 draws to a close, the country looks set to continue its upward trajectory, further cementing its status on the world tourism map.

# Brand USA Hosts 11th India Sales & Media Mission, Emphasizes Strengthening US-India Tourism Relations

**B**rand USA recently hosted its 11th India Sales and Media Mission, held from January 20 to 22, 2025, at The Taj Krishna in Hyderabad. The event was led by Fred Dixon, President and CEO of Brand USA, accompanied by senior executives from the organization, including Chris Heywood, Senior Vice President of Public Relations and Communications; Angie Briggs, Senior Vice President of Industry Partnerships; and Jackie Ennis, Vice President of Global Trade Development.

The mission also featured six prominent CEOs representing major U.S. destinations, including Simon Brooks, President of Bonotel; John Percy, President & CEO of Destination Niagara USA; Doug Bourgeois, Assistant Secretary of Tourism for the Louisiana Office of Tourism; Martha Sheridan, President & CEO of Meet Boston; Todd Davidson, CEO of Travel Oregon; and Liz Bittner, President & CEO of Travel South USA. The delegation comprised 48 U.S. tourism companies and 67 exhibitors, who engaged with 123 senior Indian decision-makers from the travel trade and media sectors.

During the event, expert-led speaker sessions explored trends and topics relevant to the Indian travel market, with a focus on fostering stronger connections and partnerships between U.S. destinations and Indian travel professionals.

The growing importance of India as a tourism source market was underscored by the U.S. welcoming 2.19 million arrivals from India in 2024—marking a 24.3% increase from the previous year. This positions India as the second-largest overseas market (excluding Canada and Mexico) and the fourth-largest for total international arrivals to the United States.



Fred Dixon commented on the milestone, stating, “We are extremely pleased to see strong arrival numbers from India, validating our past efforts and reaffirming our commitment for the future. As one of our top overseas markets, we are highly optimistic about Indian visitor arrivals and remain committed to building stronger partnerships.”

The U.S. is also preparing for an exciting year of new attractions and events that will continue to draw Indian tourists. Among the major family-friendly developments are Universal Orlando’s Epic Universe Park, Disneyland’s upcoming 70th anniversary celebrations, and Virginia Beach’s Atlantic Park. Additionally, major sporting events such as the FIFA Club World Cup, which will take place in the U.S. from June 15 to July 13, 2025, will further boost tourism. The tournament will feature 32 soccer teams from around the world, serving as a precursor to the 2026 FIFA World Cup, which will be hosted jointly by the U.S., Mexico, and Canada.

In addition to sports, 2026 will see the U.S. commemorate two significant anniversaries: the centennial of Route 66 and the 250th anniversary of the United States, marked by the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. These milestones are expected to further fuel travel demand.

Flight connectivity between India and the U.S. is also set to increase. Air India currently operates nonstop flights to five key U.S. cities—Chicago, Newark, New York, San Francisco, and Washington D.C.—and recently introduced its Airbus A350 on the Delhi-New York and Delhi-Newark routes. Meanwhile, European and Southeast Asian carriers have expanded one-stop services to the U.S. via their hubs in Europe and Asia, making it easier than ever for Indian travelers to visit the U.S.

Brand USA’s continued efforts to foster collaboration and expand opportunities for U.S. destinations are paving the way for even greater travel and tourism exchanges between India and the United States in the years ahead.





# Athens

## Recognized Among the Best Cities for Culture and Innovation in 2025

Athens has been named one of the 100 Best Cities in the World for 2025 in a prestigious ranking compiled by a leading consultancy firm specializing in tourism, real estate, and economic development. This recognition comes as part of the 10th edition of the *World's Best Cities Report*, which evaluates cities based on a combination of core statistics and user-generated data from platforms such as Google, Tripadvisor, and Instagram. The rankings offer a comprehensive assessment of a city's quality of life, highlighting its cultural

and modern offerings.

### **A Mixed Result: Decline in Ranking, But Cultural Flourishing**

While Athens has earned a spot on the list, it experienced a notable drop in rankings, slipping from 48th place in 2023 to 87th in 2025. The report attributes this decline to challenges in sustainable infrastructure and a reduction in the city's perceived attractiveness. However, the city is still celebrated for its ongoing transformation and ambitious development projects, with the report

dubbing Athens as "Europe's new It City."

Athens' cultural landscape continues to evolve, thanks to a series of landmark initiatives that showcase the city's blend of ancient heritage and modern innovation. Among the most noteworthy are the waterfront projects at Ellinikon, which aim to revitalize the coastline, and the expansion of metro lines, which will connect more neighborhoods and ease urban mobility. Additionally, the transformation of historical buildings into vibrant cultural spaces is a key element of the city's revitalization efforts.

### **Cultural and Social Reawakening**

Athens is undergoing a dynamic cultural renaissance, with several historic and civic venues now hosting a range of community-driven events. The Municipal Market of Kypseli, for example, has been reimagined as a cultural hub, offering concerts, workshops, and other public events. Similarly, the Olympia Municipal Musical Theater, located in the former National Opera building, has been repurposed to host diverse

performances.

Central to Athens' appeal are its rich cultural neighborhoods and iconic landmarks. The Exarcheia district, known for its vibrant street art and political activism, offers a different, yet equally compelling, perspective of the city. Meanwhile, the National Gallery and the Grand Promenade—an expansive, tree-lined, pedestrian-only path stretching 2.5 miles at the foot of the Acropolis—provide visitors with an immersive journey through Athens' historical and artistic heritage. The Grand Promenade links several key archaeological sites, offering a stunning and car-free experience of the ancient city.

### Rising in Key Categories

In the *World's Best Cities Report*, Athens also performed strongly in specific categories. The city ranked 24th globally for biking, which is bolstered by its increasing infrastructure for cycling enthusiasts. In addition, Athens secured the 28th position for Sights & Landmarks, reflecting its status as a must-visit

destination for history and culture. The Athens Olympic Museum, located in Maroussi, stands out as an important cultural attraction, honoring the city's long Olympic heritage and its role in hosting the 2004 Summer Games.

### Recognition Across Multiple Reports

This year, Athens also garnered attention in Europe, securing the 50th spot on an annual list dedicated to the best urban destinations across the continent. This recognition further underscores the city's growing reputation as an exciting, evolving destination within Europe.

### Global Urban Landscape: Athens Among the Leaders

Athens joins other iconic cities like London, New York, and Paris, which top the global rankings. These cities are celebrated for their sustainability efforts, career opportunities, and technological innovations. Other cities on the list include Tokyo, Singapore, Rome, Madrid, Barcelona, Berlin, and Sydney—each recognized for

their ability to adapt to economic, environmental, and social challenges.

In an era shaped by global economic volatility and geopolitical tensions, cities are increasingly focusing on sustainability, innovation, and livability to improve residents' well-being. As remote work becomes more prevalent and the demand for affordable housing rises, cities like Athens are leaning into their cultural and economic potential. In addition, priorities such as energy independence, food security, and reshoring are shaping more resilient, future-forward cities worldwide.

### Conclusion: Athens' Bright Future

Despite the dip in its overall ranking, Athens remains a key player in the global urban landscape. The city's strategic development projects, cultural resurgence, and commitment to modernization ensure that it will continue to attract visitors and residents alike. With a focus on sustainable urban living and innovative growth, Athens is poised to become an even more influential hub for culture, business, and technology in the years ahead.







# Ras Al Khaimah Celebrates Record-Breaking Tourism Year with 1.28 million Visitors in 2024

**T**his achievement represents a 12% increase in tourism revenues, underpinned by the opening of new hotels and resorts, exceptional events and expanded direct air connectivity.

Building on a track record of remarkable achievements, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development

Authority (RAKTDA) reports its strongest year ever, welcoming a record-high 1.28 million overnight arrivals in 2024, marking 12% growth in tourism revenues and a notable 15% rise in MICE visitors. This success is a testament to the Emirate's strategic and sustainable growth vision to attract over 3.5 million annual visitors by 2030.

Commenting on the Emirate's achievements, **Raki Phillips, CEO of Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority**, said, "2024 was a milestone year for Ras Al Khaimah, showcasing our commitment to sustainability, enhanced connectivity, and diverse experiences tailored to every traveller. Looking ahead, our



*vision extends beyond attracting more visitors; we aim to position Ras Al Khaimah as a destination of the future. With significant investments, world-class events, and groundbreaking developments on the horizon, 2025 is set to be another remarkable year."*

Several factors contributed to this robust performance in 2024, including the opening new hotels and resorts, a growing calendar of international events, increased connectivity to Ras Al Khaimah International Airport, best-in-class marketing campaigns and over 2,200 international activities and market engagements across 70 cities.

**Ras Al Khaimah's key achievements in 2024 include:**

- **Record-breaking visitor numbers:** 1.28 million overnight arrivals, marking 12% growth of tourism revenues and 15% rise in MICE visitors.
- **Global recognition for sustainability:** RAKTDA's sustainability programme was named the 'Middle East's Most Sustainable Project' at the Forbes Middle East 2024

Sustainability Leaders' Summit. This recognition underscores its status as the region's first destination to earn the EarthCheck Sustainable Destinations Silver Certification and its leadership in sustainable tourism through initiatives like Responsible RAK, its own certification programme for hotels and tourism business.

- **Enhanced connectivity:** Boosted accessibility to the Emirate with the introduction of new direct flights from key cities in Poland, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Romania, Czech Republic, Russia, Saudi Arabia and India, enhancing connectivity through Ras Al Khaimah International Airport.

- **Expanded hospitality offerings:** The opening of Sofitel Al Hamra Beach Resort and Anantara Mina Al Arab Resort introduced new luxury experiences, including the Emirate's first overwater villas.

- **Exceptional events:** From the third HIGHLANDER Adventure hiking challenge and Ras Al Khaimah Golf Championship to the Arab Aviation Summit and Global Citizen Forum







held for four consecutive years, Ras Al Khaimah continues to host world-class events. Highlights also include the 16th Ras Al Khaimah Half Marathon, the HUAWEI AppGallery Gamers Cup, and the launch of the Seven Wonders experiential concert series.

• **Record-breaking New Year's Eve celebrations:** The emirate ushered in 2025 with a spectacular fireworks and drone display, setting two new GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS™ titles: 'Largest aerial display of a tree formed by multi-rotor drones' and 'Largest aerial image of a seashell formed by drone'.

• **Workplace excellence:** For the fourth consecutive year, RAKTDA was certified as a Great Place to Work®, recognised in multiple categories: 'Best Workplaces in the Middle East', 'Best Workplaces in Hospitality™ in the GCC',

and 'Best Workplaces for Women in the GCC'.

• **Empowering local talent:** RAKTDA's inaugural Emirati Hospitality Programme, in partnership with Career Lab and the Swiss University of Les Roches, graduated 18 Emirati youth, equipping them for leadership roles in the tourism sector, supporting nationalization efforts in the hospitality industry.

#### **Driving growth in key markets**

Ras Al Khaimah continues to diversify and expand its reach in both established and emerging markets, with the CIS, GCC, Europe, India and China remaining core to its strategy. In 2024, the Emirate achieved new milestones in market engagement, further solidifying its position as a global tourism destination. New direct flights

introduced enhanced connectivity to Ras Al Khaimah International Airport from nine cities including Moscow, Russia; Bucharest, Romania; Tashkent, Uzbekistan; Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Prague, Czech

Republic; Warsaw and Katowice, Poland; Almaty, Kazakhstan; and Hyderabad, India. China has also emerged as a significant growth market. In 2024, RAKTDA boosted visibility in China through strategic initiatives including collaborations with Huawei Group and prominent Chinese travel platform Trip.com plus establishing a robust presence on Chinese social media platforms such as WeChat, Red, and Douyin. These efforts have earned RAKTDA notable recognitions, including Best Global Partner and Outstanding Strategic Partner of the Year by Trip.com, as

well as the title of Fastest-Growing Tourism Destination from Huawei Petal Ads, reinforcing Ras Al Khaimah's position as a rising destination for Chinese travellers.

### Expanding hospitality portfolio

Ras Al Khaimah's flourishing tourism sector is underpinned by its strategic focus on building a diverse hospitality portfolio with a well-balanced mix of internationally branded luxury hotels and family-friendly resorts. In 2024, the Emirate welcomed two new luxury properties, further establishing its reputation as a destination of choice. Anantara Mina Al Arab Resort, featuring the Emirate's first overwater villas, and the Sofitel Al Hamra Beach Resort opened their doors, adding to Ras Al Khaimah's world-class hospitality portfolio.

Additionally, existing properties underwent transformative enhancements. Rixos Al Mairid Ras Al Khaimah Resort and Pullman Marjan Island were rebranded and upgraded to meet the highest standards of hospitality, offering visitors elevated experiences.

### A world-class destination for events

In 2024, Ras Al Khaimah experienced a remarkable 15% year-over-year growth in Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) visitor numbers, reinforcing its status as a premier MICE destination. This success is attributed to several strategic initiatives by RAKTDA, including over 80 international MICE activities and market engagements across 20 markets. Key initiatives include a comprehensive MICE and Wedding incentive programs, the launch of an online training platform for MICE agents and Wedding Planners, and the introduction of the MICE playbook. The free visa initiative has also facilitated easier access for Indian MICE groups and wedding celebrations. Additionally, strategic partnerships with international Professional Congress Organizers (PCOs), Incentive Houses, Associations, Wedding Planners, and

corporate travel agencies have been instrumental in this achievement.

Events tourism was another key pillar of Ras Al Khaimah's 2024 success. The Emirate hosted several internationally acclaimed events such as the third HIGHLANDER long-distance hiking challenge, the 16th Ras Al Khaimah Half Marathon, the third Ras Al Khaimah Golf Championship, the fourth Global Citizen Forum and Arab Aviation

Summit, the HUAWEI AppGallery Gamers Cup, and the launch event of the Seven Wonders experiential concert series, headlined by world-renowned DJ Armin Van Buuren. Building on this success, 2025 will see the Seven Wonders concert series continue, featuring seven international acts who will perform across seven iconic Ras Al Khaimah destinations over seven weeks. The immersive audio and visual platform will provide an experience unlike any other, further cementing Ras Al Khaimah status as a global events destination.

The year concluded with a spectacular New Year's Eve celebration, earning two GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS™ titles for its breathtaking fireworks and drone display: 'Largest aerial display of a tree formed by multi-rotor drones' and 'Largest aerial image of a seashell formed by drone'.

### Building a sustainable future

In 2024, RAKTDA's initiatives earned the title of 'Middle East's Most Sustainable Project' at the Forbes Middle East Sustainability Leaders' Summit, highlighting the destination's achievement of the Middle East's first Silver Certification by EarthCheck and the Authority's pioneering efforts in responsible tourism. Sustainability efforts extend to cultural preservation, with RAKTDA building its Cultural and Heritage Vision in 2024 – a road map that will preserve 20 of the Emirate's 80+ historical and archaeological sites that date back as far as the Bronze Age. By developing these sites as key attractions to provide more authentic experiences for visitors and empowering Emiratis to actively

participate in tourism, Ras Al Khaimah will ensure its unique heritage is preserved for future generations.

Another focus area was accessible tourism with RAKTDA setting sights on ensuring Ras Al Khaimah becomes a truly accessible destination. The Authority partnered with Sage Inclusion, a global accessible travel expert, to undertake the largest accessibility assessment of its kind in the Middle East. A comprehensive 12-week audit took place end of 2024, covering over 40 hotels, 10 attractions, Ras Al Khaimah International Airport, and ground transportation, evaluating accessibility across various disability categories including mobility, vision, hearing, cognitive and allergy. The initiative aims to elevate Ras Al Khaimah as a flagship destination for accessible tourism, ensuring that every visitor can fully enjoy and explore the emirate.

### Live, work, thrive: a holistic destination

Beyond attracting visitors, Ras Al Khaimah is committed to becoming an exceptional place to live and thrive. The Emirate's balanced approach to sustainable tourism ensures that growth is achieved without compromising its unique culture.

This vision has already garnered global recognition, with Ras Al Khaimah ranked among the top ten cities for expats in the InterNations City Ranking 2024. It was also named the world's best city for expats to get started abroad, second for working overseas, and fifth for ease of settling in. RAKTDA was also certified as a Great Place to Work® for the fourth consecutive year, with accolades in the categories of Best Workplaces in the Middle East, Best Workplaces in Hospitality™ in the GCC, and Best Workplaces for Women in the GCC. The success of its inaugural Emirati Hospitality Programme, in partnership with Career Lab and Les Roches University, which graduated 18 local talents, underscores the Emirate's dedication to nurturing future leaders in tourism.





# Record-Breaking Year for India-Japan Tourism

## 233,000 Indians visited Japan in 2024



The Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) Delhi Office has announced a remarkable milestone: 233,000 Indians visited Japan from January to December 2024, representing a significant 40.0% increase in tourism from India compared to 166,394 visitors in 2023. A highlight of the year was March 2024, which recorded approx. 27,206 arrivals, reflecting an impressive 83.0% YoY growth. Another remarkable milestone was May 2024, which saw a 61.6% YoY growth and the highest monthly influx, with approx. 29,068 arrivals. May is traditionally a popular month for Indian families, as it coincides with summer vacations in India and end of Japan's 'Golden week' marking the off season for domestic travel. This makes it an ideal match for Indian tourists to visit Japan.

Additionally, 2024 saw the introduction of MICE movement to new regions, with some incentive tours extending their itineraries to Kansai and Hiroshima, whereas Tokyo had previously been the sole MICE destination. This clearly demonstrates the growing interest among Indian corporates and MICE planners to explore new locations for their MICE events.

This trend has been further boosted by promotional airline fares and improved connectivity. In 2024, the Bengaluru (South India)-Tokyo route increased to five weekly flights. As of the winter schedule for 2024-2025, there are now 26 direct flights

per week connecting Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru to Japan, significantly improving convenience for travelers. Additionally, recent codeshare agreements between airlines are set to enhance seamless connectivity from multiple Indian cities, further contributing to the anticipated growth in tourist numbers to Japan.

First-time Indian visitors predominantly favour the iconic 'Golden Route,' which includes Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, and Hiroshima. Moreover, the JNTO Delhi Office is actively promoting other stunning prefectures, such as Hokkaido, renowned for its powder snow and flower fields; Tohoku, with its vibrant autumn foliage; and Tateyama Kurobe Alpine route, a mountain sightseeing route connecting Nagano prefecture and Toyama prefecture, best known for its 'Snow Wall'. These efforts aim to showcase Japan's diverse beauty and encourage Indian tourists to expand their itineraries beyond the classic 'Golden Route.' As Japan prepares to take the global spotlight with "Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan" the country is poised to build on this momentum, inviting Indian travellers to explore its unparalleled charm.

The overall growth in arrivals reflects India's economic prosperity, rising disposable incomes, and a growing trend among Indians to explore new international destinations. Affluent Indian travellers are increasingly seeking fresh, culturally enriching experiences, positioning Japan as a prime destination.

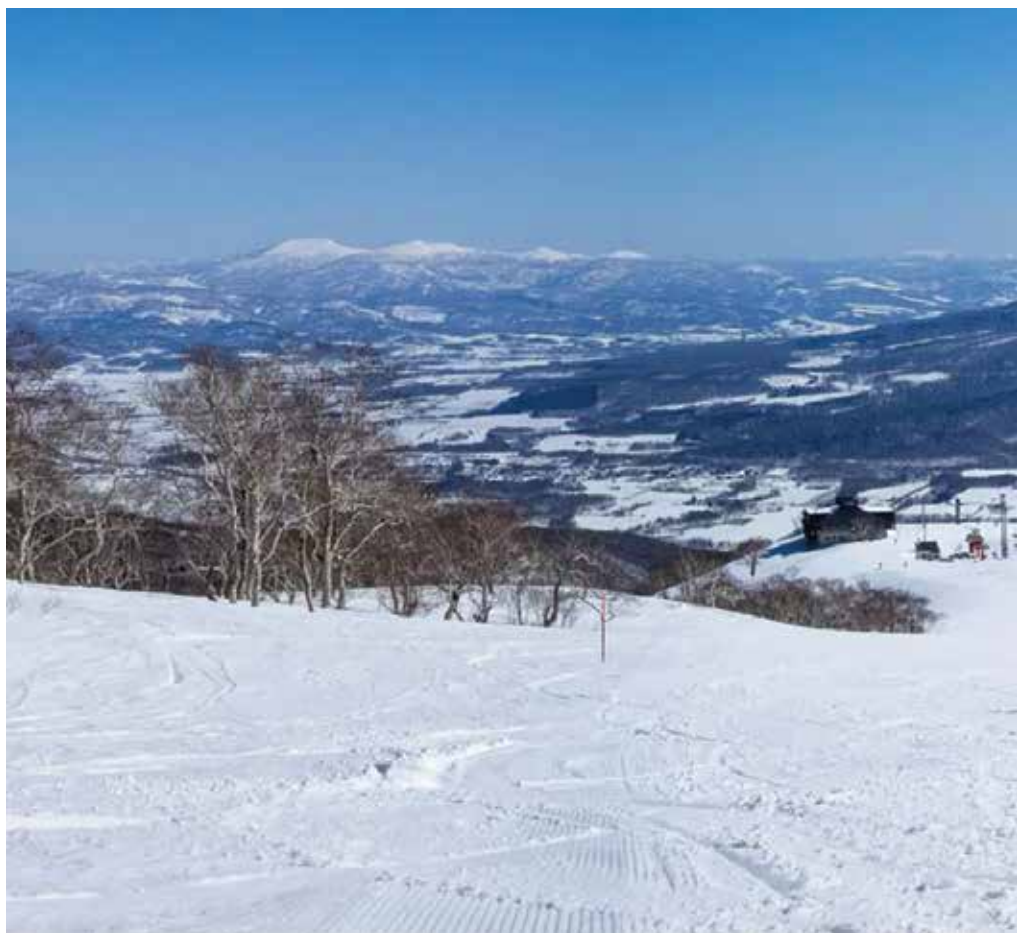




### **Celebrating Yokohama: A New Star in Japan's Night View Rankings**

Yokohama city has earned a spot among the top three municipalities in the Greater Tokyo Area for the first time, securing second place in the latest ranking of Japanese cities with the most spectacular night views. Yokohama is an easy and short trip from Tokyo, with multiple direct connections via train or bus, visitors can reach within an hour or less from Tokyo. This prestigious list, announced by the General incorporated association, YAKEI Convention & Visitors Bureau, highlights Yokohama's vibrant nightscape, including its renowned large-scale event, Yorunoyo. During Yorunoyo, buildings and structures in the Minato Mirai waterfront area and nearby locations are illuminated, creating a stunning nighttime atmosphere. Additionally, the city hosts captivating fireworks displays at its port.

Kitakyushu city and Nagasaki city, both in western Japan, retained their positions as first and third, respectively. The rankings, disclosed every three years, aim to revitalize





local communities by promoting nightscapes as valuable tourism assets. The selection is based on votes cast by individuals certified as nightscape tourism specialists by the YAKEI Convention & Visitors Bureau. Beyond its dazzling nightscape, Yokohama shares significant cultural and historical ties with India.

**Tagore's Connection:** Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore visited Yokohama's iconic Sankeien Park twice during his travels in Japan. The park,

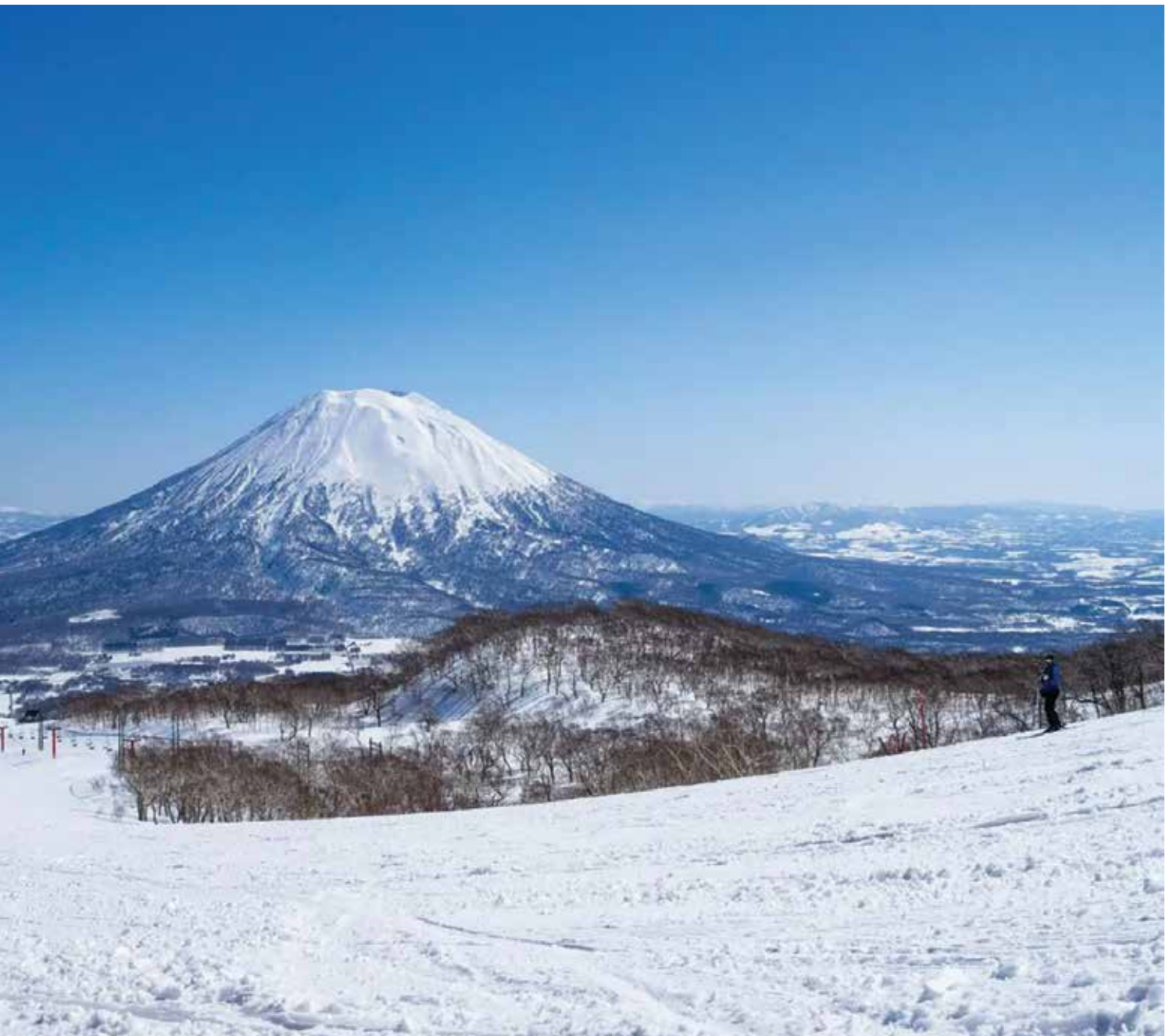
known for its traditional Japanese beauty, continues to honor this historical connection, celebrating its place in fostering cultural exchange.

**Sister Cities:** Yokohama and Mumbai have been sister cities since 1965, symbolizing a strong bond between India and Japan. This partnership has led to numerous cultural and economic exchanges, further enriching Yokohama's identity.

**Yokohama-India Center and Little India:** Yokohama is home

to the Yokohama-India Center and the Indian Commerce and Industry Association Japan (ICIJ), which play vital roles in promoting Indian culture and business in the region. Additionally, the city boasts a historic "Little India" community, preserving a vibrant slice of Indian heritage in Japan.

Yokohama's growing acclaim as a nightscape destination, combined with its rich history and cultural ties with India, makes it a must-visit city for Indian tourists.









# Disneyland Paris

Unveils Disney  
Tales of Magic  
- An Immersive  
Nighttime  
Spectacular  
That Celebrates  
the Heart of  
Disney Magic

In a captivating blend of emotion and innovation, *Disney Tales of Magic* breathes new life into the beloved façades of Main Street, U.S.A. for the first time at Disneyland Paris. Set against the backdrop of the iconic Sleeping Beauty Castle, this enchanting experience celebrates the magic that resides within each of us, offering guests a journey where nostalgia and wonder come together in a truly mesmerizing way.





Disneyland Paris invites guests to experience *Disney Tales of Magic*, an all-new immersive nighttime spectacular that takes the magic of Disney to a deeply emotional and innovative level. Building on the legacy of previous nighttime shows like *Disney Dreams!* (2012) and *Disney Illuminations* (2017), which have become unforgettable moments for visitors, this latest production shines a spotlight on the essence of magic itself.

Drawing inspiration from some of the most beloved films by Walt Disney Animation Studios and Pixar Animation Studios—including *Inside Out*, *Coco*, *Encanto*, *Pinocchio*, *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King*, *Lilo & Stitch*, *Toy Story*, and *WALL-E*—*Disney Tales of Magic* explores the deep emotional resonance of Disney stories. The show goes beyond what we see with our eyes, delving into the magic we feel within: the excitement of chasing dreams, the joy of adventures with friends, the warmth of love, the nostalgia of cherished memories, and the sense of belonging to a community or family.

The 20-minute spectacular integrates Main Street, U.S.A. for the first time alongside the iconic Sleeping Beauty Castle, transforming both into a canvas for stunning projections and visual effects. This breathtaking

fusion of technology and artistry makes guests feel like active participants in the story, as they're surrounded by intricate projections that blend seamlessly across the park's main thoroughfare and the castle itself.

Using cutting-edge technology, *Disney Tales of Magic* boasts a jaw-dropping array of special effects, including fountains, strobes, pyrotechnics, and 15 ultra-bright lasers. The show also features 60 ultra-powerful lighting fixtures,

over 200 architectural LED lighting packages, and a new immersive audio system. Drones, in collaboration with Disneyland Paris' official technology partner Dronisos, will create 3D figures in the sky, adding a spectacular new dimension to the performance. These effects, along with the show's complex programming, required over 17,500 hours of work, leveraging advanced 3D projection techniques to bring the story to life with unparalleled artistry.

Accompanying the show is an exclusive soundtrack that features over 20 iconic Disney and Pixar tracks. The centerpiece of the music is "Live in Magic," an original song performed by Noémie Legrand in both French and English. The track, recorded with a 100-piece orchestra at the legendary Air Studios in London, was composed by Legrand, Tony Ferrari, and Lucky West, and serves as a deeply emotional moment within the show.

With its dazzling scenography, intergenerational storytelling, and groundbreaking technological innovations, *Disney Tales of Magic* is poised to captivate audiences of all ages. This magical experience is included in the Disneyland Park admission ticket, ensuring that guests can share in the memories that will last a lifetime.



# MTPA launches E-learning Program to Train Travel Agents on Mauritius's Tourism Offerings

**M**auritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA) is proud to announce the launch of the “**Discover Mauritius: Destination Specialist E-Learning Program**,” a comprehensive training initiative designed specifically for Indian travel agents and tour operators. This exclusive program aims to equip participants with unparalleled expertise in promoting Mauritius, one of the world's most breathtaking and versatile island destinations.

The “**Discover Mauritius**” program offers in-depth knowledge through four engaging modules, empowering participants to become certified Mauritius Specialists. By completing the training, Travel professionals can enhance their ability to market Mauritius effectively, delight clients with tailored travel experiences, and boost sales.

#### **The Program Covers:**

##### **Module 1: A Holistic Introduction to the Island**

A comprehensive overview of Mauritius, exploring its unique history, vibrant culture, and iconic attractions.

##### **Module 2: Regional Wonders**

Learn about distinct regions of Mauritius, each offering unparalleled beauty and experiences, from majestic waterfalls to serene beaches.

##### **Module 3: Thrilling Adventures and Hidden Gems**

Learn about Mauritius adventure offerings, including water sports, hiking, and diving, along with its best-kept secrets.

##### **Module 4: Diverse Tourism Offerings**

Explore how Mauritius caters to every traveler - families, couples, MICE groups, and those seeking wellness retreats or medical tourism.

By completing the four interactive modules with 100% accuracy, the participants can earn certification and gain priority access to exclusive promotions, discounts, and networking opportunities with Mauritius tourism partners. From guiding clients through the island's regional highlights to curating unique itineraries, the program offers a chance for participants to elevate every aspect of their travel offerings.





# Riyadh to Host Saudi Tourism Forum 2025, Highlighting Kingdom's Growing Tourism Sector

Riyadh is set to host the highly anticipated Saudi Tourism Forum 2025 from January 7 to 9 at Roshn Front, marking the third edition of this key event in the Kingdom's tourism calendar. Organized by the Ministry of Tourism, the Saudi Tourism Authority, and the Tourism Development Fund, the forum will be held under the theme "To Discover," spotlighting Saudi Arabia's burgeoning tourism potential and its Vision 2030 goals.

## Showcasing Saudi Arabia's Tourism Potential

The 2025 forum will serve as a premier platform to introduce emerging tourist destinations across Saudi Arabia. Attendees will gain exclusive access to the Kingdom's diverse tourism offerings, including cultural heritage sites, eco-tourism initiatives, luxury resorts, and adventure destinations. Notable attractions such as AlUla's ancient landscapes and the futuristic developments of NEOM will be highlighted as part of the nation's ongoing transformation into a global tourism hub.

With over 100 exhibitors participating, the event promises to deliver valuable insights into the latest trends and innovations in the tourism sector. Key industry players will showcase opportunities for investment, collaboration, and skill development, all aimed at supporting Saudi Arabia's broader economic diversification strategy outlined in Vision 2030.

## Fostering Investment and Economic Growth

As Saudi Arabia continues to

position itself as a global tourism destination, the forum will play a crucial role in attracting international investors. High-profile projects like The Red Sea Project, Diriyah Gate, and Qiddiya will be presented as key opportunities for investment. These initiatives are expected to create world-class tourism destinations and drive sustainable growth in the industry.

Key features of the investment-focused sessions will include:

- **Strategic investment panels** exploring funding opportunities for tourism ventures.
- **Networking platforms** to connect stakeholders and explore potential collaborations.
- A strong emphasis on **sustainability** and innovation as the Kingdom works towards becoming a global leader in tourism.

## Educational Opportunities for Professionals

Beyond showcasing destinations and investment opportunities, the forum will offer a rich program of educational content aimed at industry professionals. Workshops and seminars will delve into pressing topics such as digital transformation in tourism, customer experience enhancements, and sustainable tourism practices.

Highlights include:

- **Interactive workshops** led by experts from the tourism sector.
  - **Panel discussions** on best practices for sustainable tourism development.
  - Presentations on emerging technologies and their impact on the tourism industry.
- These sessions will provide



attendees with actionable insights and strategies to enhance their expertise and drive growth in the sector.

## A Hub for Networking and Collaboration

The forum will bring together business leaders, investors, government officials, and dignitaries, fostering an environment of collaboration and networking. Attendees will have the opportunity to:

- **Connect with international travel companies** and local stakeholders.



- **Explore government-backed initiatives** designed to drive the Kingdom's tourism growth.

- **Establish partnerships** that align with the goals of Saudi Vision 2030.

This collaborative spirit is central to the forum's objective of diversifying the Saudi economy and increasing the contribution of tourism to the national GDP.

#### **Riyadh: A Prime Location for Global Tourism Events**

The choice of Riyadh as the host city underscores its growing stature

as a business and tourism hub in the Middle East. The capital city is home to landmark attractions such as Kingdom Centre and Diriyah Gate, making it a fitting backdrop for such a prestigious event. Roshn Front, with its state-of-the-art facilities, will provide an ideal venue for exhibitors, speakers, and attendees, enhancing the overall experience of the forum.

#### **A Vision for the Future**

The Saudi Tourism Forum 2025 serves as a testament to Saudi Arabia's commitment to building a sustainable,

innovative, and globally competitive tourism sector. By showcasing its rich cultural heritage, stunning natural landscapes, and visionary developments, the Kingdom aims to reshape the future of global tourism.

Whether you are an investor, business leader, or simply a traveler eager to discover new destinations, the Saudi Tourism Forum 2025 offers a unique opportunity to explore the dynamic potential of Saudi Arabia. Join the event from January 7 to 9 in Riyadh and be part of this transformative journey.



# Qatar Sets the Stage for a Thrilling 2025 with Major Events to Boost Global Tourism

Qatar is kicking off 2025 with a packed calendar of high-profile events designed to showcase the country's growing appeal as a dynamic global destination. From world-class

sports competitions to cultural festivals and thrilling entertainment, Qatar is positioning itself as a year-round destination for travelers seeking diverse and unforgettable experiences. Whether

it's adventure in the desert, luxury shopping, or top-tier entertainment, Qatar is set to captivate a global audience and redefine its tourism profile.



### Sealine Season: A Desert Adventure Like No Other

The year's first major event, **Sealine Season**, runs from January 3 to 27 at Sealine Beach, offering an action-packed experience for adventure enthusiasts. Set in the dramatic desert landscape, Sealine Season brings together a variety of activities including desert safaris, ATV rides, monster trucks, and 4x4 simulations. Visitors can also enjoy horse riding, boat trips, fishing excursions, and a series of vibrant entertainment options. The event includes concerts, fireworks every Friday, roaming performances, and exciting drone shows. One of the most anticipated highlights is the **kite shows**, running from January 16 to 18, offering a spectacular display of colors in the desert sky.

### Ras Abrouq: Immersive Desert Exploration

Parallel to Sealine, **Ras Abrouq** is also making waves with its immersive desert activities. Running until January 18, this event invites visitors to experience the heart of the Qatari desert with camel and horse rides, nature trails, and even thrilling hot air balloon rides. Set against the stunning backdrop of the Zekreet Film City, Ras Abrouq also offers a chance to explore a traditional Bedouin-style village, adding a cultural dimension to the desert adventure. Exhibitions, concerts, and family-friendly workshops further enrich the experience.

### Shop Qatar Festival 2025: A Shopper's Paradise

Kicking off in early January, the **Shop Qatar Festival 2025** runs until February 1 and has quickly become the country's largest shopping and entertainment event. The festival offers significant discounts, live entertainment, and a chance to win extravagant prizes, including luxury cars and a Tesla Cybertruck. With over 15 malls participating, it promises a shopping experience like no other, making it a key attraction for both residents and international visitors.

### Cultural Highlights: Msheireb Museums and Doha Jewellery & Watches Exhibition

Qatar's cultural scene will also shine in 2025. The **Msheireb Museums** are hosting the **Hosh Msheireb** event throughout January, featuring a variety of performances and activities designed for all ages. Visitors can explore Qatar's heritage and modernity through exhibitions and interactive experiences.

Meanwhile, the **Doha Jewellery & Watches Exhibition**, set for January 30 to February 5, will showcase the finest in luxury craftsmanship. Drawing more than 30,000 visitors from around the world, this prestigious event highlights Qatar's growing prominence as a global luxury hub.

### Qatar International Food Festival and ATP Open Qatar: Culinary and Sporting Excellence

Qatar's reputation as a cultural crossroads is further cemented with the **Qatar International Food Festival (QIFF)**, which runs from February 12 to 22. Now in its 14th edition, QIFF celebrates the country's rich culinary heritage with cooking classes, live demonstrations, and a series of family-friendly activities.

For sports fans, the **ATP Open Qatar**, from February 17 to 22, is set to be a landmark event. Transitioning from an ATP 250 to an ATP 500 tournament, it will feature top tennis players like Novak Djokovic, Daniil Medvedev, and Andrey Rublev, making it a must-see event for tennis enthusiasts.

### E1 Doha Grand Prix: A New Frontier in Racing

Qatar is also making history with the **E1 Doha Grand Prix**, the world's first all-electric race boat series, taking place on February 21-22 at the Corinthia Yacht Club on The Pearl Island. The event promises an exciting new addition to Qatar's growing portfolio of motorsport events, offering an electrifying experience for racing fans and setting the stage for the

country's rising prominence in the world of sport.

### Web Summit Qatar 2025: A Technology Powerhouse

Qatar is gearing up to host the **Web Summit Qatar 2025** from February 23 to 26, bringing the world's largest technology conference to the Middle East. With over 15,000 participants expected, including top investors and innovators from 180 countries, the summit promises to be a major milestone for Qatar's ambitions to become a tech hub in the region.

### Ed Sheeran in Concert: A Musical Extravaganza

Qatar's entertainment offerings will also include a highly anticipated concert by **Ed Sheeran** on April 30 at the Lusail Multipurpose Hall. As part of his **Global +==x Tour 2025**, Sheeran's return to Doha after his sold-out 2015 concert is expected to be a highlight of the country's musical calendar.

### Implications for Global Tourism

With its diverse calendar of events, Qatar is positioning itself as a key player in the global tourism industry. From sports enthusiasts to business travelers and culture seekers, the country is set to attract visitors from every corner of the world. The broad array of events—ranging from high-stakes sports competitions to cutting-edge tech conferences and cultural festivals—reinforces Qatar's commitment to becoming a premier destination for international tourism.

As Qatar continues to invest in world-class infrastructure and hosts major international events, its status as a year-round destination is becoming ever more apparent. For travelers, this means more opportunities to experience the best in sports, entertainment, shopping, and culture, all set against the backdrop of Qatar's stunning architectural landscapes and rich heritage.

Qatar's 2025 calendar is just the beginning. As the country's global profile grows, so too will its appeal as a must-visit destination in the Middle East.



# Malaysia's Bold New Campaign: Attracting Global Tourists with Visa-Free Travel and a Fresh Identity



Malaysia is setting the stage for an exciting new chapter in its tourism story with the launch of the highly anticipated **Visit Malaysia 2026 (VM2026)** campaign. This ambitious initiative aims to welcome **35.6 million international visitors** and generate a remarkable **RM147.1 billion** in tourism receipts. Officially unveiled at the **Malaysia Airlines Engineering Complex** in Sepang, Selangor, the campaign was presented

by **Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim** and **Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing**. The announcement signals Malaysia's strong push to solidify its status as a global tourism leader by blending modern appeal with sustainability and cultural richness.

## **A Fresh Look: New Logo, Theme Song, and Mascot**

At the heart of the **VM2026**

campaign is a revamped visual identity that includes a new **logo**, **theme song**, and **mascot**. Each element has been carefully crafted to reflect Malaysia's vibrant and diverse culture. The logo, inspired by traditional **batik** designs and incorporating the **hibiscus**—the national flower—symbolizes the nation's natural beauty and cultural heritage while highlighting inclusivity.

The **theme song**, titled "**Surreal**

**Experiences**", is a melodic fusion of languages and musical styles, designed to capture Malaysia's rich cultural mosaic. Composed by a group of renowned Malaysian artists, the song invites global travelers to discover the country's breathtaking landscapes, diverse traditions, and warm hospitality.

Meanwhile, the **Malayan Sun Bear** has been chosen as the official mascot, underscoring Malaysia's dedication to wildlife conservation and biodiversity. This heartwarming symbol aims to connect with audiences of all ages, adding a sense of warmth and inclusivity to the campaign.

### Sustainability: A Pillar of the Campaign

Sustainability is at the core of the **VM2026** vision, with the campaign focusing on promoting **high-yield** and **sustainable tourism**. Minister Tiong emphasized that the goal is not just to bring tourists to Malaysia, but to ensure that their experiences contribute to preserving the country's natural resources and cultural assets. This includes initiatives such as promoting **ecotourism**, encouraging **short stays**, and enhancing **layover programs**.

The campaign also emphasizes **community empowerment** by ensuring that tourism's economic benefits reach rural and less-developed areas. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim echoed this sentiment, highlighting the importance of fair distribution of tourism revenue to ensure that both urban and rural communities benefit from Malaysia's tourism growth.

### Celebrating Malaysia's Cultural Richness and Wildlife

The **VM2026** campaign will place a significant focus on Malaysia's diverse cultural heritage. From its historical sites to its vibrant festivals, the campaign seeks to offer international visitors an immersive experience into the country's traditions. The mascot, the **Malayan Sun Bear**, symbolizes this commitment to preserving the

country's unique wildlife, serving as a reminder of Malaysia's ongoing conservation efforts.

### Major Events and Collaborations Ahead

A key highlight of the lead-up to **VM2026** will be the **Malaysia Sarong Music Run**, set to take place on **February 8, 2024**, at the iconic **Petronas Twin Towers**. This highly anticipated event is expected to attract over **20,000 participants** and will showcase Malaysia's rich cultural heritage through music, fitness, and culinary delights.

In addition to these events, **VM2026** will involve strategic collaborations with prominent global and local partners, including **Malaysia Airlines, Huawei, MasterCard, Shangri-La, and The Malaysian Association of Hotels**. These partnerships will enhance the campaign's reach and create enhanced travel experiences for visitors.

### Upgrading Tourism Infrastructure

To ensure that Malaysia meets the evolving needs of international travelers, the **VM2026** campaign focuses heavily on **upgrading tourism infrastructure**. Key areas of development include:

- **Improved Connectivity:**

Enhancing air travel options and transportation networks to provide seamless travel experiences.

- **Community Empowerment:**

Ensuring that local communities are involved in tourism development, so the economic benefits are shared more equitably.

- **Digital Innovation:**

Leveraging technology to improve visitor experiences, including the implementation of **digital ticketing, augmented reality tours, and multilingual support** for international guests.

### A Vision for Sustainable Growth

With **VM2026**, Malaysia is not just aiming to boost tourism numbers but also to create a model of

**sustainable tourism** that balances growth with environmental and cultural preservation. By focusing on attracting **high-yield tourists**—those who spend more during their stay—Malaysia hopes to increase economic returns while minimizing the ecological impact of tourism. Central to this strategy is a focus on **ecotourism** and **cultural tourism**, offering travelers authentic, meaningful experiences that benefit both visitors and the local communities.

### A Call to Malaysians

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and Minister Tiong King Sing have called on all Malaysians to be ambassadors for the **VM2026** campaign. The message is clear: tourism is not just about the sights but about creating **profound connections**. Through stories, smiles, and hospitality, the people of Malaysia can play an essential role in attracting international visitors and creating lasting memories.

As Minister Tiong remarked, "We aim to offer visitors harmony, warmth, and unforgettable experiences—these are the qualities that define our nation and will make their visit special."

### Conclusion: Setting a New Global Standard

The **Visit Malaysia 2026** campaign is a transformative step in Malaysia's tourism strategy, focusing on sustainability, inclusivity, and cultural heritage. By integrating innovative strategies, bolstering infrastructure, and empowering local communities, **VM2026** aims to position Malaysia as a premier global destination that offers far more than just a vacation—it offers a chance to be part of something unique and meaningful.

With ambitious targets, strategic partnerships, and a clear focus on long-term growth, **VM2026** is set to put Malaysia firmly on the world's tourism map, attracting millions of travelers seeking new experiences while making a positive impact on the country's cultural and environmental landscape.



# Taiwan introduces digital nomad visa: Visa holders can stay in the country for up to six months



*Taiwan's National Development Council formally launched the new Taiwan Digital Nomad Visa at a ceremony held in Tainan City last 20th December.*

**D**rawing from the implementation practices in other countries, the NDC will issue digital nomad visas on a trial basis.

Depending on the effectiveness of the pilot program, it will consider amending the Act for the Recruitment and Employment of Foreign Professionals to extend the visa's duration.

#### **First steps**

According to NDC minister Liu Chin-

ching, this is Taiwan's initial foray into recruiting digital nomads, with Tainan being the starting point of the new programme.

Liu pointed out how Taiwan has several major advantages where drawing in digital nomads is concerned when attracting digital nomad talent.

The minister likewise cited a 2024 report by Global Citizen Solutions wherein Taiwan ranked first in Asia and 12th globally for digital nomads thanks to its Employment Gold Card.

Liu added that Taiwan especially welcomes digital nomad talent from Japan, South Korea, and other countries within the region.

### A community worth supporting

Liu pointed out that, currently, the digital nomad community numbers around 35 million globally and is projected to reach 40 million.

As these individuals possess exceptional digital skills and extensive experience, Taiwan will create a favourable environment for them in which their ideas may prosper.

That said, the Taiwanese government also plans to provide funding and investment opportunities in order to support entrepreneurship in Taiwan and encourage digital nomads to settle in the country.

Following President Lai Ching-te's directive, the country will be

allocating NT\$150 billion a year for initiatives related to innovation and entrepreneurship, two concepts that drive digital nomads.

### Who can apply for a digital nomad visa?

The digital nomad visa aims to attract foreign nationals who are professional and able to work remotely digitally.

This includes:

1. Individuals working remotely in Taiwan.
2. Those who have applied for digital nomad visas in other countries and intend to work remotely in Taiwan.
3. Individuals aged 30 or above with an annual income of at least US\$60,000 in the previous year, or those aged 20 to 29 with an annual income of at least US\$24,000 in the previous year.

A short-term visa will be issued with an initial validity of three months. Before expiration, it can be extended once for another three months, allowing for a maximum stay of six months.

For applicants who have previously obtained digital nomad visas from other countries, the Ministry of the Interior's review process will be waived, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will directly issue the visa.

The visa can later be converted to a work visa, or the holder can apply for an Employment Gold Card or Entrepreneur Visa.

However, once a work visa is issued, the digital nomad visa will become invalid.

Foreign nationals may bring their spouses and children to stay in Taiwan, but all applicants and their dependents must purchase adequate commercial insurance.

## Israel launches e-visa system for Indian tourists

Starting January 1, 2025, the Israel Ministry of Tourism (IMOT) has rolled out a new electronic visa (e-Visa) system aimed at simplifying the visa process for Indian tourists. This move marks a significant milestone in enhancing tourism ties between Israel and India, providing Indian nationals with a more efficient and user-friendly application process.

This digital innovation allows Indian tourists to complete their visa applications entirely online, eliminating the need for physical paperwork and streamlining the process for a hassle-free travel experience.

The e-Visa platform offers a seamless and user-friendly interface, enabling applicants to submit their details from anywhere, at any time. By integrating with Israel's Entry Travel Authorization (ETA) system, the platform ensures efficient processing and timely approvals, reflecting Israel's commitment to modernizing its entry procedures. Simplified documentation requirements further enhance the system's accessibility, catering to individual travelers while maintaining robust security standards.

This initiative marks a significant milestone in Israel's efforts to strengthen tourism ties with India, acknowledging the growing importance of Indian tourists to the country's travel sector. While individual applications benefit from the

e-Visa system, group visa submissions will continue through traditional channels.

By introducing this innovative platform, Israel reaffirms its dedication to fostering international tourism and enhancing the travel experience for Indian visitors. The move aligns with Israel's broader goals of improving accessibility, efficiency, and convenience for travelers worldwide.





# Moscow Strengthens Ties with India to Boost Tourism and MICE Engagement



**T**he Moscow City Tourism Committee is ramping up efforts to deepen collaboration with India's Outbound Tourism with special focus on the MICE sector.

Moscow is reinforcing its status as a premier destination for both leisure and business tourism, with India emerging

as a key strategic partner. After 2020 India was among the leading non-CIS countries sending tourists to Moscow, a trend that continued robustly into 2024. The first half of 2024 saw a **remarkable 1.5-fold increase in Indian travelers to Moscow** compared to the same period in 2023,

amounting to 28,500 visitors. This growth was driven primarily by the introduction of the e-visa system in August 2023, which made travel for Indian passport holders more accessible and boosted MICE traffic from India to Russia.

**Mr. Evgeny Kozlov, First Deputy**

**Head of the Office of the Mayor and the Government of Moscow, Chairman of the Moscow City Tourism Committee,** “While most tourists visit Moscow for cultural, educational, and entertainment purposes, the city has also been focusing on expanding business tourism, which is now a significant contributor to the local economy. By 2030 the number of foreign tourists is expected to reach 6 million people, mainly due to travelers from the CIS countries, the Asia-Pacific region, India, the Middle East and other parts of the world. “

Moscow is all set to captivate audiences at the **OTM International Tourism Exhibition** in Mumbai from January 30 to February 1, 2025. Over



three days, the Russian capital will present the best it can offer in cultural, leisure, and business tourism.

Ahead of the exhibition, **on January 28, a Moscow Business Mission** will bring together prominent Moscow tourism representatives and approximately 80 Indian tour operators and industry stakeholders. On January 29, a reception hosted by the Moscow City Tourism Committee will welcome Indian partners, with high-ranking officials in attendance, including **Ivan Fetisov, Consul General of the Russian Federation in Mumbai, Victor Gorelykh, the Director of the Russian House in Mumbai, and Evgeny Kozlov, Chairman of the Moscow City Tourism Committee.**

## Visit California President & CEO Caroline Beteta Issues Statement on Los Angeles Wildfires

**C**aroline Beteta, President & CEO of Visit California, issued the following statement regarding the recent wildfires in Los Angeles:

“We are still processing the devastating effects of the Los Angeles wildfires and the toll they’ve taken on the people and communities of LA, as well as those who hold the city dear.

“We are incredibly grateful for the tireless efforts of first responders, and deeply moved by the outpouring of support from across the state. From Angelenos volunteering their time to local restaurants offering free meals, to the tourism industry stepping up with donations and hotel discounts for evacuees, we have witnessed the true spirit of California’s resilience. When challenges arise, Californians come together, and now we are asking for your continued support.

“Los Angeles has always been a global

symbol of hope, creativity, and dreams—whether through the silver screen or its world-famous landmarks. Today, the city needs help writing its recovery story. One of the most impactful ways to contribute to the recovery of Los Angeles is by planning a trip.

“While some areas have been affected, over 98 percent of Los Angeles County remains untouched by the flames. The city’s iconic attractions, including the Hollywood Sign, Universal Studios Hollywood, the Santa Monica Pier, the Getty and Getty Villa, Griffith Observatory, and more, are intact and welcoming visitors.

“Los Angeles’ tourism economy is a vital lifeline for many of its businesses and residents, especially those whose lives have been upended by the fires. We encourage everyone to plan a visit to help support local communities and businesses during this critical time.”

#WeLoveLA





Elevate your 2025 bucket list:

# Boundless Opportunities Await – Make 2025 the Year You Escape to The Maldives with THE OZEN COLLECTION

As the first month of 2025 unfolds, it's the perfect time to finalize your luxury travel plans for the year ahead. Whether you're craving peaceful seclusion, thrilling adventures, or a rejuvenating wellness retreat, THE OZEN COLLECTION promises an unparalleled escape. With two extraordinary Maldivian resorts—OZEN RESERVE BOLIFUSHI and OZEN LIFE MAADHOO—this exclusive collection offers the ultimate blend of sophistication, relaxation, and adventure.

Nestled among the Maldives' renowned turquoise lagoons and pristine white-sand beaches, each private island in THE OZEN COLLECTION serves as an oasis of luxury. From bespoke dining experiences to personalized wellness therapies, every detail is curated to deliver a transformative and unforgettable escape.

"We pride ourselves on creating experiences that exemplify refined elegance and personal luxury," says Euan David Blake, Assistant Vice President – Communications. "Each resort is its own unique sanctuary, offering the finest in comfort, service, and lasting memories. As you plan your travels for 2025, we invite you to discover the transformative magic of the Maldives with us."

## OZEN RESERVE BOLIFUSHI: A New Standard of Luxury

Located on a tranquil island, OZEN RESERVE BOLIFUSHI redefines the concept of luxury with its exclusive

RESERVE™ Plan. This all-inclusive offering ensures a seamless, stress-free experience with world-class comfort and privacy. Highlights of this indulgent retreat include:

- **Exquisite Dining:** Five exceptional restaurants serving a diverse range of global flavors, fresh seafood, and tailored menus for a culinary journey like no other.
- **Butler Service:** A dedicated butler who anticipates your every need, providing personalized service at every turn.
- **Wellness Retreats:** The ELE | NA Elements of Nature Spa offers a fusion of traditional Maldivian wellness rituals and modern therapies to rejuvenate both body and mind.
- **Extraordinary Accommodations:** Choose from overwater villas with slides and infinity pools, or luxurious beachfront abodes with uninterrupted views of the Indian Ocean.

Whether you're planning a romantic getaway, a family vacation, or a solo adventure, OZEN RESERVE BOLIFUSHI promises a sanctuary of peace and unparalleled luxury.

## OZEN LIFE MAADHOO: Effortless Luxury and Adventure

Just a short speedboat ride from Malé International Airport, OZEN LIFE MAADHOO is nestled in the vibrant South Malé Atoll. The resort's INDULGENCE™ Plan offers effortless luxury, combining indulgence with adventure. Key features include:

- **Gourmet Dining:** Five exceptional



dining options, including the mesmerizing underwater restaurant M6m, ensure each meal is a culinary masterpiece.

- **Marine Adventures:** Discover the underwater world with PADI-certified dives or guided snorkeling excursions to explore the stunning nearby reefs.

- **Wellness & Serenity:** Overwater treatment pavilions at the

ELE | NA Spa offer serene settings for holistic treatments focused on well-being.

- **Versatile Accommodations:** Choose between beachfront Earth Villas or overwater Wind Villas, each designed to immerse you in the natural beauty of the Maldives.

For those seeking the perfect escape in 2025, THE OZEN COLLECTION offers more than just

a vacation—it's an unforgettable journey into luxury and personalization. From private overwater sanctuaries to exhilarating marine adventures and rejuvenating wellness rituals, every moment promises to leave a lasting impression. Make THE OZEN COLLECTION part of your travel dreams, and discover why these two Maldivian gems should top your 2025 bucket list.







## Eurostar Reports Record Growth in 2024 with Ambitious Future Plans for Sustainable Travel

**E**urostar has achieved significant growth in 2024, reporting a +5% increase in passenger numbers compared to 2023. A total of **19.5 million** customers travelled with Eurostar, marking the highest annual number of passengers in the company's history—850,000 more than in 2023, Eurostar's most successful year yet.

This record-breaking performance was driven by strong demand, particularly during the **Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games**, highlighting Eurostar's growing popularity as a sustainable and efficient travel option.

*"Eurostar continued its strong growth in 2024, breaking its own previous passenger records. I would like to thank*

*our customers and recognise the efforts of our teams for this excellent result in the company's 30th year. Looking ahead, this is further proof of the huge demand for international rail and the great potential of sustainable travel. Eurostar is targeting growth to 30 million passengers and investing in up to 50 new trains as a direct result, with the aim of delivering a unique and exceptional service long into the future"* said **Gwendoline Cazenave, CEO of Eurostar**.

*"Once again, this year, Eurostar has demonstrated its ability to attract new customers, driven by an ever-present desire to travel by train, particularly internationally. With its many customer services, Eurostar proves that it is constantly thinking about how to meet their needs and offer ever more*

*innovative and comfortable services and commercial offers”* said **Alain Krakovitch, Chairman of the Eurostar Group, Managing Director of TGV-INTERCITÉS of SNCF Voyageurs.**

Routes that have seen the most growth on the Eurostar network are:

- London - Paris (+280k passengers)
- London - Brussels (+250k passengers)
- Paris - Brussels (+160k passengers)
- Paris – The Netherlands (+140k passengers)

In 2024, Eurostar continued to improve the customer experience, enhancing travel convenience with a series of new benefits and services.

#### **New Initiatives and Services:**

- **Aftersales Policy:** Eurostar introduced a new, flexible aftersales policy allowing customers to easily exchange tickets without a fee and refund tickets up to 7 days before departure. For Eurostar Premier customers, exchanges and refunds are available up to two days post-departure.

- **Olympics and Paralympics Success:** Eurostar welcomed **1.9**

**million customers** during the Olympic and Paralympic Games, a 5% uplift compared to summer 2023, and successfully transported **7 teams and 2,000 athletes** on more than **900 trains.**

- **Club Eurostar Growth:** Eurostar’s loyalty program, Club Eurostar, now has **3.96 million members**, up 39% from the previous year, with **300 million points** redeemed in 2024.

- **Culinary Innovation:** Eurostar introduced new onboard catering experiences with renowned chefs **Jérémy Chan, Jessica Préalpato,** and **Honey Spencer,** offering Eurostar Premier passengers a high-end culinary experience with sustainable, locally sourced ingredients.

- **“Snap” for Spontaneous Travellers:** Eurostar relaunched its **Snap** service, offering up to 50% off high-speed rail journeys for spontaneous travellers, confirming train details just 48 hours before departure.

#### **Sustainability Commitments:**

- Eurostar remains committed to sustainable travel with a pledge to use **100% renewable energy by 2030.** All menus will feature fresh, seasonal

ingredients sourced from countries Eurostar travels through, further reducing its environmental footprint.

#### **Strategic Partnerships & Future Growth:**

- **SkyTeam Partnership:** Eurostar entered into a **memorandum of understanding** with SkyTeam to offer integrated intermodal journeys combining air and rail travel. This partnership marks Eurostar as the first non-airline member of SkyTeam, enhancing the convenience and sustainability of travel options for customers.

- **Investment in New Trains:** Following **€2 billion in revenue** in 2023, Eurostar is set to invest in up to **50 new trains**, expanding its fleet by 30% and ensuring continued growth and improvement in passenger comfort and service. The first of these new trains are expected to be in service by **2030.**

Eurostar’s strong 2024 results and future investments demonstrate the company’s ongoing commitment to sustainability, customer experience, and expansion in the growing international rail market. As part of its 30-year legacy, Eurostar is positioning itself for a bold, sustainable future in travel.







# Life of Taiwan

Unveils Exclusive Private Tours for 2025, Redefining Travel with Customized Journeys through Taiwan's Cultural and Natural Treasures



### Curated Journeys to Showcase Taiwan's Heritage

Designed with flexibility in mind, Life of Taiwan's private tours allow guests to explore Taiwan's renowned attractions at their own pace, tailoring each journey to individual preferences. Whether wandering through vibrant night markets, hiking along picturesque mountain trails, or discovering Taiwan's rich cultural landmarks, travelers will be able to immerse themselves in experiences that go beyond the typical tourist route. The ability to customize itineraries allows guests to focus on specific interests, such as Taiwan's culinary scene, historical sites, or natural beauty.

As Taiwan's appeal as a travel destination continues to grow, Life of Taiwan aims to meet the increasing demand for deeper, more meaningful travel experiences. The new private tours not only highlight well-known spots but also take visitors off the beaten path to discover hidden gems, offering a unique way to connect with the island's diverse heritage.

### Sustainable and Flexible Travel in Line with Global Trends

With sustainability becoming a top

priority in the travel industry, Life of Taiwan's new private tours emphasize eco-conscious practices. The tours incorporate environmentally friendly transportation options and encourage visits to less crowded destinations, alleviating pressure on heavily trafficked tourist sites. This commitment to responsible tourism aligns with the global shift towards sustainable travel, allowing tourists to enjoy Taiwan in a way that minimizes their environmental impact.

In addition to sustainability, Life of Taiwan's private tours offer flexibility in travel dates and private transportation, ensuring a safe and comfortable journey for all guests. As the tourism industry continues to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, these tailored tours provide a secure, customizable alternative to traditional group travel, meeting the growing demand for meaningful and safe travel experiences.

### Immersive Cultural and Culinary Adventures

A central feature of Life of Taiwan's private tours is the opportunity to engage with Taiwan's vibrant culture and rich culinary heritage. Guests

In response to the growing demand for more personalized travel experiences, Life of Taiwan has launched a new collection of exclusive private tours for 2025, offering a fresh approach to exploring the island's diverse cultural and natural wonders. These bespoke itineraries cater to travelers looking for immersive, one-of-a-kind experiences, from Taiwan's historical landmarks to its stunning landscapes, with an emphasis on sustainability and authenticity.







can visit iconic locations such as Taroko Gorge, Sun Moon Lake, and Taipei, guided by local experts who offer insight into Taiwan's history and traditions. The tours also highlight Taiwan's world-renowned street food scene, with visits to bustling markets and traditional eateries, offering travelers an authentic taste of the island's diverse flavors.

The flexibility of these private tours allows for a blend of activities, from hiking through Taiwan's mountains to enjoying local tea ceremonies and sampling delicacies. As demand for experiences that combine adventure, culture, and cuisine continues to rise, Life of Taiwan's curated itineraries are poised to attract travelers seeking lasting memories in one of Asia's most dynamic and diverse destinations.

### **Taiwan's Growing Popularity as a Global Travel Hub**

Taiwan's tourism scene has seen a surge in interest as travelers are drawn to the island's natural beauty, rich cultural tapestry, and welcoming

hospitality. Life of Taiwan's private tours cater to this growing demand, offering travelers the chance to explore Taiwan's unique offerings in an intimate, personalized way. These tours are designed not only for individuals and families but also small groups, ensuring that every journey is curated to meet the specific desires of each guest.

The launch of these private tours is expected to further elevate Taiwan's status on the global tourism map, attracting more international visitors who are looking for authentic, sustainable travel experiences.

### **A Tailored Approach to Post-Pandemic Travel**

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, private tours have become an attractive option for travelers seeking a safer, more controlled environment. Life of Taiwan's offerings are designed with health and safety in mind, allowing guests to enjoy a customized travel experience without the concerns of larger, group-based tours. With private itineraries, travelers

can explore Taiwan at their own pace, avoiding crowded areas while still enjoying an enriching and immersive journey.

### **A Positive Outlook for Taiwan's Tourism Industry**

The launch of Life of Taiwan's exclusive private tours comes at a pivotal moment for the global travel industry. As travelers increasingly seek authentic, meaningful, and sustainable experiences, Taiwan is well-positioned to meet these demands. The rise in interest for customized travel options aligns perfectly with Life of Taiwan's new offerings, which are set to play a key role in shaping the future of Taiwan's tourism sector.

With its unique cultural heritage, breathtaking landscapes, and commitment to sustainability, Taiwan is poised to remain a must-visit destination for global travelers. As tourists flock to the island to explore its hidden treasures, Life of Taiwan's tailored tours will provide an unparalleled way to discover all that Taiwan has to offer.

# NMACC Arts Cafe: A Fusion of Culinary Innovation and Cultural Inspiration

Nestled within the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre (NMACC), the *Arts Cafe* offers a unique dining experience that merges the worlds of food, art, and conversation. Designed to reflect Mrs. Nita Ambani's vision of blending India's rich heritage with global influences, the cafe presents a menu that creatively reinterprets Indian classics while incorporating flavors from across Asia, Europe, and beyond. Each dish serves as a narrative, bridging tradition with innovation and inviting guests to embark on a culinary journey unlike any other.

The *Arts Cafe* stands out not only for its diverse and thoughtfully curated menu but also for its visually stunning interior, designed by renowned designer Gauri Khan. The space is a blend of sophistication and warmth, with earthy tones, brass accents, and an iconic 16-foot wave-shaped bar that is bathed in natural light. The design is complemented by striking artworks from globally acclaimed artists such as Damien Hirst and Takashi Murakami, transforming the cafe into a visual feast as much as a culinary one.

Culinary excellence is at the heart of the *Arts Cafe*, helmed by Chef Joy Bhattacharya and Chef Tarang Joshi. Together, they craft everything



from gourmet soups to decadent desserts, each dish meticulously prepared to deliver an unforgettable dining experience. The menu is further elevated by an expertly curated selection of craft cocktails, wines, and bespoke mocktails, ensuring that every meal is accompanied by the perfect beverage.

For those who prefer dining al fresco, the cafe offers a beautiful terrace with panoramic views of the *Fountain of Joy*, making it an ideal spot for art lovers, food enthusiasts, and families looking to unwind. Whether it's an intimate

meal or a vibrant gathering, the *Arts Cafe* provides the perfect setting to enjoy both exceptional food and captivating art.

The *Arts Cafe* is adding yet another layer of allure to the cultural centre, which has already become a cornerstone of Mumbai's cultural and artistic landscape. Designed as a space where art meets gastronomy, the cafe is poised to become a hotspot for both culture enthusiasts and food connoisseurs alike.

The cafe comes alive on weekends with vibrant entertainment and exclusive menu additions.

Its Sunday brunches are set to be a star attraction, offering the perfect weekend getaway to savor delicious food with friends and family. With special treats and engaging activities for children, it promises a delightful experience for all ages.

With its latest venture, the NMACC continues to redefine luxury and culture in India, offering a holistic experience that seamlessly bridges fine dining with artistic exploration.

Reservations for the *Arts Cafe* open on December 29. To learn more and book a table, visit NMACC Dining.



# IRIS Reps Expands Portfolio with Two Exciting New Partnerships: The Rickshaw Travel Group, East Africa and Ninety-Six Hotel Collection



IRIS Reps, a leading PR and marketing firm in the travel industry, is thrilled to announce the addition of two prestigious names to its portfolio: **The Rickshaw Travel Group, East Africa**, a renowned specialist in African safaris and cultural journeys, and **Ninety-Six Hotel Collection**, a distinguished group of city hotels in Mauritius.

As part of this expansion, IRIS Reps will exclusively represent all its brands under its umbrella, including these two new additions, offering unparalleled travel experiences and services to Indian travellers. The firm's approach is focused on curating a unique selection of products that are tailored to meet the evolving needs

of the Indian market.

**Alefiya Singh, Founder of IRIS Reps**, shares her excitement about these new associations: "We are delighted to introduce **The Rickshaw Travel Group to our portfolio**. Their expertise in creating bespoke travel experiences focusing on across **South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, and Rwanda** is unmatched, and we're excited to bring these exceptional safari and cultural journeys to Indian travellers. Their tailored itineraries and personalized services offer the ultimate African adventure, from safaris to mountain treks and beach tours. We believe they're a perfect fit for Indian travellers looking for unique and enriching travel

experiences."

She continues, "As for the **Ninety-Six Hotel Collection**, we are equally excited. This Mauritius-based collection embodies the perfect blend of cultural heritage and modern luxury. From the elegant 5-star **Labourdonnais Waterfront Hotel** to the charming 4-star hotels: the dynamic and artistic **Hennessy Park Hotel**, the contemporary **Le Suffren Hotel & Marina** and the unique **The Address Boutique Hotel & Residences**, this collection offers a diverse range of options for both business and leisure travelers. We are confident that Indian travelers will fall in love with the charm, sophistication, and cultural richness these hotels provide."

As **Pooja Lalji, Director, a spokesperson from The Rickshaw Travel Group, East Africa**, shares: "We are excited to partner with IRIS Reps and bring our authentic African experiences to Indian travelers. With our deep local knowledge, we are confident that we can deliver extraordinary and tailored experiences, making African adventures seamless and unforgettable for your clients."

**Mr. Rolph Schmid, Managing Director**

**of Ninety-Six Hotel Collection**, says: "We are thrilled to be part of IRIS Reps' portfolio. With our hotels blending art, culture, and contemporary luxury, we are ready to introduce Mauritius in a unique way to travelers looking for unforgettable moments, whether for business or leisure."

Looking ahead to major upcoming travel events such as OTM and SATTE, Alefiya outlines her strategy to make a strong market impact: "We aim to create a buzz around these incredible new additions by offering targeted promotions and engaging with both trade partners and travel agents. Our goal is to leverage these events to create direct connections with Indian travel professionals and highlight the personalized, high-quality offerings from both brands. It's all about ensuring that our clients are equipped with the tools they need to sell these exceptional products to the discerning Indian traveler."

Both Rickshaw Travels DMC and Ninety-Six Hotel Collection promise to bring exceptional experiences to Indian travelers, and IRIS Reps is eager to help travel agents and partners take full advantage of these exciting new opportunities.

# Tourism Malaysia Sales Mission to Hyderabad, Bengaluru & Kochi



of Indian visitors. The strong connectivity between Southern India and Malaysia is underscored by 151 weekly flights and a total seat capacity of 26,686 seats per week. The recent introduction of new flights by Indigo Airlines to Penang and Langkawi from Chennai and Bengaluru further enhances travel options, making it easier for travellers from Hyderabad, Bangalore, and Kochi to explore Malaysia's diverse offerings.

**Datuk Manoharan Periasamy, Director General of Tourism Malaysia**, who will lead the Sales Mission, commented, *"India has been a key market for Malaysia for over 20 years, and with the upcoming Visit Malaysia Year 2026 (VMY2026), we are targeting 1.6 million Indian travellers. Southern India, with its robust flight connections, is crucial to our growth strategy. The 151 weekly flights and 26,686 seats per week reflect the high demand for travel between Malaysia and the Southern cities of India. This mission provides a valuable opportunity to highlight Malaysia's appeal as a top destination for MICE, wedding tourism, and leisure travel, offering world-class infrastructure and beautiful destinations for all types of travellers."*

Malaysia's MICE tourism offering includes state-of-the-art convention centres, luxury hotels, and professional services for hosting international conferences and business events. With its modern facilities and efficient connectivity, Malaysia is quickly becoming a leading choice for corporate incentives, meetings, and exhibitions.

Wedding tourism is also a rapidly growing sector, with Malaysia being increasingly chosen by Indian couples for their dream weddings. From beachside ceremonies to luxurious hotel receptions in stunning destinations, Malaysia offers a wide range of unforgettable wedding venues and world-class services to ensure a seamless and memorable celebration.

**Mr. Hishamuddin Mustafa, recently appointed Director of Tourism Malaysia Chennai**, said, *"The Southern Indian cities of Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Kochi are vital markets for us, and the ease of access through 84 weekly flights and 12,395 seats per week makes Malaysia an attractive destination for travellers seeking a diverse range of experiences. Whether it's for MICE, a dream wedding, or a family vacation, Malaysia has something for everyone. With Visit Malaysia Year 2026 on the horizon, we are excited to showcase all the new destinations, cultural experiences, and world-class venues Malaysia has to offer."*

Tourism Malaysia's Sales Mission will place a strong emphasis on Malaysia's growing appeal as a destination for MICE, wedding tourism, and leisure travel. The mission aims to strengthen Malaysia's presence in Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Kochi, while promoting Malaysia as a leading hub for business and social events.

**T**ourism Malaysia is set to launch its largest-ever Sales Mission to India, taking place from 3-7 February 2025. The mission will visit key cities Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Kochi, featuring a delegation of 62 sellers from Malaysia. This mission aims to emphasize growing opportunities in the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) sector, as well as wedding tourism, alongside traditional leisure travel, with a special focus on India's Southern region.

In 2024, Malaysia welcomed a record one million tourists from India, with Southern India contributing more than 50%



# FITUR

## 2025 Draws Record 255,000 Attendees, Exceeding Expectations

The International Tourism Fair concludes its 45th edition with nearly 255,000 attendees, reaffirming its leadership position thanks to strong corporate support and institutional backing.



IFEMA MADRID announces that FITUR 2026 will take place from January 21 to 25.

The **45th International Tourism Fair**, organized by **IFEMA MADRID**, closes its doors with outstanding participation and attendance figures. FITUR has exceeded expectations, reaching a first estimate of nearly

**255,000 visitors**, with significant growth in its first three days, which welcomed **155,000 professionals**.

These figures reflect the strong recovery of the global tourism industry in 2024, **with 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals, according to UNWTO, as well as record numbers for both**

**Spain and Madrid, which saw 94 million and 16 million visitors, respectively.** Furthermore, these FITUR figures anticipate the forecast that, in 2025, both travelers and tourism spending will continue to grow, driven by strong demand. Worldwide, tourism-related revenues have reached 1.9 trillion US dollars,



with Spain and Madrid following this trend. Tourist spending figures have risen to 126 billion euros nationally and 16 billion euros in the Madrid region. Moreover, these figures from FITUR anticipate that by 2025 both traveler numbers and tourism spending will continue to grow, driven by strong demand.

Alongside these outstanding attendance figures, and with a total of **nine halls**, FITUR 2025 consolidates its leadership in participation, hosting more than **9,500 companies** across **884 stands**. This year, FITUR has brought together **156 countries** from around the world, with **101 of them participating with official delegations**. This influx also has an economic **impact of 445 million euros on Madrid**.

Under the **theme “Proud. We Are Tourism,”** FITUR has celebrated an edition in which all stakeholders have advocated for **sustainability criteria to ensure balanced and viable global growth in the medium and long term for both the planet and local communities**. Additionally, experts have emphasized how **diversification, seasonality reduction**, and the integration of **new technological tools** are driving an **inclusive and competitive tourism** model that ensures a more sustainable future for all. This model is promoting different **types of tourism** that contribute to this development, **including sports, film, and language tourism**.

Progress toward this sustainable tourism model is also essential to

**preserve the right to travel for future generations**, ensuring that travel remains an accessible and enriching reality.

With **Brazil as the Partner Country**, the Fair was inaugurated on **January 22 by Their Majesties, the King and Queen of Spain**. The event saw the participation of all stakeholders in the tourism industry’s value chain, who presented the latest trends, showcased the sector’s dynamism through numerous business transactions, and exchanged knowledge and best practices to continue shaping the sustainable development of the industry.

**IFEMA MADRID** is already working on the **2026 edition of FITUR**, which will take place from January 21 to 25, with **Mexico as the Partner Country**.



# Saudia Achieves Record Growth in 2024, Reaching 20 Million International Passengers

**T**hroughout 2024, Saudia carried a total of 35 million passengers, recording a 15% rise compared to the previous year. The airline operated 193,000 flights, both scheduled and additional, achieving a 10% increase year-over-year. Flight hours saw an 8.5% surge, surpassing 581,000 hours, while maintaining an on-time performance rate of 89.1%, an improvement of 2.7%. Furthermore, customer satisfaction saw significant growth, with the Net Promoter Score (NPS) climbing by 4.5% to 32.7, demonstrating higher guest satisfaction and a stronger likelihood of recommendations.

Saudi Arabia's national flag carrier, Saudia, has reported impressive growth for 2024, carrying 35 million passengers and achieving a 16% year-on-year increase in international travelers, reaching 20 million. This surge is part of a broader trend in the Middle East, which, along with Europe and Asia-Pacific, saw the highest demand growth in air travel globally. However, the region's airlines still face challenges related to aircraft supply, which have limited their ability to fully meet demand, according to a recent statement from the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

**Ibrahim Al-Omar, Director General of Saudia Group**, attributed the airline's success to its continuous strategy evolution and commitment to operational excellence. "This remarkable growth reflects the dedication of Saudia's employees and the strategic optimization of our aircraft fleet to deliver exceptional service," said Al-Omar. He also highlighted the airline's ongoing efforts to enhance guest experiences and services.

In total, Saudia saw a 15% increase in overall passenger numbers, with 35 million guests traveling with the airline in 2024. The airline operated 193,000 flights, including scheduled and additional services, which marked a 10% increase compared to the previous year. Additionally, Saudia reported a rise in flight hours by 8.5%, totaling more than 581,000 hours, while maintaining a strong on-

time performance rate of 89.1%, an improvement of 2.7%.

Customer satisfaction also improved, with the airline achieving a score of 32.7, a 4.5% increase from 2023. Saudia also made strides in its digital transformation, reporting a 40% increase in the usage of its mobile app and a remarkable 324% growth in digital service adoption through the Government Digital Wallet, GovClick.

The airline's growth was further reflected in an 18% rise in transit passengers, surpassing 9.3 million, as Saudia worked to strengthen global connectivity and support the goals of Saudi Vision 2030, particularly in tourism, entertainment, sports, and the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages.

Saudia's future plans include expanding its fleet and increasing seat capacity to accommodate growing demand, especially during peak travel seasons. With a current fleet of 147 aircraft, the airline aims to add 118 new planes in the coming years. These initiatives are aligned with the airline's goal to continue its global expansion and solidify its position in the competitive aviation market.

According to IATA, the Middle East's air travel market continues to recover strongly, with passenger demand increasing by 8.9% in November 2024 compared to the same month in 2023. This growth outpaced the global average of 8.1%, reinforcing the strength of the region's aviation sector.



# Arabian Travel Market 2025 Sees 25% Growth in Travel Tech Exhibitors as Global Market Hits \$10.7 Billion

The global travel technology market is currently valued at \$10.7 billion and continues to show impressive growth, with an expected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.05% from 2025 to 2033. As the tourism industry increasingly embraces technological innovation, the 32nd edition of Arabian Travel Market (ATM) in 2025 will highlight these developments with a significant focus on connectivity, featuring a 25% year-on-year increase in Travel Tech exhibitors. The event will take place from April 28 to May 1 at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC), marking another milestone in the region's growing role in global travel tech.

This year's ATM theme, 'Global Travel: Developing Tomorrow's Tourism Through Enhanced Connectivity', will explore how technology is reshaping the tourism sector. The event's exhibition space dedicated to travel technology has expanded by 22%, and the lineup of exhibitors will include both established global companies and enterprising start-ups, showcasing innovations in analytics, machine learning, blockchain, augmented reality, and more.

**Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME for Arabian Travel Market,** expressed excitement about the growing role of

technology in the sector. "ATM Travel Tech brings together the brightest minds across the industry for a platform of discovery, debate, and deal-making. As connectivity and integration take center stage, this year's event offers unmatched opportunities to explore how technology is transforming travel."

The event's Future Stage will host expert speakers who will discuss the cutting-edge innovations driving the industry forward, with sessions focused on topics such as hyper-personalization in luxury travel, AI's pervasive role in tourism, and the transformative power of data-driven travel. With the travel technology market poised to grow to \$18.6 billion by 2033, ATM 2025 will provide a vital opportunity for attendees to explore this lucrative space.

The Middle East and Africa (MEA) region is experiencing strong competition from Asia-Pacific but remains a key player in the travel tech landscape. Countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia are embracing technological advancements to attract tech-savvy travelers and bolster their position as leading global travel destinations.

Dubai, known for its Smart Dubai initiative, serves as an ideal host city for ATM



2025. Curtis highlighted the city's role in advancing smart travel, transport, and urban planning, making it the perfect hub for innovation and connectivity. "Dubai continues to set global aspirations with its commitment to digitalization and smart city technologies, providing a dynamic backdrop for leaders and disruptors from across the globe," she said.

The Travel Tech exhibition at ATM 2025 will showcase cutting-edge innovations including smart technologies, mobile applications, contactless solutions, and more. Major exhibitors like Amadeus, Huawei, Sabre, Expedia, and WebBeds, among others, will present their latest products and solutions.

ATM 2025 is set to attract professionals from the leisure, luxury, travel tech, corporate, and MICE sectors, offering ample opportunities for networking, knowledge exchange, and business development. In addition to the exhibition, ATM will feature extensive conference programming across its Global, Future, and newly launched Business Events stages, bringing together international and regional experts to discuss the future of travel.

Strategic partners for ATM 2025 include Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism (DET), Emirates as the Official Airline Partner, IHG Hotels & Resorts as the Official Hotel Partner, and Al Rais Travel as the Official DMC Partner.



# Virgin Voyages Surges into 2025

## with Bold New Offerings and the Debut of Brilliant Lady



Virgin Voyages, the luxury cruise line founded by global entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson, is gearing up for an exciting 2025 with new ships, expanded itineraries, and an array of exclusive experiences. With the unveiling of its fourth and final ship, *Brilliant Lady*, set for September, the line is doubling down on its commitment to redefining adult-only cruising with an irresistible WAVE offer. The promotion, available now, allows guests to book one Sailor and receive a second cabin at 80% off, plus up to \$300 in free drinks.

“2025 is going to be a landmark year for Virgin Voyages,” said **Nirmal**

**Saverimuttu, CEO of Virgin Voyages.** “With the launch of *Brilliant Lady*, new voyages, and an expanded roster of iconic destinations, we are thrilled to offer our Sailors a truly exceptional cruising experience. This year’s WAVE offer is one of the most valuable in the industry, and we’re proud to continue offering experiences that make vacationing more exciting and memorable for our guests.”

The WAVE offer applies to all itineraries across Virgin Voyages’ award-winning fleet, including those aboard the much-anticipated *Brilliant Lady*. This new ship will set sail on a range of exciting journeys,

from Alaska’s rugged wilderness to Bermuda’s idyllic beaches. Signature itineraries such as the four-night *Fire and Sunset Soirées* to Key West and the seven-night *French Daze and Ibiza Nights* from Barcelona will also be available with the deal.

Virgin Voyages has already established itself as a leader in adult-only travel, offering a boutique cruise experience that focuses on immersive, high-end vacations free from the distractions of children or overcrowded ships. According to market analysts, adult-only travel is expected to grow significantly in the next decade, with Virgin Voyages well-positioned to

capitalize on this trend.

“Longer, more immersive voyages are becoming increasingly popular, and we’re seeing that reflected in our own guest behavior,” Saverimuttu added. “Many of our guests are returning for these extended trips, which now make up a significant portion of our bookings. It’s a trend that’s shaping the future of travel, and we’re excited to offer both short and long itineraries to cater to all kinds of travelers.”

One of the fastest-growing routes in Virgin Voyages’ portfolio is its six-night *Western Caribbean Charm* cruise, which takes guests to the picturesque ports of Costa Maya and Roatán. Another highlight for 2025 is the 10-night *Starry Nights in Greece and Croatia*, which includes stops in Santorini, Dubrovnik, and Mykonos. Destinations like Iceland, Crete, and Barbados are also on Virgin Voyages’ radar, with several named to *Travel + Leisure’s* “Where to Go in 2025” list.

For those looking for an all-inclusive,

month-long experience, Virgin Voyages is offering a limited number of Summer Season Passes. Starting at \$14,999 per cabin, this unique offering gives guests a chance to work and play aboard the ship, complete with the fastest Wi-Fi at sea, while exploring some of the world’s most coveted destinations.

In addition to its core offerings, Virgin Voyages is bringing back its popular specialty sailings in 2025, including the *Eat & Drink Festival*, themed holiday voyages, and *A Virgin Celebration Voyage*—an event that, last year, was headlined by none other than Boy George. Wellness enthusiasts can also look forward to the return of Virgin’s wellness sailings, which feature everything from high-energy fitness classes to rejuvenating spa experiences.

One particularly anticipated event is the *Elevate Voyage*, an empowering sailing focused on women’s health and wellness. Returning in April, the voyage will feature expert-led workshops,

self-care experiences, and motivational talks designed to inspire confidence and self-growth.

Looking ahead, *Brilliant Lady* will be Virgin Voyages’ grand finale. Set to debut in September 2025, the new ship will make her inaugural voyages with a North American tour that includes sailings from New York City to Bermuda, Los Angeles to Mexico, and Seattle to Alaska. The ship will also take guests on a thrilling journey through the Panama Canal to Costa Rica and Guatemala. *Brilliant Lady* promises to be a game-changer, with new dining options, cutting-edge entertainment, and unique surprises for guests.

As Virgin Voyages prepares to make waves in 2025, it is clear that the brand is committed to offering a cruise experience like no other, with exciting new destinations, exclusive offers, and a steadfast focus on creating unforgettable vacations for adult travelers.

## Delta launches nonstop Detroit-Punta Cana Route



Delta Air Lines is launching a new seasonal nonstop flight from Detroit to Punta Cana starting May 10, 2025. Operated by a Boeing 737-900, the weekly service will make it easier for travellers to reach this popular Caribbean destination. Roundtrip fares for the route begin at \$724, and tickets are now available for booking.

Top Luxury Resorts in Punta Cana  
1. Lopesan Costa Bavaro

Ideal for those seeking an all-inclusive experience, this resort offers premium amenities such as swim-up rooms and exclusive lounge access. Rates start at \$480 per night.

2. Eden Roc Cap Cana

A luxurious retreat in Cap Cana, featuring beachfront villas and world-class dining. Perfect for travellers seeking exclusivity, with rates starting at \$1,700 per night.

3. Casa de Campo, La Romana

Located an hour from Punta Cana, this iconic resort offers world-class golf, equestrian activities, and a marina. Rates in the Premier Club start at \$2,005 per night.

Things to Do in Punta Cana

From snorkelling and zip-lining to relaxing on stunning beaches and enjoying vibrant nightlife, Punta Cana offers something for everyone, making it a top Caribbean destination.



# Accor Unveils Japan's Hidden Gems with Grand Mercure and Mercure Hotels

*Celebrating Authentic Cultural Experiences in Lesser-Known Destinations*



Japan's regional wonders await discovery, offering a tapestry of natural beauty, rich traditions, and heartfelt local connections. For those seeking more than the well-trodden tourist paths, Accor, a global leader in hospitality, invites travellers to uncover the authentic charm of Japan's lesser-known destinations through enriching stays at Grand Mercure and Mercure hotels. These hotels serve as gateways to the unique traditions, natural beauty, and warm hospitality of local communities across Japan, from the northern reaches of Hokkaido to the tropical allure of Okinawa.

The allure of Japan's regional destinations has grown, with a 36.1 percent increase in international visitors to these areas since 2019, according to the Japan Tourism Agency. Destinations such as Oita Prefecture's Beppu and Wakayama Prefecture are captivating travellers,

while Nagano's Matsushiro has gained popularity among Australian visitors for its winter sports and serene charm.

Accor expanded its footprint in Japan with the opening of over 20 hotels in 2024 – these new properties are thoughtfully located near hidden treasures, offering a perfect base for exploration. Grand Mercure celebrates local heritage through immersive experiences that celebrate national culture and stimulate the senses, while Mercure unveils the treasures surrounding each address, inviting guests to experience the vibrant charm of the local neighbourhood.

### **#HanareTabi: Embracing the Art of Regional Exploration**

Accor's #HanareTabi travel initiative celebrates the hidden beauty of Japan's remote corners. Central to this experience is *Musubi-Bito*, a program featuring local guides who provide guests with meaningful connections to their destinations. These guides, deeply rooted in their communities, share intimate insights into local culture and traditions, enhancing every journey.

#### **Featured #HanareTabi and Musubi-Bito Gems:**

##### **Explore Kannawa Onsen Town with Spring Hunter Kiriko Toyoshima**

In the hot springs capital of Japan, guests at *Grand Mercure Beppu Bay Resort & Spa* can join a "spring hunter", Ms Kiriko Toyoshima, to explore the Kannawa Onsen's steam-filled alleys and learn about the history and benefits of hot springs. Along the way, participants can experience the famous traditional *mushi-yu* (steam baths) and savour *jigoku-mushi* also known as "edible onsen", a unique dish prepared using the natural hot spring steam.

##### **Walking the Historic Kumano Kodo in Pilgrimage Attire**

At *Grand Mercure Wakayama Minabe Resort & Spa*, guests can walk the historic Kumano Kodo pilgrimage route with a *Musubi-Bito* guide in traditional pilgrim attire and gain insights into ancient paths and the history of sacred sites along this UNESCO World



Heritage trail. A lesser-known path on modern maps, this route was a well-travelled pilgrimage path during the Heian and Kamakura periods, showcasing how pilgrims journeyed from Kyoto to sacred sites.

##### **Indulge in Shinsu's Unique Flavours and Secret Healing Bath**

At *Mercure Nagano Matsushiro Resort & Spa*, guests can savour local delicacies like Japanese yam, vegetable-filled *oyaki* dumplings, and fragrant Shinshu soba noodles. The historic Matsushiro Onsen, once favoured by Buddhist monks and samurai, is said to have been discovered by Nichiren during his exile, who praised its healing properties. During the Battle of Kawanakajima, it served as a secret retreat for soldiers

seeking recovery and rejuvenation, adding to its storied legacy.

##### **Tranquillity and Flavours in Zao's Majestic Setting**

At *Mercure Miyagi Zao Resort & Spa*, guests can savour Zao specialties like the famous *Sendai gyutan* (beef tongue) and *zunda mochi*, a sweet dish made from edamame paste, both crafted using traditional techniques. The resort's onsen facilities, including a Japanese-style outdoor bath with stunning mountain views, offer an oasis of tranquillity. According to legend, a revered monk discovered a healing bath in the area, attracting pilgrims seeking restoration. This legacy, combined with Zao's majestic nature, provides a deeply rejuvenating experience.



# AYANA Residences Unveils Alamanda Tower: A New Era of Luxury and Sustainability in Bali



**A**YANA Residences has introduced its latest offering, *Alamanda Tower*, a collection of 26 exclusive residences that seamlessly blend high-end living with sustainable practices. Located in Bali's most coveted destination, the tower is named after the vibrant yellow Allamanda flower, reflecting the property's natural beauty and commitment to eco-conscious living.

One of the standout features of *Alamanda Tower* is its stunning rooftop oasis, which includes three luxurious pools offering panoramic views of Jimbaran Bay. While one pool is open to all residents, two others can be privately reserved, ensuring a balance of exclusivity and community for those seeking a more intimate experience.

The residences themselves offer

world-class amenities, including a fully equipped gym, a lap pool, sauna, and steam room. A co-working space will also be available starting Q1 2026, catering to the growing demand for remote workspaces in a serene environment. The interiors, designed by renowned architect Carl Almeida of P49 Design, strike a harmonious balance between contemporary luxury and traditional Balinese elements, providing residents with an inviting, culturally rich living space.

Families will find particular appeal in the dedicated children's play area, as well as the extensive facilities of the adjacent AYANA Bali resort. With 14 pools, a world-class spa, a range of dining outlets, and cultural experiences like the SAKA Museum, the property offers an unparalleled lifestyle that

combines relaxation, recreation, and cultural immersion.

In keeping with its eco-conscious ethos, AYANA Residences has partnered with Utama Spice, a local brand known for its organic, Bali-crafted amenities. Residents will also enjoy a unique connection to sustainability through a complimentary herbal plant package from AYANA Farm, allowing them to grow fresh ingredients in their own homes.

*Alamanda Tower* offers one- and two-bedroom residences for long-term lease, providing a lifestyle that fuses luxury, sustainability, and the rich cultural heritage of Bali. It's an exceptional opportunity for those seeking a home in one of the world's most desired locations, with a focus on both comfort and environmental responsibility.

# Praveg Unveils Luxury Resort in Jawai, Rajasthan: A Fusion of Adventure and Opulence



*Praveg Caves Jawai aims for an occupancy rate of 60% to 70% with room rates between ₹18,000 to ₹22,000, targeting high-end travelers looking for offbeat luxury destinations. The resort offers elegantly designed rooms and tents, allowing guests to immerse themselves in nature while enjoying top-tier amenities.*

**P**raveg Resorts has launched its latest luxury destination, *Praveg Caves Jawai*, in the heart of Rajasthan's wild leopard territory. Officially opened on January 1, 2025, this resort offers an extraordinary blend of adventure and opulence, providing guests with an immersive experience surrounded by nature's beauty and wildlife. Situated in Jawai, known for its striking landscapes and large population of leopards, the resort aims to attract high-end travelers seeking a unique escape in one of India's most untamed regions.

The resort is designed to seamlessly combine the raw allure of Rajasthan's wilderness with the lavish comforts of a luxury stay. With elegantly appointed rooms and luxury tents, *Praveg Caves Jawai* allows visitors to connect with nature while indulging in world-class amenities. The property promises to

deliver Praveg's signature style—an impeccable fusion of luxury, adventure, and local culture.

This opening marks another milestone for Praveg Resorts, a brand renowned for reimagining experiential travel. Known for its innovative resorts across iconic locations like the White Rann, Diu, Daman, and near the Statue of Unity, Praveg has made a name for itself by curating exceptional retreats in both spiritual and coastal destinations. The Jawai resort further broadens its portfolio by venturing into the emerging market of luxury wildlife tourism, making it a must-visit destination for those seeking a blend of exploration and indulgence.

With an occupancy target of 60% to 70%, *Praveg Caves Jawai* positions itself as a high-end getaway for discerning travelers. Room rates range between ₹18,000 to ₹22,000 per

night, reflecting the resort's appeal to those seeking exclusive, off-the-beaten-path luxury. Guests can look forward to a wide range of activities, from wildlife safaris to stargazing, while enjoying the tranquility and privacy of the resort's pristine location.

Praveg, formerly known as Praveg Communications India, has evolved into a diversified leader in India's hospitality and luxury tourism sector. Expanding from its roots in events, advertising, exhibitions, and pharma, the brand's latest venture into the luxury resort space solidifies its position as a key player in the country's burgeoning tourism industry.

*Praveg Caves Jawai* is now open for bookings and is expected to become a sought-after destination for travelers looking to experience both the thrill of India's wilderness and the comforts of world-class luxury.



# Centara Karon Resort Phuket Reopens After Dramatic Transformation



**C**entara Hotels & Resorts, Thailand's leading hotel operator, is delighted to unveil the new-look **Centara Karon Resort Phuket**, which has started welcoming the world's travellers back to paradise following a remarkable renovation that has transformed every aspect of the guest experience and successfully positioned this flagship resort for a bright and exciting future.

Just moments from the soft sands of Karon Beach and the Andaman Sea, Centara Karon Resort Phuket is a haven of tranquility and adventure. Following its dramatic revitalisation, the resort

now invites all visitors to unwind in three distinct zones – The Terrace, The Lagoon, and The Tropicale – creating options for couples, families and friends alike.

With a contemporary design that harmoniously blends a soothing colour palette with geometric patterns and natural elements, the resort's newly refreshed accommodation is tailored to the needs of every guest. Highlights include The Terrace's spacious rooms, which feature balconies with views of the city or sea. Set to be unveiled by the end of 2025, the one-, two- and

three-bedroom Pool Villas will be spectacular sanctuaries with outdoor pools and a dedicated check-in area – ideal for romantic getaways or grand celebrations with up to eight guests.

An eclectic mix of activities and experiences makes this the ultimate tropical oasis for all ages. Immersive adventures unfold at the resort's 3,000-square metre pool zone, with three separate pools for adults and kids, plus thrilling water slides and fountains. Children and teens can find inspiration at the Chang Dee Kids' Club or E-Zone, with a full schedule of activities and games. Parents can also

enjoy personal moments, including therapies at the signature SPA Cenvaree or invigorating workouts at the fully-equipped fitness centre.

Centara Karon Resort Phuket is the perfect place to embark on a culinary journey. A trio of tropical pool bars – Tropix, Koh Kool, and Splash – set the scene for daytime refreshments, from fruit smoothies to cool cocktails, while Pink Social provides a chic spot to socialise. For memorable meals, Bistro Grill & Bar presents a range of international and Thai favourites throughout the day, while modern global cuisine and grilled specialties take centre stage at Escape Pool Club.

For curious explorers who want to

head out and uncover the wonders of Phuket, the powder-soft sands of Karon Beach are just a short walk away, while several golf courses are within easy reach, and Phuket's heritage-rich Old Town, with its Sino-Portuguese architecture and vibrant night markets, is just 15km away.

“We are delighted to reveal the newly transformed Centara Karon Resort Phuket. With its perfect blend of daytime excitement and private serenity, this breathtaking resort will ensure unforgettable escapes for every guest, from fun-seeking families to couples who crave privacy. I would like to invite our cherished visitors from around the world to come and experience the beauty of

Phuket and Centara's warm, Thai hospitality,” said David Martens, Vice President of Operations for Centara Hotels & Resorts, and General Manager of Centara Karon Resort Phuket.

Travellers can now discover the reimagined Centara Karon Resort Phuket with an exclusive reopening offer: **“A Star is Reborn”**. This enticing package lets kids stay and dine for free, while also offering THB 500 of daily resort credit, early check-in, late check-out, and a complimentary minibar (refreshed daily). Centara The1 members will enjoy an additional 15% discount and triple points. Not a member yet? Sign up for free via [centara1card.com](http://centara1card.com).





# Jamaica's tourism sector is on track to achieving growth targets of attracting 5m. visitors

*Jamaica targets 5 million visitors and \$5 billion earnings by 2025, highlighting tourism's economic impact and Sandals' regional contributions.*



**W**ESTMORELAND, JAMAICA – After welcoming some 4.27 million total visitors and securing earnings of approximately US\$4.35 billion in 2024, Jamaican Minister of Tourism, Hon **Edmund Bartlett** is confident that Jamaica is on track to achieving its growth targets of attracting 5 million visitors and generating earnings of US\$5 billion for the nation's economy by 2025.

*"The 2024 end-of-year figures represent increases of 5.3% in visitor arrivals and 3.3% in earnings when compared to 2023 and were achieved despite challenges, including travel advisories, severe weather events and airlift restrictions over two quarters,"* Minister Bartlett said.

The 5x5x5 targets were previously set in 2016 and were on the verge of being achieved when the COVID-19 pandemic literally wiped-out global travel, forcing Jamaica and other tourist destinations to start all over from ground zero in rebuilding the industry.

Addressing **Sandals Resorts International's 2025 Global Sales Meeting** at its **Sandals South Coast** resort on January 9, Minister Bartlett underlined the importance of tourism to Jamaica and the wider Caribbean as he lauded Sandals as a leading contributor to the industry's growth in the region.

Describing it as a phenomenal home-grown multinational corporation, Mr. Bartlett suggested to its executive

chairman, **Adam Stewart** that the time had come for Sandals to spread its wings beyond the Caribbean and become a global brand.

*"We need to go beyond the Caribbean now because the world is waiting for what you have given to the Caribbean, making it the most tourism-dependent region on planet Earth,"* he suggested.

More than 50% of the Caribbean region's gross domestic product (GDP) is predicated on tourism and one-in-four of all the workers are employed in the industry and, except for oil in Guyana, *"tourism again stands out as the huge driver of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the region,"* he pointed out. Similarly, locally, *"when tourism grows, the economy grows; when tourism contracts, unfortunately the economy also contracts,"* he noted.

Having achieved *"more in 24,"* Minister Bartlett hailed the global Sandals sales force as dedicated professionals united by the purpose of strengthening and growing *"the incredible Sandals brand that has become synonymous with Caribbean hospitality."* Underscoring that *"Sandals are an integral part of our national identity,"* he challenged them *"to thrive for 25"*.

Ascribing several attributes to Sandals, including its contribution to the Jamaica workforce and supporting farmers and other industries, Minister Bartlett affirmed that *"this is what responsible tourism looks like, where success is measured not just in occupancy rates alone but by investing, and people are at the heart of the tourism industry."*

In that regard, he assured that notwithstanding the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning and the wonderful things technology can do to change the way things are, *"they are going to change it for people, and it is human intelligence that will give efficacy to the changes."* Mr. Bartlett argued that *"the type of industry that will survive, whatever transition the world embraces, going forward, is going to be about people and tourism as the industry that is most related to people, will survive."*

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