

LUXURY AND LIFESTYLE TRAVEL MAGAZINE

# travel

A PROFILES MEDIA NETWORK PUBLICATION  
www.travelspan.in

## SPAN

JANUARY 2019 | Rs.250/-

**Toronto** SETS  
NEW CONFERENCE RECORD

**MUZIRIS PADDLE**  
EXPLORES THE OLDEST  
SPICE ROUTE OF  
**KERALA**

Top reasons **travelers**  
can't keep away from  
**Jeju Island**

**Sri Lanka**  
THE PERFECT  
WARM WINTER  
HOLIDAY DESTINATION

The  
**20** BEST THINGS  
TO DO IN  
**HOUSTON**

18<sup>TH</sup> YEAR OF PUBLICATION



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# CONTENTS

JANUARY 2019



## BUSINESS AND EVENTS

### Toronto Sets New Conference Record

*Business Events Toronto Hosted 26 Citywide Conventions in 2018*

Toronto's place as the hub for innovation, technology, finance and business within Canada attract these major events to the region... Business events are a thriving and vital part of Canada's tourism industry that contributes \$33 billion in direct spending in Canada, directly employs 229,000 people and \$19 billion of GDP... Great things happen when people come together, whether in a meeting room, on a convention floor or out experiencing a destination. Tourism Toronto and Business Events Toronto — its meetings, conferences and events unit — defines a citywide convention or event as one that occupies 1,100 hotel rooms on peak night, a minimum of two hotels for delegates and the use of a convention centre or event complex.

## INDIA



### Muziris Paddle explores the oldest spice route of Kerala

*This New Year: Paddle Your Way Through The Backwaters...*

Get excited, Kayaks! Begin your New Year paddling your way through the beautiful backwaters of Kerala with the Muziris Paddle Expedition.

## INTERNATIONAL

### The 20 best things to do in Houston

*Consider this your ultimate guide to the best things to do in Houston, from great galleries to the Space Center*

As the country's fourth largest city by population, Space City, AKA Houston, is nearly as big as Chicago, and it's not hard to see why so many people flock there. Yep—with so many things going on, the saying must be true: everything is bigger in Texas.

## BUSINESS AND EVENTS

### Experience Thai traditions and cultural values in Thailand's annual events and festivals

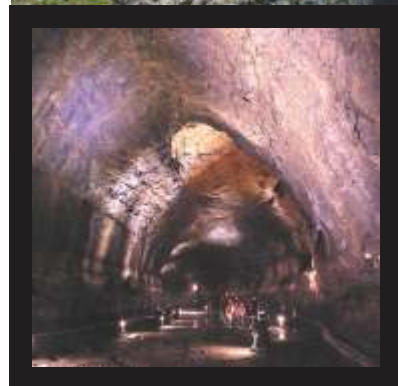
Thailand is a land of festivals and celebrations that reflect Thai traditions and cultural values. Most Thai festivals derive from the Buddhist and Brahman beliefs, with many being originated from local traditions, folklore and the way of life. Many have taken place over the course of a year for centuries.



### Top reasons travelers can't keep away from Jeju Island



Just off the coast of South Korea, Jeju Island pulls in vacationers and honeymooners by the thousands. Regular direct flights to and from international cities make getting here a snap. The picturesque island is very popular, so popular that Seoul International to Jeju International is the world's busiest air route, with around 6.5 million people making the return trip last year.





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- Abu dhabi city tour with ferari park US\$ 90 PP
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# CONTENTS

JANUARY 2019



## INTERNATIONAL

The style-savvy residents of the country's fourth largest city know that there's no place like **Houston**

With more than 2.2 million residents, the city attracts visitors and transplants with a wonderful mix of world-class arts, booming business, pro sports and award-winning cuisine. As the rest of the country discovers what locals have known all along, Houston is finally enjoying the recognition it deserves.

## HOSPITALITY AND FOOD - INDIA

### Sri Lanka

The perfect warm winter **holiday destination**

*Sri Lanka, the perfect destination for a warm winter vacation  
From breezy beachy winter to adventure safari*

Are you craving for a dose of winter sun and also want to have a beachy vacation with calm seas and clear sky? Then the ideal destination is Sri Lanka, the budget-friendly island which offers an exotic sun-soaked up winter vacation.



## HOSPITALITY AND FOOD - INTERNATIONAL

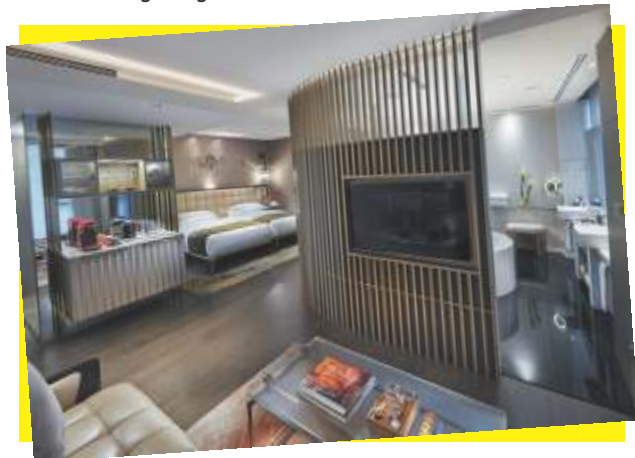
### Immerse yourself in **Mandarin Oriental Macau**

**Mandarin Oriental Macau** could simply be pronounced 'style'. There's no casino here, or any similar sort of dollar-bound circus, simply first-rate beds and food to match in an exclusive location.



### Landmark Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong - International is a masterpiece of **contemporary design**

One of the most exclusive luxury hotels in the world, The Landmark Mandarin Oriental is a chic five-star retreat in the heart of Hong Kong's business and fashion districts.



## HOSPITALITY AND FOOD - INDIA

### Thailand Tourism Festival 2019 promotes environmentally-friendly travel

*Hyatt Place Goa/Candolim rebranded and redesigned as Hyatt Centric Candolim Goa*

**Hyatt Hotels Corporation** has announced the rebranding of Hyatt Place Goa/Candolim to Hyatt Centric Candolim Goa, marking the brand's second hotel in India. Located in prime destinations across the world including New York, Miami, Madrid, Tokyo and Chicago, the Hyatt Centric brand serves as a launch pad to destination exploration and discovery for millennial-minded travelers who want to be in the middle of the action





**travel**  
SPAN

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## Editor's Letter

# TRAVEL TRENDS FOR 2019

## Persistent changes in the travelers preferences

The Indian travel industry has been growing at an exponential rate at the backdrop of burgeoning socio economic disposition and evolved preferences of customers. Fuelled by Government initiatives like UDAN and digitalization reaching nooks and corners of the subcontinent, India has been motivated to travel a lot this year. The much awaited HR mail with the holiday calendar in the first week, marks a beginning of planning for the year. Families plan their long vacations and festive visits to book way ahead in time.

However, the trend of millennials and the corporate crowd making last minute decisions to escape and make most of their long weekends continued through the year. With the destinations getting commercialised by the hour, the younger and the more adventurous lot are moving to unexplored and off beat destinations.

Travel has become more about rejuvenation, adventure, fulfilment, learning new skills and 'being more of who you are' than just ticking off places and flopping in the sun. Travel has now become a priority in the decision-making process of how they want to spend their disposable income. The trend can also be attributed to the first generation of digital nomads who would put envy-worthy Instagram and Facebook feeds with picture-perfect photographs and inspire more and more people to travel, creating a snowball effect.

Taking frequent breaks and shorter vacations, they are just looking for a reason to give in to their wanderlust – be it a weekend break, destination wedding, baby-mooning or a second honeymoon. An interesting observation to note here is that the travelers across the world are not hesitant to stay in a stranger's house. For a cost effective and indulgent trip, homestays have become quite popular. Although we have seen an inclination towards budget hotels, we cannot ignore the fact that there is high level of interest for luxury travel and properties, encouraged by the macro economic conditions. Needless to say, whether budget or luxury, all travelers want is to weave a tapestry of experiences while travelling.

With travel becoming more experiential than functional, brands are personalizing their offerings as per customer preferences. Basis their buying patterns brands push relevant offers to their target segment, recommend options for their stay, etc. Big data, cloud technology & personalization is having a

profound positive impact on the travel industry as it offers customer insights that were hitherto not available previously. With this new information, businesses are in a better position to provide customized service, enhance customer satisfaction, and increase operational efficiency and at the same time help companies gain competitive advantage.

To sum up, while some of the trends in the travel space prevailed, there has been persistent changes in the travelers preference and studying those, some of the on looking trends for the next year could be:

- **Green Travel** - More and more travellers are increasingly 'going green' in their travel choices while keeping the needs of the environment in mind
- **Food Tours** - In 2018 culinary travel ruled the trends, and keeping along with that theme brings 2019's big food-related travel trend: foodie tours. Almost every big city provides at least one Foodie Tour, from Savannah's Southern Charm Sidewalk Tours to Brooklyn Chocolate Tour
- **Family Travel** - When you're on the go with a crew in tow, experiences are clearly the best option. But instead of the usual Disney World or all-inclusive beach getaway for groups, families are being much more adventurous
- **Instagram's Enticement** - One area that will remain hot next year is Instagram. The social media platform continues to take the industry by storm, making "insta-tourism" as much a part of global travel as passports. Younger explorers are making entire trip plans based on photogenic spots captured on Instagram.
- **Personalisation** - Big data and machine-based learning both provide opportunities to deliver a more personalised experience and this trend will only grow in the years ahead.
- **Internet of Things (IoT)** - Another digital trend in the travel industry is 'The Internet of Things' which refers to the use of internet capabilities within everyday devices, allowing them to send and receive data. This is extremely useful within the tourism industry, because it can be deployed to automatically reduce costs and improve the experience for customers, without the need for human interjection.
- **Virtual Reality (VR) & Augmented Reality (AR)** - In the current day and age where technology is the big bet of the day, consumers are spoilt for choices and are increasingly looking of this intervention even in their travel choices

WE ARE ON



DEVENDER GROVER

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## AVIATION

# flynas Concluded 2018 with 60,000 Flights Carrying about 6.6 Million Passengers

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, January 2019:



**M**r. Bander Al-Mohanna, the Chief Executive Officer of flynas, the Saudi national air carrier and leading low-cost airline in the middle east, revealed that flynas has carried about 6.6 million passengers on 60,000 domestic and international flights during 2018, noting that the increase in the number of passengers is a result of the increasing number of flights and destinations in line with flynas' expansion plans to meet its passengers' needs.

Mr. Al-Mohanna stressed that the growth rate in passenger numbers is an extension of flynas' previous successes and expansion plans in the domestic and international market, as it has launched 11 new destinations in 2018.

He added, "this year's flynas results confirm that it continues to be the best travel choice in the Kingdom, which further enhances our future ambitions to expand and reach new destinations". He also noted flynas' achievements, as it has won the prestigious Skytrax Award twice in a row (2017 and 2018) and Middle East's Leading Low-Cost Airline from the World Travel Awards for four consecutive years (2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018).

Al-Mohanna stated that

flynas' domestic flights has carried about 4.3 million passengers, while the total number of passengers on international flights exceeded 2.3 million in 2018. He also said, "the increasing number of passengers on our flights reflects our relentless efforts to improve passenger experience and develop plans to boost growth. We have expanded our domestic and international destinations as well as our strategic partnerships with Jet Airways, Pegasus and Etihad Airways".

In 2019, flynas will continue with its expansion strategy, and new destinations



will be launched on a new fleet of 120, A320neo aircraft purchased from Airbus for a total value of 32 billion riyals, to be delivered successively in 2019.

## Aristocrat tours



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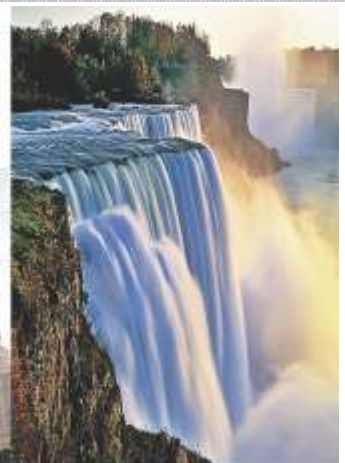


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# flydubai

## launches new routes to Europe

**Dubai-based carrier to operate daily flights to Budapest and up to five flights a week to Naples**

**Flights to Naples will start on 04 June 2019 with flights to Budapest starting on 27 June 2019**

**flydubai becomes the first UAE carrier to offer direct flights to Naples**

**Dubai, United Arab Emirates (TSNNS)**

Dubai-based airline flydubai has announced the start of flights to Budapest in Hungary and Naples in Italy. flydubai will operate up to five flights a week to Naples from 04 June 2019 becoming the first UAE carrier to offer direct flights. Daily flights to Budapest will start on 27 June 2019 and will be in addition to the current service offered by Emirates. Emirates will codeshare on both routes and further illustrates the strength of the partnership which aims to provide more options for travel to passengers. Both

routes will operate from Terminal 3 at Dubai International (DXB).

Commenting on the launch, **Ghaith Al Ghaith, Chief Executive Officer of flydubai**, said: "We are delighted to be launching flights to Budapest and Naples. These destinations provide our passengers with more choice on our network while reaffirming our commitment to the vision set by us to create free flows of tourism and strengthen direct airlinks with the UAE."

Naples is one of the largest cities in Italy and is home to a wealth of cultural attractions, great food and the beautiful

Amalfi coastline. Budapest, which is situated on both banks of the Danube river, combines impressive architecture with numerous museums, galleries and its famous thermal baths.

"Budapest and Naples are important centres for commerce, trade and industry and are incredibly popular leisure destinations, especially during the summer," said Jeyhun Efendi, Senior Vice President, Commercial Operations and E-commerce for flydubai. "Making these destinations more accessible to travellers looking for new places to explore will undoubtedly stimulate traffic flows and tourism. These new routes provide those in Hungary and Italy with the opportunity to explore Dubai and beyond on our network."

To offer passengers more comfort and an enhanced travel experience, flydubai will operate the new routes on the brand-new Boeing 737 MAX 8. The new cabin offering features a flat-bed in Business Class and in addition to the extra space and privacy, passengers can sleep

comfortably during their flight. Economy Class offers new RECARO seats, which are designed to optimise space and comfort, so passengers can sit back, relax and enjoy their flight. flydubai also offers exceptional inflight entertainment with a full HD, 11.6-inch screen, featuring a wide selection of movies, TV shows, music and games in English, Arabic and Russian.

flydubai's route network in Europe currently includes 24 points in Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, Italy, Macedonia (FYROM), Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Turkey and Ukraine.

As part of the Emirates flydubai partnership, each airlines' passengers will have the opportunity to connect in Dubai to hundreds of destinations across the world. For bookings under the codeshare, Emirates passengers receive complimentary meals and the Emirates checked baggage allowance on flights operated by flydubai in Business and Economy classes.

## AVIATION

# British Airways' January Sale offers return fares to London from INR 43,779

India, January 11, 2019—British Airways' January sale is now on with over 100 destinations on offer across its World Traveller (economy), World Traveller Plus (premium economy) and Club World (business) cabins.

Return fares to London start from INR 43,779 and the sale runs until January 31, 2019. The travel period for passengers varies by destination and cabin.

Moran Birger, acting Head

of Sales Asia Pacific and Middle East at British Airways, said: "What better way to ring in 2019 than to make exciting travel plans? We have offers to suit a range

of budgets and requirements with prices starting from INR 43,779 and more than 100 destinations on offer across our network.

"Customers should log on



to ba.com to take advantage of this exciting offer." Moran added.

British Airways is investing £6.5 billion for its customers over five years, covering the installation of the best quality Wi-Fi and power in every seat, fitting 128 long-haul aircraft with new interiors and taking delivery of 72 new aircraft. The airline is investing £600 million specifically in its Club World business class, including outstanding catering and The White Company's luxurious bedding which is available on the London and India routes, plus, from 2019, a new seat with direct aisle access.

## NTO / TURKEY

# Indian tourist arrivals in Turkey to increase in 2019

The Turkish Tourism Board in India recently announced that the number of Indian tourists travelling to Turkey could reach nearly 250,000 arrivals in 2019. The numbers are expected to rise with increase in direct flights between Turkey and India this year. If this happens, it will be a record number for Turkey in terms of the Indian tourist arrivals.

Currently, the tourism board estimates that more than 160,000 Indian tourists travelled to Turkey till December 2018 though the confirmed numbers are yet to come from Ministry of Tourism, Turkey.

Culture & Tourism Counsellor, Turkish Culture and Tourism Office in India said "By the end of 2018, Turkey hosted more than 40 million tourists and as a result Turkey ranks 6th in terms of the international tourist arrivals in the world. Istanbul and Antalya are amongst the top 5 cities in Europe in terms of international tourist arrivals by hosting more than 12 million tourist in one year.

The numbers for India are positive too, however we know that it could be much better. In 2019, Turkey Tourism will focus on highlighting the uniqueness of Turkey in India with special attention on cultural heritage sites like Gobekli Tepe, Ayasofya and Topkapi."

About 12 million Turkish people travel abroad every year and are looking for new destinations. India has always been perceived as a mysterious country by Turkish people for cultural diversity, yoga and religion. Turkey and India enjoy warm relations, which has steadily grown year by year in both scope and depth and spans many different areas of cooperation. The tourism exchange between both the countries has gone upward and Turkey is emerging as a hotspot for MICE, weddings and leisure tourism. India is one of the most crucial and promising tourism markets for Turkey.

With the inauguration of new Istanbul airport which is supposed to be the biggest when it operates with the full

capacity, new frequencies and operations from different international airlines will increase including ones operating from India. The aviation

industry in India is growing tremendously and the majority of Indian aviation companies are looking for new destinations. Istanbul being a hub city for Eurasian and Middle East regions gives hope that no Indian airliner would want to miss the opportunity of directly flying to Turkey from different Indian cities and benefit from new Istanbul airport.

“As Tourism Counsellor, I know that Turkish people have keen interest to visit & explore India. However,



lack of sufficient direct flights between both the countries and difficulty in procuring Indian visa for Turkish citizens hinders the arrival of Turkish tourists to India. With mutual efforts, we can overcome these problems and increase the mutual touristic flow between our countries. I also believe that tourism authorities of both countries need to work in association with each other so that both India & Turkey can achieve the target numbers."

Said Mr Deniz Ersöz

## TRAVEL TRADE

# Travstarz Global Group Enters Cruises as the New PSA for DREAM CRUISES AND STAR CRUISES

**Travstarz Global Group**, the CTRIP Invested Leading B2B Company announced their entry into Cruises with their Partnership with Genting Cruise Lines as their new **Preferred Sales Agent (PSA)** for both **DREAM CRUISES AND STAR CRUISES**. Announcing the development, Pankaj Nagpal, MD, Travstarz Global Group said "We had been eyeing the Cruise business for some time now and we are elated with our new partnership with **DREAM CRUISES AND STAR CRUISES**. This completes our Product Portfolio as we will get Cruises on our Online Reservation System in.rezb2b.com which already has Flights, Hotels, Tours, Transfers, Insurance and Visas. Cruising is definitely picking up at a fast pace in India and we hope to see some robust numbers from our Cruise vertical as well. We already have **Vani Singh** with us who had been a part of Star Cruises in the past and will help driving this vertical



GCL, added 'Travstarz is one of the fastest growing B2B company in India and we are very glad to have them onboard with us. We are sure that with their dedicated approach and a strong Top leadership, this partnership



along with **Ramanpreet Singh**, our GM – Sales in North and East India and **Hema Manghnani** leading the team in Mumbai for West and South India. I would specially like to thank **Mr.**

**Michael Goh, Mr. Naresh Rawal** and the entire **GENTING CRUISE LINES** team for their faith and trust in Travstarz and look forward to a long partnership". **Mr. Naresh Rawal**, VP – Sales,

will prove mutually beneficial for us. We assure our full support to Travstarz Team and wish them luck in this new endeavour."

## HOSPITALITY AND FOOD

# Introducing the very first **FAIRFIELD by MARRIOTT** **PUNE KHARADI** in Maharashtra

**After** successfully digging their shoes in Belagavi, **Fairfield by Marriott** introduces itself in Pune Maharashtra. Located in close proximity to Pune business hubs, **Fairfield by Marriott Pune Kharadi** is the perfect destination for any business trip or a quick getaway. Enjoy an ideal location near great shopping, family activities and celebrated attractions, including EON IT Park, World Trade Centre, Magarpatta City and Amanora Mall.

Featuring 109 well-appointed rooms, the hotel's contemporary design offers

fuss-free and easy comfort with its range of in-room amenities; the hotel is a haven for families, vacationers and business travellers. Dining options include Kava Kitchen and Bar – the

signature all-day dining restaurant offering a mix of international and local delicacies; the bar provides a selection of premium liquor, fine wines, cocktails and mocktails, and the market – a 24/7 convenient store with a wide variety of grab-and-go food option. Host flawless corporate events at **Fairfield by Marriott Pune Kharadi's** versatile meeting and

conference space featuring state-of-the-art audio-visual equipment and customized catering.

For travellers who want to maintain momentum and stay balanced, **Fairfield by Marriott Pune Kharadi** uniquely supports productivity and well-being with smart spaces, health-conscious options and a stress-free experience so you never skip a beat. Whether you are travelling in Pune for a day, a week or a month, **Fairfield by Marriott Pune Kharadi** provides a modern respite where your needs always come first.





## SATTE 2019 receives an overwhelming response from the global travel and tourism market

**26<sup>th</sup> edition**  
of the **South Asia's leading**  
and celebrated  
**travel trade**  
show to be held  
in **Greater Noida**



IATA Agents Association of India (IAAI), India Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB), Universal Federation of Travel Agents Association (UFTAA), Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) and Enterprising Travel Agents Association (ETAA) to name a few.

The three-day expo will witness several exciting partnerships and announcements that promise to augur in new trends in the industry. SATTE 2019, fresh after its gala silver jubilee celebrations last year, has witnessed a record-breaking number of enrolments for its Domestic Buyer Programme with 500 domestic buyers already registered three months before the exhibition. The expo expects footfalls from a wide range of visitors that comprise tour operators, travel agents, wedding planners, corporate travel decision makers, potential Investors in the field of hospitality, leisure and travel industries as well as location planners from leading Television and Film production houses.

While Thailand, Malaysia and Sri Lanka are partner countries so far, Indonesia is the feature destination for SATTE 2019. Partner states for SATTE 2019 are Rajasthan, Goa and Madhya Pradesh. SATTE is also in discussion with few more countries and states to become the partner countries and states for SATTE 2019.

Speaking at the

UBM India, India's leading B2B exhibitions organiser, is all set to bring in the 26th edition of SATTE - South Asian Travel and Tourism Exchange from January 16 to 18, 2019 at the new venue - India Expo Mart, Greater Noida - NCR. This year, the exhibition has witnessed a tremendous response from the industry with participation from over 1,000 exhibitors and representation from over 50 countries and 90 cities from across India. SATTE will provide a comprehensive platform to domestic and international buyers and professionals from across the travel, tourism and hospitality industry along with National and State Tourism Boards (NTOs and STOs) to congregate and conduct



business, arrive at solution-driven innovations to counteract economic uncertainties, and promote inbound, outbound and domestic tourism in India. SATTE has grown hand-in-hand with the consistent support of the Ministry of Tourism as well as all State Tourism Ministries and the Indian travel and tourism fraternity in totality.

SATTE continues to

receive the support of international organizations/associations and Indian travel trade associations such as World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), Travel Agents Association of India (TAI), Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI), Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI),



announcement of the 26th edition of SATTE, Mr. Yogesh Mudras, Managing Director, UBM India said, "Globally, Travel & Tourism is an important economic activity. In India, the total contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP was USD 234 billion, 9.4 of the GDP in 2017 and is forecast to rise by 7.5 per cent

in 2018, and to rise by 6.9 per annum to USD 492.2 billion, 9.9 per cent of GDP in 2028. Total contribution of the sector to employment was 8 per cent of the total employment in 2017 which is expected to rise to 8.4 per cent in 2028. Travel and tourism is the third largest foreign exchange earner for India. The industry is



growing at an unprecedented pace with India's travel sector expected to grow to a \$56 billion market opportunity by 2020. While the foreign tourist arrivals are growing with an unprecedented rate of around 15 , Indian outbound travel is growing with a CAGR of over 10 per cent since last few years. Our Domestic Travel Visits currently stands at 1.6 billion reflecting growth of 18 per cent."

He added, "With a proactive measure from the Govt of India such as ease of visa, Regional Connectivity Scheme, launch of Incredible India 2.0 campaign, implementation of Swadesh Darshan, PRASAD, Prayatan Parv and Adopt A Heritage schemes amongst others, India Tourism Industry is set to touch a greater height. Indian aviation industry has been witnessing over 20 per cent growth since last 3 years. This is where a travel and tourism show of SATTE's stature is so significant. Backed by international organizations and Indian associations, SATTE endeavours to analyse trends, forecast future developments, come up with viable solutions and of course, help businesses thrive."

SATTE 2019 will have an array of exhibitors with many of them increasing their presence for the 26th edition of SATTE. "Exhibitors such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Azerbaijan amongst others have taken larger stall space at SATTE 2019. We have new exhibitors such as Qatar, Iceland, Cyprus and few more from overseas joining for the first time at SATTE. Once again SATTE is set to witness the participation of close to 28 states along with Ministry of Tourism Govt. of India, most of which are in the process of finalizing their participation. Also, for the 2019 edition, SATTE has seen an overwhelming response from the private segment, both outbound and inbound, and a lot of new

private players are expected to come on-board." Pallavi Mehra, Group Director & Publisher – Travel Trends Today, UBM India said.

SATTE India Conference 2019, a concurrent event of SATTE, is set to once again provide industry professionals with the tools and techniques to succeed in today's fast-paced marketplace. This year, SATTE has roped in global and national associations/think tanks like World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), ASM Global Route Development, Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE) and Network of Indian MICE Agents (NIMA) amongst others. While UNWTO will have a session titled as 'Tourism and Jobs: a better future for all', CLIA will organize a 1 hour workshop for agents and operators selling cruise holidays followed a panel discussion on India as a cruise destination and market on Day 1 (January 16, 2018). ACTE will organize a dedicated 'Corporate Travel Day' at SATTE on Day 2 (January 17, 2019). NIMA will organize a workshop and two business sessions one each on Meetings and Incentives and one session each on Conferences and Exhibitions on Day 1 and 2 respectively. ASM Global Route Development is organizing a session on 'Air Route Development and Tourism Growth' on Day 3. UBM India will be hosting the 3rd Edition SATTE Awards powered by T3, which is an endeavour to recognize and celebrate the excellence, triumphs and innovations of key stakeholders in the Travel and Tourism industry.

## HOSPITALITY AND FOOD

# IHG marks re-entry into Bangladesh with opening of InterContinental® Dhaka

New Delhi (TSNN)

**IHG® (InterContinental Hotels Group)**, one of the world's leading hotel companies, has announced the opening of InterContinental® Dhaka in partnership with Bangladesh Services Limited. The luxury hotel is situated in a prime and one of the most prestigious locations in the capital city, Minto Road with easy access to the downtown business district.

Dhaka has witnessed significant economic development in the recent years with a rise in both domestic and international travellers. With opening of InterContinental® Dhaka, IHG aims to provide the discerning travellers the best in luxury in its signature style.

Located in the heart of the city, InterContinental® Dhaka is easily accessible from all key city landmarks such as the Prime Minister's Office, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Medical

Introduces a **luxurious** offering to guests visiting the **capital city**



University, Bashundhara City Shopping Center, the famous Dhaka University Campus and renowned historical monuments. Built in a contemporary design, the hotel offers 226 stylish guest room, including 201 premium or deluxe rooms, 10 deluxe suites, 5 superior suites, 5 diplomatic suites and 5 presidential suites. Guests staying in the Club InterContinental Rooms can access the Club Lounge, to relax, work or enjoy exclusive dining options including breakfast, evening beverages and canapés.

InterContinental® Dhaka offers 2 exquisitely designed ballrooms and 7 spacious meeting rooms equipped with

the latest technology. With over 21000 square feet of specially designed space for meetings and events, the hotel promises flawlessly executed corporate and social events.

InterContinental® Dhaka features unrivalled facilities and amenities including a temperature-controlled swimming pool overlooking Ramna park, a gymnasium, a steam room, a sauna and a spa offering an extensive menu of signature therapies. The hotel also offers the finest dining options with an array of local and world cuisines including an indulgent all-day dining, a speciality restaurant, a café in the lobby and a pool bar. Guests can also enjoy carefully curated cocktails and canapés at the Club bar and restaurant. The hotel has a dedicated concierge service team that provides attentive and tailored service to ensure that every guest experiences personalized luxury during their stay.

**Vivek Bhalla, Regional Vice President, SWA, IHG**

**commented:** "Today is a milestone occasion for us as we announce the opening of InterContinental® Dhaka – a stunning property that will offer the guests a luxurious experience with signature facilities and high standards of service that we have become renowned for. We are confident that the hotel will be a great success and we look forward to welcoming our guests from around the world. The opening also aligns with our strategy to expand our presence across brands, and key cities in the SWA region."

**Mr. Md Mohibul Haque, Secretary of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism and Chairman of Bangladesh Services Limited**, further stated: "We are delighted to partner with a global hospitality company such as IHG to open InterContinental® Dhaka, a landmark hotel in the capital city."

## TRAVEL TRADE

# American Express opens a new lounge at the Mumbai International Airport

An exclusive space for **Card members** to relax and unwind before taking off to their next travel destination

Mumbai (TSNN)

**American Express** has opened a new proprietary lounge at Terminal 2 of the Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport, Mumbai. This is the second proprietary lounge of American Express in India, the other being in Delhi.

The lounge facility offers an opportunity for travelers to relax in style and comfort. Entry to the lounge is complimentary for Centurion and Platinum Card members. Platinum Reserve Card members receive up to 12 complimentary visits a year. The lounge is fitted with luxurious interiors and comfortable seating, and an ambiance



that evokes plush hospitality. It offers a lavish spread and gourmet menu, covering breakfast and all-day dining selections available as a la carte (for Centurion Card members) and buffet (for Platinum and Platinum Reserve Card

members). The lounge also offers a rich collection of the finest spirits and cocktails.

Speaking about the new launch, **Manoj Adlakha, CEO – American Express, India**, said, "Our Card members travel extensively for business and pleasure and we are committed to meeting their needs wherever they go. Access to the Mumbai Lounge and the broader American Express Global Lounge Collection is among an expansive suite of benefits designed to create a more seamless travel experience for our Platinum and Centurion Card members. Special privileges at the lounge, such as fast Wi-Fi, comfortable seating, private work areas, make the wait time an enjoyable experience."

The American Express Global Lounge Collection includes access to American Express Centurion Lounges, international American Express lounges, Delta Sky Club® for Card members flying on Delta and Priority Pass™ Select Lounges. Card members can find a lounge at <https://www.americanexpress.com/in/benefits/the-platinum-card/>.

## CRUISE TRENDS

# Royal Caribbean International

redefines cruise travel in Asia; announces the arrival of Spectrum of the Seas in the region in 2019

**T**IRUN Travel Marketing, the exclusive India representative of Royal Caribbean International announced the arrival of the award-winning cruise line's ship Spectrum of the Seas and its inaugural season in Southeast Asia in May 2019. As the ship readies to homeport in Asia, Royal Caribbean International has once again upped the yardstick for cruise holidays in the region. While the cruise line has been introducing innovative ships to the continent for over a decade now, this is the second time that it has deployed a brand new ship for homeporting in Asia, underscoring its confidence in the ever-growing number of cruise enthusiasts from the region.

The first of the Quantum Ultra Class segment of ships, Spectrum of the Seas has a total capacity of accommodating 5,622 guests and is 1,139 feet long, surpassing sister ships Quantum and Ovation of the Seas, both currently Asia's largest. Spectrum is equipped with several first-at-sea features such as Sky Pad, a virtual reality, bungee trampoline experience and the two-level Ultimate Family Suite with an in-room slide, as well as new innovative dining concepts, on top of the iconic Quantum Class favourites.

Spectrum of the Seas will debut in April 2019 in Barcelona with segmented cruises on the Global Odyssey to Singapore before

**The award-winning cruise line deploys a brand new ship to homeport in Asia for the 2nd time, underlining the growing popularity of cruise travel in the region.**

continuing on to Shanghai, taking guests to 13 countries. For her Shanghai season from June 2019, she will introduce new itineraries with visits to new ports, such as Hakodate and Nigata, Japan; Ilocos, Philippines; and Vladivostok, Russia. In winter 2019, the ship will reposition to Hong Kong to offer special holiday cruises.

**Spectrum of The Seas will offer the following itineraries from Singapore:**

- 3-night cruise to Kuala Lumpur (Port Klang) on May 18
- 4-night cruise to Penang on May 21
- 9-night one-way cruise from Singapore to Shanghai, calling at Ho Chi Minh City, Nha Trang and Hong Kong (with an overnight stay) on May 25.

Speaking on the announcement, **Mrs. Ratna Chadha, Chief Executive, TIRUN Travel Marketing,** said, "The inaugural season and homeporting of Royal Caribbean International's Spectrum of the Seas in Southeast Asia is great news

for the cruise enthusiasts of the region. The ship, which is the first of the Quantum Ultra Class fleet, offers an incredible and evolved cruising experience. Further, new features such as the Ultimate Family Suite, are the perfect addition for Indian families who look forward to spending quality time and enjoying thrilling experiences together each summer. We are certain that the arrival of Spectrum in Asia will give a stronger fillip to the growing affinity of Indians for cruise travel."

### First-At-Sea Adventures

The first ship in Royal Caribbean International's fleet custom built for the Asian market, Spectrum of the Seas will feature bold and unexpected experiences including the iconic Sky Pad, a virtual reality, bungee trampoline experience located on the aft of the ship. The out-of-this-world experience is for guests of all ages and can also be enjoyed without virtual reality headsets, for those who prefer to look out over the expansive ocean as they leap toward the sky.

### Luxury Private Suite Enclave

Debuting on the forward end of the ship is the cruise line's first private enclave for suite guests. Guests booked in the suites will have exclusive card key access, a

private elevator and outdoor space for relaxing and a dedicated restaurant and lounge.

For families that want to experience more quality time together, Spectrum of the Seas will introduce a two-level, 2,809-square-foot, Ultimate Family Suite accommodating up to 11 guests. The three-bedroom suite will include a master bedroom with an en-suite bathroom that extends above the sea level providing unparalleled ocean views, and two additional suites for grandparents and kids in the family.

### Revolutionary Dining

Guests onboard the 18-deck smartship will enjoy multiple restaurant venues with cuisines from around the globe, including an awe-inspiring three-level Main Dining Room serving a variety of International and Asian a la carte options, imaginative cuisine at Wonderland, Jamie's Italian by celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, Izumi Japanese cuisine, a new specialty restaurant Sichuan Red which will serve authentic Sichuan cuisine, and Leaf and Bean a traditional tea room and café parlour.

### Transformative Entertainment Experiences

New to the fleet is Star Moment a lively and energetic karaoke venue. Making a return are signature features such as the North Star elevated glass capsule, RipCord by iFly skydiving simulator, the FlowRider surfing simulator, Bionic Bar, transformative venues such as Seaplex, the largest indoor activity space at sea with new augmented reality walls and floors providing guests with thrilling high-tech interactive experiences and Two70 – a high-tech entertainment venue offering 270 degree panoramic views out of the back of the ship.

Spectrum of the Seas' sailings are now open for sale at [www.tirun.com](http://www.tirun.com)

## HOSPITALITY AND FOOD

# Unplugged Courtyard Gurgaon a Destination In Itself... In A Brand New Avatar

**T**he opening of Unplugged Courtyard Gurgaon is in continuation of our long standing, successful relationship with Unplugged Courtyard, Connaught Place. This property has been built with a great amount of thought and passion, giving personal attention to every detail. We believe the resulting product is indeed grand and we are confident the Unplugged Courtyard will be the new fun with panache address of the city,' says Dinesh Arora, Chief Managing Director, Eastman Colour Restaurants

### AMBIENCE

Walk in through a cluster of balmy trees and travel into a completely different land.... an alfresco setting that exudes Charm! Allow Unplugged Courtyard Gurgaon to transport you into the climes of Goa right in the heart of Gurgaon's precinct of Udyog Vihar. All that's missing is the feel of the waves lashing your toes. The space is welcoming, intimate and quite effortlessly dramatic.

Nestled in a leafy, serene lane in Gurgaon's upscale Udyog Vihar, Unplugged Courtyard is understatedly



elegant and generously spaced over 15,000 square feet spanning two levels, reflects an urban chic vibe.... and the best part....there are no parking blues! With clean lines and welcoming seating, the décor is balanced between chic and comfortable. With a capacity of over 375 covers, the restaurant also boasts a terrace area, a secret garden and a quirky bus give the space a distinctly 'comfy' feel, without ever seeming over-designed.

The ambience of this all fun **SPACE** in Gurgaon is as hard to title down as its scope. Without controlling its skill to switch from a relaxed daytime hangout to a refined nightfall space, the environs mirror multi-faceted creativity. You can select the air you desire, as you make *tête-à-têtes* over a drink or pondering over the



menu concentrating an interesting mix of traditional traveller's fare and new age cooking made from the finest ingredients and cultivated to create the most enjoyable taste, savour and smoothness.

It would be most appropriate to say that the interior design of this courtyard restaurant club is in absolute consonance with the architecture of its shell creating just the right vibe of an unmistakably 'laid-back' space.





## FOOD

Unplugged Courtyard Gurgaon sets a benchmark for its pioneering food and often-irreverent take on the idea of traditional cuisines. As important as food, design and music, the bar keeps abreast offering trendy and affordable yet fabulous tasting cocktails. Having firmly established itself as a quality chill zone destination in New Delhi, it now opens its doors to the people of Gurgaon.

**Corporate Chef Akshay Bhardwaj** is no stranger to immaculateness. He shares his exceptional take on modern day comfort food combining

ingredients that marry the Chef's progressive approach to World cuisine **Akshay** specializes in European cuisine, though over the years he has been clever to sculpt a place for himself in inventive western & Pan Asian food which emphasises on



freshness, the use of indigenous ingredients and most notably feeds the customer and not only excites them with theory. His influential years working under perhaps some of the best chef's helped coach his panache and ideas of cuisine.

His focus in every dish is always prime ingredients; his dishes elicit the real flavour of every natural element. **Laal**

**Maas Ki Lahori Seekh** for example marries mutton mince with Rajasthan spices; served with walnut **Labneh**, this is an addictive blend of Indian and Middle Eastern influences. Nothing encompasses South East Asia more than that distinctively delicious entity known as Thai Basil Chicken, and the flavour-explosion that is the Khow Suey topped with fried onion and garlic. One of the chef's

favorite is the **Bhuna Gosht** with saffron **Parantha**. A fresher rendition of the classic version, it makes for a perfect bite, with marinated onions providing a satisfying contrast to the flavour and texture of the meat. Every diner needs a **Biryani**, and Unplugged Courtyard Gurgaon offers one of the best in the city with its special **Biryani** section. Desserts like the French toast with ice cream in a rich banana cake, and **Churros** with chocolate sauce promise potent doses of decadent comfort. The crockery here is cheerfully matched and, perfectly complements the honest wholesomeness of the food. Embark on a culinary journey of a lifetime at **Unplugged Courtyard Gurgaon**.

## BEVERAGE

The tastefully designed cocktail bar is trendy and our bar menu enticing and indulgent. It is the perfect setting to savour our first-rate cocktails or even a glass of wine in the early evening through to midnight. Food is as important as the design and music and, for once, the bar has kept abreast. It's trendy and affordable and, above all, high on taste! There is never a dull moment here. The music is buzzy and you don't make a reservation at Unplugged Courtyard Gurgaon you saunter in whenever the mood grabs you. The vibe is cool and new, yet, familiar.

## ADDRESS

No 9 Convenience  
Shopping Complex, Phase II,  
Udyog Vihar, Sector 20,  
Gurgaon, Haryana, Near  
Oberoi Hotel



# DINESH ARORA

Chief Managing Director, Eastman Colour Restaurants

his creative genius behind the **Swanky Unplugged Courtyard Connaught Place**, the all vegetarian Swad and upcoming multifaceted **Unplugged Courtyard Gurgaon** and **La Roca**, an upmarket **Tapas bar** is unquestionably one of India's important restaurateurs.

**Dinesh Arora** is a restaurateur who has not only established a collection of restaurants that set a new model within the hospitality profession; he also likes to shake things up a bit every now and then by reinventing his restaurants and cuisine concepts. A sparkle forms in his eye as he admits he loves keeping his patrons guessing as to what he'll dream up next in his realm of ingenious dining. No doubt his upcoming **Gurgaon Unplugged Courtyard** in a bigger and better avatar has already become the talk of the town. One can never accuse **Dinesh Arora** of having lack of ambition. The road has occasionally been rocky, but no restaurateur has ever put themselves quite like

him. A true fount of knowledge, his eye for detail across all facets of operation- from the design of the uniforms, upholstery of his sofas and the floor tiles to the plan of the menu and alignment of the kitchen- has stemmed in some of India's finest concepts.

He grew up in New Delhi and studied Commerce at the Delhi University; he loves travelling and has built quite a refined palate of his own. His first bite of '**Paella**' in Spain, '**Tom Yum**' in Thailand, '**Crème Brûlée**' in France, '**Dimsums**' in Hongkong or his visit to fine dining restaurants in London and Dubai, the bounty of the street food is where his passion stemmed from, his menus have largely drawn enthusiasm from these and the diners. The hard steel of ambition took time to enter his soul. Like many others before him, he entered the restaurant business owing to his love of food. Interestingly **Dinesh loves Bollywood** as much as his food, hence the name **Eastman Colour** restaurants and hence also



**Unplugged Courtyard Connaught Place** being launched by King Khan himself.

## PUSHING THE BOUNDARY

**Unplugged Courtyard Connaught Place** is largely to thank for the current trend for open spaces, bare brick walls, great food to give with your tittle, stellar live music and no reservations. **Dinesh Arora** dreams big and constantly pushes the boundaries of what a restaurant can be; he intends to take his eponymous restaurant concepts pan India. 'It's not every time the utmost cutting-edge food, but its food that shoves the restrictions just enough while remaining comfortable for people', says **Dinesh Arora**. You will find him spend each day checking

on an existing restaurant, peeking at a behind-schedule construction site, meeting with clients. He zooms back and forth in his car, and thinking aloud about something that has to be done that isn't being done but might be done, or not. Amid the bustle of his business, he loves watching customers' special moments. 'The other evening, I saw a group of youngsters celebrating their grandmother's birthday,' **Arora** says. 'It does make it worthwhile, being there. You can savour that moment'.

'But then you have to get back to the other side of the business,' he says. He smiles. 'The paranoia. You want everything to be right.' In his spare time he loves socializing with his friends and spending time with his family.

# AKSHAY BHARDWAJ

Corporate Chef, Eastman Colour Restaurants

**Delhi's** favourite and hottest young **Corporate Chef, Akshay Bhardwaj** overlooks all food & beverage outlets at **Eastman Colour Restaurants** including the upcoming multi-faceted, '**Unplugged Courtyard**' in Gurgaon and '**La Roca**' in Aerocity.

'Cooking is my passion. My Grandfather loved making chutneys and I enjoyed giving him a hand as a child. I feel cooking is the best thing that has happened to me. I love creating dynamic edible works of art and bringing the perfection to each creation. I have always found myself associated with cooking', shares **Akshay**.

Passion is one ingredient that **Chef**

**Akshay Bhardwaj** brings in abundance and one that has proven to be the most significant facet of his promising culinary career. Having sautéed, roasted and grilled out his path by doing what many of the greatest chefs in the world have done in their early careers, learning by doing, and gaining a breadth of knowledge in the process. This experience came from Europe's finest kitchens of the likes of **Le Bateau Ivre- Jean Pierre Jacob**, **Oceania Cruise line**, **Noma** by **Rene Redzepi** to name a few and his amazing stints in India at **Ista Hyderabad**; **Pullman** where he was the opening Chef at **La Riviera** and also created the first ever **Foie Gras Ice-Cream**; and the last one being **Whisky Samba** which did phenomenal business under his helm. Needles to add, the accumulated experiences have launched him on his own path. It was at **Noma** that he developed his adoration for emphasis placed on freshness and the quality of ingredients. **Akshay's** philosophy on food is clear, he believes

food should be made with love and that simplicity is key.

## HIS FORTE

**Chef Akshay Bhardwaj** specializes in European cuisine, though over the years he has been clever to sculpt a place for himself in inventive western & Pan Asian food which emphasizes on freshness, the use of indigenous ingredients and most notably feeds the customer and not only excites them with theory. His influential years working under perhaps some of the best chefs helped coach his panache and ideas of cuisine.

## CHEF SPEAK

"To have arrived in the market when the idea of a menu concentrating on a mix of traditional traveller's fare and new age cooking was still comparatively nascent, and to have worked alongside the odds in changing the outlook of an entire city is where the sense of accomplishment lies".

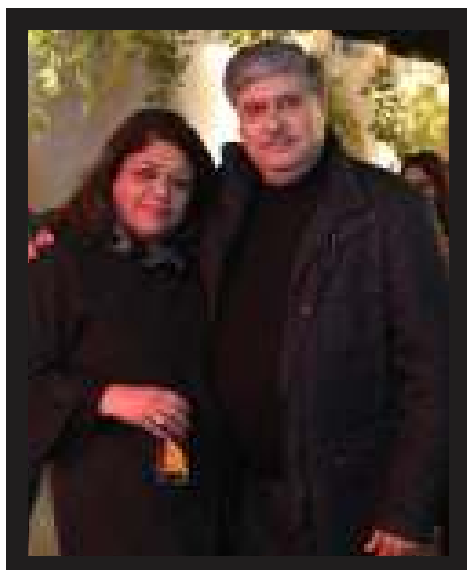
## HOSPITALITY AND FOOD

### Travel Span & Unplugged Courtyard

Gurugram, organized an evening of **Fun, Music** and **Entertainment**

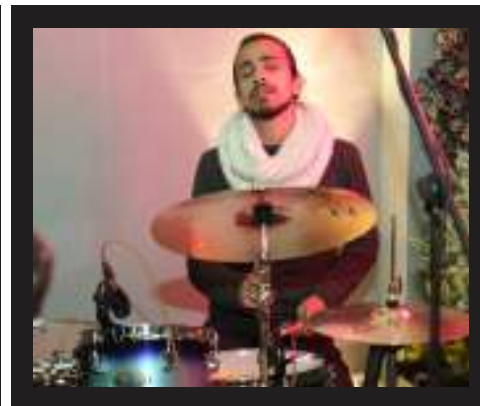
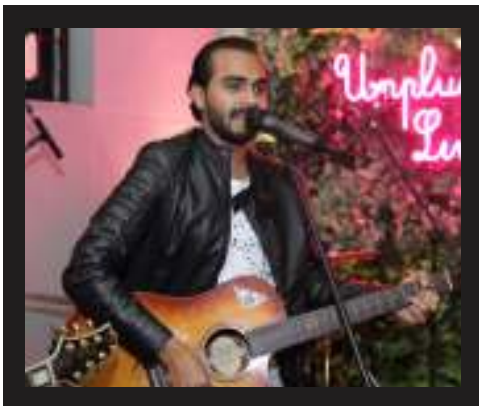
**T**ravel Span, **Luxury and Lifestyle magazine** recently organized a special evening of **Fun, Music and Entertainment** for a select gathering from the **Travel Industry** at the newly opened **Unplugged Courtyard in Gurugram (Gurgaon)**. The venue offered a **Serene, Dreamy And Romantic ambience**.

Unplugged Courtyard's new outlet in Gurgaon is one of those magical places that will make you forget that you're in the heart of a bustling city. Once you walk past the cluster of balmy trees, you'll enter a gorgeous al fresco seating space that will make your city-stress fade away. The decor is chic and comfortable, so you'll feel at home right away. You can choose to sit on the terrace or in the secret garden and enjoy the few days of Delhi winter. You can also opt to sit in a quirky London bus that will take you back to your childhood days. The indoor section had Bollywood and Hollywood music for those who danced the night away on their trippy toes. The musical and magical night offered yummy bites and boozy drinks.



# Travel Span & Unplugged Courtyard

Gurugram, organized an evening of  
**Fun, Music and Entertainment**



# Travel Span & Unplugged Courtyard

Gurugram, organized an evening of  
**Fun, Music and Entertainment**



# Enter the world of exotic flavours with Butter Chicken Factory



Cross the threshold of the **Butter Chicken Factory** and enter a world of exotic flavours. Modern dining room complements the traditional menu, which features authentic Indian dishes that will be sure to delight.

Authentic Recipes - The experts agree – its intimate and relaxed dining experience offers something different to local and foreign patrons and ensures you enjoy a memorable food experience every time.

Flavorful **DISHES** - For those with pure food indulgence in mind, visit the **BCF** and sate their desires with ever authentic recipes inspired from Northern India.

**Butter Chicken Factory** is a place for all the chicken lovers with immense options and delicacies available under one roof. The iconic butter chicken factory at Bandra in Mumbai has opened dine-in outlet which serves both indoor and outdoor seating, capable of seating 20 pax each. It has a warm ambiance, and convenient lighting fixtures with a large hanging



lap above each table.

**Butter Chicken Factory** is a story of two foodies who were on a quest to present authentic North Indian Cuisine and more importantly, the best iteration of its single most popular dish - butter chicken. They tried out almost 300 versions and over a 100 recipes until they stumbled upon one which completely encapsulated the aroma, taste, spice and flavours of the original **Butter Chicken**, yet keeping its aligned to the 21st century sensibility. What



resulted was vibrant, fiery, lip-smacking original curries envisioned in modern setting. It is a 12 hour process, from hand picked farm tomatoes to ice baths, their instead of our

gravy is a result of obsessed precision nurtured over relentless hours in the kitchen. After brining Delhi's original taste to Mumbai, BCF quickly spread its wings and encompassed eight locations including Mumbai, Gurgaon and Pune. The chain is spreading its wings in other cities as well. Butter Chicken Factory at Gurgaon offers vibrant, fiery, lip-smacking North Indian soul food made with modern Indian sensibilities.

BCF chef brings not only his skill in the cooking of Indian cuisine but also his heart.

All the dishes served at the BCF ensure that the food that the chef creates is as close to the Indian culinary tradition as can be.



# Gokulam Grand Hotel and Spa Bangalore

### Appoints Prashanth Rajagopal as Director of Business Development and Marketing

Prior to joining **Gokulam Grand, Rajagopal** held several leadership positions in India and the Middle East, across multiple sectors including technology services, automotive to name a few.

**RASHANTH RAJAGOPAL** has been recently been appointed by **Gokulam Grand Hotel and Spa Bangalore** as Director of Business Development and Marketing at the hotel. With over two decades of experience in sales and marketing, Rajagopal will be responsible for the 5-star property's strategic growth by delivering an exceptional experience to corporates as well as loyal customers.

Prior to joining **Gokulam Grand, Rajagopal** held several leadership positions in India and the Middle East, across multiple sectors including technology services, automotive

to name a few. Over the years he has achieved breakthroughs in several key accounts by consistently providing world class service.

**Rajagopal's** focus on customer experience is centred on delivering promises, building meaningful relationships and developing repeat business.

Speaking on the appointment, **Akash Gupta, General Manager, Gokulam Grand Hotel and Spa** said, "We are delighted to have Prashanth to head the Business and Marketing department at our hotel. His overall experience in various

sectors with proven track record speaks a lot about his leadership skills, which I'm sure will prove to be a boon for Gokulam Grand Hotel and Spa."

**Rajagopal** said, "I'm happy to be a part of such an established property. I'm looking forward to working with the talented team of executives at the hotel to drive growth and create timeless hospitality experiences for our esteemed guests. We aim to position Gokulam Grand as the first choice for business and luxury."



## IHCL Inks New Taj Branded Property in Lucknow; To Open Third Hotel in the City

*The Greenfield project is slated to open in 2022. With this addition, the homegrown hotel company will have three hotels across two of its brands in the city – Taj and Ginger.*

**THE INDIAN Hotels Company Limited (IHCL)** has just signed a Taj branded hotel in Lucknow in partnership with Luxus Hospitality Pvt Ltd. The Greenfield project is slated to open in 2022. With this addition, the

homegrown hotel company will have three hotels across two of its brands in the city – Taj and Ginger.

Speaking about the signing, Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director and CEO, IHCL said, "We are delighted to partner with Luxus Hospitality. This signing is aligned to Aspiration 2022 with its focus on aggressive domestic growth. The Company is very optimistic about Lucknow as it is an important centre of governance, business, culture and tourism."

Located strategically at Vibhuti Khand, New Gomti Nagar Centre, the 185-key hotel is located in close proximity of key corporate parks, institutions and recreational facilities. The hotel will also boast of an all-day diner, a specialty restaurant, a bar, a wellness area and banqueting facilities.

Amit Singh, Director, Luxus Hospitality Pvt Ltd said, "We are proud to partner with The Indian Hotels Company Limited for its iconic Taj brand and bring their famed hospitality to Lucknow."

# Hyatt Centric Brand Expands In India With Opening Of Hyatt Centric Candolim Goa



HYATT  
CENTRIC™

**Hyatt Place  
Goa/Candolim**  
rebranded and  
redesigned as  
**Hyatt Centric  
Candolim**

**Hyatt Hotels Corporation** has announced the rebranding of Hyatt Place Goa/Candolim to Hyatt Centric Candolim Goa, marking the brand's second hotel in India.

Located in prime destinations across the world including New York, Miami, Madrid, Tokyo and Chicago, the Hyatt Centric brand serves as a launchpad to destination exploration and discovery for millennial-minded travelers who want to be in the middle of the action.

Situated in the heart of North Goa, Hyatt Centric Candolim Goa provides chic and contemporary accommodations just steps

away from the city's best beaches, shopping centers, culture, entertainment, nightlife and other local hotspots, making it easy for guests to get out and explore.

"The opening of Hyatt Centric Candolim Goa is our first step in introducing the Hyatt Centric experience to the vibrant state of Goa," said Sunjae Sharma, vice president operations India, at Hyatt. "Based in one of the most popular areas of the island, we are confident that Hyatt Centric Candolim Goa will allow guests to discover all that Goa has to offer. The introduction of the Hyatt Centric brand displays yet another way for us to care for our guests, while offering them international hospitality and authentic experiences."

Contemporary and eclectic, the hotel has 167 spacious guestrooms including one suite, all offering incredible views of the garden, pool or hillside

through large bay windows or balconies. With features such as complimentary wi-fi, an LED TV, tea and coffee facilities, mini-fridge, in-room electronic safe and more, each guestroom offers the perfect setting to relax after a day of business or leisure. The suite features a separate living area and bedroom with a spacious bathroom and powder room.

With artisanal craft cocktails and local fare, Hyatt Centric Candolim Goa's dining scene is as unique as it is authentic. During the day, the restaurant, Grok, features a spacious and relaxed atmosphere with delicious local Goan favorites and handcrafted cocktails. In the evenings, Grok is a themed kebaberie and bread bar, with the bar serving mixology cocktails. Additionally, for a unique space to work, play, or socialize, The Corner serves

coffee and light fare.

Hyatt Centric Candolim Goa also offers 6,065 square feet (563 square meters) of meeting and event spaces, including Jade Vine, a modern ballroom with state-of-the-art facilities, Isle de Sol, a contemporary flexible meeting space, and Jardim, an outdoor banquet space that can be used for either business or social events.

Hyatt Centric Candolim Goa also provides guests with a modern fitness studio, outdoor swimming pool, kids play area, 24-hour room service, currency exchange, multilingual staff, laundry and dry cleaning services. Additionally, the hotel offers guided off-site experiences that allow guests to truly immerse in the locale, such as scuba diving, heritage walks and food tours, highlighting the best Goa has to offer. For more information, please visit [hyattcentriccandolimgoa.com](http://hyattcentriccandolimgoa.com)

## HOSPITALITY AND FOOD

### The Council - An exclusive business club at **HYATT REGENCY DELHI**

New Delhi (TSNN)

**Hyatt Regency Delhi** launched its exclusive, members-only business club in August '17 for leaders of the industry, catering to a network of entrepreneurs and professionals from across the business world.

The Council is touted to be the ultimate amalgamation of a

corporate boardroom and a networking carouse. By creating an intimate yet diverse environment for corporates to conduct work and leisure at one address, The Council seeks to provide a niche space for achievers across industries.

Members will enjoy an extensive range of facilities including access



to a boardroom with state of the art facilities without prior reservations, an exclusively curated menu along with wine and cigar room, annual events, and loyalty membership to Club at The Hyatt (CATH). The members will also enjoy special access to world-renowned art on demand, among many other offerings. For the businessperson of today, The Council offers the perfect place to relax, recharge and conduct business at ease as per their requirements.



## **SAROVAR HOTELS** expands presence in **Africa** with **Neelkanth Sarovar Premiere, Lusaka**

New Delhi (TSNN)

**Sarovar Hotels Pvt. Ltd.** announces the opening of its first hotel in **Zambia - Neelkanth Sarovar Premiere, Lusaka**. With three operating hotels in Tanzania and Kenya this will be their fourth in the African continent.

**Neelkanth Sarovar Premiere** is an all-suite upscale development in the vibrant Manda Hill area of Lusaka and offers easy connectivity to the airport. It offers a splendid guest experience with 82 all-suite, an all-day-dining restaurant, poolside grill, bar, lobby cafe, fitness centre and spa. The hotel has large banquet and conferencing facilities to



accommodate up to 600 people.

Designed to exacting standards, the hotel interiors are contemporary and make liberal use of traditional African art. Each suite speaks of a unique and bespoke style.

All suite in the hotel are equipped with best in class modern amenities and supported by Sarovar's distinct service standards.

Lusaka, the geographical and commercial heart of Zambia is the sure stop for

any business traveller to Southern Africa. For the leisure traveller, the city offers wildlife exploration in the Munda Wanga Park, for the history buff there's the Henry Tayali Gallery, and above all the majestic and grand Victoria Falls.

"I am delighted to welcome guests to **Neelkanth Sarovar Premiere** in Lusaka. For us, marking our presence in the capital city of Zambia is in line with our long-term focus on our growth plans for Africa. The elegantly appointed interiors along with our prompt personalised services will ensure our guests have a memorable stay in Lusaka." says Anil Madhok, Executive Chairman, Sarovar Hotels and Resorts.

## HOSPITALITY AND FOOD

# ICRA: Hospitality Sector in India set to Grow by 9-10 Per cent through Fy23

The domestic demand in FY19 will continue to be driven by increased air connectivity, and higher appetite for domestic leisure travel, the report adds.

**THE HOSPITALITY** industry is expected to grow annually by 9-10 per cent over the next four years, mainly due to robust domestic demand and a muted supply pipeline, says a report by ICRA.

Going forward, the rating agency expects revenue improvement and margin expansion for the hotel industry and growth is expected to be 9-10 per cent over the next four years, with a strong 10-12 per cent during 2018-19.

The domestic demand in FY19 will continue to be driven by increased air connectivity, and higher appetite for domestic leisure travel, the report adds.

Besides this, domestic demand to get a boost from the robust corporate performance which has witnessed the strongest top-line growth in the last 10 quarters in the September quarter of the current fiscal year.

The supply side, however, is likely to lag demand over the medium term and grow at a subdued 3.6 per cent over the next five years, warns the report.

But the situation is set to improve given the inventory and the number of premium rooms across 12 key cities is likely to go up from 82,800 in FY18 to 98,900 by FY23.

"This low supply growth is expected to be the backbone for the current up-cycle, as demand is expected to grow at a much faster rate. The demand-supply gap is expected to go up from around 1 per cent in FY18 to 5 per cent in FY2023," the report notes.

Margins are likely to expand due to operating leverage, with the return of stronger revenue



growth, it adds.

Interest and debt cover are likely to improve gradually over the medium term but the return on capital employed is expected to remain at sub-cost of capital at least until FY20, notes the report.

The total debt for the industry is set to improve to 1.2 times in FY23 from 3.9 times in FY2018 and 3.1 times in FY19.

The debt reduction measures undertaken by some large industry participants have resulted in a sizable reduction in leverage levels as of March 2018 as a result return on capital employed is expected to improve upwards of 15 per cent in FY23 from 6.3 per cent in FY2018, it adds.

"We expect the current industry up-cycle to continue over the next three to four

years and the outlook continues to be stable. The stable outlook will be driven by robust domestic demand and a muted supply pipeline. The return of pricing power across key markets will be more evident from the next rate cycle beginning January 2019 and a consequent improvement in financial performance is expected," said Pavethra Ponniah, Vice-President, ICRA.

However, she says, costs will need tight monitoring as the main concerns faced by the industry are fund availability and other case-specific factors stemming from

heightened competition in the property market, poor revenue management, delayed projected commissioning and over-leveraged capex and acquisitions, she warns.

## Visit Finland

concludes 2018 with series of educational fam trips under FIT, Luxury and Education Travel theme for Indian Travel Fraternity

aving witnessed a robust growth of 42 per cent in tourist arrivals and overnights from the Indian market in 2017, Visit Finland has reinstated their focus in the India Market through the appointment of **Ms. Sara Sodhi Juneja** to head Visit Finland activities in India based in New Delhi.

**Dr. Jukka Holappa**, Trade Commissioner for Business Finland India, shared that, India has become one of the fastest growing outbound tourism industries given its favorable economic

conditions and further growth is expected as a total of 32.3 million outbound trips are forecasted in 2020. Aligning with the growing potential of India market and our Global expansion strategy, Visit



## HOSPITALITY AND FOOD

# Hospitality industry veteran **Kapil Chopra** launches new **luxury brand** opens **3 hotels in Goa**



A veteran of Indian hospitality, **Kapil Chopra** who had resigned as the Oberoi Group's president exactly a year back to start an entrepreneurial journey, recently launched a new experiential luxury brand "**The Postcard Hotel**". **Chopra** told **Travel Span** that first three properties under this brand opened recently across Goa. "We will have 50 hotels in five years. In the next 12 to 18 months. The Postcard Hotel will be present in seven more destinations across the country," he said.

The three hotels are spread across unique neighborhoods in Goa. The Postcard Moira, nestled in one of the four heritage villages of Goa, The Postcard Velha, surrounded by 300 acres of virgin coconut plantations in old Goa; and further south, in keeping with its proposition of taking travelers back in time, The Postcard Cuelim, that houses a 350 year old chapel.

"A UAE-based fund,

Small Ventures, has invested in us. We have arranged for \$100 million for capital expenditure," Chopra said. Aimed at leisure travellers, Chopra's branded properties will be by the sea, mountains and jungles. "We are going to deliver an unparalleled experience. People say watch sunrise from the beach. We will take guests in a boat to the Indian Ocean and they will watch sunrise from the sea," Chopra said.

Transformative experiences and local community are at the heart of The Postcard Hotel's offering. Each hotel will offer unique experiences that are true to its surroundings, giving guests a sense of the neighborhood and the destination in a way never seen before. The experience within the hotel, too, is in keeping with the times of conventional luxury hotels. This means no set breakfast hours, no buffets, and definitely no sugary welcome drinks. In its place, will be authentic local

experiences, from food, to design, to artisanal welcome cocktails, to defining your own check in and check out hours and immersions with the local community.

"What I wanted to do with The Postcard Hotel, is make luxury hotels for the modern audience but bring back the romance and charm of sun kissed holidays. We wanted it to be rich in its experience but also wanted it to be simple. We believe guests want to stay in a place where the hotel does the thinking for them, where they get the simple things right, yet offer fantastic spaces for them to relax, meet like-minded people and experience local culture. This is why, we handpick our locations and our hotels, so that guests have a different experience whether they are in Goa or overlooking the snow clad Himalayas," said Kapil Chopra.

**The brand is committed to building and operating 50 hotels in the next 5 years. In the next 12 to 18 months, The Postcard Hotel will be present in seven more destinations across the country:**

- The Postcard, Uttarakhand
- The Postcard on the Arabian Sea, Karnataka
- The Postcard, Dhauladhar Mountain Range
- The Postcard Ravangla, Sikkim
- The Postcard, Darjeeling
- The Postcard, Sundarbans
- The Postcard, Kanha

As it starts its operations, the hotel company has INR 600 crores of assets under management, led by a group of carefully chosen hospitality talent that has experience in the best hospitality names in India and the world.

The trusted partners too are helping build the right narrative for the brand.

**Ambuja Neotia group** and The Postcard Hotel will jointly deliver three hotels in Eastern and North Eastern India. Led by Harsh Neotia, the Ambuja Neotia group's vision on architecture, art and design is appreciated globally. Architect, Akshat Bhatt of Architecture Discipline, an award winning and internationally acclaimed studio was tasked with creating the spaces with sustainability at its core. Jas Arora, actor and designer, brings his unique eye to the uniforms by giving traditional Goan motifs a modern touch. The interiors of all The Postcard Hotels in Goa will also have new photographs taken by full time courtier and photographer JJ Valaya.

Wellness plays a crucial role in The Postcard experience, which is why the hotel went south in search of the right Ayurveda partner. Coimbatore based Purnanava Ayurveda will create an "optimum healing environment" in the quietude of Goa, offering on site Ayurvedic consultation and treatments for guests across all hotels in Goa ranging from 7 to 21 days. Forest Essentials, meanwhile, offer amenities from their exclusive range of Nargis, the Kashmiri daffodil. Developing the brand, its identity and story is the new multi-disciplinary creative agency Propaganda, led by Mohamed Rizwan.

## JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru appoints Gaurav Sinha as Director of Operations



**J**W Marriott Hotel Bengaluru, city's premium luxury property is elated to announce the appointment of **Gaurav Sinha** as the Director of Operations. Being in the industry since 2001, **Gaurav** comes with vast knowledge and experience in the hospitality domain. He is a result driven individual with proven track record of guiding teams to deliver to the best of their abilities and continues to thrive in a competitive environment. **Gaurav** started his career

as a Front Office Assistant with Trident, Udaipur in 2001 and has been a part of prestigious properties such as Taj and Trident Hotels in the past, where he has had a steady growth trajectory.

He later joined **The Leela Kempinski Hotels & Resorts**, Gurgaon as the Assistant Front Office Manager and was a part of the pre-opening team. He grew with the brand and he was promoted as the Front Office Manager in 2010 at Kempinski. He later moved on to work with The Leela Ambience Hotel & Residencies, Gurgaon as a Rooms Division Manager.

In the year 2017 he joined the Marriott family as the Director of Rooms with JW Marriott Aerocity, New Delhi.

On joining JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru, **Gaurav** said "It is an honor to continue my journey with this iconic brand and be a part of JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru, the flagship property of Marriott International. I'm looking forward to working with the talented team of associates and contribute to the overall growth of the hotel".

**Reuben Kataria, General Manager, JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru** said, "We are delighted to have **Gaurav** on board as his experience in the industry speaks volumes about his craft. We are looking forward to creating seamless operations to further strengthen brand's positioning in the market".

## Azerbaijan Tourism Board appoints Blue Square Consultants as India Representative

**B**lue Square Consultants has been appointed as the representative for **Azerbaijan Tourism Board (ATB)** in India. Blue Square Consultants will be responsible to build and develop strong relations with key tourism and hospitality entities and trade partners to grow and strengthen the tourism potential of the destination in the Indian market.

Confirming the appointment, **Sevinj Zeynalli – International Market Management Director, Azerbaijan Tourism Board** said, "India being an important outbound market, we're pleased to partner with a highly reputed organization like Blue Square Consultants that has a strong foothold across different cities in India. Owing to their successful track record, we are confident that their expertise will help us gain greater visibility and we look forward



to welcoming more Indians on their holiday to Azerbaijan".

**Lubaina Sheerazi, COO, Blue Square Consultants** stated, "We are delighted to represent the magnificent country of Azerbaijan and drive it as a preferred leisure destination for Indian travellers. The strategy is to tap into the growing outbound market and change perceptions to showcase the tourism prospects of Azerbaijan. We have the requisite knowledge and an excellent track record in managing various tourism boards and the recent appointment is a reaffirmation of our proficiency in the travel sector".

Furthermore, Blue Square Consultants will support the representation of Azerbaijan at various tourism exhibitions and fairs to get the trade allied with the destination

## Hyatt Regency Delhi appoints Mr. Kunal Dewan as Director of Sales and Marketing

**H**yatt Regency Delhi is pleased to announce the appointment of **Kunal Dewan** as the **Director of Sales & Marketing**. A driven, strategic and skilled individual, **Kunal** possesses a broad knowledge base of the hospitality industry



and brings more than a decade of experience to the role, where he will be responsible for the daily sale efforts and overall positioning of the hotel.

**Kunal** has been recognised with various awards like Sales Leader of the year and Marriott International careers: Hotel Manager track during his career at Marriott International.





# Varun Bharadwaja Appointed as DoSM at The Westin Maldives Miriandhoo Resort

of **Varun Bharadwaja** as the **Director of Sales and Marketing**. In his role at the hotel, he will be leading the management staff in implementing effective strategies and key initiatives to maximize revenue generation and achieve marketing opportunities for the hotel.

An extensive 13 years of sales and marketing experience in the hospitality industry has led **Varun** to evolve into a collaborative leader. Equipped with a proven track record of success in increasing revenue and market share, improving customer satisfaction, and

surpassing budgeted occupancies, are just some of his achievements. **Varun** is adept at creating innovative opportunities for new business leads and ensuring marketing visibility. His success rate in achieving the targeted goals is always at its peak. With a collaborative and flexible approach combined with profound communication skills, **Varun** will delve deeper into understanding the client base. He will cultivate a result oriented and persistent managing team that provides extraordinary financial and guest satisfaction results.

**Varun** started his career with Indian Hotels Company Limited Corporate Office as Relationship Executive in 2005. He worked across different portfolios within the group and was elevated as the youngest Director of Sales and Marketing for Taj Palace Hotel in New Delhi in 2013. Prior to joining The Westin Maldives Miriandhoo Resort, he was Director of Sales and Marketing at Taj Exotica Resort & Spa and Taj Coral Reef Resort & Spa in Maldives for over three years.

**P**rior to joining **The Westin Maldives Miriandhoo Resort**, he was **Director of Sales and Marketing** at **Taj Exotica Resort & Spa** and **Taj Coral Reef Resort & Spa** in Maldives for over three years.

THE WESTIN Maldives Miriandhoo Resort announced the appointment

## HOSPITALITY AND FOOD

# Preferred Hotels & Resorts Unveils New Brand Website



**P**rovider of sales, marketing, and distribution services to independent luxury hotels, has recently announced the launch of its new brand website, **PreferredHotels.com**. With careful consideration to the balance of form and function, the new visual forward, fully-responsive website has been deftly designed to draw more qualified traffic and make a quick, impactful connection between travelers and the brand's global portfolio of 700 independent hotels

worldwide.

"Luxury travelers expect a digital experience that is truly representative of the hospitality they would receive upon arrival at any one of our incredible hotel destinations. The online search and booking process should be easy, thoughtful, and rewarding," said Chief Marketing Officer Kristie Goshow. "Like a great iceberg, it is what cannot be seen that will become the powerhouse of Preferred's digital

strategy going forward. As we continue to grow both our hotel destinations and consumer audiences, our investment in progressive technology is critical to the scalability of our digital efforts." As part of the redesign, Preferred Hotels & Resorts ensured that I Prefer Hotel Rewards – the world's largest points-based program for independent hotels globally – remained a focal point of the user experience. To capture greater loyalty from leisure and corporate travelers alike, icons highlighting the benefits

of I Prefer membership appear on every page alongside access to exclusive member rates.

Visitors to the site will also see that each member hotel is highlighted through large-scale, vibrant photography that is complemented by lively, expanded property guides. Further, all hotels now have the opportunity to target visitors to the site through a variety of new merchandising opportunities on the enhanced homepage. The revamped site will better capture consumers' attention through informative destination tips; new filters that invite searches by destination, travel theme, type of

property, and level of luxury; and an enhanced technical structure that translates seamlessly onto mobile devices, tablets, and desktop computers. A real-time feed of consumer reviews through TripAdvisor will appear on every hotel page, creating an unabashed transparency to help potential guests make an informed, confident purchase decision – a new feature perfectly timed following Preferred Hotels & Resorts being named the #1 "Most Excellent" large hotel chain by TripAdvisor travelers.

## Tourism Authority of Thailand kicks off 2019 unveiling their India market strategy & plans for massive key stakeholder interactions at SATTE 2019

Launching a new strategy presentation at the Shangri-La Hotel;

expanding the niche-market segments of Indian tourists; expansion of flights from India to Thailand, and mobilising complete trade networking with Thai partners as a 'Partner Country' in SATTE, Delhi...



2018 was a phenomenal year for the **Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)** as arrivals from India registered a growth of +12.84 taking the figure to 1,596,937 keeping Thailand among the top 2 most preferred destinations by Indians.

India is clearly ready to fly! The signs of the booming Indian economy are quite evident with a 7.5 + GDP growth, the paradigm shift in outbound travel; i.e., trickling down to smaller towns and the overall affluence of the new middle class. Supporting this is the Indian government's investment in infrastructure including the UDAN project, the addition of 267 Passport Seva Kendras (PSK & POPSK) over the past year, and India now third in line globally after China and the USA with 73.8 million passport holders.

Thailand has even bigger expectations ahead from the buoyant Indian market to not only grow tourist arrivals, but significantly increase the market share of outbound Indians.

TAT will organise a planning presentation for its travel trade partners at the Shangri-La Hotel, New Delhi on 15 January, 2019. The objective of this event is to promote the direction of Thailand's tourism towards the Indian market and also the new campaigns that would be of great interest to Indian travellers.

### INTERNATIONAL MARKETING DIRECTION AND COMMUNICATIONS

In 2018, TAT launched its new Amazing Thailand's 'Open to the New Shades' campaign covering five main travel sectors including Gastronomy, Arts and Crafts, Thai Culture, Nature and Beach, and Thai Way of Life to help international visitors experience the Kingdom from a new perspective. This popular marketing campaign will be carried forward in 2019 as well. The concept of "Open to the New Shades" reflects another kind of "Thainess", which is the unique characteristic of the Thai people to welcome visitors from around the world.

### TARGETED MARKET

The growing sophistication and maturity of the Indian traveller has given us enormous opportunity to promote our emerging range of niche-market products.

<http://thailandfirstvisit.com> has been launched for first-time travellers to come and experience the varieties of Amazing Thailand with its rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes of great natural beauty, and world-class products; such as, hotels, resorts, and beaches all supported by the wonderful and warm Thai hospitality.

For **women travellers**, the Women's Journey Thailand campaign has been launched

to help women travellers enjoy a huge range of activities, special deals, and privileges in Thailand by collaborating with various tourism-related businesses throughout the country.

**Luxury** transportation ranging from the luxury carriages on rail, which connect to major destinations and private jets, which are perfect for five-star flights to destinations within Thailand and the entire Mekong Subregion, are ready to serve tourists who seek a luxury travelling experience. Meanwhile, a growing number of world famous, Michelin star restaurants and bars; such as, Gaggan and Nam, which are very popular with Indian visitors, in Bangkok and expanding to Phuket will further enhance the status of Thailand as a 'Preferred Destination' for luxury travellers as well.

**Weddings and Honeymoons** has now become a trend amongst high net worth Indians to celebrate special occasions out of the country. Thailand with its proximity, comfort level and affordable luxury is becoming popular for weddings and honeymoons. TAT has created a special website to provide couples, wedding organisers, and travel agents in India with useful information for wedding planning.

**Shopping** in Thailand is always exciting. Beside from shopping at Bangkok's most savvy luxury world-class shopping destinations such as the ICON SIAM, the EM District and Central Embassy, Floating market is another unique experience to try; such as, the Amphawa Floating market and Tha Kha Floating Market located in Samut Songkhram.

For **family traveller**, TAT is promoting the nature-inspired city of Samut Songkhram, which is at a driving distance of just 80 km from Bangkok

city. **Ban Bang Phlab Community Centre** is the main attraction. Here families can experience the way of life of the local Thai people, living in traditional teak houses, set among fruit orchards and explore the surrounding orchards on foot or by bicycle. Enjoy fresh fruits and fresh air, learn how to plant organic fruits, produce organic fertilizer and ferment sweet fruits.

### AIRPORT EXPANSION AND AIR CONNECTIVITY

Indians can receive visa-on-arrival facilities at Thailand's international checkpoints. The Immigration Bureau is planning to introduce online visas for Indian citizens this year, which will make it even more convenient to visit Thailand.

Bilateral airline capacity is at an all-time high with 325 weekly flights between Thailand and 16 major cities in India by 13 airlines in the winter 2018-19 timetable: Thai Airways, Bangkok Airways, Air India, Thai Smile, Bhutan Airlines, Druk Air, Jet Airways, Air Asia, Spice Jet, Thai Lion Air, Indigo, Nok Scoot and GoAir.

### SATTE 2019 - COUNTRY PARTNER

TAT will be participating as the 'Country Partner' in the 26th edition of SATTE 2019, held from 16-18 January, 2019, at the India Expo Mart, Greater Noida - Delhi NCR. SATTE is an annual three-day B2B trade show designed to bring together key travel industry leaders and stakeholders at all levels in the region. It convenes Indian and international exhibitors and buyers to forge new partnerships and strengthen business ties.

TAT has one of the largest stands at the exhibition where about 70 sellers from Thailand including representatives of hotels, airlines, DMCs, theme parks, etc, will get an opportunity to network and showcase their products to travel agents and tour operators, who will be attending the exhibition from all over India.

# NTO - THAILAND

Bangkok (TSNN) –

**T**he Ministry of Tourism and Sports announced the tourism figures for January-November 2018. Thailand received 34,431,489 international visitors, up by 7.53% over the same period of last year, generating an estimated 1.8 billion Baht in tourism revenue, up by 9.79%. The highlight of the results was the fact that seven countries (China, Malaysia, South Korea, Lao PDR., Japan, India, and Russia) have already generated more than one million visitor arrivals, and three more countries (USA, Vietnam and Singapore) were set to follow suit when the full year 2018 results were tabulated.



## Top 10 Markets for Thailand in January-November 2018

Rank	Nationality	No. of Arrivals	Change
1	China	9,697,321	7.86
2	Malaysia	3,569,736	15.52
3	Korea	1,621,237	4.75
4	Laos	1,593,971	4.48
5	Japan	1,502,111	6.82
6	India	1,429,078	12.03
7	Russia	1,267,868	10.33
8	USA	993,631	6.37
9	Vietnam	956,652	10.18
10	Singapore	934,504	3.73

**Remark:** Preliminary figures

**Source:** Ministry of Tourism and Sports

## Summary of the key results in January-November 2018:

**Overview:** All regions grew well except the Middle East and Oceania. Visitors from East Asia totalled 23.62 million (+9.21%), Europe 5.91 million (+4.03%), the Americas 1.41 million (+3.70%), South Asia 1.77 million (+11.32%), Oceania 838,713 (-1.40%), the Middle East 683,420 (-6.24%), and Africa 174,565 (+9.63%).

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**East Asia:** East Asian visitor

arrivals comprised the biggest market share of all visitors. A total of 23.62 million or 68% were from East Asian countries. Apart from China (9.69 million), the other top sources of arrivals were Malaysia (3.56 million), South Korea (1.62 million), Lao PDR. (1.59 million) and Japan (1.50 million).

The **ASEAN** countries in total generated over 9.17 million arrivals, with growth by Malaysia (+15.52%), the Philippines (+12.63%), Indonesia (+11.52%),

Vietnam (+10.18%), Cambodia (+4.59%), Lao PDR. (+4.48%), Singapore (+3.73%), and Myanmar (+0.68%). Only Brunei showed a decline (-3.89%).

**Europe:** European visitors were up 4.03 to 5.91 million. Russia retained its status as the largest source market from Europe with arrivals of 1.26 million, up 10.33%. The United Kingdom was the second highest source market with a total of 877,502, followed by Germany 789,150, up 4.46%, and France 677,579, up 1.46%. Visitor markets also grew from East Europe (+9.22%), Austria (+12.08%), the Netherlands (+6.41%), Italy (+6.17%), Denmark (+4.25%), Finland (+2.22%), Belgium (+1.84%), and Spain (+1.32%).

**The Americas:** Arrivals from the Americas grew by 3.70 to 1.41 million. The main market, the USA, increased by 6.37% to 993,631. Arrivals from Canada were up

7.18% to 245,227.

**South Asia:** Arrivals from South Asia grew by a strong 11.32% to 1.77 million. India topped the list with arrivals up by 12.03% to 1.42 million. Other countries also showed good growth; such as, Nepal (+27.63%), Bangladesh (+8.21%), Sri Lanka (+2.81%), and Pakistan (+2.70%).

**Oceania:** Arrivals from Oceania declined by 1.40% to 838,713 visitors. Australian visitors declined by 1.61% to 728,720. Arrivals from New Zealand declined by 0.23% to 106,378.

**Middle East:** Arrivals from the UAE declined by 7.16% to 117,162. Arrivals from Saudi Arabia declined by 18.99% to 26,075. However, some markets like Kuwait (+2.74%) reported good results.

**Africa:** Arrivals from Africa grew by 9.63% to 174,565, mainly due to arrivals from South Africa (86,509).

# Houston exudes a cosmopolitan and down-home vibe



**H**ouston the 4th largest city in the United States is home to America's space program and the most culturally diverse city. **Jorge Franz, Senior Vice President of Tourism, Visit Houston and William Harris, President & CEO, Space Center Houston were in New Delhi, India, recently to showcase the destination amongst the Indian travel fraternity.**

The style-savvy residents of the country's fourth-largest city and third-largest county (Harris) know that there's no place quite like Houston.

With more than 2.2 million residents, the city attracts visitors and transplants with a wonderful mix of world-class arts, booming business, pro sports and award-winning cuisine.

As the rest of the country discovers what locals have known all along, Houston is finally enjoying the recognition it deserves. Just last year, the city landed on several "best of" lists, as roundup of America's Favorite Cities and the Hotwire.com index of most affordable U.S. vacation destinations.

See for yourself, here in Houston, where much of daily life happens outdoors, thanks to mild, year-round temperatures. Take time to explore the eclectic, culture-filled neighborhoods, gallery

spaces and attractions, which offer diverse flavors that can only be found here.

Take the food, for example. Countless cutting-edge chefs have made a home in Houston, where diners eat out more than residents of any other city. Here, you'll find James Beard Award winners and internationally renowned chefs serving up innovative cuisine that frequently catches the attention of foodies in Bon Appetit, Food & Wine and Saveur.

But the stylish dining scene is only a slice of Houston's epicurean offerings—a fact that the city's culinary masterminds intend to prove with the Houston Culinary Tours. Each of the intimate, 16-person, chef-led tours aim at showing the underbelly of the city's food scene—one



Jorge Franz, Senior Vice President of Tourism, Visit Houston

William Harris, President & CEO of Space Center Houston

taco truck and ethnic market at a time.

Venture Downtown during your stay and discover a thriving professional arts scene, with professional resident companies in ballet, opera, symphony and theater; only four other U.S. cities can say the same. And the nearby Museum District stakes its claim as the country's fourth-largest, with 18 cultural powerhouses set within blocks of one another.

Houston has its own version of Central Park, too, offering nearly 1,500 acres of green space in the heart of the city. Just inside "the loop," Memorial Park is home to a public golf course, swimming pool, tennis courts, trails and more. Downtown, Discovery Green park is outfitted with WiFi, a farmers market, dog runs, fine dining and ice-skating during the winter—just one more of the 650-plus urban green spaces filling the city.

Not surprisingly, businesses also recognize the allure of Houston's offerings. Twenty-five companies on the Fortune 500 list call the Energy Capital of the World home. Aeronautic research is unsurpassed at NASA headquarters—the facility responsible for putting the first man on the moon—and Texas Medical Center remains the largest in the world with 47 highly lauded research and treatment institutions.

**Houston actually is home to some of Texas' most popular attractions.** The Johnson Space Center was at the center of the space race during the 1960s and is still active in space exploration. Of course, the San Jacinto Monument marks the very spot where Texas won its independence from Mexico and is a must-see for history buffs. Adjacent to the San Jacinto Monument is the Battleship Texas, which fought to maintain America's freedom during WWII.

The Houston Zoo has long been a favorite stop for Houston area residents and visitors alike. More recently, the Downtown Aquarium has also drawn a lot of attention

from visitors. Houston also boasts an impressive array of museums, including the Buffalo Soldier Museum, the Holocaust Museum, Museum of Natural Science, Museum of Fine Arts, and many, many more.

Sports fans also have plenty to cheer about while in Houston, regardless of the season. The University of Houston and Rice University each field a full complement of men's and women's NCAA Div. I athletic teams. And, Reliant Stadium is home to the Houston Bowl, a DI college football bowl game. On the pro level, the NBA Rockets, NFL Texans, and MLB Astros all call Houston home.

Houston is also a popular stop for shoppers. From the upscale Galleria in the heart of the city to the sprawling Katy Mills Mall on the outskirts of town, Houston is home to thousands of retailers.

When it comes to dining, Houston offers some of the best – and most diverse – restaurants in the nation. From seafood to steaks, Tex-Mex to Indian, Houston has an eatery with virtually any and every style of food.

Throughout the year, Houston also hosts a number of festivals and events. The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo is by far the biggest of these annual events and draws hundreds of thousands each year. However, Houston is also home to the largest hot air balloon festival in Texas (Ballunar Liff-off in Clear Lake), the Houston International Festival, Houston Hot Sauce Festival, and many, many more.

**Space Center Houston**, the Official Visitor Center of NASA Johnson Space Center, is Houston's No. 1 attraction for international visitors and the first Smithsonian Affiliate in the greater Houston area informed **William Harris, President & CEO, Space**

#### **Center Houston.**

He invited Indian travellers to discover the exciting future and remarkable past of America's human spaceflight program set among the largest collection of space artifacts in the southwestern United States. There is always something new to see and do, he added. With more than 400 space artifacts including flown spacecraft, the largest collection of moon rocks on public display and at multiple major seasonal exhibits a year, Space Center Houston offers an array of exciting attractions for people of all ages.

Explore the red planet during your next visit in our new Mission Mars exhibit. Experience a virtual Martian sunset, climb into a simulated Orion capsule and feel the texture of rock cliffs inspired by the red planet in our brand-new interactive exhibit. Discover what it takes to travel to Mars, what hardware will get us to the fourth planet in our solar system and how humans may live on the red planet in the next few decades.

A must-see is the international landmark Independence Plaza presented by Boeing. It is the only shuttle replica mounted on a shuttle carrier aircraft, and the only place where visitors can enter both vehicles. The eight-story, multiple-exhibit complex gives visitors a rare glimpse into the historic shuttle era and the NASA breakthroughs and technological advances gained from the Space Shuttle Program which impacted future exploration.

Don't miss Space Center Houston's most popular attraction, the NASA Tram Tour. This is your chance to go on site at NASA Johnson Space Center and get a behind-the-scenes look at human space exploration. Explore Rocket Park, where one of only three of the remaining actual Saturn V rockets is displayed. Visit Historic Mission Control from which NASA led Gemini and Apollo missions, including the first lunar landing. Discover the Space Vehicle Mockup Facility where NASA astronauts train and where scientists are developing the next generation

of space exploration vehicles. The nonprofit Space Center Houston draws more than 200,000 teachers and students from around the world annually to take part in its extraordinary learning opportunities. Students train underwater like an astronaut and discover space science through immersive, hands-on activities in year-round educational programs like Space Center University.

#### **Highlights of the Space Centre -**

- Go inside the multiple exhibit complex Independence Plaza, featuring the original shuttle carrier aircraft NASA 905 with the high-fidelity shuttle replica Independence mounted on top.
- Touch one of the few moon rocks on earth available to the public inside the Lunar Vault.
- Stand close to multiple flown spacecraft, including Gemini V, Faith 7 and Apollo 17.
- See history in the making aboard the NASA tram tour. The tram tour takes visitors to see the state-of-the-art working facilities where astronauts prepare and train for missions.
- Walk inside the massive Skylab Trainer, where astronauts first trained for life in space.
- Explore a comprehensive spacesuit collection, including astronaut Pete Conrad's spacesuit, worn on the moon.

So, whether it is business or pleasure that brings you to Houston, finding plenty to do won't be a problem. In fact, you'll probably find you don't have nearly enough time to squeeze in everything.

Come. Live like a local for a few days and discover why Houston's mix of international appeal and Southern charm have captured the imagination of taste makers the world over.



## Switzerland Tourism successfully conducts Four-City Roadshow

Mumbai, (TSNN)

Indian Tourists are increasingly looking at Switzerland as a travel destination because of the plethora of options it offers to each traveller. In order to showcase these diverse options, Switzerland Tourism has taken its multiple offerings across the four Indian cities of Mumbai, Pune, Kolkata and Delhi through its recently-concluded annual roadshow that saw the participation of destinations, hoteliers, transport partners, mountain excursions and other local representatives from various parts of Switzerland. Key partners included the cities of Zurich, Lucerne, Interlaken and St. Moritz, regions such as Lake Geneva Region and the Swiss Travel System among others.

Switzerland's increasing number of Indian overnights can be attributed to the very successful and talented Bollywood actor **Ranveer Singh** coming on board as the brand ambassador in August 2016. We had a 23.4 increase in the overnights spent by Indians in Switzerland in 2017. This number has exponentially gone up, primarily on account

of the well-received Ad campaigns that had Ranveer Singh showcasing the different experiences available in Switzerland.

"This year has also been a very exciting one for Switzerland Tourism with the passionate and effervescent Ranveer Singh continuing as our brand ambassador. His charm and energy are unparalleled, and he has showcased Switzerland in a very attractive and diverse light, be it adventure, sports, culture, food, new destinations or experiences. Each year, we see a growing interest among Indian travellers but 2017, thanks to Ranveer, the overnights have been extremely high. Our numbers this year are also encouraging – we are up 10 in hotel overnights in the period January to August 2018 as compared to the same period last year. Besides this campaign, we also continue our travel trade campaigns – with regular webinars, training sessions in tier 2 and tier 3 cities as well our new e-learning modules on the Switzerland Travel Academy,"

said Mr. Claudio Zemp, Director – India, Switzerland Tourism.

The roadshows in all the four cities had a special B2B session where the Indian travel agents met and discussed business prospects and ideas with the Swiss delegations. Mr. Claudio Zemp, Director - India, Switzerland Tourism & Ms. Ritu Sharma, Deputy Director - India, Switzerland Tourism also shared their insights on the current market growth, while discussing new products and trends on tourism in Switzerland.

"Switzerland is the ideal travel destination for everyone because of the diversity in options it offers. It is a 365-day destination that is ready for visitors any time of the year. What also sets us apart in terms of the convenience and ease-of use for tourists is our Swiss Travel Pass - an all on one ticket valid on all modes of public transportation. We together with Swiss International Airlines have recently introduced the Stopover Switzerland program

allowing travellers to stop in Switzerland from 1 to 4 days on their way to any other destination. We offer multiple packages – for individual cities as well as multi-destination packages. This would give travellers a chance to sample Switzerland without having to pay anything extra for airfare. We are sure that these travellers will then return for a longer holiday once they have experienced the charms of Switzerland. We are happy to note that in the last few years, apart from the metro cities, we have managed to penetrate the Tier 2/3 markets as well and we see not only group travel but also FIT's from these cities," said Ms. Ritu Sharma, Deputy Director, Switzerland Tourism India.

The Grand Train Tour of Switzerland encompasses the country's top attractions and gives tourists an opportunity to explore its unique beauty. As the Grand Train Tour is one of the most important aspects of the promotions for 2018-19, Switzerland Tourism offered a unique experience on Deccan Odyssey to Goa to their suppliers (22) and buyers (34) as a part of the networking program this year.

## NTO - THAILAND

# Thailand Tourism Festival 2019 promotes environmentally-friendly travel

**Features five** zones of fun and food from 23 to 27 January in Bangkok's Lumpini Park Bangkok (TSNN)

Excitement is building for this year's Thailand Tourism Festival 2019 (TTF 2019), which aims to inspire Thais, expatriates and visiting tourists alike to travel around Thailand in an environmentally-friendly and sustainable way. The event takes place from 23 to 27 January in Bangkok's Lumpini Park with five 'tourism villages' representing the regions of Thailand plus two additional zones.

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Governor Mr. Yuthasak Supasorn said each zone of the 'tourism village' comes with its own theme or

stage for activities and performances.

"Under the theme of environmentally-minded tourism, the Thailand Tourism Festival 2019 promotes green travel with the objective of presenting inspirational and attractive tourism products and services to stimulate more travel bookings to both major and emerging destinations.

"It also encourages visitors and Thai nationals to boldly step out and travel beyond traditional destinations and experience Thailand from a new perspective and point of view."

The different zones on offer at the TTF 2019 include:

Central Region Zone – presents the heritage of old Siam through a traditional Thai house and the former



rural way of life back in the days through demonstrations; such as, traditional garland making.

Northern Zone – showcases the beautiful handwoven cotton and silk textiles the region is famous for, presenting the intricate patterns. The zone reflects the artistic nature of the people of the North plus a range of contemporary arts inspired by the region.

Southern Zone – presenting new perspectives of the South that boldly goes beyond the beaches and islands including the secondary cities; such as, Surat Thani and Phatthalung, the hidden gems in major cities like Phuket's Peranakan and arts in the three southernmost provinces.

Northeastern (Isan) Zone – brings Thailand's more vibrant cuisine to life. Food is one

major inspiration for travelling to this region, linking it with traditional festivals and cultural values while promoting its three main tourism clusters: North Isan, Central Isan and South Isan.

Eastern Zone – presenting new perspectives of the East under a 'more fun' concept through replicas of landmarks most synonymous with the region in combination with three dedicated corners for 3D photography backdrops reflecting the region's identity.

Perhaps most importantly, there is also a 'Reduce-Reuse-Recycle' waste initiative zone to help raise awareness and promote responsible sustainable tourism through various activities, games and more.

## Thailand extends visa-on-arrival fee waiver until 30 April 2019

**The** period Thailand celebrates Chinese New Year in February and Thai New Year (Songkran) in April

Bangkok (TSNN) – The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has announced that the Royal Thai Government has approved the extension of the visa-on-arrival fee waiver for citizens of 20 countries until 30 April. The decision was announced in the Royal Thai Government Gazette as a measure to stimulate and promote tourism as well as to enhance the kingdom's attractiveness among foreign visitors during the high travel season.

Mr. Yuthasak Supasorn, Governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), said the continuation of the stimulus visa-on-arrival measure came at a perfect time as Thailand is set to celebrate Chinese New Year

in February and the Thai New Year (Songkran) in April.

Chinese New Year celebrations are huge in Thailand, and this year will mark the 15th anniversary of cooperation between TAT, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China, and the Chinese Embassy in organising annual Lunar New Year festivities in Thailand. This year's date falls on 5 February. Mr. Yuthasak said: "This year, the Chinese New Year official opening ceremony will be held at Siam Square, one of the most popular shopping areas in Bangkok. We aim to attract more of the younger generation to enjoy the traditional performances."

Every year, China sends over 100 traditional Chinese dancers and musicians, martial artists, Chinese opera performers and acrobats from several cities in a cultural

exchange. In addition to the opening ceremony, typically held at Bangkok's Yaowarat (China Town), performances are also held in key cities around Thailand where Chinese New Year is celebrated in grand style. In return, TAT organises education tours of Thailand for the performers.

For the Thai New Year (Songkran), TAT will continue its strategy to promote Thai traditions and cultural values, the core part of almost all traditional events and festivals in Thailand, according to Mr. Yuthasak. "As usual, TAT will provide support to the organising of Songkran celebrations in various destinations throughout the kingdom." The Songkran Festival, 13-15 April, is an event where boisterous fun and ancient traditions go hand-in-hand. For tourists, the event offers a chance to enjoy a huge celebration where water parties break out in the streets of

Thailand's towns and villages. For locals, it is a time when they can spend precious moments with their families and visit the temples to observe ancient rites and make merit.

Other notable events and festivals scheduled during the period include the World Wai Kru Muay Thai Ceremony on 17 March in Ayutthaya and the uniquely local Poi Sang Long Festival (held during March or April) in the northern province of Mae Hong Son. The list of countries eligible for the visa-on-arrival fee waiver until 30 April:

Citizens of Andorra, Bulgaria, Bhutan, China including Taiwan, Cyprus, Ethiopia, Fiji, India, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Papua New Guinea, Romania, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan will be exempted from the 2,000 Baht visa-on-arrival fee for the purpose of touring in Thailand for not more than 15 days.



# HELSINKI

seeks a **million virtual visitors** in 2019

**VR-Helsinki** aims to become the service platform for sustainable tourism. The unique virtual city experience has been developed by the **City of Helsinki** together with its partner **VR-studio ZOAN**. Virtual Helsinki will be presented at Slush, the world's leading startup event, on 4-5 December. **Virtual Helsinki** is a digital twin of Helsinki that has been created by means of 3D modelling. The aim is to profile Helsinki as a centre of **VR/AR** expertise, as well as to attract a million virtual visitors to **Helsinki in 2019**. "Virtual tourism is a globally interesting and growing theme. Consumers are increasingly aware of the climate impacts of tourism and are keen to make responsible decisions. Virtual tourism also supports **Helsinki's** own goal of being a pioneer in sustainable tourism while

reinforcing our reputation as a city that utilises the latest digital innovations," explains Laura Aalto, CEO of Helsinki Marketing. Urban life, design and nature Helsinki recently won the European Commission's new European Capital of Smart Tourism competition, the evaluation criteria for which included the sustainable development of tourism, the use of digitalisation in tourism services, an interesting cultural heritage and innovative tourism offerings. **VR-Helsinki** combines the same themes. In the virtual city experience presented at Slush, visitors can enjoy an exciting tour of Senate Square, the home of legendary Finnish architect Alvar Aalto in Munkkiniemi and the recreational island of Lonna. The tour is accompanied by music and changing seasons.



## CONTENT ALSO BY SERVICE PROVIDERS

While many actors in the tourism industry already market their destinations in 360-videos that can be viewed on VR headsets, the concept for Virtual Helsinki is broader. **VR-Helsinki** allows visitors to move about freely in the computer simulation of Helsinki, and various additional experiences can be created. In the future, **VR-Helsinki** will serve as a digital platform that enables also service providers to run their businesses. "For example, visitors can tour Helsinki as it was in the early 20th century or purchase Finnish design products and have them delivered to their homes by post. In addition, as virtual reality becomes more social in the near future, friends from all around the world can meet and explore virtual destinations together," explains **Miikka Rosendahl, CEO of**



### ZOAN.

"Helsinki wants to offer visitors more impressive experiences. The virtual city experience offers unlimited opportunities to visit Helsinki from the comfort of one's own sofa. **VR-Helsinki** can also be used to promote Helsinki as a host city for congresses and events," Laura Aalto adds. **VR-Helsinki** will be available as of next year, for example from VR content stores and at various events and venues around the world.

# MUZIRIS PADDLE 2019

explores the oldest spice route of **Kerala** and aims create awareness for river conservation

**Kerala's most incredible nature experiences (January 5th and 6th, 2019)**

**M**uziris Paddle, the two-day kayaking expedition organized by Jellyfish Watersports in partnership with Muziris Heritage Project (Kerala Tourism) will be held on January 5th and 6th, 2019. Over 200 paddlers are likely to participate in the event which will be flagged off from the Kotturpuram Jetty in Kodungalloor district and end at Bolgatty Island in Kochi. Being touted as one of Kerala's most incredible nature experiences the event targets domestic & international tourists, paddling enthusiasts, people from all walks of life, children and even non-swimmers.

Muziris, once a bustling seaport and the heart of the historic spice route used to be the key trade point between southern India and rest of the world. The region is dotted with numerous monuments of a bygone era that is more than 3,000 years old. Participants will get an opportunity to visit the legendary Muziris heritage sites on the way. The paddling event promotes the usage of our rivers for recreational usage and creates a connection to the river with youngsters and tourists.



The kayakers will cover overall distance of 40 km traversing through rivers, backwaters and important Muziris destinations en route. Each day they will cover an easy distance of 20 km with several strategic breaks for sightseeing and greeting locals. The entire expedition will be managed by Jellyfish Watersports and participants will learn skills from expert trainers and river guides. The

package includes Kayak rental, expert guidance, camping gears, lifeguard support, night camping, team activities and food & refreshments.

"For centuries locals and visitors have enjoyed the scenic natural paradise of Gods own country. Muziris Paddle is a great way to experience Kerala through its water bodies and be part of the growing eco and responsible

tourism initiatives. We have conducted several river expeditions and clean up initiatives in the past that have been immensely popular amongst nature enthusiasts locally and internationally. Kayak for a cause is helping in creating more awareness about the conservation of river and to retain its original beauty", says Kaushiq Kodithodi, Founder, Jellyfish Watersports.



# Sri Lanka

The perfect warm  
**winter holiday** destination

**W**inters in Sri Lanka are pleasant and an ideal holiday destination for travellers looking to trade snow for sunshine. Here's why you need to visit the destination for a perfect warm winter holiday.

## BRILLIANT WEATHER AND IMMACULATE BEACHES

One of the perks of vacationing in an island country like Sri Lanka are the stretches of pristine beaches, azure ocean waters and seemingly endless horizon. The beaches of Southern Sri Lanka are well suited for families owing to the calm seas, clear skies and breezy weather. Some of the best winter vacations experienced by travellers to South East Asia have been in the southern region of Sri Lanka where it doesn't rain often and the sun is out the majority of the time. This has made it an ideal getaway for holiday-goers looking to soak up the sun and frolic in the sea and sand during winters. Hikkaduwa, Mirissa and Weligama are home to some of the best surfing spots.

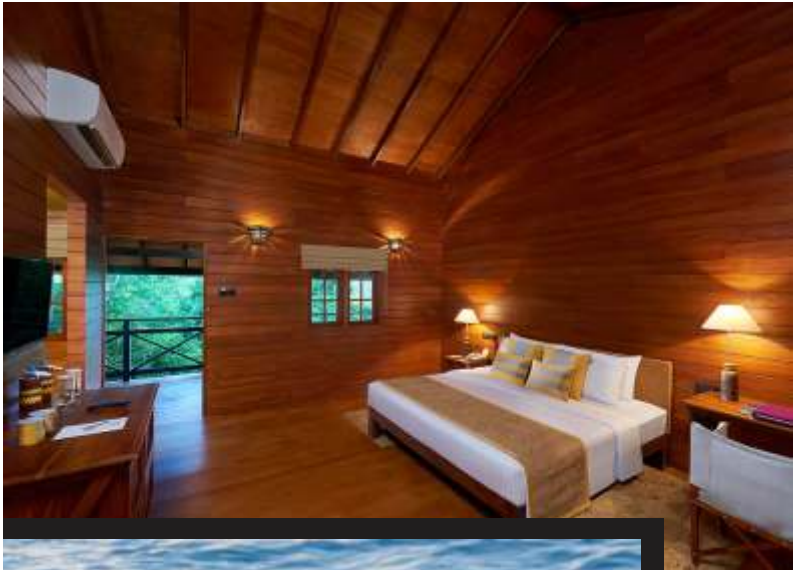
Hikkaduwa particularly is a notable favourite and the preferred spot for a getaway from the hustle and bustle of Colombo. If it's luxury accommodation along with unique excursions that you're looking for, stay at Hikka Tranz by Cinnamon where you can expect to experience the island in all its glory whilst having your every need catered to.





## WHALE AND DOLPHIN WATCHING

Affordable winter vacations are a possibility in Sri Lanka, where you can enjoy a holiday rich in unique experiences such as whale and dolphin watching without breaking bank. Hotels like Trinco Blu by Cinnamon offer more personalized excursions guided by Cinnamon naturalists to spot spinner dolphins, sperm whales and blue whales up, close and personal during your stay there. The South of Sri Lanka is a whale highway of sorts during winters. Be sure to have your camera with you on your whale watching expedition to capture blue whales, humpback whales and killer whales real time.



## ENJOY WATERSPORTS

One of the best things about holidaying in Sri Lanka during the winters is that the island's toasty weather avails you to a spectrum of adrenaline-boosting physical activities that you cannot experience elsewhere. With endless stretches of pristine coastline, Sri Lanka's beaches are ideal for a range of water sports with their many shipwreck diving spots, waves for surfing and winds for kite surfing. This December, make it a point to travel further inland into hill country, particularly to Kithulgala and Ginigaththena, you can enjoy white water rafting, kayaking and waterfall free jumping.

## GIVE IN TO THE CALL OF THE WILD

When in Yala, safari, sun and sand are the only orders of the day. Those who thirst for adventure and desire to journey into the unknown are in for a treat with a plethora of exotic flora and fauna here. Camp outdoors or pamper yourself with luxury accommodation at resorts like Cinnamon Wild Yala, where specialized naturalists take guests on guided nature walks, Infrared night drives or safaris and bird watching tours. A winter holiday in Sri Lanka would be incomplete without exploring the country's wild side that is home to leopards, elephants, crocodiles and hundreds of bird species.

## World's most beautiful train trip? Ella to Kandy in Sri Lanka

The train trip from Ella to Kandy in Sri Lanka, or the other way around, is considered to be one of the most picturesque train trips in the world. Winters being the ideal time, the seven hour long journey will take you through stunning landscapes of green and lush tea plantations, mountain views, charming villages, waterfalls and bridges with seemingly huge drop-offs. Hop onto this ride and visit the scenic city of Kandy with a stay at Cinnamon Citadel Kandy located on the banks of Mahaweli River.

Sri Lanka's tropical weather and the many new hotels, eateries, shopping malls and excursions that have cropped up in recent times make it the perfect destination for those desiring to experience a winter vacation with a difference. Be sure to add the above to your bucket list of things to do to make the most of your trip to this quintessential island.





# Toronto Sets New Record For Number Of Citywide Conferences Hosted In 2018

TORONTO, (TSNN)

**T**ourism Toronto and its meetings, conferences and events unit Business Events Toronto, announced today that 26 citywide conventions were held in 2018 – a new record for the number of citywide conventions held in a single year. The total tops the previous record of 18 citywide conferences set in 2017.

“The record number of citywide conferences speaks to Toronto’s place as the hub for innovation, technology, finance and business within Canada,” said Johanne Bélanger, President and CEO of Tourism Toronto. “Our team at Business Events Toronto taps into Toronto’s strength in these key economic sectors and uses the vibrancy of Canada’s Downtown to attract these

**Major new  
conference also  
announced  
for 2019**

major events to the region.”

Tourism Toronto defines a citywide convention or event as one that consumes 1,100 hotel rooms on peak night, a minimum of two hotels for delegates, and the use of a convention centre or event complex.

“Business events are a thriving and vital part of our tourism industry that contributes \$33 billion in direct spending in Canada, directly employs 229,000 people and \$19 billion of GDP,” said Heidi Welker, Chair of Meetings Means Business Canada. “Great things happen when people come together, whether in a meeting room, on a



convention floor, or out experiencing a destination. Our industry within Canada and in Toronto excel at bringing people together in an exceptional way.”

Following the success of citywide conferences in 2018, the momentum continues into next year. Tourism Toronto is pleased to announce that Jehovah’s Witnesses will be hosting

their 2019 international convention in Toronto, bringing an expected 45,000 delegates. That convention joins other meetings and events secured for 2019 including MPI’s World Education Congress (WEC) – the signature event for meeting professionals. WEC gives Toronto the opportunity to showcase itself to the professionals planning meetings, conferences and events across the globe.



## TORONTO AS A HOST DESTINATION FOR MEETINGS, CONFERENCES, SPORTS AND EVENTS

In 2018, Toronto was named Canada's top convention destination, and consistently ranks among the top five in North America. Toronto was also among the top-ranked destinations selected by meeting planners in the 2018 Watkins Report, which rates the most positive overall

experience for major conventions in North America.

Toronto offers planners a destination that is open, diverse and safe – a city that blends the best of Canadian inclusiveness with iconic events, attractions, restaurants, culture and festivals. The region, as Canada's Downtown, is home

to North America's second largest financial services centre, third largest technology sector and the country's largest combined life-sciences sector, providing access to industry thought-leaders and businesses driving innovation in their field.

### 2018 BUSINESS EVENTS HIGHLIGHTS

The banner year for Business Events Toronto include direct service support for 1,025 events hosted in 2018 including citywide conferences. Those meetings represented 500,208 delegates and an economic spend of \$565 million.

**Some of the key conferences, meetings and events that took place in 2018 included:**

- NU SKIN China – May 2018 (4,000 delegates)
- Pediatric Academic Societies – May 2018 (9,100 delegates)
- VMWare – May 2018 (4,050 delegates)
- Rotary International Convention – June 2018 (24,000 delegates)
- Enterprise World 2018 – OpenText – July

2018 (4,000 delegates)

- Primerica Canadian Convention – July 2018 (7,000 delegates)
- 19th World Conference on Lung Cancer – September 2018 (7,500 delegates)
- Cyber Security Connect East (Palo Alto Networks) – September 2018 (3,515 delegates)
- Family Medicine Forum – November 2018 (3,000 delegates)

Business Events Toronto is the meetings, conferences and events unit of Tourism Toronto – the official destination marketing organization for the region, "Canada's Downtown" –

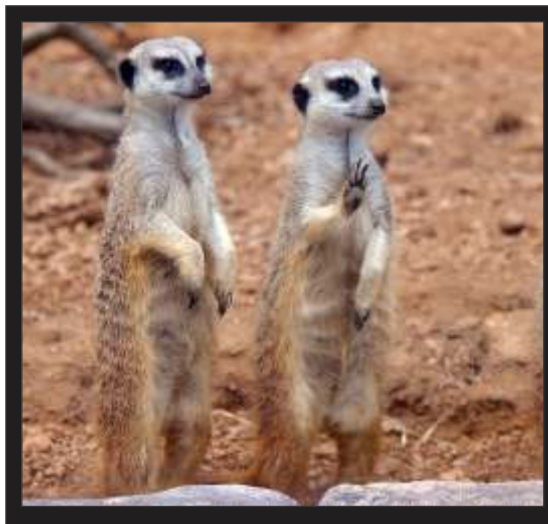
encompassing Toronto, Mississauga and Brampton. With sales and marketing programs in key markets around the world, Tourism Toronto promotes the Toronto region as a remarkable destination for tourists, convention delegates and business travelers. Tourism Toronto operates in partnership with the City of Toronto, the Greater Toronto Hotel Association and the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. See [TorontoNow.com](http://TorontoNow.com) and [businesseventstoronto.com](http://businesseventstoronto.com).



## DESTINATION - HOUSTON - TEXAS

# 20 Best Things to Do in HOUSTON, TEXAS

This large Texas metropolis can seem overwhelming at first glance. But with a little bit of research, you'll discover that there's plenty to do in the Bayou City. Houston is home to the Space Center Houston, NASA's astronaut training, and flight control complex, as well as a buzzing Historic District, full of 19th-century architecture and upscale restaurants, and some world-class museums and art spaces, like the reverent Rothko Chapel. Whether it's your first time to this great Texan city or your tenth, there's always something new to discover. Here's our list of the 20 best things to do in Houston.



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### VISIT THE HOUSTON ZOO

Sheltering over 4,500 animals and 900 species, the Houston Zoo is one of the most visited zoos in the nation. Spend the day strolling through the facility's beautifully landscaped grounds, or enjoy a more hands-on encounter by scheduling a guided tour.



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### TOUR THE JOHNSON SPACE CENTER

The Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center, home of the NASA astronaut corps, is located in Southeast Houston. The center spans 1,620 acres and consists roughly 100 facilities. Tourists can experience a simulation of a zero-gravity environment in the Living in Space exhibit or encounter a virtual rocket launch complete with exhaust at the Blast Off Theater.

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### STROLL AROUND THE MUSEUM DISTRICT



The Houston Museum District refers to the collection of museums, galleries, and cultural centers located within a 1.5-mile radius of Hermann Park. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, which also houses the Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens, boasts a collection of roughly 60,000 pieces. Just a few blocks away is the Health Museum, home to Houston's first and only 4D theater. Other area attractions include the Holocaust Museum, Houston Center for Photography and the Lawndale Art Center.

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### HAVE A LITTLE FUN AT KEMAH BOARDWALK

Kemah Boardwalk is now Houston's nearest and largest amusement/entertainment park. Primarily occupied by hotels and restaurants, Kemah Boardwalk is an ideal place to entertain the entire family. Dining options include Landry's Seafood House, the Cadillac Bar and Saltgrass Steakhouse. Attractions such as a Ferris wheel, train ride, and a carousel are all individually priced.





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## GO ON A WALKING TOUR OF MONTROSE

One of Houston's most demographically diverse regions, Montrose has become the city's hub of vintage shopping, live music, and LGBT activism. Restored mansions and bungalows, tree-lined boulevards, and an antique mall make this neighborhood a unique, pedestrian-friendly tourist spot. Stop at Rudyard's, a neighborhood dive bar, for a cold beer and a meal—you might even catch one of their famous comedy shows.

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## EAT DELICIOUS TEX-MEX

Houston might not have invented the fajita, but it sure has mastered it. With hundreds of amazing Tex-Mex restaurants throughout the city, there's no excuse not to get your fill. Check out the Original Ninfa's on Navigation to experience some culinary history, or try any other of the city's best Tex-Mex restaurants for a taste of Houston's most famous cuisine. Don't forget the breakfast tacos or queso.



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## TAKE A BIKE RIDE DOWN BUFFALO BAYOU

Houston has some great green spaces and hike and bike trails. The Buffalo Bayou itself stretches from just outside the 610 Loop all the way into the center of the city, and the park, which begins at Shepherd Drive, offers some breathtaking views of the downtown skyline. Don't have a bike? You can rent one using the city's bike-share program Bcycle. Docking stations are located near the trail at Jackson Hill and Memorial Drive and the Sabine Bridge.

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## HANG OUT AT DISCOVERY GREEN

A splash of vegetation in Houston's otherwise concrete and glass-laden downtown, Discovery Green is more than just a pretty park. With concerts, exercise classes, special events and more, the 12-acre green space has tons of activities for people of all ages.

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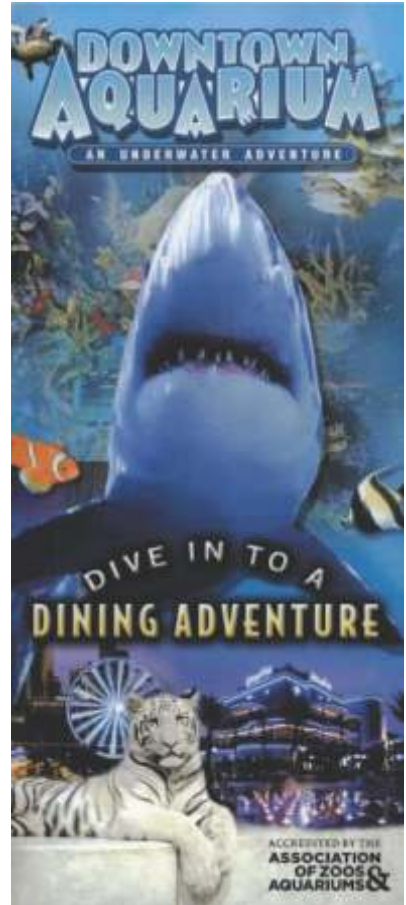
## SEE THE SHARKS AT THE DOWNTOWN AQUARIUM

Discover over 400 species of marine life and dine alongside a 150,000-gallon, two-story tank at the Downtown Aquarium. Witness white tigers lounging about, pet a stingray or go on an exhilarating train ride through the Shark Voyage. Wrap up the evening by feasting on seafood entrees, steaks and decadent desserts in the aquarium restaurant.

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## GO SHOPPING IN THE GALLERIA MALL

The Galleria Houston is an upscale shopping mall centrally located just outside the 610 Loop in Houston's Uptown District. The retail center is anchored by Macy's, Neiman Marcus, Nordstrom and Saks Fifth Avenue, and occupies such high-end tenants as Tiffany and Co., Dior, Louis Vuitton and Saint Laurent.



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## ADMIRE THE JAMES TURRELL SKYSPACE

Head to the Rice University campus for one of the most impressive art installations you're likely ever to see. Artist James Turrell has created an acoustically-engineered light and sound installation next to the campus's Shepherd School of Music which remains one of the best things to see in H-Town. Dubbed "Twilight Epiphany," the show is projected onto the building's roof at sunrise and sunset. While the show is free, reservations are required.



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of 20

## MAKE YOUR OWN CRAFT BEER PUB CRAWL

Craft beer has always been popular in Houston, and there is no shortage of great breweries to try some suds. The city is home to Texas's oldest craft brewery, Saint Arnold, which is open for tours Monday through Saturday. After visiting the original, you have no shortage of options, ranging from 8th Wonder Brewery, with its massive backyard, to Brash Brewing, a tucked-away warehouse-style brewery where you can try beers like the Smoglifter, a chocolate milk stout.

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## FLOAT ALONG A TEXAS-SHAPED LAZY RIVER

Everything's bigger in Texas—even the swimming pools. Houston's massive Marriott Marquis hotel opened in 2017 with a truly impressive Texas-shaped lazy river for guests to float in. While the pool is primarily open to guests of the hotel, you can book a spa treatment at the hotel's Pure Spa for day access. Floaties and towels are provided.

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of 20

## DINE UNDERGROUND AT THE CONSERVATORY

Summers in Houston can be brutally hot. Escape the sun at the Conservatory, the city's first underground food hall and beer garden. There are four different food options, including international picks such as poke and pho, as well more than 50 different beer taps, plus wine by the glass or bottle from the in-house wine bar, Noble Rot. Conservatory is also an excellent option for a rainy day!

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## HAVE A LITTLE FUN AT KEMAH BOARDWALK

Kemah Boardwalk is now Houston's nearest and largest amusement/entertainment park. Primarily occupied by hotels and restaurants, Kemah Boardwalk is an ideal place to entertain the entire family. Dining options include Landry's Seafood House, the Cadillac Bar and Saltgrass Steakhouse. Attractions such as a Ferris wheel, train ride, and a carousel are all individually priced.

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of 20

## WATCH A FREE SHOW AT THE MILLER OUTDOOR THEATRE

If you're looking for an inexpensive, yet entertaining, night out, visit the Miller Outdoor Theatre in Hermann Park. Since 1923, Miller has offered entirely free performances from March through November. During any given month, you might catch anything from Shakespeare to a screening of Jurassic Park.

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of 20

## GO SEE THE BATS AT WAUGH BRIDGE

If you thought Austin was the only city with a famous bat colony, think again. Houston has its very own colony of 250,000 Mexican free-tailed bats, which reside under the Waugh Bridge, near Buffalo Bayou. While Austin's colony is larger, Houston's bats live under the bridge year-round and are not migratory. The bats emerge nightly to feast on insects, often eating up the 1,200 mosquitoes in an hour.

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of 20

## EXPLORE A MYSTERIOUS UNDERGROUND CISTERN

Most Houstonians don't know that there's an 87,500 square-foot, 25-foot-tall cistern lurking under Houston's Fourth Ward. When it was built in 1926, it served as the city's first underground drinking reservoir before being decommissioned in 2007 due to leaks. Today, after a thorough restoration, guests can tour the underground cavern, which now hosts public art installations.

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of 20

## MEDITATE AT THE MODERN ROTHKO CHAPEL

This one-man museum is one of Houston's most popular attractions—an impressive feat given that it only houses 14 works of art. Rothko Chapel opened its doors in 1971, as a monument to the work of abstract artist Mark Rothko. Today, the main room of the interfaith chapel is a quiet octagonal room filled with the artist's massive, single-color canvases. Other than simple wooden benches and a few meditation mats, the chapel has no furniture or decoration.

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of 20

## GO TO THE TOP OF THE SAN JACINTO MONUMENT

This historical monument flies under the radar for most visitors, but it remains an important symbol of Texas's independence. Resembling D.C.'s Washington Monument, the San Jacinto Monument stands 567-feet tall and is topped with a star weighing 220 tons. Visitors can head to the tower's observation deck for an eagle-eye view of Houston's expanding metropolis.

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of 20

## NIGHTLIFE

There's never a dull moment when it comes to Houston's nightlife scene. Whether you're looking for high-energy dance clubs or Texas honky tonks, action-packed sports pubs or low-key wine bars, there's something for every taste. And there are numerous nightlife districts to explore, including Downtown, Midtown, Montrose, Washington Avenue and Rice Village.



## INTERNATIONAL MICE TRENDS

# FIT Dominant and Fast Growing among World's Major Markets in Asia

Meet FIT and Trade & MICE in different days of ITE, Hong Kong's only Travel Fair

More wealthy Chinese now travel abroad are FIT (Free Independent Travellers), while Hong Kong up-market FIT, who dominate the city's outbound market, take multiple holidays each year! Thus, overseas suppliers shall cover both travel agents and FIT, for more present and future business!

Hong Kong's quality outbound market is big! In fact, it named by UNWTO the World's 10th largest market by total outbound spending in 2016(\*1), but ranked top of these top ten markets by per capita spending! Latest figures show the city continues spending more on traveling abroad!

In 2017, Hong Kong spent



US\$25.5 billion on international tourism, up 5.8 ! The city's travel agents reported outbound package tour business in the first half this year grew by 14.8 !(\*2)

Several popular destinations reported more arrivals last year from Hong Kong. For examples, Japan had 21.3 more or 2.23 million, Thailand up 9.5 to 820,000, and Australia 13.8 more to 282,100.

ITE Hong Kong 2019, the 33rd ITE on leisure and the

14th ITE MICE, will be held from June 13 to 16 at Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre. We would invite you to take part in.

Launched over 30 years ago, the annual ITE Hong Kong is the city's only travel fair. Its 2018 survey collected over 3000 replies and found 84 of ITE's 90000 public visitors travel in FIT / private tour, they're educated (42 university & another 34 post-secondary); and nearly 60 take three or more holidays a year! Further, they are quality

FIT accessible to overseas suppliers: 63 do onsite booking.

ITE's two trade days, which require registration for admission, drew 12460 buyers and visitors - 6580 from travel agents or operators and 2567 MICE or corporations ; geographically 73 from Hong Kong and 21 from mainland China of whom nearly 2000 from Guangdong 9 cities in the Greater Bay Area (the Bay).

The Bay, which has a cumulative GDP of US\$1.69 trillion and population of 68 million, includes Hong Kong, Macau and 9 Guangdong cities like Guangzhou and Shenzhen. The launching of Mega Bridge and Express Rail extension to Hong Kong boost closer integration so likely more visitors to ITE!

Highly international, 87 of ITE's 666 exhibitors from abroad and China, and some 180 target MICE. Highlighting theme travels, the annual ITE covers regional travel trade, MICE and well off FIT in separate days, promotions and seminars etc !

## New Infrastructures boost Travel Fair ITE Hong Kong's Coverage on the Greater Bay Area

The Greater Bay Area (the Bay), which includes Hong Kong, Macau and 9 Guangdong cities like Guangzhou and Shenzhen respectively China 3rd and 4th top cities, has a cumulative GDP of US\$1.69 trillion and population of 68 million.

Being close neighbours, ITE Hong Kong, the city's only travel fair, drew in 2018 just from these 9 Guangdong cities, exhibitors taking nearly 20 stands and some 2000 buyers and trade visitors.

The new Mega Bridge across the Pearl River and the new China's Express Rail extension to Hong Kong, which further cut down travel time especially for journey between Hong Kong and southwest Guangdong, greatly enhance linkage and integration of this world class

cities cluster, thus likely boost effective coverage of ITE on the Bay and other parts of China too!

The Bay with major source markets of Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Shenzhen etc. included, constitutes a big outbound market and easier at the same time to make joint offers to draw more inbound tourists.

Hong Kong, which was ranked World's 10th largest and Asia's 3rd largest source market by UNWTO on outbound spending in 2016; saw in 2017 some 2.23 million outbound to Japan, 1.54 million to Taiwan, 0.66 million to South Korea etc. while total outbound spending rose 5.8 to US\$25.5 billion!

ITE's two trade days which require registration for admission, draw 12460

buyers and visitors (Hong Kong 73 , China 21, others 6 ) and (6580 travel agents and 2567 MICE/Corporations); and 666 exhibitors (87 from abroad and China) with some 30 official pavilions or stands with China and Japan the two largest pavilions each taking around 90 stands.

Its two public days over 90000 upmarket visitors with 84 FIT; educated (42 university & 34 postsecondary) so likely English speaking, and take multiple holidays a year (13 had 6/More, 44 "3 to 5", and 40 "1 to 2")! Also, 63 interest in booking at fairground, 60 in online booking directly with suppliers, while 19 in joining "local" tour at destination.

ITE highlight theme travels,

host over 30 seminars, events and forums for trade and professionals, and over 100 travel seminars for FIT etc. Our B2B program and B2C program include pre-show e-newsletters and onsite advertising, Business Matching, speaking opportunities, sponsorship, and assisting exhibitor holding seminars etc.

Organized by TKS Exhibition Services Ltd and supported by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China and Hong Kong Tourism Board etc., ITE Hong Kong 2019, the 33rd ITE (leisure) and the 14th ITE MICE, will be held from 13 to 16 June 2019 at Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre. [www.itehk.com](http://www.itehk.com)

## FESTIVALS - THAILAND

# Experience Thai traditions and cultural values in Thailand's annual events and festivals

Thailand is a land of festivals and celebrations that reflect Thai traditions and cultural values. Most Thai festivals derive from the Buddhist and Brahman beliefs, with many being originated from local traditions, folklore and the way of life. Many have taken place over the course of a year for centuries.

Two internationally known festivals are Songkran or the Thai New Year with its water-based fun and the charming full moon

festival of Loi Krathong. And among many religious events tourists are encouraged to witness include the 'Khao Phansa' and 'Ok Phansa' festivals that respectively mark the beginning and the end of Buddhist Lent.

Each Thai festival has its own outstanding features, which differ from region to region, and here are just some of the many events and festivals celebrated annually in Thailand.

### World Wai Kru Muay Thai Ceremony

17 March, Ayutthaya

The annual World Wai Kru Muay Thai Ceremony, held annually at the Ayutthaya Historical Park, allows the opportunity for hundreds of Muay Thai practitioners from around the world to express their gratitude to their masters in the time-honoured tradition known as the Wai Kru ceremony, as well as to celebrate the aged-old martial art of Muay Thai.

The event begins with an afternoon Muay Thai fair featuring unique Thai traditions including sword-making, Thai tattooing and calligraphy and Thai martial art

shows. Taking place thereafter is the highlight: the ceremony to pay respect to ancient Thai kings and warriors who protected the sovereignty of the land; namely, King Naresuan the Great, Phrachao Suea, and Phraya Phichai Dap Hak, with a Wai Kru dance performed by all participating Muay Thai boxers.

Hundreds of Muay Thai practitioners from around the world perform dance in the time-honoured tradition known as the Wai Kru ceremony.



### Poi Sang Long Festival

March-April, Mae Hong Son

The annual Poi Sang Long Festival is an aged-old ordination ceremony undergone by boys between seven and 14 years of age of the Tai Yai ethnic group in Northern Thailand, but mostly synonymous with Mae Hong Son province. Usually, a large group of boys are ordained as novice monks at the same time. The three-day ritual is believed to help gain more merit than an ordinary ordination. On the first day, the boys enter a tonsure ceremony and dress up in the Sang Long dress. On the second day, the boys are carried on the shoulders of their male relatives or mentors, as their feet are not allowed to touch the

ground except at home and in the temple. On the last day, the novice monks enter the temple for a period, which can vary from a week to many months or more.

The Sang Long or novice monks getting ready for the aged-old ordination ceremony.



### Songkran Festival

13-15 April, nationwide

**Songkran Festival** is an event where boisterous fun and ancient traditions go hand-in-hand. For tourists, the event offers a chance to enjoy a huge celebration where water parties break out in the streets of Thailand's

towns and villages. For locals, it is a time when they can spend precious moments with their families and visit the temples to observe ancient rites and make merit.

Some of the best locations to celebrate the Songkran Festival, region-by-region, are: Central and Eastern Region: Bangkok and Pattaya; Northern **Region:** Chiang Mai; **Northeastern Region:** Khon Kaen; and **Southern Region:** Hat Yai.

Locals and visiting tourists sprinkle water onto Phra Phutthasihing during the Songkran Festival at Tha Phae Gate, Chiang Mai.





### Bun Bung Fai (Rocket) Festival

*May or June, some provinces in the Northeast and South*

Among the most spectacular festivals to be experienced in Thailand is the annual rocket festival, which takes place in the Northeast as the rainy season begins. Known as Bun Bung Fai, the festival is seen as a way of encouraging the rains to fall and to help the local rice crops to grow. It also allows people to have a fun and festive break before the hard work of planting and harvesting begins.

The celebrations differ from province to province, but mostly involve the firing of homemade rockets up into the sky with teams competing against each other to send their rockets the highest. There are also parades with floats and displays of

traditional costume and dancing.

The Festival can be enjoyed in many provinces of Isan including Roi Et, Yasothon and Kalasin. There is also a rocket festival in Sukhirin district in the southern province of Narathiwat, initiated by people who moved south from Isan.

### Bun Luang and Phi Ta Khon Festival

*June-July, Loei*

One of the most vibrant, and distinctly unique festivals in Thailand's Northeastern Region is the Bun Luang and Phi Ta Khon Festival in Dan Sai district, Loei. The three-day event normally takes place during the first week after the sixth full moon of the year (in June or July). The entire event is

traditionally called Bun Luang, a mass merit-making ceremony organised with the aim to celebrate the return of Prince Vessandorn (the last incarnation of Lord Buddha) and to worship Phra That Si Song Rak, the highly-revered Buddha stupa for both Thai and Lao people. But the highlight is the Phi Ta Khon masked-dance procession. Villagers, mostly male, dress in ghost costumes and wear huge masks made from carved coconut-tree trunks, topped with wickerwork and sticky rice steamers, dance and strike amusing poses to the cheerful crowds as they parade around town. Other activities include Phi Ta Khon costume competition and the firing of Bung Fai (rocket).





### Khao Phansa or Buddhist Lent Day

*On the day after the full moon of the eighth lunar month (normally in July), nationwide*

One of the most charming festivals celebrated in Thailand is Khao Phansa, or Buddhist Lent Day, which marks the start of the rainy season and the period when monks traditionally retreat to their temples for a three-month period. Traditionally, candles were donated to temples enabling monks to continue their studies into the evenings. Nowadays, these offerings take the form of huge wax effigies, which are shown off in local parades accompanied by folk dances, displays of local crafts, and sound and light

performances. Khao Phansa day itself is a day of special celebration and is held on the day after the full moon of the eighth lunar month (normally in July). But many of the celebrations to mark the festival will take place over several days during the week. Some of the best locations to witness spectacular candle parades are Ubon Ratchathani, Saraburi (Tak Bat Dok Mai or flower offering), Ayutthaya and Nakhon Phanom.

### OK Phansa or End of Buddhist Lent Day

*On the full moon of the 11th lunar month (normally in October), nationwide*

The Ok Phansa festival is celebrated on the full moon of the 11th lunar month and marks the end of the Buddhist Lent. It is a time of celebration and merit-making with provinces nationwide set to celebrate the occasion on different days and in distinctive styles, depending on their locality and tradition. Among the notable Ok Phansa celebrations include Nakhon Phanom Illuminated Boat Procession, Sakon Nakhon Wax Castle Festival, Naga Fireball Festivals in Nong Khai and Bueng Kan, Chaiyaphum 'Ti Khli (fireball

croquet)' competition, Samut Prakan Rap Bua (receiving lotus) Festival, Uthai Thani 'Tak Bat Devo' Ceremony, and Mae Hong Son 'Chong Phara' procession of the Tai Yai ethnic group. In the Southern region, several provinces including Surat Thani, Phatthalung and Trang are famous for their unique Chak Phra, Lark Phra or Hae Phra ceremony, where a highly-revered Buddha image is carried on beautifully decorated floats and hauled in the river or on the road, allowing Buddhist devotees to join in making merit.

### Long-boat Racing Festivals

*Normally held coinciding with the Ok Phansa Festival at selected locations nationwide*

There are many long-boat racing festivals organised in Thai provinces where big rivers pass; such as, Phichit, Phitsanulok, Ayutthaya, Ang Thong, Saraburi, Pathum Thani, Nan and Surat Thani. The Phichit Traditional Long-boat Races is the first type of such festival held in Thailand as well as one of the oldest. It is also regarded as one of the grandest and most spectacular boat races in the

country. Meanwhile, the Nan Boat Races, initially organised to mark the end of the Buddhist Lent, has become a fixture on Thailand's annual festival calendar, having the most numbers of boats entering the races or about 200 boats from over 100 communities. In the South, the annual Surat Thani Long-boat Races is held alongside the Chak Phra Festival.



## Vegetarian Festival

*Normally held for nine days during the period of the ninth lunar month (around October), nationwide*

One of Thailand's most unique and lively events, the Vegetarian Festival has its origins in Chinese culture. It is believed that abstinence from meat and stimulants will bring about good health and peace of mind to individuals and the community. Thus, a lot of Thai people, especially those of Chinese lineage, will restrict themselves to only a vegetarian diet for nine days and nine nights as a form of purification of a person's body, mind and spirit.

Phuket boasts Thailand's most famous Vegetarian Festival celebration, also

known as the Nine Emperor Gods Festival, with notable ceremonies including the processions of god images and of celebrants in a trance-like state displaying awe-inspiring supernatural power. Other locations with unique celebrations have included Krabi, Trang, Phang Nga, Hat Yai, Surat Thani, Chumphon, Nakhon Ratchasima, Nakhon Sawan, Chon Buri (Pattaya) and Samut Sakhon.

## Loi Krathong Festival

*On the full moon night of the 12th lunar month (normally in November), nationwide*

Nearly all visitors to Thailand agree that in this land of festivals, it is Loi Krathong that stands out as the most charming.

The annual ceremony is a time of special celebration in Thailand. The rains have mostly ended, and the weather is cool, so people take the chance to get out for the evening, socialise and enjoy many fun activities as well as making and floating krathongs. These are candlelit floats, traditionally made from banana stalk and leaf or coconut shell and decorated with incense, offerings, flowers and candles. They are then floated out onto the water as a way of paying respect to the water

spirits to thank them for their bounty as well as to apologise to rivers and streams for pollution and for their use of water over the year.

Some of the best locations to see Thai people at their most fun loving while enjoying a genuinely beautiful spectacle include Bangkok, Samut Songkhram (Loi Krathong Kap Kluai), Tak (Loi Krathong Sai), Sukhothai (Candle Festival), Chiang Mai (Yi Peng Festival) and Roi Et (Somma Nam Khuen Pheng Seng Prathip).



## River Kwai Bridge Week

*November-December, Kanchanaburi*

The River Kwai Bridge is one Thailand's more recent historical attractions. It commemorates the sacrifice of British, American, Australian, Dutch, and New Zealand prisoners of war, in addition to the many Thai, Burmese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Malays, and Indians, who were part of the estimated 61,700 people who died there. The River Kwai Bridge Week pays respect to their memory while also balancing the freedom all who attend enjoy. It is known for staging one of Thailand's most spectacular sound and light shows that tells the stories of the World War II in honour of the prisoners of war who built the infamous Death Railway, the Bridge on the River Kwai and Hellfire Pass. The event normally takes place for 10 days around November and December.





LANDMARK MANDARIN ORIENTAL, HONG KONG

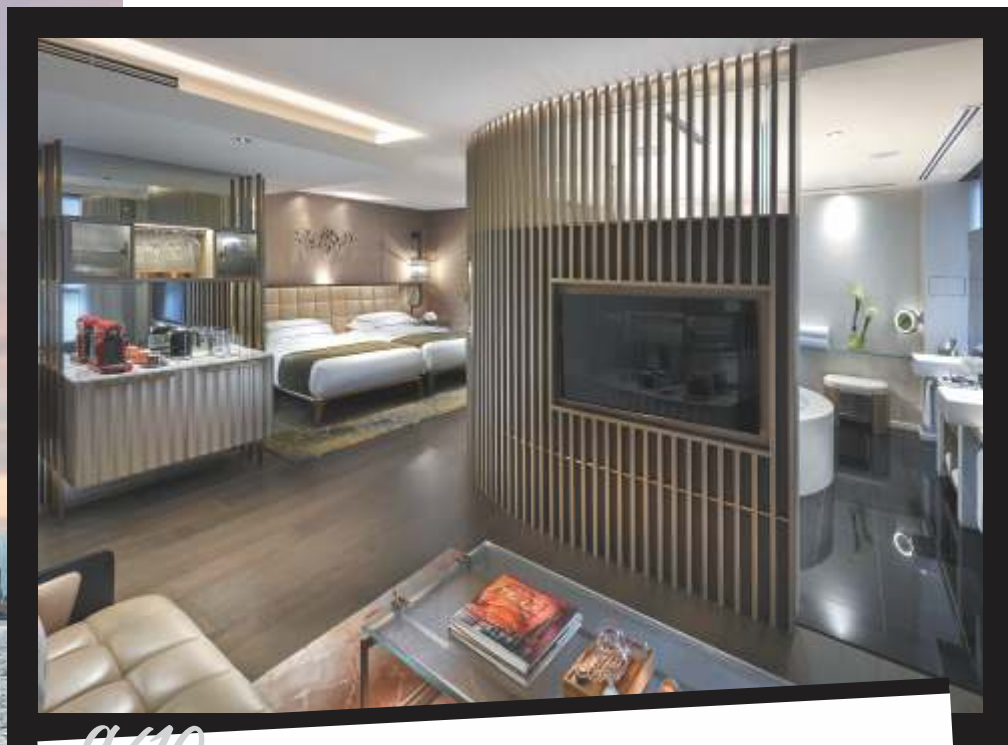
# The Landmark Oriental Mandarin is a masterpiece of contemporary design

**F**eaturing the newest designer guestrooms in **Hong Kong**, the **Landmark Mandarin Oriental** is a chic, **5-star hotel**. It's located in Central, the heart of **Hong Kong's** business, fashion and entertainment district where guests can explore the city's local favourites and its dynamic nightlife. An '**urban sanctuary**' is how this supremely metropolitan hotel likes to describe itself. Unlike its nearby big sister – the **Mandarin Oriental** – the Landmark is boutique-sized, with just **113 guestrooms**, but it packs a major punch in both style and food."



## 9/10 LOCATION

This really is the epicenter of Hong Kong's shopping and business district. The Landmark shopping mall is aptly-named: it's a pivotal point from which covered walkways radiate off to all corners of Central (including to the Mandarin Oriental, a few minutes' stroll away). You can walk from the hotel to the Airport Express at Hong Kong station without leaving an air-conditioned environment.



## 9/10 ROOMS & SUITES

*Exuding style, serenity, space and a sense of luxury*

Mixing cutting edge design and comfort, its spacious rooms and elegant suites offer a fresh take on contemporary style, inspired by our unique urban setting.

As part of the hotel's first-decade celebrations, there's been a complete redesign of all the rooms and suites. These are some of the biggest guest rooms (and bathrooms) in the city and the combination of low-key colours, high-end fabrics and streamlined furniture has increased that luxurious sense of spaciousness. Everyone gets a Nespresso machine plus a glass chilled-cabinet (a 'vitrine') in which complimentary daily treats from two-Michelin-starred restaurant Amber are safely stored.

All rooms have 48-inch (55-inch in the suites) television screens. The padded, curving headboards – with proper reading lights – contribute to the pleasurable effect of a cocoon.

## 9/10 STYLE & CHARACTER

The sleek entrance to the hotel, all polished wood and curves, is supposed to resemble a yacht. You ascend a short flight of stairs – or a lift for disabled guests – into the lobby leaving behind the surging wave of humanity on Hong Kong's streets. The small reception area has the fragrant air of a boudoir and is lined with fashion tomes.

## 9/10 SERVICE AND FACILITIES

Pretty faultless. The hotel prides itself on attending to all needs and is noticeably attentive to single travellers. The staff is good at greeting you after a short time in residence. There's an 18-metre heated indoor swimming pool, a decent-sized gym and a weekly schedule of yoga and Pilates classes. Best of all, it also has an excellent, and enormous, spa on two floors.





## FOOD & DRINK

### *An exquisite dining experience*

With a stunning design and delicious cuisine, the two dining areas – MO Bar and Amber are for sure to dazzle you. MO Bar is very popular with locals as well as guests; it's on the ground floor, and has a pleasant buzz throughout the day starting with a great breakfast buffet, moving through lunch and afternoon tea and on to a vast selection of cocktails (globally-recognized mixologists are regularly imported). Amber is a Michelin-starred, World's 50 best-listed restaurant, which serves the sort of divinely-inspired food you never knew your taste-buds desired until you'd sampled it.



### **Late Night Cocktails - PDT**

The hotel has an intimate bar concept in collaboration with the iconic New York cocktail bar, PDT (Please Don't Tell).

### **Meetings and Events**

Landmark offers an exclusive setting for the events with a combination of stylish surroundings, privacy and gourmet inspiration.

### **Weddings & Events**

#### *Intimate, stylish and exclusive*

The Landmark Mandarin Oriental provides the perfect backdrop for a glamorous celebration. The two floor Spa offers a range of treatments and facilities including a luxurious couples' spa suite.

### **What makes the hotel special**

- Small and intimate hotel that offers more privacy and personalized service, a rare aspect in Hong Kong
- 480- thread-count bed linens or La Maison Du Chocolat turn down amenity : sleep well !
- Amongst the largest hotel rooms in Hong Kong

9/10

### **VALUE FOR MONEY**

Beautiful hotel with extremely helpful and lovely staff. Highly recommended! Everything was perfect. Probably the best hotel in Hong Kong.

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN

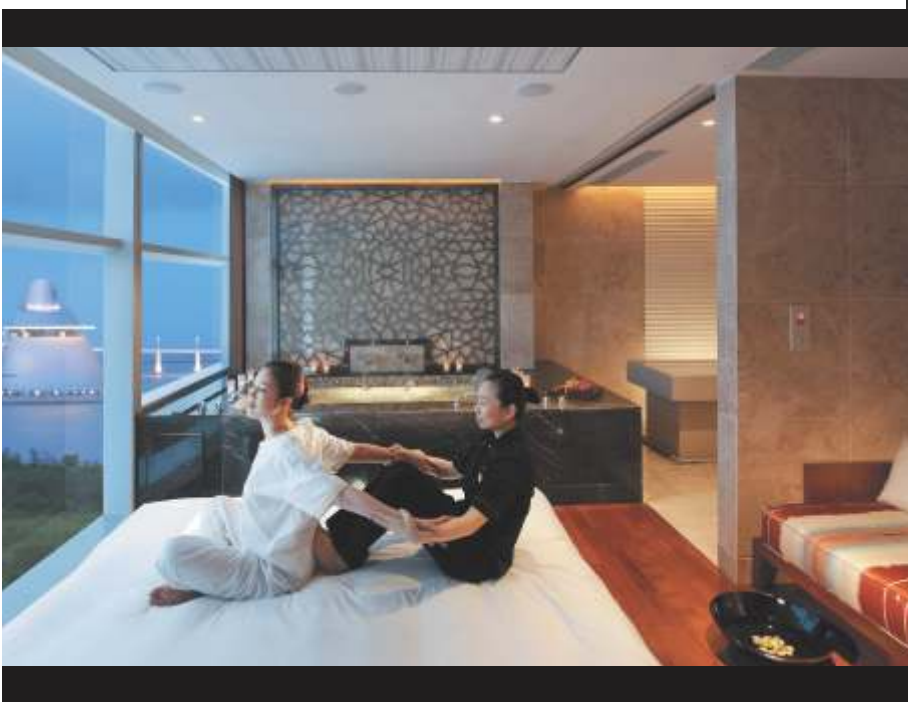
# Mandarin Oriental Macau

**Mandarin Oriental Macau** could simply be pronounced '**style**'. There's no casino here, simply first-rate beds and food to match in an exclusive location. One of the most exclusive hotels in **Macau, Mandarin Oriental, Macau** is a decidedly elegant five-star retreat. With a chic, **contemporary design, fabulous restaurants and legendary service**, it offers a sophisticated atmosphere, waterside setting and unbeatable luxury.

## 8/10 LOCATION

On the fringe of downtown Macau the Mandarin overlooks the inner harbour and Nam Van lake. The seriously swish One Central mall is right next door.





## 9/10 **STYLE & CHARACTER**

The hotel is shaped like a **ship**, with her bow pointed south toward the harbour. Rather than a grand lobby with soaring columns, there's a modest entrance from whence new arrivals are whisked discreetly upstairs. Fellow guests are likely to be on a business trip, taking a relaxed holiday from mainland China or Hong Kong, or indulging in a spa break rather than trying to cram everything into a three-night, two-day gambling and guzzling spree.

## 9/10 **SERVICE & FACILITIES**

What first struck me about the staff, and continues to do so, is their natural confidence. Courteous, humorous, assured, utterly professional, yet never straying into the inanity of "have-a-nice-day" or "how's-your-meal?", they're one of the prime reasons for staying here, or at any other Mandarin Oriental. The spa also deserves a sustained round of applause, as does the infinity pool.

## 8/10 **ROOMS & SUITES**

*Contemporary design & soothing atmosphere*

There are 213 rooms and suites, but for my money, the best place to stay is either a Waterfront Suite or a Premier View Room which adorn the hotel's "prow", allowing you to snuggle under the goose-down bedding while watching what might be labelled "TV Macau", the 24/7 show right outside the windows. All the rooms are crammed with the latest tech bits and bobs, which blend seamlessly in among the luxurious fittings.

The serene setting of the property's rooms and suites combines superb comfort with state-of-the-art technology. Towering over the picturesque Macau waterfront, Mandarin Oriental, Macau enjoys a prime location and offers spectacular views of Nam Van Lake and Macau Bay from each of its guestrooms.

## 8/10 **MEETINGS AND EVENTS**

Its sensational setting, serene atmosphere and unbeatable service has made the property a perfect venue for meetings, events and weddings.

## **WEDDINGS & EVENTS**

As the only five-star, non-gaming hotel on the peninsula, Mandarin Oriental, Macau's discreet and luxurious atmosphere, exclusive style, grace and efficiently friendly service, sets the tone for your wedding or special occasion.





8/10

## FOOD & DRINK

### *Where dining is Theatre*

*From mouth-watering menus to delicious cocktails and fabulous cakes, Mandarin Oriental, Macau offers a range of memorable dining and drinking experiences*

There's a substantial case to be made for taking breakfast and lunch and dinner at Vida Rica, the hotel's only restaurant (Natural stone and sensuous lighting create an exhilarating ambience for all-day dining with a contemporary twist). And afternoon tea too, just for good measure. Showcasing Asian and Western dishes with equal dexterity, it's modern without being fussy, and you can taste the freshness. I nurture a special affection for the Szechuan-style poached turbot, and have to make a conscious effort not to lick my lips while perusing the wine list.

The adjoining bar is a well-paced cavalcade of marble and chrome, with separate areas devoted to coffee, cocktails, and champagne and tapas. A glass of something imaginatively alcoholic tastes even better while appreciating the metropolitan and marine views through the 7.5-metre high windows. Finally, nobody has ever raised any objection to my bringing home a perishable souvenir from the hotel's Cake Shop.

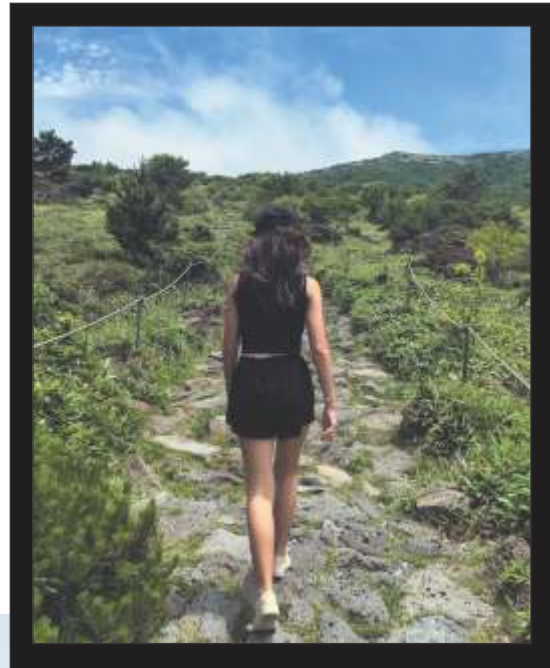


## A PERFECT VENUE AND VALUE FOR MONEY

- Adjacent to world class casinos
- Views of the harbour, Nam Van Lake, Sai Van Lake and all three bridges linking Macau to Taipa
- An ideal base to explore Macau's historic UNESCO World Heritage sites
- 10 minutes from Macau International Airport
- 5 minutes from Macau Ferry Terminal
- 60 minutes from Hong Kong (by ferry)

## DESTINATION - JEJU ISLAND

# Top reasons travelers can't keep away from Jeju Island



*Top reasons that can't keep you away from this destination are slated as follows:*

**J**ust off the coast of **South Korea**, **Jeju Island** pulls in vacationers and honeymooners by the thousands. Regular direct flights to and from international cities make getting here a snap. The picturesque island is very popular, so popular that Seoul International to Jeju International is the world's busiest air route, with around 6.5 million people making the return trip last year.

**Jeju Island** features a volcanic Hallasan commanding the island from the center, a 224-kilometer semi-tropical forested national park, a wild coastline dotted with waterfalls and the longest lava tube in the world. Korea's largest island, has long been the country's favourite domestic holiday destination thanks to its beautiful beaches, lush countryside and seaside hotels designed for rest and relaxation.

There's plenty on Jeju-do to appeal to those who prefer to be active. Hike up South Korea's highest mountain, Halla-san, or climb the incredible tuff cone Seongsan Ilchul-bong, rising straight from the sea, to watch the sun rise from the ridge of a crater. For a less-demanding nature experience, meander along one of the Jeju Olle Trails and explore tangerine-trimmed country roads, jagged coasts and narrow lanes dotted with cottage-style homes made from black lava rock. The ocean is never far away, so plunge into blue seas to view coral as colourful as the sunsets and dig into Jeju-do's unique cuisine, including seafood caught by haeneyo (female free divers).



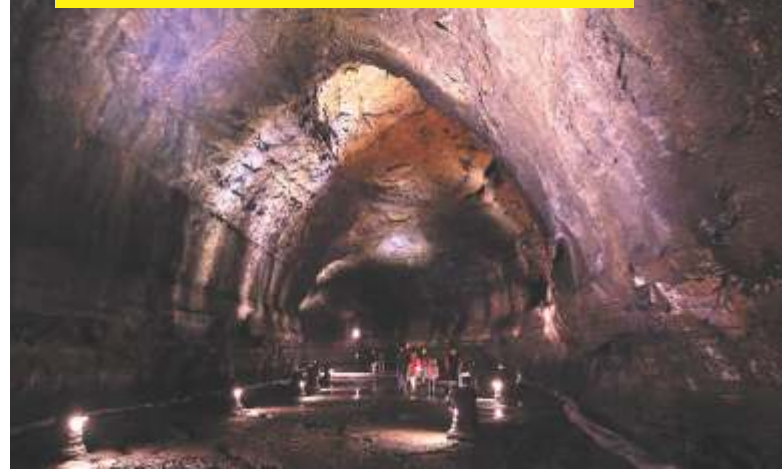
## 1 The highest mountain in South Korea

The dormant volcano Hallasan stands 1,950 meters above sea level, but you can hike up and down in a day if you start early. Avoid the rain clouds of summer in favor of springtime azaleas, autumn colors or winter snow. Hallasan is a UNESCO Biosphere reserve

containing a crater lake, alpine plants, woodpeckers, chipmunks, butterflies and beetles. Hiking clubs regularly take to these slopes, and those of 368 parasitic volcanoes.

## 2 Lava tubes

Another UNESCO Geopark, the **Manjang cave** is more than eight kilometers long and you can walk one kilometer of its eerie passageway. Formed by cooling lava, the cave's dark, cold, often narrow and slippery with water, and you know there are bats up in its murky corners: not somewhere for the claustrophobic.



## 3 Grandfather stones

With just a tad of irony, Jeju boasts "three plenties" -- wind, rocks and women. The second of these is due to its formation from an outpouring of lava. Ninety percent of its surface is basalt. Dry-stone walls protect fields from storms. Then around 1750, to scare off invaders, masons started carving rocks into forbidding black "grandfather stones" (dolharubang) -- massive phallic statues that might be mistaken for distant cousins of Easter Island's moai. Forty-five still exist -- but don't be fooled by replicas. The stones remain a symbol of a distinct ancient culture furnished with many gods and legends.



## 4 Deep-diving women



In years gone by, when Jeju's men disappeared for weeks in fishing boats, someone had to stick around to haul those rocks and put dinner on the table. As rice won't grow on this wild, windy island, women learned to dive for octopus, abalone, clams, squid and seaweed. Nowadays, the powerful sea-women (haenyo) who dive 10-20 meters without any breathing apparatus, are renowned throughout the country. The haenyo's average age is 65, with some diving into their 80s in darned wetsuits. You can see them at work in various locations across the island, including Jungmun Beach, Seogwipo.



## 5 Superb beaches

Korea's a peninsula; it never lacks for beaches. But most of the superb beaches seem to encircle Jeju Island. Jungmun beach: a sweep of pale sand, blue sea, green creepers trailing over dunes. Just behind is the Lotte World mega-hotel complex's Vegas-style pool area complete with fake cliffs, swan-shaped pedal boats and a Dutch windmill. The beautiful beach is empty outside of summer. Other top beaches for swimming and surfing are Emerald Bay, Gwakji, Hamdoek and Shinyang. Hamdeok Seoubong Beach is located an approximately 40 minute drive away from Jeju International Airport in the direction of Seongsan Ilchulbong Peak. This small but charming beach has emerald colored waters.

The beach is perfect for beginner swimmers and touring families as the waters are only waist-high even away from shore. In the spring, canola flowers bloom behind the beach and the yellow field creates harmony with the blue ocean to create captivating scenery. In addition, visitors can take in the view of the ocean by following a walking path that leads to a suspension bridge connected to Seoubong Peak at the end of the beach. As Seoubong Beach is one of the few Jeju beaches to remain open at night in the summer, don't miss this chance to enjoy the evening sea breeze of Jeju Island. With its moderate waves perfect for surfing and ocean kayaking, Hamdeok Seoubong Beach is a haven to water sport fans.

## 6 Loveland-It has an erotic theme park

If any of Jeju's honeymooners need to get in the mood, this is one blatant way to go about it. This hilarious over-the-top adult theme park is dedicated to sex. Grotesque oversized casts of Western-looking nudes are locked in embraces or

caught in the throes of ecstasy. It's no place for prudery. The handle on the door to the ladies' toilets has an extremely distinctive shape, and interactive displays include a pleasure-giving exercise bike.



## 7 Olle walking trails / Jeju's stunning coast

Olle in the local dialect means a winding path to your front door, and Olle coastal trails now wind around much of the island.

From a lush, ambling south coast route overlooking craggy islands, clamber down to the sea over strange rock formations and see the caves that islanders were

forced to dig by Japanese occupiers to hide weapons. The massively popular historical drama "Jewel in the Palace" was filmed here, so you can pose as one of the stars, should you want. The route near Oedolgae has the views made famous in "Dae Jang Geum" ("Jewel in the Palace").



## 10 Sunrise from a volcanic crater

Jeju is certainly full of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and here's another one. Known as Sunrise Peak, it is famed for the picturesque sunrise scenic views one can enjoy at the peak. Sunrise Peak (Seongsan Ilchulbong), the 182-meter-high cone rising from the sea with a wide, green crater on the island's eastern edge. It can be reached by a bridge, the approach is dominated by a shopping arcade and coach park.



## 8 Water/oxygen/massage therapy

At Hanwha Therapy Resort, let jets of water massage you from every angle. Float in the pool with the lights out and music playing, lie back in an oxygen room, get wrapped in a sheet and cocooned in hay in a crib, then wake up in a tropical rain shower. Or try the herb sauna and outdoor spas at Jeju Waterworld.

## 9 Seaweed and sea urchin soup

Beyond raw seafood, the array of local specialties includes pheasant, whole grilled mackerel in sea salt and barbecued pork from Jeju's black pigs. But if you really want to get a taste of the island try some of the seaweed and sea urchin soup. The urchin averse can opt for vegetarian health food at Yeoonnae outside Halla Arboretum serving potato pancakes and a green tea and perilla-seed soup.

## 11 It has an impressive 12 World Heritage sites

Jeju Island forms part of the country's roster of 12 UNESCO World Heritage Sites. These national treasures include royal palaces, tombs, shrines and well preserved hanok villages (hilly settlements packed with traditional Korean houses).





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