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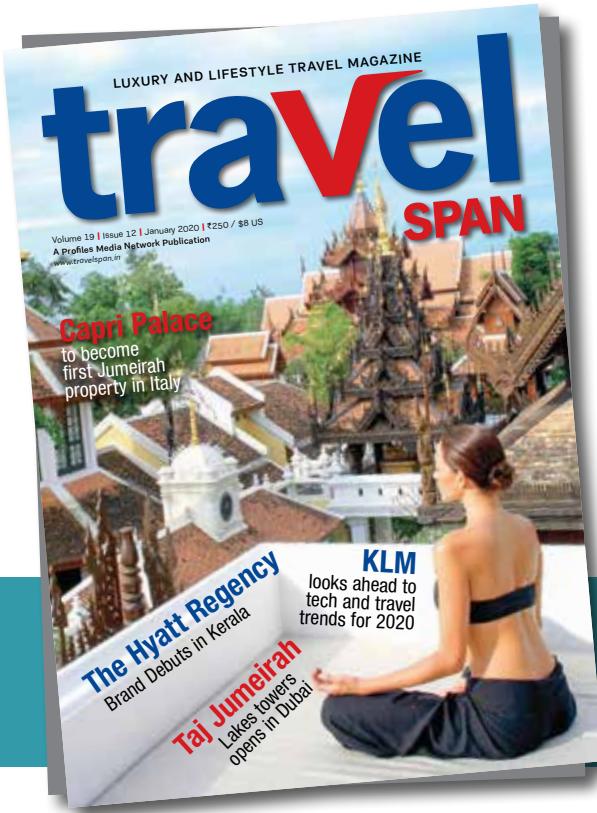
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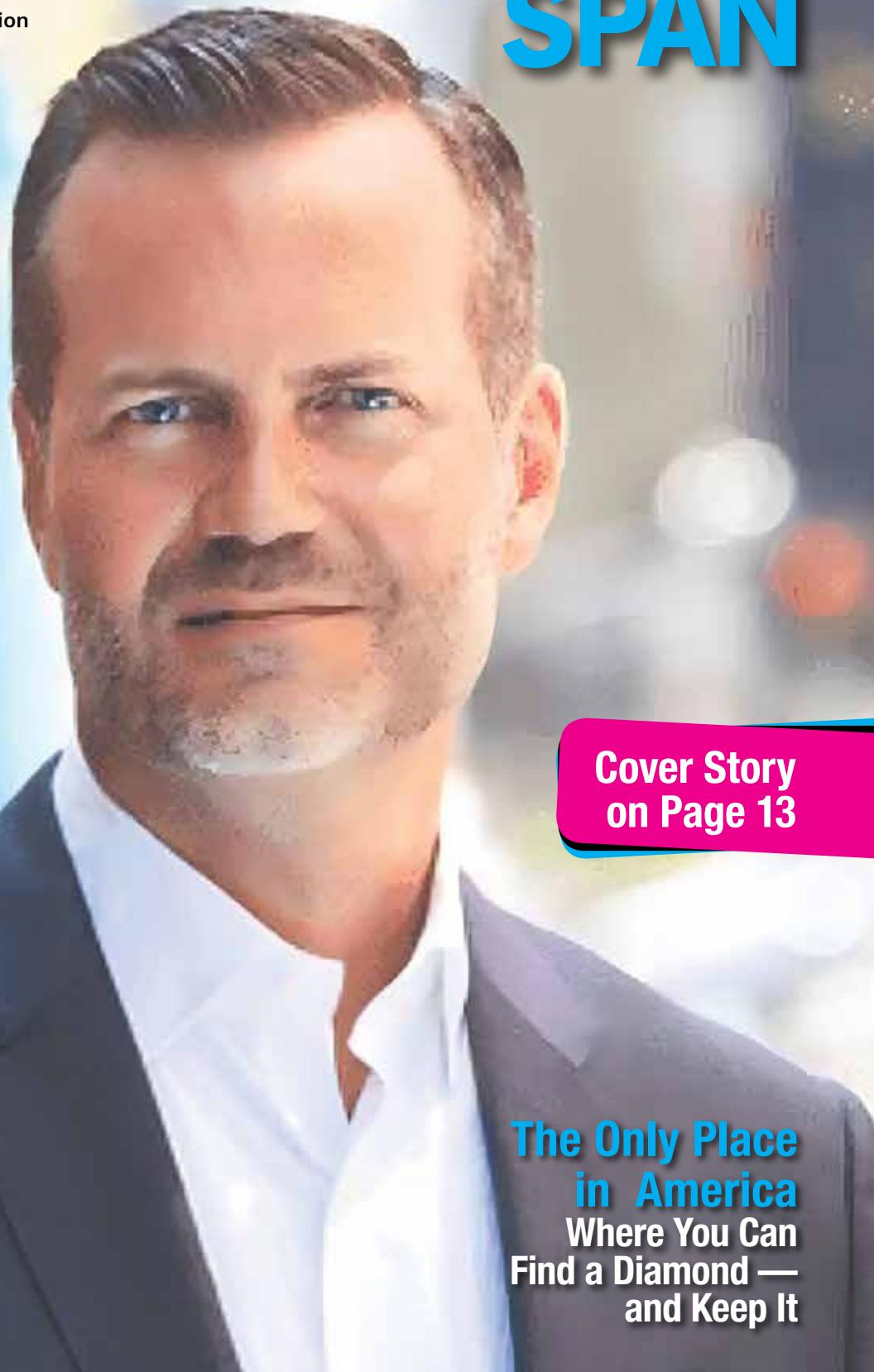
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## SPAN

Volume 25 | Issue 12 | January 2026 | ₹500 / \$12 US

A Profiles Media Network Publication

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**Texas'**  
**Hidden Canyons**

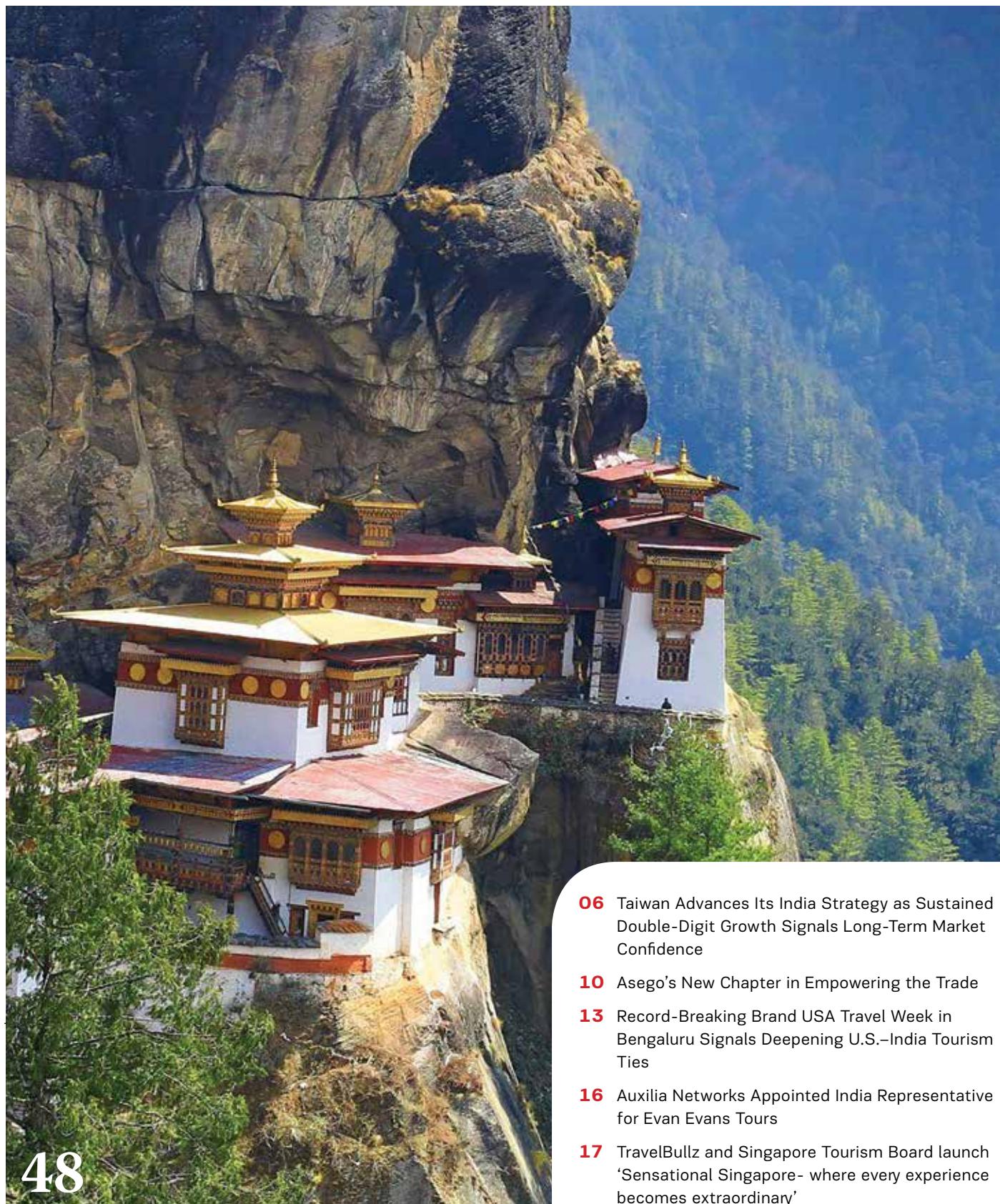
**Beyond Luxury:**  
The Saudi Red Sea  
Defines Travel with  
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**Hilton**  
**Accelerates**  
Global Expansion with  
1,000 New Hotels

**The Only Place  
in America  
Where You Can  
Find a Diamond —  
and Keep It**

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## EDITOR'S LETTER

# Taiwan Advances Its India Strategy as Sustained Double-Digit Growth Signals Long-Term Market Confidence

- With over 20% year-on-year growth from India, Taiwan sharpens its focus on luxury leisure and MICE segments through high-impact trade engagement.
- Strategic roadshows, immersive showcases and strong trade partnerships underline Taiwan's long-term commitment to the Indian market.
- As India's outbound market matures, Taiwan positions itself as a sophisticated, experience-led Asian destination.



**A**t a time when premium outbound travel from India is expanding at unprecedented pace, Taiwan is quietly but confidently positioning itself as one of Asia's most compelling high-value destinations. Backed by **two consecutive years of over 20 percent year-on-year growth in Indian visitor arrivals**, the **Taiwan Tourism Administration (TTA)** is launching its **2026 India market development programme** with two high-impact trade initiatives — the **Taiwan Mega Roadshow in Delhi** and a prominent presence at **OTM 2026 (February 5-7) at Mumbai's Jio World Convention Centre**.

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

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#### **PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY**

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

#### **PRINTED BY**

STUDIO 9 PRODUCTIONS, C-59, Defence Colony, Chetna Marg, New Delhi 110024, India  
Volume 25, Issue 12, January 2026

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For a destination that blends cutting-edge urban sophistication with pristine natural landscapes and deeply rooted culture, this is not merely promotional activity — it signals a calibrated, long-term strategy to capture India's fast-evolving luxury leisure and MICE segments.

***"Taiwan is no longer a hidden gem for Indian travellers — it is rapidly becoming a preferred destination for luxury leisure and high-value corporate travel."***

#### **India: A Priority Market**

##### **Delivering Results**

Taiwan's India story is no longer one of potential — it is now a narrative backed by measurable performance.

In **2025, Taiwan welcomed 46,134**

**Indian visitors**, reflecting a **20.90 percent year-on-year growth**, outperforming many broader outbound travel trends. This momentum follows TTA's structured re-entry into India in January 2024 with a **360-degree market development strategy** encompassing:

- Trade roadshows and destination seminars
- Media and trade familiarisation programmes
- MICE-focused activations
- Digital campaigns and PR outreach
- Influencer collaborations
- Participation at key travel trade platforms such as SATTE and OTM

The result is a steadily rising profile for Taiwan among Indian travellers seeking destinations that combine exclusivity, safety, culinary distinction, and experiential depth.

#### **Delhi Mega Roadshow: Engaging India's Primary Outbound Hub**

***"With advanced convention infrastructure, seamless connectivity and experiential depth, Taiwan offers corporate planners a compelling alternative in Asia's MICE landscape."***

Scheduled ahead of OTM, the **Taiwan Mega Roadshow in Delhi** targets **Delhi NCR — India's largest outbound travel gateway**. The event is expected to host **around 125 leading travel trade buyers**,





offering an in-depth view of Taiwan's portfolio across **leisure, luxury and MICE**.

Designed as an immersive showcase rather than a conventional B2B event, the roadshow integrates experience-led engagement:

- Interactive zones including a **Selfie Booth, AI Photo Booth and Digital Jigsaw Puzzle**

- Cultural performances by Taiwanese artists
- DIY activity stations that reflect Taiwan's creative culture
- A curated culinary experience featuring **Taiwanese fried chicken, bubble tea and award-winning Kavalan whisky**

A delegation of **25+ Taiwanese tourism stakeholders** — including Shih Chun Travel, Relax Go Taiwan, Welcome Wonder, Edison Tours, Apple Tour, Top International Travel Services, Tour One, the Taiwan Visitors Association and TTA officials — underscores the seriousness of Taiwan's trade commitment.

## OTM 2026: Expanding Reach Across Western & Southern India

Following Delhi, TTA's participation at **OTM Mumbai** is strategically aimed at **Western and South India**, now among the country's fastest-growing outbound regions. The **Taiwan Pavilion**, built around a wave-inspired design echoing the global brand theme "**Taiwan – Waves of Wonder**," will spotlight:

- Four-season tourism appeal
- Premium leisure experiences
- Taiwan's advanced MICE infrastructure
- Cultural showcases and interactive activities

The focus is clear: positioning Taiwan as an attractive option not only for affluent leisure travellers but also for **corporate groups, incentive travel and high-value events**.

## Beyond Leisure: A Diversified India Strategy

*"From award-winning gastronomy and design-forward cities to mountain landscapes and hot springs, Taiwan delivers the kind of immersive experiences today's discerning Indian traveller seeks."*

TTA's India outreach has evolved well beyond traditional sightseeing tourism. Over the past two years, the destination has sharpened its appeal in:

- **Luxury and experiential travel**
- **Incentive and corporate travel**
- **Golf tourism**
- Emerging source markets such as

### East India

At the same time, partnerships with Indian travel trade, OTAs and airlines have strengthened connectivity, product packaging and destination awareness.

## A Destination in Sync with India's New Traveller

As Indian outbound travellers increasingly prioritise **authentic experiences, premium infrastructure, culinary exploration and safe, well-managed destinations**, Taiwan's proposition aligns seamlessly. Efficient transport

systems, world-class convention facilities, vibrant night markets, mountain landscapes, hot springs and design-forward cities make it particularly attractive for a new generation of discerning travellers and corporate planners.

**As Paul Shih, Director – Singapore Office, TTA**, notes, India has become "one of the most promising and strategically important source markets," with growth that has consistently exceeded overall outbound trends.

## The Road Ahead

*"Taiwan's strategy in India is partnership-led — investing in trade relationships, product innovation and long-term market development rather than short-term promotion."*

Taiwan's 2026 initiatives reflect a destination investing ahead of the curve — in partnerships, visibility and experience-led storytelling. For India's travel trade and corporate planners, the message is clear: Taiwan is not simply seeking arrivals; it is seeking long-term engagement with high-value segments.

As India's outbound travel enters its next phase of sophistication, Taiwan appears ready to ride the wave — not as a niche alternative, but as a mainstream premium contender in Asia's luxury and MICE landscape.



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# ATM 2026 Launches Dedicated Travel Tech Event in Dubai, Showcasing Global Innovation in AI, Mobility, Fintech, and Sustainability



Arabian Travel Market (ATM), the premier tourism industry event in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, has announced the launch of **ATM Travel Tech**, a co-located event debuting at **ATM 2026**, scheduled from May 4–7 at the **Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC)**.

Expanding from its earlier presence as a high-growth segment within ATM, the new **ATM Travel Tech** will occupy **two dedicated halls**, reflecting the increasing centrality of technology in shaping the future of travel. Anchored in the overarching theme of ATM 2026 – “Travel 2040: Driving New Frontiers Through Innovation and Technology” – the event will highlight innovations that are redefining the global tourism experience, including **AI-driven trip planning, smart mobility, fintech solutions, immersive commerce, and sustainable travel technologies**.

## A Showcase of Global Expertise

The exhibition will feature over **180 exhibitors from 30 countries**, spanning established travel

technology providers and emerging start-ups. Industry leaders such as **Sabre, Traveport, Amadeus, HBX Group, Juniper Consulting, WebBeds, Infinios Financial Services, and Travog Expense Technologies** will present their latest solutions, while innovators in **automation, AI, payments, and customer experience** will offer insights into the next wave of travel transformation.

Danielle Curtis, **Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market**, said:

“As travel technology evolves at an unprecedented pace, we have expanded ATM Travel Tech into a fully co-located event. Technology is no longer just a support tool; it is now central to how the entire travel journey is imagined, delivered, and improved. ATM Travel Tech will be a hub for the minds and solutions reshaping our sector and beyond.”

## Market Insights and Industry Growth

According to **Research and Markets**, the global travel technology

market was valued at **USD 10.7 billion in 2024**, with projections to reach **USD 18.6 billion by 2033**, growing at a **CAGR of 6.05%**. This underscores the rising significance of travel technology as both a commercial and strategic driver for the industry.

## Tech & Innovation Hub and Future Stage

At the heart of ATM Travel Tech will be the **Tech & Innovation Hub**, a **850-square-metre space** featuring immersive product zones, live demonstrations, and augmented experiences spanning the entire travel technology ecosystem. The dedicated **Future Stage**, a 250-seat theatre, will host over **25 expert-led sessions, 30 technology demonstrations, and two Start-up Pitch Battles**, covering topics such as **immersive technologies, cybersecurity, robotics, AI applications, and sustainable innovations**.

Curtis added:

“The Future Stage is designed to act as a launchpad for ideas, from practical applications of new technology to bold predictions about the future of travel. It will ignite dialogue among creators, investors, and operators, ensuring the industry stays ahead of the curve into the next decade.”

With its expanded scale, immersive experiences, and focus on global innovation, **ATM Travel Tech 2026** is set to position Dubai at the forefront of travel technology development, providing a comprehensive platform for **destinations, airlines, hotels, start-ups, and technology providers** to engage, collaborate, and shape the future of the sector.

# Asegos **New Chapter in** Empowering the Trade



*Dev Karvat, Founder  
and CEO - ASEGO*

For over 25 years, Aseglo has stood alongside the Indian travel trade — as a partner grounded in innovation, trust, and a steadfast trade-first philosophy. While awareness around travel risks has grown significantly in recent years, a persistent gap continues to separate intent from action.

Industry research shows that although nearly nine in ten Indian travellers say they intend to purchase travel insurance for their next international trip, only about 70–75% actually bought cover for their most recent journey abroad — leaving one in four travellers flying uninsured. The disparity widens domestically, where less than 1% of travellers protect their holidays within the country.

These numbers highlight a truth the travel trade has long understood: availability isn't the issue — communication at the point of sale is. Frontline counter professionals, who interact with customers daily and shape the final booking decision, are the ones who ultimately convert risk awareness into responsible action. Yet this crucial segment has historically had limited access to structured, specialised training focused solely on travel protection.

Although various service providers and trade partners have worked steadily toward raising travel insurance awareness, uptake often surged only after major disruptions — such as the recent wave of airline cancellations that forced thousands of travellers to reassess their preparedness. This was the very gap Aseglo set out to bridge.

#### Introducing SmartEdge: India's Most Advanced Travel Protection Certification Programme

Recognising the need for a deeper, more consistent capability-building framework, **Aseglo launched SmartEdge**, India's most advanced travel protection certification programme crafted exclusively for customer-facing professionals.

Led by seasoned, renowned industry trainers who understood the realities of the counter, SmartEdge went far



beyond generic sales workshops. The programme equipped participants to listen actively and decode travellers' needs, confidently match them with the right protection and assistance solutions, and communicate benefits clearly — whether they were speaking to a student travelling overseas, a family exploring Europe, a business professional, or a couple planning an offbeat domestic escape.

What began as a pilot **rapidly scaled** into a countrywide skill-building movement. SmartEdge **was conducted** in 32 cities, **training and certifying** 3,500 frontline professionals. Each session was highly interactive and scenario-driven, covering real-world challenges

such as lost baggage, medical emergencies abroad, visa rejection, insurance requirements, airline delays, cancellations, trip disruptions, and more. Participants were not merely taught what to sell; they were empowered with how to have the right conversations — with confidence, empathy, and a deep understanding of the traveller's journey.

Kerala, Punjab, Bhubaneshwar, Coimbatore and Gujarat **emerged** as standout performers, showcasing exceptional participation, engagement, and measurable improvement in post-training travel protection uptake. Other markets quickly followed suit, with leading agencies nominating their teams



repeatedly — a sign that SmartEdge was fast becoming the gold standard for frontline excellence.

### Shifting Mindsets, Strengthening Outcomes

Many admitted that earlier, insurance would be mentioned hurriedly at the end — almost as an afterthought. After SmartEdge, they seamlessly integrated travel protection into core trip-planning conversations, explained coverages in simple language, and handled concerns with clarity. Complex questions no longer intimidated them; instead, they saw each question as an opportunity to reassure customers and elevate the service experience.

Reflecting on the programme's impact, Dev Karvat, Founder & CEO of Asegō, **shared**,

*“Frontline professionals are the first to engage travellers and the last to influence their decisions. SmartEdge is Asegō’s commitment to their growth*

— because when they thrive, the entire trade thrives.”

This belief was evident in the programme's structure: smaller batches for deeper interaction, content continuously refined based on trade feedback, and real-time certification that reflected genuine skill — not just attendance.

### 25 Years of Trust, Innovation & Duty of Care

As Asegō marked 25 years of service, SmartEdge formed part of a broader, heartfelt commitment to give back to the community that helped shape its journey. Asegō's **Grow Trees** initiative continued to symbolise the company's values of sustainability — planting mangrove saplings to mark partners' special occasions such as birthdays, celebrating relationships that grow stronger each year.

Complementing this was **Travel Business Protect**, Asegō's first-

of-its-kind liability protection solution designed specifically for travel companies navigating today's increasingly complex operational and legal environment — from compliance risks to customer claims.

### The Road Ahead: A Future-Ready Travel Ecosystem

Much like Asegō's technological innovations and flagship protection offerings, SmartEdge represents the company's long-term vision: a future-ready travel ecosystem where every partner — from large consolidators to independent agencies — has the skills, support, and security needed to succeed.

For Asegō, the last 25 years have been defined by the trade it proudly serves.

With SmartEdge and Asegō's growing suite of solutions, the next chapter promises an even stronger trade — sharper in communication, smarter in service, and far better prepared for tomorrow's traveller.

# Record-Breaking Brand USA Travel Week in Bengaluru Signals Deepening U.S.–India Tourism Ties



*Fred Dixon,  
President and Chief  
Executive Officer of  
Brand USA*

In a landmark event underscoring the growing significance of India as a source market for U.S. inbound tourism, Brand USA convened its largest-ever delegation during **Brand USA Travel Week 2026** in Bengaluru. The event, held earlier this week, brought together 74 delegates representing 48 U.S. travel and tourism organisations — a strong indicator of the United States' strategic focus on converting India's robust outbound demand into long-term travel flows.

Organised by Brand USA, the destination marketing organisation for the United States, Travel Week 2026 marked an unprecedented scale

of engagement with India's travel trade. The delegation included a broad spectrum of tourism stakeholders — from destination marketing organisations representing states and major cities to premier attractions, theme parks and tour operators — reflecting the breadth and depth of interest in the Indian traveller.

According to **Jackie Ennis, Vice President, Global Trade Development at Brand USA**, the size and diversity of the delegation this year was unmatched. "This is not only our largest delegation ever, but also our most varied, with senior leadership from across the U.S. tourism

ecosystem present," Ennis said. "Their participation reflects the importance the United States places on India as a dynamic and high-growth market."

Leading the delegation was **Fred Dixon, Chief Executive Officer of Brand USA**, who remained in India throughout the week, alongside **Leah Chandler**, the organisation's newly appointed Chief Marketing Officer. Their presence reinforced the U.S. tourism industry's commitment to forging deeper ties with Indian partners and consumers.

## India's Fastest-Growing Source Market Momentum

Brand USA revealed that the number of Indian visitors to the United States has surged in recent years, fuelled by strong demand in both leisure and experiential segments. In 2025, over **2 million Indian travellers** visited the United States — a new record that marked a **40% increase over 2019 figures**, making India the fastest-growing large source market and the second-largest overseas market overall.

"It is not just the numbers that are transformative," Ennis noted. "Indian travellers are exploring the United States in new, adventurous ways — seeking customised experiences ranging from luxury and outdoor adventure to cultural events, theme parks and attractions."

Traditionally, Indian arrivals have concentrated in iconic gateway states such as **New York, California and Texas**. However, Brand USA reports a noticeable broadening of interest, with Indian travellers increasingly venturing into diverse regions and lesser-known destinations. "From Alaska and Florida to the deserts of Arizona and the





historic landscapes of New England, the Indian traveller is keen to explore every corner of the United States," Ennis said. The growing participation of U.S. states such as **Wyoming, Mississippi and South Dakota** at this year's Travel Week speaks to this expanding appetite for geographic diversity.

#### Market Development Amid Major U.S. Events

Industry leaders believe that 2026 holds special promise for further accelerating travel from India, in part due to the convergence of three major events: the **250th anniversary of American Independence**, the **FIFA World Cup hosted in the U.S.**, and the **centennial celebrations of Route 66** — the iconic cross-country highway. Brand USA anticipates that these milestones will amplify interest among Indian travellers and build on the momentum of recent growth.

According to Ennis, interest from cities historically less associated with U.S. travel is already rising, particularly

in regions such as **Kolkata, West Bengal and the Northeast**. The FIFA World Cup is expected to stimulate demand from these emerging source cities, expanding the geographic footprint of Indian outbound travel.

#### "America the Beautiful" and Emotional Engagement

To sustain and deepen market growth, Brand USA recently launched its latest global marketing platform, **"America the Beautiful."** The campaign is designed to showcase the United States in all its diversity — from sweeping landscapes and cultural richness to vibrant communities and personal stories — with the goal of creating an emotional connection with prospective travellers.

"We are focusing on showing the full spectrum of American experiences," Ennis said. "Our intent is to reach beyond transactional tourism and engage travellers on a more emotional level, drawing them into the idea of discovery, connection and transformation."

#### Implications for Indian Travel Trade

The record-setting Brand USA Travel Week has provided Indian travel professionals with fresh insights into evolving U.S. product offerings, incentive programmes, tiered experiences and bespoke itinerary options that address the preferences of modern Indian travellers — particularly those seeking luxury, experiential and multi-destination travel.

By fostering direct dialogue between U.S. industry leaders and Indian partners, the event has reinforced the United States' long-term strategic commitment to India's outbound market — one that looks beyond volume to cultivate deeper engagement, enriched experiences and diversified travel flows.

As global tourism continues its post-pandemic recovery, Brand USA's Bengaluru edition marks a clear milestone: India is no longer just an emerging market for U.S. tourism — it has become a cornerstone of future growth strategies across the entirety of the American travel landscape.

# Auxilia Networks Appointed India Representative for Evan Evans Tours

*Strengthening India engagement for premium guided coach tours*



**A**uxilia Networks, a leading tourism consultancy, e-learning and destination representation firm, has been appointed as the official India representative for Evan Evans Tours (EET), one of the United Kingdom's most established and respected guided coach tour operators.

Founded in 1933, Evan Evans Tours is among Europe's oldest legacy coach operating companies, renowned for its expertly curated guided tours, attractions and immersive experiences across London and the United Kingdom. With nearly a century of operational excellence, the brand is synonymous with high-quality touring, deep destination knowledge and consistently premium travel experiences.

Under the new partnership, Auxilia Networks will spearhead Evan Evans Tours' trade engagement and public relations initiatives in the Indian market. The mandate includes strengthening brand visibility, deepening relationships with the Indian travel trade, and driving qualified business by providing comprehensive product knowledge, sales support and booking assistance for EET's portfolio of premium tour offerings.

India continues to be a key growth market for inbound UK travel, particularly within the guided tours and experiential travel segments, making the collaboration strategically significant for both organisations.

Commenting on the appointment, **Alexis Peppis, Head of Sales at Evan Evans Tours**, said:

"We are delighted to partner with Auxilia Networks to strengthen Evan Evans Tours' presence and visibility across India. This is a highly important and growing inbound market for us, and we look forward to working closely with Auxilia and with buyers across the region to build strong partnerships and deliver outstanding experiences for Indian travellers visiting the United Kingdom."

**Paramjit Bawa, Founder and Principal of Auxilia Networks**, added:

"We are absolutely thrilled to be chosen by Evan Evans Tours as their India representative. An almost century-old, legendary touring company with an exceptional pedigree and reputation, Evan Evans is one of the most respected names in UK coach touring. This partnership aligns perfectly with our focus on representing best-in-class global travel brands, and we look forward to promoting their exceptional offerings to our valued travel trade partners across India."

The appointment further strengthens Auxilia Networks' growing portfolio of premium international travel brands while reinforcing Evan Evans Tours' long-term commitment to the Indian market.

# TravelBullz and Singapore Tourism Board launch 'Sensational Singapore- where every experience becomes extraordinary'



TravelBullz, in collaboration with Singapore Tourism Board has launched Sensational Singapore, a B2B focused travel trade initiative aimed at strengthening Singapore's positioning in the Indian market during the travel period of December 2025 to March 2026.

This initiative, which is the first ever B2B collaboration for Singapore Tourism Board is designed to support travel agents by providing them access to exclusive hotel rates, experiences at competitive pricing and tailor-made packages attaining to a variety of demographics including honeymooners, families, couples and travellers seeking luxury experiences in Singapore. While this collaboration has been molded to enhance the experience of the end consumer, Travel agents can enjoy various benefits such as amazon vouchers, networking dinners, and a staggering opportunity for top 10 performing agents to receive a familiarisation (FAM) trip to Singapore.

**Kean Bon Lim, Area Director, India (New Delhi), said** "India remains one of Singapore's most important and dynamic source markets, and Singapore continues to evolve as a destination that offers far more than just a city break – from world-class attractions and gastronomy to nature, wellness and luxury. Our collaboration with TravelBullz seeks to showcase just this by leveraging its network of travel agents, who are key touchpoints for travellers to access and experience Singapore, giving Indian travellers easier access to curated, high-quality Singapore offerings during the peak travel season."

The framework of this collaboration is built on offering unique and unforgettable experiences for every traveller to Singapore and all agents who book with TravelBullz; a common theme that is identified in the customised packages under this promotion. The inclusion of these packages will be unveiled at three networking dinners across Punjab,

Ahmedabad and Delhi in attendance of travel agents and partners of TravelBullz and Singapore Tourism Board.

"Our primary objective is to enable travel agents to confidently sell Singapore across diverse traveler segments while driving sustainable market growth," said **K.D. Singh, founder and president of TravelBullz**. "The tagline 'Where every experience becomes extraordinary' is rooted in real-world performance, supported by strong 4.5 google reviews and customer ratings, reliable on-ground partners and 24/7 customer support. Our collaboration with the Singapore Tourism Board further reinforces our commitment to long-term partnerships and market-led initiatives."

The partnership between Singapore Tourism Board and TravelBullz is expected to increase the outbound of Indian travellers to Singapore while optimising the user experience of Travel agents.

# Utah Office of Tourism Brings the Spirit of Utah to India Through Trade & Media Networking Events in Mumbai and Delhi

*Ranked 7th Among U.S. States for Indian Travel, Utah Sees Longer Stays and High-Value Growth from India*

**T**he Utah Office of Tourism brought the spirit of Utah to India through exclusive **trade and media networking events in Mumbai and Delhi**, providing a platform to deepen collaboration with the Indian travel ecosystem and strengthen long-term partnerships between **India and the State of Utah**.

The events saw participation from **70+ leading travel trade partners and media representatives**, underlining India's growing importance as a **high-value long-haul market** for Utah. Indian visitation to Utah is projected to grow by approximately **10% by 2030**, while **spending from India is expected to increase by nearly 28%**, reflecting longer stays, higher-value travel, and deeper destination engagement. Utah currently ranks **7th among U.S. states visited by Indian travellers**, highlighting strong awareness alongside significant growth potential.

A key experiential highlight of the events was the **Guided Glass Gardens – A Utah Landscape Terrarium Making Experience**, a hands-on activity inspired by Utah's diverse natural landscapes. Through the guided session, guests metaphorically "built their own Utah," reflecting the destination's balance of **nature, creativity, sustainability, mindful luxury, and wellness**. The experience



encouraged relaxed interaction and networking while offering a memorable takeaway aligned with Utah's outdoor and scenic identity.

Commenting on Utah's engagement with India, **Tera Atwood, Global Markets Manager, Utah Office of Tourism**, said: *"India is a priority market for the State of Utah, and our focus is on building long-term, high-value engagement. We are seeing Indian travellers stay longer, explore more deeply, and seek destinations that offer variety within a single journey—something Utah is uniquely positioned to*

*deliver. Through these events, supported by immersive touchpoints, we reinforced Utah's diversity, year-round appeal, and our commitment to growing meaningful partnerships with the Indian travel trade."*

Indian travellers are increasingly spending more time in Utah and engaging more meaningfully with the destination, signalling growing confidence in its ability to support immersive and well-paced itineraries. Travellers from India are gravitating toward destinations that combine **dramatic scenery, strong infrastructure, and multi-generational appeal**—an area where Utah stands out by offering iconic landscapes, scenic road trips, family-friendly experiences, and urban comforts within a single itinerary. **Family-focused travel and immersive road trips** are expected to continue driving growth in **2026**, supporting longer stays and experience-rich itineraries.

Winter travel was also highlighted as a compelling opportunity to experience Utah differently. With **world-class snow**, easy access to ski resorts, and **five iconic national parks within the same state**, travellers can seamlessly combine winter getaways with national park visits. Utah's unique geography further allows visitors to experience **multiple seasons and climates in one trip**, pairing alpine environments and cool mountain air with desert landscapes and warmer weather within a few hours' drive.

**Sustainability remains integral to Utah's tourism approach**, with a focus on encouraging travel beyond peak seasons, supporting local communities, and promoting guided, experience-led travel. **Looking ahead to 2026**, the Utah Office of Tourism remains committed to thoughtful growth, deepening trade partnerships, expanding education, and supporting itinerary development that benefits travellers, trade partners, and Utah's local communities alike—further strengthening the bridge between India and Utah.

# Japan Records Historic Milestone with Over 315,000 Indian Arrivals in 2025

*Year-on-year growth of 35.2% underscores India's rising significance as a key outbound market*



Japan has achieved a landmark in the Indian outbound travel market, with total arrivals from India surpassing 315,000 in 2025—marking the first time the 300,000 threshold has been crossed. This represents a 35.2% increase compared to 233,061 arrivals in 2024 and nearly 80% higher than pre-COVID levels of 175,896 in 2019.

In a statement, the **Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO) Delhi office** attributed the record performance to enhanced air connectivity, strategic engagement with the Indian travel trade, and growing interest in destinations beyond the traditional **Golden Route** of Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, and Hiroshima.

"The Indian market continues to demonstrate strong and sustained growth.

By highlighting diverse regions, off-the-beaten-path destinations, and all-season travel opportunities, Japan is emerging as a year-round destination for Indian travellers," the statement said.

## Seasonal Trends and Emerging Travel Windows

May 2025 proved to be a particularly notable month, with 43,040 Indian arrivals—the highest single-month figure ever recorded, even after the conclusion of the cherry blossom season. This indicates a shift in travel patterns, with Indian tourists increasingly exploring Japan outside the spring bloom period. The months of May and June are emerging as key travel periods, driven by summer holidays, fewer crowds after

Golden Week, and improved access to accommodations and attractions.

March and April also demonstrated strong growth. March saw 32,967 arrivals from India, a 20% increase over March 2024, while April surged 61% year-on-year to 37,352 visitors, largely due to the peak cherry blossom season.

Autumn travel is similarly gaining traction among Indian travellers. November arrivals reached approximately 28,900, up 22%, while December registered 23,300, reflecting a 37% increase. Snow destinations such as **Hokkaido** and the **Japanese Alps** are attracting Indian families and honeymoon travellers, drawn to powder snow, winter illuminations, and seasonal sports.

## Beyond the Golden Route

JNTO noted a rising interest among Indian travellers in destinations beyond the traditional Golden Route. Popular alternatives now include the Alpine Route, Okinawa, and Hokkaido, supported by enhanced hospitality infrastructure, multilingual signage, Indian cuisine options, tax-free shopping, and curated cultural experiences.

The growth also reflects Japan's continued positioning as a **luxury destination** combining

culture, nature, and modern urban experiences. Visitors are increasingly balancing classic urban itineraries with unique regional explorations.

## Connectivity and Market Initiatives

Enhanced air connectivity has been a key enabler of growth. **Japan Airlines (JAL)** has added a new Narita route alongside its Haneda services, while **All Nippon Airways (ANA)** plans to operate daily Mumbai–Narita flights in 2026. Additional code-share agreements and regional connections through Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and Hong Kong have further facilitated travel from India.

JNTO's sustained promotional activities in India—including consumer-facing events like **Japan Travel Fair 2026**,

advertising campaigns, trade seminars, familiarisation tours, and collaboration with travel partners—have also contributed significantly to building awareness and driving arrivals.

With record-breaking arrivals and growing interest in diverse regions, India is now firmly established as a **strategic market** for Japan's tourism sector, with all-season travel, luxury experiences, and off-the-beaten-path destinations poised to sustain momentum into 2026.

# Qatar

## Records Strong Tourism Growth with 5.1 Million Visitors in 2025



Qatar has marked a significant milestone in its tourism development journey, welcoming **5.1 million visitors in 2025**, reflecting sustained growth in arrivals and reinforcing the country's positioning as a competitive, year-round tourism destination in the region.

According to figures released by **Visit Qatar**, the country's tourism promotion authority, visitor arrivals increased by **3.7 per cent year-on-year**, with **December 2025 emerging as a standout month**, recording **674,000 visitors**—a near **16 per cent increase** compared to the same period last year. The strong year-end performance was driven in part by a packed calendar of international

events, including the **FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025**, which drew significant inbound traffic.

### Hospitality and Revenue Performance

Qatar's hospitality sector mirrored the positive momentum in arrivals. Room nights sold rose **8.6 per cent** to **10.8 million**, while accommodation revenues increased **12 per cent** to **QAR 8.3 billion (USD 2.3 billion)**. The growth highlights improved demand across hotels and serviced accommodations, supported by a diversified visitor mix spanning leisure, business and event-led travel.

Visit Qatar attributed the record performance to a coordinated approach across marketing, partnerships and

destination management. Over **35 global strategic partnerships** were activated during the year, complemented by more than **95 integrated marketing campaigns** rolled out across **19 international source markets**, strengthening Qatar's global visibility and market reach.

### Events and MICE Drive Demand

Events continued to play a central role in Qatar's tourism strategy. The country hosted **more than 600 events** in 2025, ranging from sports and cultural festivals to international exhibitions. The **Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE)** segment emerged as a key contributor, attracting **over**



### 1 million international business visitors during the year.

In addition, Qatar successfully secured **14 international event bids** scheduled to take place across **2026 and 2027**, underlining its growing credibility as a global events destination. The designation of **Doha as the GCC Tourism Capital for 2026** further reinforced Qatar's leadership position within the regional tourism landscape.

### Focus on Service Excellence and Culinary Development

Service quality and visitor experience remained central to Qatar's tourism development agenda. In 2025, Visit Qatar launched **Taste of Qatar**, a nationwide culinary quality



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initiative that inspected approximately **800 restaurants**. Around **150 establishments** were awarded **3-Star certification**, setting new benchmarks for dining standards across the country.

The city's culinary credentials were further strengthened with the continued expansion of the **Michelin Guide Doha**, positioning the capital as an emerging gastronomic hub in the Middle East.

### Workforce Development and Digital Readiness

Significant progress was also recorded in tourism workforce development. Since 2022, more than **55,600 individuals** have completed the **Qatar Host Programme**, while over **13,000 professionals** have graduated from the **Qatar Specialist Programme**, contributing to higher service standards across the visitor economy.

Operational readiness and digital infrastructure were enhanced through the **Hayya platform**, which processed nearly **1 million e-visa applications** in 2025. During the FIFA Arab Cup, Hayya also managed more than **1.1 million ticket scans**, delivering seamless operations without major disruptions.

### Cruise Tourism Gains Momentum

Cruise tourism continued to expand as part of Qatar's diversification strategy. The 2025–2026 season is set to feature **72 cruise calls**, reflecting growing interest from international cruise operators and reinforcing Doha's role as a regional cruise hub.

### Looking Ahead

With sustained growth across leisure, business, events and cruise tourism, Qatar's 2025 performance underscores the effectiveness of its long-term tourism strategy. Continued investment in global partnerships, service excellence, digital innovation and large-scale events positions the country well to maintain momentum and further enhance its appeal to international travellers in the years ahead.

# Virgin Atlantic Supercharges London–Bengaluru Connectivity with 11 Weekly Flights from Early 2026



Virgin Atlantic is set to significantly strengthen its footprint in the India–UK aviation corridor with a major expansion of its London Heathrow–Bengaluru service. From January to March 2026, the airline will operate up to 11 flights per week on the route, up from the current seven, responding to surging demand across business, leisure, and cargo segments and reinforcing its long-term commitment to the fast-growing Indian market.

The expanded schedule reflects the rising strategic importance of Bengaluru—India's technology capital and one of its most influential corporate centres—within Virgin Atlantic's global network. More than a simple frequency increase, the move

enhances connectivity between South India, the UK, and North America, positioning London Heathrow as a powerful hub for transatlantic travel.

## Strengthening a High-Growth India–UK Corridor

India has emerged as Virgin Atlantic's largest growth market outside the United States, and Bengaluru sits at the heart of this expansion. Often described as the Silicon Valley of India, the city is home to a dense concentration of multinational corporations, global technology firms, and fast-scaling startups. This corporate ecosystem, combined with rising outbound leisure travel and robust cargo demand, has driven sustained growth on the

London–Bengaluru route.

By increasing frequencies during the peak winter period of January, February, and March 2026, Virgin Atlantic aims to provide greater choice and flexibility for travellers while supporting trade and business flows between the two economies. The enhanced Bengaluru service complements the airline's established daily operations to Delhi and Mumbai, further cementing India's role as a cornerstone of its international strategy.

## Bengaluru's Expanding Role in Virgin Atlantic's Network

With 11 weekly flights from London Heathrow, Bengaluru becomes an even more prominent gateway in Virgin Atlantic's India network. The additional

services strengthen links between the UK and India's southern business powerhouse, while also unlocking convenient onward connections to domestic destinations including Goa, Amritsar, and Jaipur through the airline's partnership with IndiGo.

This integrated approach allows Virgin Atlantic to serve not only point-to-point demand but also a broader network of secondary Indian cities, extending its reach well beyond the major metros and enhancing its appeal to both corporate and leisure travellers.

#### Seamless Links to North America via London Heathrow

A key differentiator of the expanded London–Bengaluru service is its seamless connectivity to North America. Through Virgin Atlantic's joint venture and partnerships with Delta Air Lines and WestJet, passengers travelling via London Heathrow can connect smoothly to major North American gateways such as New York JFK, San Francisco, Seattle, Toronto, and beyond.

This connectivity reinforces London's role as a global hub linking India with the transatlantic market, opening new opportunities for business travel, tourism, and trade. For travellers from Bengaluru, the increased frequencies translate into improved access to some of the world's most important commercial and cultural centres with minimal transit complexity.

#### Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner: Comfort, Efficiency, and Sustainability

The London Heathrow–Bengaluru route will continue to be operated by Virgin Atlantic's Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner, an aircraft known for its passenger comfort and fuel efficiency. Configured with 31 Upper Class seats, 35 Premium seats, and 192 Economy seats, the aircraft offers a premium experience across all cabins.

Upper Class passengers benefit from the airline's signature social space, while the Dreamliner's advanced design contributes to reduced fuel burn and lower emissions. The deployment of

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the 787-9 underlines Virgin Atlantic's dual focus on delivering a high-quality onboard experience while advancing its sustainability objectives.

#### India Demand Surges as Capacity Grows 250%

Virgin Atlantic's expansion into India has been marked by exceptional growth. Since 2019, the airline has increased its capacity to the country by 250%, now offering more than 500,000 seats annually between the UK and India. This growth has been fuelled by strong demand from business travellers, a growing expatriate population, and rising leisure traffic in both directions.

The decision to boost Bengaluru frequencies is a clear signal of confidence in the market and a strategic move to secure long-term leadership in the competitive Indo–UK aviation space as the airline prepares for a busy 2026.

#### Leadership Perspective: A Long-Term Commitment to India

Commenting on the expansion, Juha Järvinen, Chief Commercial Officer at Virgin Atlantic, highlighted Bengaluru's importance within the airline's global strategy. He noted that the additional flights are a direct response to strong customer demand and the city's role as one of India's most dynamic technology and business hubs.

Järvinen also emphasised the value of Virgin Atlantic's partnerships with Delta Air Lines and WestJet, which significantly enhance connectivity to North America and strengthen the airline's proposition for international travellers. His message was clear: Virgin Atlantic is investing for the long term, with a focus on making travel between India, the UK, and North America more convenient and accessible.

#### Flight Schedule from January 2026

From 5 January 2026, the expanded London Heathrow–Bengaluru schedule will operate as follows:

##### • London Heathrow–Bengaluru

**(VS346):** Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday

- Departure: 14:00 (GMT) | Arrival: 05:15 (+1 day, IST)

##### • Bengaluru–London Heathrow

**(VS347):** Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday

- Departure: 07:05 (IST) | Arrival: 12:50 (GMT)

##### • Bengaluru–London Heathrow

**(VS347):** Sunday

- Departure: 07:20 (IST) | Arrival: 13:05 (GMT)

The timings are designed to cater to both business and leisure travellers, offering convenient departures and optimised connections at London Heathrow.

#### A Strategic Bet on 2026 and Beyond

Virgin Atlantic's decision to scale up its London–Bengaluru operations marks a bold and timely response to explosive demand in one of the world's most important aviation markets. As India's economy continues to expand—driven by innovation, technology, and global trade—the enhanced service strengthens vital links between South India, the UK, and North America.

With modern aircraft, strong airline partnerships, and a clear focus on connectivity, Virgin Atlantic is positioning itself as a leading carrier in the Indo–UK travel landscape. As 2026 approaches, the expanded Bengaluru service stands as a clear statement of intent: India is central to Virgin Atlantic's global growth story.



# Saudia and Air India Sign Codeshare Agreement

*Providing guests with expanded travel and flight options*

**S**audia, the national flag carrier of Saudi Arabia, and Air India, India's leading global airline, have signed a codeshare agreement that will take effect in February. The agreement introduces a range of benefits for Saudia's and Air India's guests, boosting connectivity, enhancing travel experience, strengthening network access, maximising flight options, and supporting growing demand across tourism, business travel, and wider guest segments.

Through the new partnership, guests will enjoy streamlined booking and ticketing, smooth connections using a single itinerary, and baggage check-through to their final destination.

The codeshare will provide Saudia's guests access to major cities across India via Mumbai and Delhi, including Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Kochi, Hyderabad, Chennai, Lucknow, and Jaipur and more than 15 other destinations as interline.

Air India guests travelling to Jeddah or Riyadh with Air India can

take seamless onward connections on Saudia-operated flights to Dammam, Abha, Gassim, Gizan, Madinah, and Taif. The addition of codeshare flights on the Jeddah-Riyadh route now allows guests more flexibility to arrive in one city and depart from another. Connections to select complementary international destinations will be added later this year.

H.E. Engr. Ibrahim Al-Omar, Director General of Saudia Group, said: "The codeshare agreement with Air India marks a strategic step forward, given both airlines' long histories and their shared commitment to increasing connectivity within their home markets and between their countries, while offering guests broader access to more destinations through simplified travel procedures that elevate the overall travel experience."

He added: "Saudia's presence in India spans over 60 years, during which we've proudly served a wide range of guests and helped foster stronger ties between our two nations. Saudia

Arabia is a great place to visit, and with seamless e-visas, stopover visas, and also visa-on-arrival for eligible Indian passport holders, it has never been easier to visit the Kingdom."

Campbell Wilson, Chief Executive Officer & Managing Director, Air India, said: "Saudi Arabia is amongst our most important markets in the Middle East, with the country fast transforming into a major international gateway to the region. We are happy to be partnering with Saudia to provide greater access to the large Indian diaspora spread across Saudi Arabia as well as to open up the Kingdom's rapidly evolving and diverse tourism offerings and remarkable destinations to holidaymakers from India."

Saudia currently has 25 active codeshare agreements, enabling its guests to access more than 100 additional international destinations. These agreements also allow travelers on partner airlines to reach a wide range of domestic destinations in the Kingdom, reinforcing Saudia's role in expanding global connectivity and bringing the world to Saudi Arabi

# Saudia Continues to Support Saudi Arabia's Dynamic Global Events



**A**s Saudi Arabia continues to build momentum as a premier international destination, Saudia, the Kingdom's national flag carrier, is reinforcing its role as the airline supporting access to the country's most anticipated events throughout 2026.

From world-class sports to vibrant cultural festivals, the year ahead showcases Saudi Arabia's continued evolution into the global stage. With major hubs in Jeddah and Riyadh, Saudia is uniquely positioned to facilitate travel for the Kingdom's expanding calendar of events.

Looking ahead to 2026, visitors can expect the continuation, introduction, or return of a sophisticated array of global highlights such as:

## **Diriyah Season (Nov 2025 – March 2026)**

- Offering a powerful

convergence of living history, world-class culinary experiences, and captivating performance in the ancestral home of the Saudi state. This season offers a diverse range of culture and heritage-driven programming centered around the UNESCO World Heritage site of At-Turaif.

**Riyadh Season (Oct 2025 – March 2026)** The Kingdom's flagship entertainment festival continues to push boundaries with a massive lineup of global concerts, elite sporting events like the WWE Royal Rumble, and high-energy attractions such as Beast Land, inspired by the challenges of MrBeast.

A new highlight of the current season is the BLVD Flowers zone, presenting a record-breaking botanical wonderland spanning 214,000 square meters and

featuring 200 million real blossoms and 3D floral art with three retired Saudia Boeing 777s integrated into the garden, allowing visitors to discover a landscape where aviation meets art.

## **Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale (Opens Jan 2026- May 2026):**

Hosted in the creative JAX District, this premier art event features over 70 international artists. The 2026 edition, "In Interludes and Transitions," explores the global themes of movement and cultural exchange through large-scale installations and performances.

## **Noor Riyadh (Dates to be announced, 2026):**

The world's largest annual light art festival, transforming Saudi Arabia's capital into an open-air gallery through large-scale light installations, immersive artworks, and creative programming by

Exciting travel events across Saudi Arabia – including wellness, sports, and music – set the stage for 2026 travel.

leading international and regional artists.

In addition, Saudi Arabia's events calendar includes globally recognized cultural, entertainment, and sporting attractions such as MDLBEAST, the Historic Jeddah Festival in Al Balad, and Winter Wonderland, alongside a selection of Saudia-supported international events, including Formula E, the Esports World Cup, and The Saudi Cup—an internationally acclaimed thoroughbred horse-racing event and the world's richest race by prize value—further reinforcing the Kingdom's appeal as a year-round destination for global audiences.

With premium, award-winning in-cabin service, state-of-the-art aircraft, and strategic global partnerships, Saudia continues to expand access to the country's most compelling destinations and experiences. Each flight supports Saudi Arabia's transformation into a global tourism and cultural hub – part of a broader movement toward sustainable development and diversified economic growth.

# Air India Unveils Custom-Styled Cabin Interiors of the First Made-for-Air India B787-9; New Interiors to Become Standard Across B787 Fleet



- Completely new cabin interiors styled exclusively for Air India
- Headphone pairing capability via Bluetooth available in seats across all cabins
- Introducing wireless charging pads and more in Business Class suites
- New onboard mood lighting inspired by ancient Indian wellness traditions

**A**ir India has unveiled the custom-styled cabin interiors of its first line-fit (made-for-Air India) Boeing 787-9 aircraft. Bearing the registration mark VT-AWA, the new aircraft features completely new cabin interiors, designed especially for Air India and installed directly on Boeing's production line.

Air India received delivery of the new aircraft on 11 January 2026, arriving in

Delhi non-stop from Boeing's factory in Everett, Washington. The aircraft is entering commercial service on flights between Mumbai and Frankfurt from 1 February 2026.

**Campbell Wilson, Chief Executive Officer & Managing Director, Air India**, said: "The arrival of this new Boeing 787-9, the first production widebody from the 470 aircraft-strong order signed three years

ago, is a significant moment in Air India's 5-year Vihāan AI transformation programme. Though nearly 100 new and leased aircraft have already joined the Air India group's fleet since privatisation, this is the first to be designed by and for Air India. It underscores Air India's commitment to delivering a world-class physical product and inflight entertainment experience to complement the warm Indian hospitality



already delivered by our crew."

*"The new cabin interiors on this aircraft will soon become the standard across our entire Boeing 787 fleet as, in addition to 19 more production aircraft, all 26 of Air India's existing Boeing 787-8 aircraft are being retrofitted with the same new cabin interiors and entertainment systems. The retrofit programme is well underway, with the first upgraded aircraft due to return to service in the coming weeks and the remainder of the fleet by mid-2027."*

#### All-new cabin interiors

Air India's new Boeing 787-9 aircraft comes with 296 seats distributed between three cabin classes: Business, Premium Economy, and Economy. The cabins feature customised versions of the Elevate Ascent seat in Business Class and RECARO PL3530 and CL3710 seats in Premium Economy and Economy Class, respectively. All seats are equipped with Thales' state-of-the-art AVANT Up inflight entertainment (IFE) system.

The **Business Class** cabin consists of 30 luxurious suites in a 1-2-1 configuration, offering direct aisle access to every guest. Each suite, featuring a sliding privacy door, reclines into a fully flat bed of 79 inches in length or a chaise lounge, and offers 42" of pitch, 17-inch 4K QLED HDR touchscreen and IFE handset, Bluetooth headphone pairing, wireless charging and Type A and Type C fast

charging ports, height-adjustable armrest, as well as plenty of storage. The suite also features an attractive cubby area that offers storage space with soft lighting inside, a vanity mirror and headphone hook, and a feature lamp designed with Air India's *jaali* pattern that is inspired by India's rich architectural and cultural heritage.

**Premium Economy** - a dedicated, upscale cabin offering greater privacy - features 28 seats in a 2-3-2 configuration, designed for enhanced long-haul comfort. Each seat offers generous legroom with 38-inch pitch and 7-inch recline, 6-way adjustable headrest, individually adjustable calf rest as well as a leg rest, 13.3-inch 4K QLED HDR touchscreen, Type A and Type C fast charging ports, and a bottle holder.

**Economy Class** features 238 lightweight and ergonomically optimised seats in a 3-3-3 configuration, each offering the standard 31"/32" pitch and 5" recline, an 11.6-inch 4K QLED HDR touchscreen, and Type A and C charging ports. Of the 238 seats in Economy, Air India has made 220 seats available in its booking inventory for flights operated with this new aircraft.

#### A new design standard

Air India has styled the interiors of the new B787-9 aircraft, including seats, galleys, lavatories, flight crew rest area, side panels, laminates, etc.

in collaboration with JPA Design, a global multidisciplinary design studio, especially to reflect Air India's revitalised global brand identity.

The cabins feature a harmonious palette of soft creams, pinks, reds, warm golds, and rich purples, complemented by tactile materials inspired by natural textures and modern craftsmanship. This creates a sensorial experience of quiet luxury, authenticity, and contemporary Indian identity, with refined detailing, soft curves, warm lighting, improved stowage, and intuitive usability across all classes.

#### Mood lighting inspired by ancient Indian wellness traditions

On board the new B787-9 aircraft, Air India has introduced a unique mood lighting system, developed in collaboration with Tata Elxsi. It draws inspiration from India's rich heritage in wellness and the ancient concept of *chakras* - viewed in traditional philosophy as vital energy centres in the human body that support physical, mental, and emotional balance. The new mood lighting offers 10 custom scenes designed to align with passengers' circadian rhythms and aid melatonin regulation, enhancing wellbeing on long-haul flights. *Due to pending regulatory approval, the privacy sliding door feature of the Business Class suites is currently unavailable for passenger use. All other features of the suites remain fully functional.*

# Air India Strengthens Dreamliner Operations with Long-Term Boeing Services Partnership



Air India today announced a multi-year agreement with Boeing Global Services for its Component Services Program (CSP), encompassing the airline's entire Boeing 787 fleet, both existing aircraft and those on order.

The agreement was signed today, 28 January 2026, on the sidelines of Wings India 2026, one of the region's premier civil aviation events, in Hyderabad, India.

The CSP is a comprehensive solution that will deliver end-to-end component management tailored to the operational demands of Air India's growing 787 fleet as the airline scales up its long-haul network. This includes:

- Component pooling, providing immediate access to a broad pool of serviceable 787 components, enabling rapid replacement of line-replaceable units to reduce turnaround time
- Repair, overhaul, and modification, providing expert handling of returned

components through Boeing-approved facilities and partners, ensuring quality repairs and upgrades to maintain fleet performance

- Logistics services to help with efficient worldwide transportation and delivery of parts, supported by Boeing's infrastructure for in-time availability

This pooled approach will help Air India to access a shared pool of high-value, dispatch-critical components for its 787 fleet. The CSP will also enable Air India to enhance cost predictability, while maintaining high reliability for its fleet.

"As Air India transforms into a globally competitive full-service carrier, dependable component support is vital to sustaining high operational standards across our expanding Boeing 787 operations," said Sisira Kanta Dash, Chief Technical Officer, Air India. "This agreement with Boeing Global Services strengthens our long-standing partnership and provides integrated solutions needed to deliver greater fleet efficiency, reduced

downtime, and consistent service excellence to our passengers."

This strategic collaboration builds on Air India's ongoing fleet modernization drive, which includes the recent induction of its first line-fit Boeing 787-9 aircraft and plans for multiple additional 787-9 deliveries in 2026, alongside cabin retrofits of 26 legacy 787-8 aircraft.

"The 787 Component Services Program is one of Boeing Global Services' core solutions, designed to optimize component availability and provide operators with scalable, reliable component support," said William Ampofo, senior vice president, Parts & Distribution and Supply Chain, Boeing Global Services. "This long-term partnership with Air India deepens our commitment to enabling cost-effective, resilient operations for their Dreamliner fleet, while our global parts and repair network delivers the uptime and cost predictability their operations require."

# TripJack's Blueprint for Long-Term Travel-Tech Leadership

## Manish Dua, Chief Growth Officer



### 1 TripJack operates in a crowded travel-tech market. What is your single biggest growth differentiator today?

Our biggest growth differentiator is **value-led technology built specifically for Indian travel businesses**. At TripJack, we don't build features for vanity at scale. We build solutions that solve real operational challenges for agents, corporates, and travel sellers. From deep inventory access and flexible payment flows to post-booking reliability, our platform is designed to improve partner margins, reduce friction, and enable sustainable business growth. That focus on practical, outcome-driven tech sets us apart in a crowded market.

### 2 What does "sustainable growth" actually mean for a B2B travel platform in India?

Sustainable growth means growing **with our partners, not ahead of them**. For a B2B platform, it's about balancing expansion with stability ensuring supply reliability, strong unit economics, and long-term partner trust. At TripJack, sustainable growth also involves **continually updating our platform and technology to enhance the agent experience**, along with securing **more direct contracted inventory**, which gives partners better pricing and improved margins. Ultimately, we measure success through **repeat usage, partner profitability, and resilience during market volatility**, not just topline numbers.

### 3 How has the role of travel agents evolved post-pandemic, and how is TripJack adapting to that shift?

Post-pandemic, travel agents have evolved from being transaction-focused to becoming **travel advisors and problem-solvers**. Clients today expect speed, transparency, and assurance. TripJack has adapted by strengthening automation, improving real-time support, focus on strategic customer guidance and relationship-building rather than operational complexity.

### 4 Which growth metric matters more to you right now: scale, retention, or profitability and why?

**Retention matters most right now.** Scale without retention is temporary, and profitability without retention is fragile. Strong retention reflects **agent partner centricity**, it shows that our platform consistently delivers relevance, trust, and tangible business value to our partners. At TripJack, retention is a leading indicator of long-term profitability and scalable growth because it demonstrates sustained partner confidence and repeat engagement.

### 5 How are data and technology changing decision-making at TripJack?

Data is central to how we operate. From demand forecasting and pricing intelligence to partner behavior analysis, it enables faster, more informed decisions. Technology allows us to respond to market shifts in real time, optimize supply performance, and proactively improve the partner experience rather than reacting after issues arise. **These insights help us identify high-potential travel corridors and evolving demand patterns, enabling us to align inventory, pricing, and go-to-market strategies with where growth momentum is building.**

### 6 Can Indian travel-tech companies realistically compete with global players in terms of innovation?

Absolutely. Indian travel-tech companies have a unique advantage: a deep understanding of local and cultural complexities at scale. Innovation isn't just about advanced technology; it's about relevance. Indian players like TripJack innovate by solving for diverse payment systems, fragmented supply, regulatory nuances, and varied customer expectations shaped by cultural differences, areas where global platforms often struggle to adapt.

### 7 What's the biggest challenge to growth in Indian travel today that no one talks about?

The biggest under-discussed challenge is operational consistency across the ecosystem. Growth is often constrained not by demand, but by inconsistent post-booking experiences, fragmented supplier standards, and weak process alignment. **Addressing this requires long-term investment in systems, partnerships, and discipline without shortcuts.**

### 8 As a growth leader, how do you strike a balance between speed and long-term trust in the travel ecosystem?

Speed is essential in a competitive market, but **trust, once lost, is difficult to rebuild**. At TripJack, we evaluate every growth initiative through the lens of partner impact and long-term reliability. Our philosophy is simple: growth achieved by compromising transparency, accuracy, or consistency is short-lived. By combining rapid innovation with unwavering accountability, we have positioned ourselves as a trusted partner, proving that speed and long-term trust can coexist and even reinforce each other.

### 9 Looking ahead, what will define the winners in travel-tech over the next five years? Can you back this with tech?

The next generation of travel-tech leaders will be defined by platform depth, predictive intelligence, and ecosystem trust. Companies that can seamlessly integrate end-to-end journeys, leverage data for smarter decision-making, and maintain operational reliability at scale will lead the market. At TripJack, we are already investing in these areas by building advanced analytics, real-time supply optimization, and robust automation so we not only respond to market trends but actively shape them, setting the standard for innovation and trust in the Indian travel-tech landscape.



# 'The Lion King' Fireworks Spectacle Debuts on Disney Adventure with Shah Rukh Khan as Narrator

Disney Cruise Line, a subsidiary of the Walt Disney Company, has announced a dazzling new onboard entertainment experience: *The Lion King: Celebration in the Sky*. Set to debut on the company's newest vessel, **Disney Adventure**, the spectacular fireworks show will feature Bollywood superstar **Shah Rukh Khan** as the narrator, combining cinematic storytelling, world-class music, and immersive pyrotechnics for a truly unforgettable evening at sea.

The announcement comes just

weeks ahead of Disney Adventure's maiden voyage from Singapore in March 2026. The 3-night and 4-night itineraries will feature select evenings of the show, inviting guests to gather on the ship's open decks for a vibrant tribute to Disney's beloved *The Lion King*.

According to Disney Cruise Line, the production blends stunning fireworks, dramatic lighting, and iconic music from the *Lion King* films. The musical arrangements are performed by the **Royal Scottish National Orchestra**,

accompanied by the harmonies of South Africa's **Ndlovu Youth Choir**, creating an evocative auditory and visual experience designed to resonate with audiences of all ages.

Shah Rukh Khan, one of the world's most influential entertainment figures, lends his voice and narrative presence to the production. Having voiced **Mufasa** in the Hindi adaptations of *The Lion King* films, Khan brings an intimate familiarity and emotional depth to the story. "The *Lion King* will always hold a special place in my heart," Khan said in

a statement. "Its timeless messages of bravery and hope continue to resonate across generations. Narrating this new reimagining feels like a full-circle moment and a true passion project. *Celebration in the Sky* is a tribute to the power of family and community, perfectly mirroring the magic that our guests will experience onboard the Disney Adventure."

Sarah Fox, Vice President and Regional General Manager, Southeast Asia, Disney Cruise Line, highlighted the significance of Khan's participation. "Welcoming Shah Rukh Khan as the narrator brings a unique and meaningful addition to the guest experience," she said. "Collaborating

with a talent who has long been part of iconic Disney storytelling—and is recognised across Asia and beyond—allows us to bring this beloved story to life in a new and exciting way. It reflects our commitment to creating experiences that are locally relevant yet unmistakably Disney as we welcome guests onboard in Singapore."

The show's soundtrack features classic *Lion King* numbers including *Circle of Life*, *Hakuna Matata*, *He Lives in You*, and *Can You Feel the Love Tonight?*, performed in original arrangements that enhance both the visual spectacle and the musical storytelling.

Guests onboard can access show

schedules and updates via the **Disney Cruise Line Navigator app**, ensuring they never miss this highlight of their voyage. With *The Lion King: Celebration in the Sky*, Disney Cruise Line reinforces its reputation for blending cutting-edge entertainment with immersive, culturally resonant experiences that appeal to families and adult travellers alike.

*Disney Adventure*'s debut in Singapore marks a significant expansion of Disney Cruise Line's presence in Southeast Asia, with the new fireworks spectacle expected to become a signature offering that combines Hollywood-level production, global talent, and the company's hallmark storytelling magic.





# StarDream Cruises Launches New Brand Films to Deepen Engagement with Indian Travellers

Leading Asian cruise operator StarDream Cruises has unveiled two new brand films as part of its evolving communication strategy for the Indian market, signalling a shift towards experience-led cruising that prioritises emotional connection, cultural familiarity and time well spent on board.

According to the company, the films align with its 2026 communication platform, "**Disconnect to Reconnect**," with "**Perfect Moments**" positioned as the overarching brand tagline. The messaging reflects a growing emphasis on cruising as a seamless, all-inclusive travel environment where operational

logistics are taken care of, allowing guests to focus on relationships, shared moments and meaningful experiences.

The master brand film, ***A World Between S.E.A & SKY***, was shot on board the *Genting Dream* and captures everyday life at sea through the perspectives of individuals,

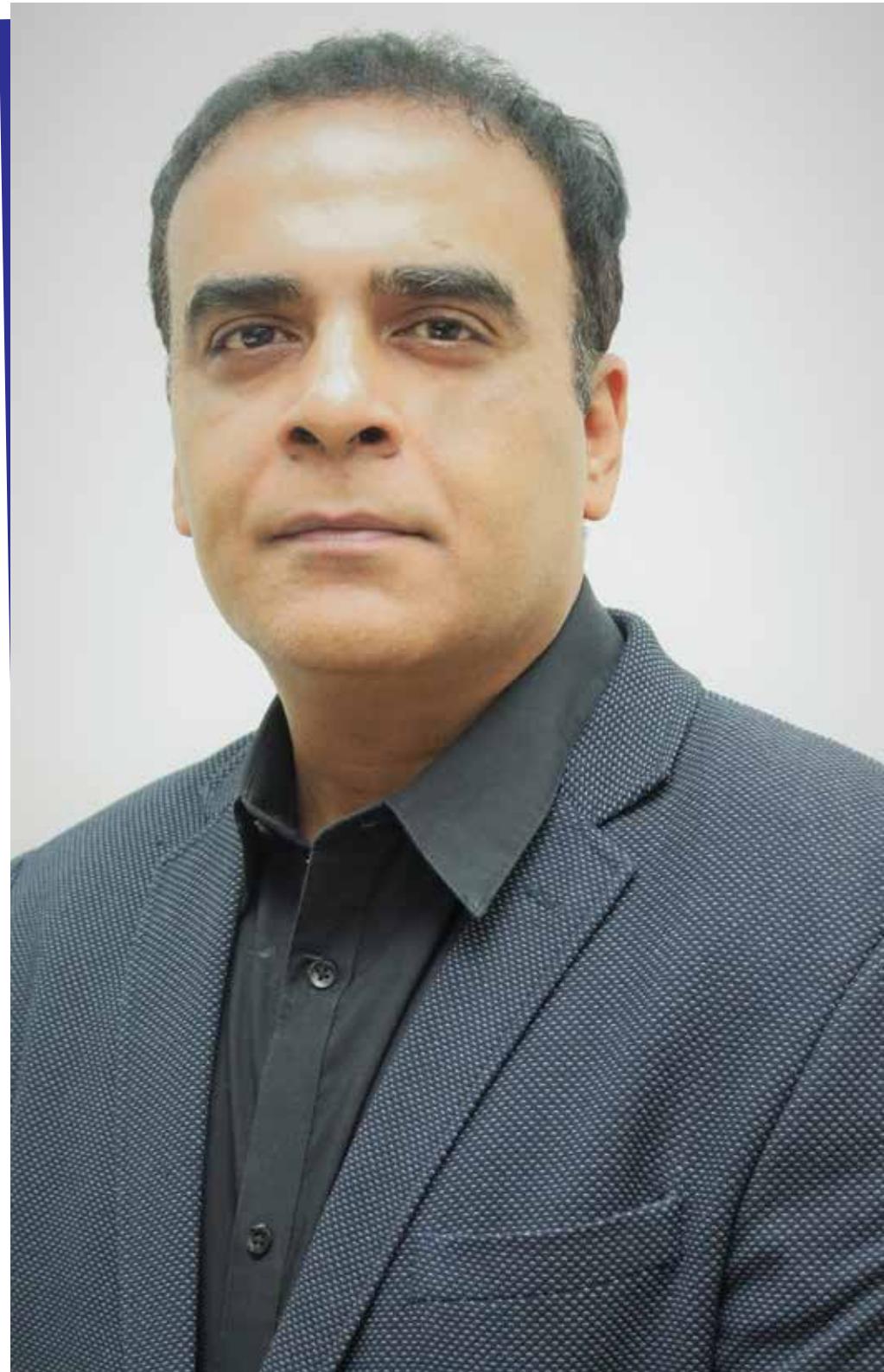
families, leisure groups and corporate travellers. Rather than highlighting destinations, the film focuses on the onboard experience, showcasing dining, entertainment, accommodation, safety and service as interconnected elements that collectively support a more relaxed and intentional pace of travel.

Complementing this is a second film tailored specifically for the Indian market, titled ***A Voyage Called India – A Heart That Sails With Us***. This film centres on Indian travellers and highlights how Indian cultural sensibilities are thoughtfully integrated into the cruise experience. Featuring families and groups from diverse linguistic and regional backgrounds, including Marathi, Gujarati, Punjabi, Kannada and Bengali, the narrative reflects variations in food preferences, social customs and group dynamics.

The film underscores StarDream Cruises' efforts to create an inclusive onboard environment for Indian guests, with a strong focus on familiar culinary offerings such as vegetarian, non-vegetarian and Jain meal options, as well as social spaces and interactions that mirror the travel patterns of Indian families and groups.

As part of its outreach strategy, the India-focused film will also be screened in cinemas during the Republic Day period, alongside the film *Border 2*. The cinema rollout will span nine states and two Union Territories, covering 23 cities and 63 screens between January 23 and 29. According to the company, this approach aligns with themes of collective viewing, national identity and shared cultural experiences.

Commenting on the campaign, **Naresh Rawal, Senior Vice President – Sales & Marketing, StarDream Cruises**, said, "These films reflect how we view the StarDream Cruises experience today. *A World Between S.E.A & SKY* captures the rhythm of life on board, while *A Voyage Called India – A Heart That Sails With Us* highlights how Indian travellers experience that journey. From food preferences and familiar comforts to the way families, friends and groups



come together, the films demonstrate how we have adapted cruising to feel intuitive and inclusive for Indian guests."

The dual-film launch reinforces

StarDream Cruises' commitment to the Indian market while positioning cruising as a culturally attuned, experience-driven travel choice for the country's evolving traveller profile.

# Global Leisure Travel Spending Set to Reach USD 15 Trillion as Middle East Accelerates Growth



## ATM 2026 to Spotlight USD 15 Trillion Global Leisure Travel Opportunity

Global leisure travel spending is on track to reach **USD 15 trillion by 2040**, up from **USD 5 trillion in 2024**, according to analysis by **Boston Consulting Group (BCG)**. As the leisure travel economy expands at an unprecedented pace, the **Middle East** is emerging as one of the fastest-growing regions worldwide, positioning itself at the forefront of the next phase of global tourism growth.

Joint forecasts by **Arabian Travel Market (ATM)** and **Tourism Economics** indicate that leisure travel spending in the Middle East is expected to grow at an average rate of **7 per**

**cent per year between 2025 and 2030**, second only to **Asia Pacific**. This strong performance reflects sustained investment in infrastructure, enhanced air connectivity, and the region's increasingly diverse leisure offerings.

These developments will take centre stage at the **33rd edition of Arabian Travel Market (ATM 2026)**, scheduled to be held from **4 to 7 May 2026** at the **Dubai World Trade Centre**, where global destinations, airlines, hotels and tourism stakeholders will convene to explore emerging opportunities in the leisure travel sector.

## Leisure Travel in Focus at ATM 2026

Held under the theme "**Travel 2040: Driving New Frontiers Through Innovation and Technology**," ATM 2026 will examine the forces reshaping the global travel landscape. Leisure travel will form a core pillar of the event's programme, with discussions centred on evolving traveller behaviour, technological innovation and the Middle East's growing stature as a destination of choice for international tourists.

According to the **ATM Travel Trends Report**, developed in collaboration with **Tourism Economics**, international tourism nights in the Middle East are projected to reach **1.5 billion by 2030**, representing a

**90 per cent increase** compared to 2024 levels. Leisure travel is expected to be a major contributor to this growth, with **leisure tourism nights forecast to rise by 87 per cent** over the same period.

Approximately **15 per cent** of these tourism nights are anticipated to come from leisure travellers originating outside the region. While **Europe currently accounts for around 50 per cent** of inbound leisure travel to the Middle East, the fastest growth over the next five years is expected from **Africa and Asia Pacific**, driven by expanding middle-class populations and improved connectivity.

#### Commercial Opportunities for the Travel Industry

For exhibitors and buyers attending ATM 2026, these projections underline the strong commercial potential of the leisure segment. The event is expected to host **more than 2,600 exhibitors from 161 countries** and attract **over 47,000 industry professionals**, providing a comprehensive platform for stakeholders to engage with rising demand and form strategic partnerships.

"By 2030, there are expected to be nearly **30 billion tourism nights globally**, with the Middle East accounting for approximately **8 per cent** of that total," said **Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian**

**Travel Market.** "During the same period, leisure nights in the region are projected to grow by **87 per cent**, reflecting rapid infrastructure development and expanding experiential and cultural offerings. ATM 2026 will bring together the destinations, attractions, brands and innovators shaping this USD 15 trillion opportunity."

#### Shifting Traveller Profiles and Experiences

The ATM and Tourism Economics analysis also highlights significant shifts in traveller demographics and preferences. **Millennials and Gen Z travellers** are planning more frequent trips and actively adopting digital tourism innovations, while **multigenerational and solo travel** have transitioned from niche segments to mainstream travel behaviours.

Industry experts surveyed for the report identified **leisure events** as the leading opportunity for tourism growth. In the Middle East, established leisure segments such as **beach holidays, city breaks and nature-based travel** remain strong, while demand for **sports tourism, cultural travel, and health and wellness experiences** is growing rapidly.

"Leisure tourism can no longer be defined by a single demographic or travel style," Curtis added. "Today's travellers are seeking authentic, personalised experiences that reflect their values. The Middle East is ideally

positioned to play a defining role in the next era of global tourism, and we look forward to welcoming the international travel community to Dubai in May to explore these opportunities together."

#### A Global Gateway for the Future of Travel

Beyond leisure travel, ATM 2026 will showcase a broad spectrum of industry trends, innovations and investment opportunities. With a strong focus on **Middle East, North Africa and South Asia (MENASA)** markets for both inbound and outbound travel, the event will further reinforce **Dubai's role as a global gateway**, connecting more than **240 destinations across six continents**.

Key features of the 2026 edition will include the **ATM Ultra Luxury Lounge, IBTM @ ATM** for business events and corporate travel, and the co-located **ATM Travel Tech**, which will span two dedicated halls. Together, these platforms will highlight how the travel industry is evolving to meet the needs of new traveller segments while strengthening collaboration between destinations, buyers and brands shaping the future of global travel.

As the leisure travel economy moves toward the USD 15 trillion mark, ATM 2026 is set to provide a timely and strategic forum for industry leaders to navigate the opportunities and challenges of the decades ahead.

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# ATM 2026 to Spotlight the Expanding Global Ultra-Luxury Travel Market

The global **ultra-luxury travel market** is poised for significant expansion, with its value projected to rise from **USD 2.7 trillion in 2025 to USD 4.8 trillion by 2032**, underscoring the growing appetite for highly personalised, exclusive and experience-

driven travel. This rapidly evolving segment will take centre stage at **Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2026**, scheduled to be held from **4 to 7 May 2026** at the **Dubai World Trade Centre**.

Taking place under the theme "**Travel 2040: Driving New Frontiers**

**Through Innovation and Technology,** the 33rd edition of ATM will explore how innovation, individuality and sustainability are redefining the future of ultra-luxury travel, with the Middle East emerging as a key growth engine for the sector.

## Ultra-Luxury Travel Gains Momentum

According to research by **Fortune Business Insights**, the global luxury travel market—defined by premium, tailor-made journeys centred on exclusivity, elevated comfort, personalised service and enhanced privacy—continues to demonstrate strong long-term growth. These defining characteristics now sit at the core of the ultra-luxury segment, which is increasingly shaped by technological integration,

bespoke design and experiential depth.

Reflecting this evolution, **ATM 2026 will introduce the ATM Ultra Luxury Lounge**, marking the beginning of a multi-year focus on the convergence of **ultra-luxury, technology and sustainability**. The dedicated space will bring together leading global brands and specialists operating at the highest end of the travel spectrum, including bespoke tour designers, private island operators and **private jet service providers**.

The private aviation segment, in particular, is gaining momentum. According to advisory firm **Creative Zone**, the regional private jet market is expected to exceed **USD 943 million by 2029**, driven by rising demand for privacy, flexibility and premium travel experiences.

The ATM Ultra Luxury Lounge will serve as a curated showcase for high-end travel offerings, enabling suppliers to engage directly with qualified luxury travel buyers through an **exclusive, appointment-based programme** designed to facilitate high-value networking and collaboration.

#### Middle East Strengthens Its Ultra-Luxury Credentials

"While luxury travel remains one of ATM's strongest growth pillars, **ultra-luxury is emerging as the next frontier**, reflecting the region's maturing market and its growing base of high-spending travellers," said **Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market**. "To meet this demand, we have created the ATM Ultra Luxury Lounge—an exclusive environment designed to connect ultra-luxury brands with buyers serving high-net-worth individuals, elevating the quality and depth of engagement at ATM."

*Reflecting this evolution, ATM 2026 will introduce the ATM Ultra Luxury Lounge, marking the beginning of a multi-year focus on the convergence of ultra-luxury, technology and sustainability.*

Curtis noted that the region's expanding portfolio of ultra-luxury developments continues to fuel market confidence. "Ambitious projects such as **Saudi Arabia's Red Sea destinations**, the forthcoming **Cheval Blanc resort in Dubai on Naïa Island**, and the **Bulgari Resort & Mansions in Abu Dhabi**, alongside rising interest in private jet ownership and charter services, clearly demonstrate the strength of demand across this segment," she added.

#### Global Brands and Luxury Destinations in Focus

Beyond the ultra-luxury segment, ATM 2026 will continue to showcase leading luxury hospitality brands including **Mandarin Oriental**, **Four Seasons**

**Hotels & Resorts, Jumeirah International, and One&Only**, alongside premier luxury destinations such as the **Maldives** and **Mauritius**.

Insights from the **ATM Travel Trends Report 2025**, developed in partnership with **Tourism Economics**, highlight the resilience of the luxury travel sector. High-end and experiential travel segments continue to outperform broader global tourism growth, with **outbound luxury travel from the Middle East rising at twice the global average**.

Tourism Economics data further shows that travellers from the Middle East spend **approximately 50 per cent more per trip than the global average**, reinforcing the region's dual role as both a leading luxury

destination and a powerful source market for premium travel worldwide.

#### Redefining Luxury for the Future

"Luxury travel today is no longer defined by opulence alone," Curtis said. "It is increasingly shaped by **purpose, connection and transformation**.

Discerning travellers are seeking journeys that are exclusive yet meaningful—experiences that enhance wellbeing, align with personal values and foster deeper connections with people and places."

As the ultra-luxury segment continues to evolve, the Middle East remains at the forefront of this transformation, blending innovation with authenticity and conscious design. Through dedicated platforms such as the ATM Ultra Luxury Lounge, **ATM 2026 will provide a strategic forum for global industry leaders to shape the next chapter of ultra-luxury travel**, as the sector advances toward a USD 4.8 trillion future.





# Sports Tourism Emerges as a High-Value Growth Engine at Arabian Travel Market 2026

Sports tourism is set to take centre stage at **Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2026**, as new research highlights the powerful role of major sporting events in reshaping leisure travel demand and driving higher visitor spend across destinations. Scheduled to take place from **4 to 7 May 2026 at the Dubai World Trade Centre**, ATM 2026 will spotlight how sports-led travel is creating significant opportunities for destinations, hotels and tourism stakeholders across the Middle East and beyond.

According to *Sports Tourists: Travelling with Passion*, a white paper by **GSIQ**, a global sports and tourism insights agency and official research

partner of ATM 2026, travellers who attend live sporting events — defined as those who travel overnight for sporting experiences — spend substantially more per trip than traditional leisure tourists. Frequent sports travellers, the study reveals, can spend **up to twice as much per trip**, while increasingly seeking premium, high-quality and immersive experiences.

## A Rapidly Expanding Global Market

The research underscores the scale of opportunity presented by sports tourism. GSIQ projects a potential **63 per cent increase** in the number of people intending to take sports-related

trips in the coming years, signalling strong future demand. PwC estimates the **Middle East sports tourism market** to be worth approximately **USD 600 billion**, while globally, the segment is expected to exceed **USD 2 trillion by 2030**, positioning sports tourism as a transformative force within the global travel and tourism industry.

“By understanding the mechanics of sports tourism, destinations and tour operators can develop strategies to drive repeat visitation and attract new audiences,” said **Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market**. “Knowing what motivates sports fans to travel is essential for meeting evolving consumer expectations and ensuring sustained engagement in this highly lucrative segment.”

## Value, Accessibility and Extended Stays

While passion for sport remains the primary driver, GSIQ’s research highlights that sports travellers’ decisions are strongly influenced by accessibility, affordability, quality and

overall value. Around **63 per cent of respondents** cited fair ticket and package pricing as a critical factor, particularly among first-time and emerging sports travellers. Notably, only **36 per cent** said a destination must already appeal to them, while **41 per cent** indicated they would consider extending a sports-focused trip into a longer leisure holiday.

This behavioural shift positions major sporting events as powerful catalysts for destination growth, encouraging deeper exploration, longer stays and stronger word-of-mouth advocacy. Approximately **80 per cent of sports event attendees** either return to destinations as leisure tourists or recommend them to others, often reporting a more positive perception of locations first experienced through sports travel.

#### Thought Leadership at ATM 2026

GSIQ will present its findings at ATM 2026 in an exclusive Global Stage session titled "**The Power of Sport Tourism: New Audiences & New Revenue.**" The session will explore how destinations, hotels and travel businesses can translate sports-driven travel demand into sustainable, long-term tourism revenue.

"Sports tourism is no longer a

niche segment — it is one of the fastest-growing drivers of global travel demand," said **Eva Stewart, Global Managing Partner at GSIQ**. "Our research shows that sports travellers spend more, stay longer and return more often, making them one of the most valuable audiences for destinations worldwide. With the Middle East rapidly expanding its world-class sporting infrastructure, the region is exceptionally well positioned to capture this growth."

#### Aligning with Regional Momentum

The focus on sports tourism aligns with broader regional trends highlighted in the **2025 ATM Trends Report**, developed in partnership with Tourism Economics, an Oxford Economics company. The report notes that destinations across the Middle East are increasingly capitalising on demand for live events, ranging from global sporting tournaments to concerts and festivals.

Building on the legacy of landmark events such as **Expo 2020 Dubai** and the **FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022**, momentum is expected to accelerate further as **Saudi Arabia prepares to host the FIFA World Cup in 2034**, reinforcing the region's position as a global hub for sports and events tourism.

#### A Broader Events and MICE Focus

Beyond sports tourism, ATM 2026 will also examine the evolving landscape of events and business travel. The expanded **IBTM @ ATM** will return as a dedicated hub for business events, corporate travel and experiential design, while the **Experience Stage** and **Global Stage** will host high-profile discussions on creativity, immersive technology and changing traveller expectations.

Key sessions include "**The New Experience Economy: What Will Make Events Irresistible in 2030?**", which will explore the future of events in the region, and "**Decoding Growth: How Hospitality Is Adapting to New Traveller Needs**," focusing on the increasingly multi-motivated nature of global travellers.

"From mega sporting tournaments to world-class cultural experiences, events are enabling destinations to reach new audiences, extend length of stay and accelerate progress toward long-term tourism growth targets," Curtis added. "The strengthened ATM platform reflects the Middle East's growing influence and underscores its emergence as one of the world's most dynamic and fast-developing meetings and events markets."

As ATM 2026 approaches, the spotlight on sports tourism reinforces its growing role as a strategic pillar of destination development — one that blends passion, performance and profit in shaping the future of global travel.



# Fitur 2026

## Highlights Inclusive Travel and Tackles Misinformation Challenges

*Global Tourism Leaders Examine Accessibility, Communication, and the Impact of Fake News*



The 46th edition of Fitur 2026, one of the world's premier tourism trade fairs, continued on its third day with in-depth discussions addressing two pressing issues for the global travel sector: accessibility in tourism and the growing challenge of misinformation. The dual focus

reflected an emerging consensus among industry leaders that inclusion and credible communication are critical for sustaining tourism growth in a rapidly changing world.

The first International Summit on Communication and Tourism, organised jointly by Fitur and Spanish media

giant Agencia EFE, opened with a call for professional knowledge-sharing in tourism communication. José Vicente de los Mozos, President of the Executive Committee of IFEMA Madrid, emphasised the forum's ambition to become a global hub for communication and tourism expertise.

Miguel Ángel Oliver, President of Agencia EFE, highlighted the strategic importance of placing tourism at the centre of economic policy, particularly amid geopolitical uncertainty. He stressed that progress in gender equality, labour inclusion, sustainability, innovation, and investment must remain priorities for tourism stakeholders worldwide.

In parallel, Fitur 4all, Fitur's dedicated platform for accessible and inclusive tourism, showcased how inclusion is transitioning from rhetoric to measurable outcomes. Francisco Sardón, President of Impulsa Igualdad, reported that Spain saw a 10 percent increase in tourists with reduced mobility in 2025. He noted that accessible tourism not only supports social equity but also delivers measurable economic returns. "We are committed to ensuring that Spain remains the global reference for tourism for all," Sardón said.

Communication emerged as a central theme across both forums. During the panel on tourism communication in times of uncertainty, José Luis Sá Nogueira, Minister of Tourism of Cabo Verde, highlighted professional training as essential for building credibility and trust. Cabo Verde is investing in strengthening its communication workforce ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, for which the country has qualified for the first time.

Fernando Valmaseda, CEO of RV Edipress and director of *Miradas Viajeras*, warned that weak or untrained communication can undermine destinations. "Communication should be treated as an investment, not a cost," he stressed, noting that professional expertise is critical for instilling confidence in travellers and stakeholders alike.

The summit also addressed the growing threat of misinformation and fake news in tourism. Jonathan Gómez, Director General of Tourism, City Council of Málaga, cited an incident in which viral images of supposed shark sightings off Marbella—later identified as herbivorous fish—damaged Andalusia's tourism image. Jorge

Ocaña, journalist with EFE Verifica, presented additional cases, including manipulated images, fabricated destinations, and travel scams, illustrating how quickly false content can harm destinations financially and reputationally.

For accessible travel, the stakes are particularly high. Travelers with reduced mobility or specific access requirements depend on accurate information to plan safe and enjoyable trips. Nuria Cabrero, Editorial Director at Lonely Planet Spain, underscored that rigorous verification is the only effective response to misinformation, with all content cross-checked against trusted sources.



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Fitur 4all discussions reinforced that transparency and precise communication are fundamental for policy development and market engagement. Igor Stefanovic, Head of Culture, Ethics, and Social Responsibility at UN Tourism, described accessible tourism as both a human right and a viable business opportunity, noting that one-third of the global population has specific access needs

due to age, disability, or health conditions.

Market-specific insights also featured prominently. Miguel Carrasco, Director of Tourism at Impulsa Igualdad, highlighted differences in traveller preferences: French visitors tend toward active tourism and shorter stays, while North American tourists often favour longer journeys focused on heritage and gastronomy. Meeting these diverse expectations, he explained, requires clear, accurate, and tailored communication.

The Spanish government presented its new international tourism brand, "Think You Know Spain? Think Again", positioning the country as a diverse, accessible, and inclusive destination. Bárbara Couto, Deputy Director General for Marketing at Turespaña, explained that the initiative targets markets including the United States and the United Kingdom, emphasizing equality of opportunity as a core message.

Discussions also stressed the importance of professional training and infrastructure. John Sage, CEO of Accessible Travel Solutions, described education as the foundation of accessible tourism, while Glenn Mandziuk, CEO of the World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, highlighted the need for accommodations to create an inclusive environment that welcomes all travellers.

The day concluded with a call to re-centre tourism's narrative around human values. Natalia Bayona, Executive Director at UN Tourism, emphasized that the sector must inspire hope and remain grounded in reality. "While tourism is experiencing strong growth in investment and arrivals, credibility depends on returning to values and storytelling rooted in truth," she said.

Fitur 2026's third day underscored the intertwined importance of accessibility and accurate communication for building a resilient, inclusive, and trustworthy global tourism industry—key priorities as the sector prepares for continued recovery and expansion in the years ahead.

# Fitur 2026 Closes in Madrid with Record Global Participation

*255,000 Visitors, 10,000 Companies, 161 Countries Highlight Tourism Recovery and Innovation*

The 46th edition of the International Tourism Trade Fair, **Fitur 2026**, concluded this week in Madrid with record-breaking global participation, attracting over **255,000 visitors** and **10,000 companies** from **161 countries**, including 111 nations with official representation. Organised by **IFEMA Madrid**, the five-day fair reinforced its status as a premier international platform for the tourism industry.

During the professional days, attendance reached **155,000 visitors**, consolidating previous figures and marking a **12% increase in international attendance**, alongside an **11% growth in international exhibitors**. The general public weekend welcomed an additional **100,000 travellers**, highlighting the

fair's broad appeal across both B2B and consumer audiences.

According to IFEMA, **Fitur 2026 generated an economic impact of EUR 505 million for Madrid**, supporting **3,753 jobs**, and underlining the fair's role as a key driver of the regional economy and a strategic forum for global tourism dialogue.

## Global Tourism Momentum Reflected at Fitur

The event opened on **January 21** with a minute of silence to honour the victims of recent railway accidents, a gesture echoed during the official inauguration on January 22, when the **King and Queen of Spain** signed the book of condolences at the Andalucía stand.

"Fitur 2026 reaffirms Spain's and Madrid's position as a global tourism

hub," said IFEMA in a press statement. "With record participation, diverse international representation, and extensive business activity, the fair underscores the sustained recovery and growth of the global tourism sector."

According to UN Tourism data, **international tourist arrivals exceeded 1.5 billion globally in 2025**, while Spain welcomed **97 million international visitors**, reflecting strong inbound tourism momentum.

## Institutional Backing and Sector Confidence

Fitur 2026's institutional relevance was further emphasised by **official visits from over 70 regional presidents, ministers, and senior tourism authorities**, highlighting the fair's role as a forum for global policy dialogue, investment, and partnerships.

The nine exhibition halls were buzzing with activity as destinations, companies, and institutions unveiled new products, strategies, and tourism initiatives. The **Knowledge Hub** emerged as a central feature, hosting **over 200 sessions, 250 speakers, eight auditoriums, and ten conference programmes**, providing insights into emerging trends and strategic developments in tourism.



## Specialised Sections Showcase

### Diversity and Innovation

Fitur's specialised segments reinforced the fair's innovation-driven agenda:

- **Fitur 4All** promoted accessible and inclusive tourism.
- **Fitur Cruises** strengthened sustainable blue tourism offerings.
- **Fitur Experience, Fitur Lingua, and Fitur LGTB+** highlighted emerging tourism segments with growth potential.

• **Fitur Screen, Sports, Talent, and TechY** showcased the convergence of tourism with technology, sport, and culture.

- **Fitur Woman** emphasised female leadership in tourism.

• **Fitur Know-How & Export** highlighted the international expertise of Spanish companies.

With **Mexico as the Partner Country**, the fair also spotlighted international collaboration and cross-border tourism opportunities. IFEMA

confirmed that these initiatives reinforced Fitur's **global leadership in participation, business generation, and sector innovation**, while enhancing tourism's role as an economic and social driver.

Looking ahead, IFEMA is already preparing **Fitur 2027**, with **Puerto Rico as Partner Country**, signalling a continued focus on international engagement, market diversification, and the evolution of global tourism offerings.

# Malaysia Aviation Group Strengthens Leadership with Key Executive Appointments

*Strategic appointments signal disciplined growth and transformation under Long-Term Business Plan 3.0*

**M**alaysia Aviation Group (MAG), the parent company of Malaysia Airlines and its subsidiaries, has announced a major leadership reshuffle, appointing **Bryan Foong Chee Yeong** as Chief Executive Officer of Airline Business and **Low Wen Long** as Group Chief Strategy Officer, effective February 1. Both executives will report directly to **Nasaruddin A Bakar**, President and Group Chief Executive Officer of MAG, as the airline group advances into the next stage of its transformation.

In a statement, MAG said the appointments are part of its commitment to **scalable and disciplined growth** under the framework of Long-Term Business Plan 3.0, a strategic blueprint designed to stabilize core operations, expand market reach, and enhance financial sustainability while reinforcing MAG's standing as a globally competitive aviation group.

As the new Chief Executive Officer of Airline Business, Bryan Foong Chee Yeong will oversee the strategic direction and operational performance of MAG's airline portfolio,

which includes **Malaysia Airlines, Firefly, and Amal**. Chee Yeong, who previously served as Group Chief Strategy Officer, was instrumental in MAG's financial restructuring during the Covid-19 pandemic and in steering the group back to profitability, demonstrating a proven record in developing high-impact strategies, strategic partnerships, and operational excellence.

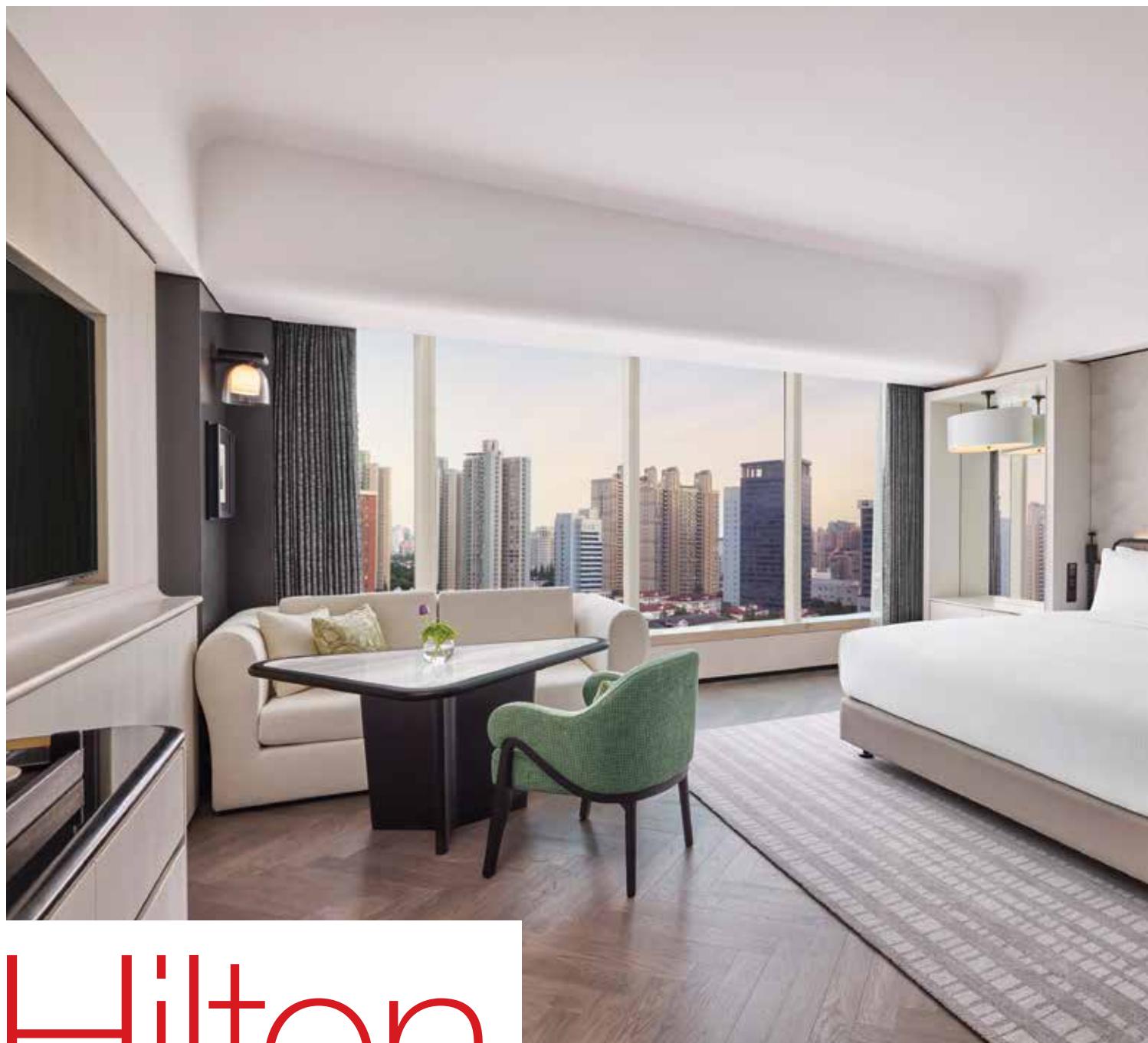
Meanwhile, Low Wen Long, in his new role as Group Chief Strategy Officer, will lead enterprise-wide strategy development and execution across MAG's core business segments to drive sustainable growth and long-term value creation. Since joining MAG as Head of Corporate Strategy in 2018, Wen Long has played a critical role in **fleet planning, network optimisation, and strategic initiatives**, shaping both Long-Term Business Plan 2.0 and the current 3.0 framework.

**Nasaruddin A Bakar**, incoming President and Group CEO, emphasized the significance of the appointments. "As MAG enters the next stage of its transformation, moving from

stabilisation to disciplined, scalable growth, we are focused on building a financially sustainable and globally competitive aviation group that contributes to Malaysia's long-term development. I have full confidence in our leadership team to execute strategic priorities with discipline, delivering consistent performance and creating lasting value for our customers, employees, and stakeholders," he said.

The announcement also reinforces MAG's leadership across its three core business segments. **Mohd Nadziruddin Mohd Basri** continues as CEO of Aviation Services, while **Philip See** leads Loyalty and Travel Services. Complementing this executive structure are **Amran Mohd Tomin**, appointed Group Chief People Officer, and **Ong Min Hui**, serving as Group Chief Transformation and Customer Experience Officer, providing a strengthened leadership backbone to support MAG's ambitious growth trajectory.

With these appointments, MAG positions itself to leverage enhanced leadership capabilities, drive strategic initiatives across multiple business portfolios, and deliver a consistent, customer-centric, and sustainable aviation experience in a highly competitive regional and global market.



# Hilton

Accelerates Global Expansion with  
1,000 New Hotels, Total Pipeline  
Surpasses 520,000 Rooms

*Luxury and Lifestyle Portfolio Tops 1,000 Properties Worldwide*



Hilton, one of the world's leading hospitality companies, marked another record year of growth in 2025, adding nearly 800 hotels and 100,000 rooms to its global portfolio. The expansion represents a full-year net unit growth of 6.7 percent and underscores Hilton's continued dominance in both the luxury and lifestyle segments.

In a press statement, Hilton

highlighted that the company achieved a major milestone as its luxury and lifestyle portfolio crossed 1,000 hotels globally, fueled by strong owner demand, a surge in hotel conversions, and increasing interest in high-end and lifestyle properties.

#### Record Pipeline Growth

Hilton signed more than 1,000 new hotels in 2025, equating to nearly 140,000 rooms. The company now has more than 3,700 hotels under development worldwide, totaling over 520,000 rooms—a testament to Hilton's unmatched growth trajectory. Nearly 100,000 rooms also broke ground during the year, representing the company's highest-ever annual construction start count on an organic basis. Hilton estimates that approximately one in every five hotel rooms currently under construction globally will join its system.

Chris Nassetta, President and CEO of Hilton, said:

*"Hilton's record growth in 2025 reflects the power of our brands, the dedication of our team, and the trust of our owners and guests. We continue to strengthen our network effect and strategically expand into destinations around the world. With a robust development pipeline and industry-leading commercial engines, we expect net unit growth of 6-7 percent in 2026, positioning Hilton to lead the industry for years to come."*

#### Brand Innovation and Expansion

The company also announced the launch of two new brands, *Apartment Collection by Hilton* and *Outset Collection by Hilton*, with additional brand announcements expected in 2026. *Outset Collection*, introduced in October, is a conversion-focused brand for independent hotels, with over 60 properties already under development and the potential to scale to more than 500 hotels across the U.S. and Canada. Conversions accounted for nearly 40 percent of

Hilton's openings in 2025, highlighting the company's strength in attracting independent and other branded hotel owners to its portfolio.

The luxury and lifestyle segment also saw notable growth. Key developments included the reopening of Waldorf Astoria New York, new Waldorf Astoria properties in Finland, Japan, and Costa Rica, and landmark signings such as NoMad Hotels in Detroit and Singapore. Lifestyle brands also expanded into new markets, with Canopy by Hilton launching in South Africa and Curio Collection entering Thailand. Hilton's luxury and lifestyle portfolio now encompasses more than 1,000 hotels worldwide, with over 200 additions in 2025 alone.

#### Global Reach and Market Leadership

Hilton surpassed 9,000 operating hotels globally in 2025, moving steadily toward 10,000 properties, with brand debuts in emerging markets such as Rwanda and Pakistan. The company now operates in 143 countries and territories.

Christian Charnaux, Executive Vice President and Chief Development Officer, Hilton, said:

*"Hilton is committed to being the preferred partner for owners worldwide. Our brands deliver industry-leading returns, with market share premiums driving top-line revenue and our system scale maximizing margins. This has resulted in our record 520,000 rooms under development and a 20 percent share of all rooms currently under construction globally, compared to our current market share of 5 percent. The opportunity to further grow our portfolio has never been stronger."*

With its strong pipeline, focus on luxury and lifestyle expansion, and continued innovation in brand offerings, Hilton is strategically positioned to lead the global hospitality industry well into the next decade.

# Tourism Powers UK Economy with USD 198 Billion Contribution; India and China Emerging as Key Growth Markets



## Future Growth and International Markets

The report anticipates that the total value of UK tourism activity will reach GBP 161 billion by 2030—a real growth of 9.3 percent, outpacing the UK economy overall at 8.8 percent. Inbound tourism is expected to drive a significant portion of this growth, with international visitor spending forecast to rise by GBP 9.4 billion, a 32 percent increase between 2024 and 2030. Emerging markets such as India and China are highlighted as key growth drivers, alongside steady contributions from traditional markets like the United States, which is projected to deliver GBP 7.6 billion to the UK economy in 2026. The Gulf markets, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, remain strategically important, with the UK capturing over a third of outbound trips to Western Europe from the region.

Stephanie Peacock, Tourism Minister, emphasised the sector's breadth: "From rich culture and historical landmarks to beautiful landscapes and coastal communities, the UK is one of the best and most visited holiday destinations in the world. Without the incredible workforce behind the tourism industry, it would not be the powerhouse that it is today. The economic contribution of the tourism sector is clear, and the government is ambitious about ensuring it can continue to grow."

## Domestic Tourism and Regional Impact

Domestic tourism also plays a pivotal role, particularly for rural and coastal destinations. VisitBritain notes that 84 percent of domestic overnight tourism spending occurs outside London, and converting just

**T**ourism continues to assert itself as a major economic engine for the United Kingdom, contributing GBP 147 billion (USD 198 billion) annually—equivalent to around five percent of the national economy—through both direct and supply chain impacts, according to a new report by VisitBritain. The report also identifies emerging markets such as India and China as key drivers, projected to grow at an annual rate of 12 percent.

The report, *Economic Value of Tourism in the United Kingdom*, underscores tourism's outsized influence on employment, tax revenues, and regional economies.

VisitBritain highlights that the sector alone surpasses the insurance and pension industries combined, generating over GBP 52 billion in tax revenues for the UK government in 2024. Nearly one in every 15 jobs across the country is linked to tourism, with its impact felt far beyond London, supporting at least five percent of jobs in every region and nation of the UK. The sector also plays a critical role in providing first employment opportunities for young people and upskilling the workforce, with projections indicating an additional 175,000 tourism-related jobs by 2030.

10 percent of outbound holiday spend by British residents into domestic breaks could inject over GBP 8 billion annually into the UK economy. To encourage this shift, VisitBritain is preparing a pilot domestic marketing campaign targeting North West coastal destinations ahead of the summer season.

**Patricia Yates, CEO of VisitBritain**, highlighted the strategic importance of tourism for national prosperity: "This research underscores tourism's importance as one of the UK's most valuable industries, driving economic growth for every nation and region and supporting our high

streets, hospitality businesses, cultural institutions, and communities. As a critical driver of future growth, our priority is to work with industry and government to realise tourism's huge potential to bring social and economic benefits, create jobs, support businesses, and deliver prosperity across local communities."

#### Challenges and Strategic Priorities

Despite robust growth, the sector faces challenges, including the decline in domestic holidays, which has particularly affected coastal destinations amid rising living costs. Additionally, longer-term international forecasts

suggest the UK is losing some global competitiveness, with inbound visits remaining highly London-centric. The report's findings are being shared with the UK government to inform policy making, track tourism development, and support VisitBritain's statutory role in providing strategic advice to the industry.

With sustained focus on high-value international markets, domestic tourism, and regional development, VisitBritain aims to ensure the UK tourism sector continues to deliver economic growth, social impact, and global competitiveness well into the next decade.

## Saudi Tourism Authority Strengthens Indian Outreach Through Travel Trade Engagement in Hyderabad

*Strategic partnership with TBO Academy highlights Saudi Arabia's growing appeal for Indian travellers*

The Saudi Tourism Authority (STA), in collaboration with TBO Academy, has reinforced its engagement with the Indian travel trade through a high-profile destination presentation in Hyderabad. The session, attended by over 130 leading travel agents, offered an immersive showcase of Saudi Arabia's diverse tourism portfolio and highlighted the Kingdom's strategic focus on India as a key outbound market.

In a press briefing, TBO said the presentation centred on Saudi Arabia's "Golden Triangle" of Riyadh, Jeddah, and AlUla. Riyadh was positioned as a dynamic global capital, blending business, entertainment, and large-scale events. Jeddah's historic charm and vibrant coastal culture were emphasised, while AlUla, home to the UNESCO World Heritage site of Hegra and natural landmarks such as Elephant Rock, was presented as a cultural and heritage-focused destination.

The event also highlighted emerging destinations including Taif, Aseer, and Al-Baha, noted for their cooler climates, scenic landscapes, and cultural experiences. Special attention was given to **Red Sea Global**, Saudi Arabia's ultra-luxury, sustainable development designed to appeal to travellers seeking premium and eco-conscious experiences.

Connectivity and ease of travel were also central themes. The session provided insights into expanding flight options from Hyderabad through carriers including IndiGo, Air Arabia, flynas, and Saudia. Simplified visa solutions, including Tourist Visa, eVisa, Visa on Arrival, and Stopover Visa options, were underscored as key enablers for hassle-free travel to the Kingdom.

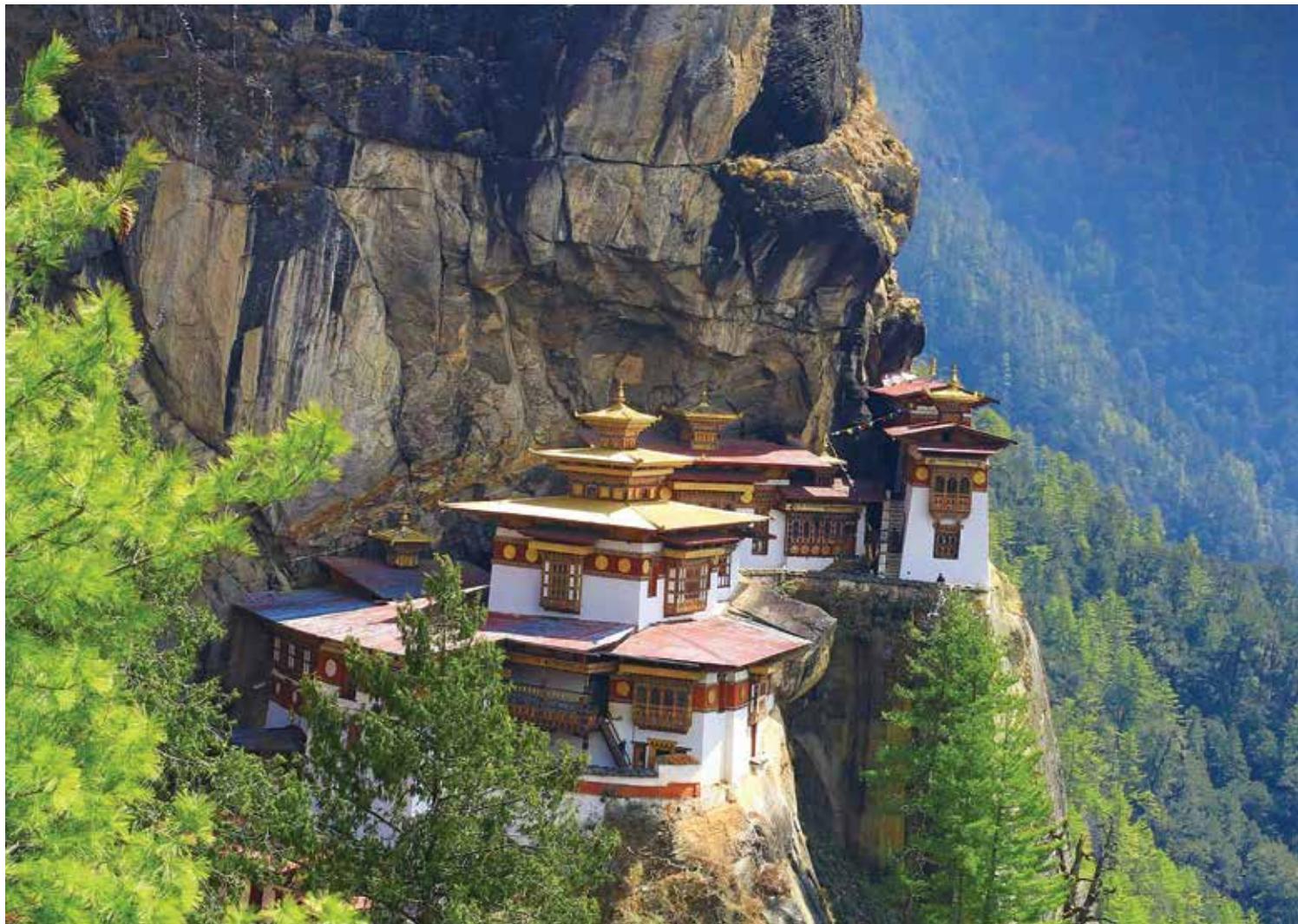
STA and TBO highlighted Saudi Arabia's vibrant calendar of year-round events. Signature offerings such as **Riyadh Season**, the **MDLBeast music festival**, and AlUla's cultural programming were showcased as opportunities for Indian travellers across leisure, entertainment, and heritage segments.

TBO Academy leveraged the occasion to launch its **trade**

**engagement platform**, featuring destination-specific learning modules, market-ready itineraries, and exclusive incentive programs. Agents attending the Hyderabad session were eligible for performance-based rewards and giveaways, designed to recognise and motivate top-performing travel partners.

A spokesperson from STA noted, "This engagement demonstrates Saudi Arabia's commitment to positioning itself as a vibrant and accessible destination for Indian travellers. By equipping travel agents with in-depth knowledge, experiences, and tools, we aim to ensure they can inspire travellers to explore Saudi Arabia's cultural, heritage, and luxury offerings."

The Hyderabad initiative complements STA's ongoing strategy across India, building on prior engagements in Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru. With growing air connectivity, simplified travel procedures, and a robust portfolio of destinations and experiences, Saudi Arabia is positioning itself as a premier outbound choice for Indian travellers across leisure, cultural, and luxury segments.



# Bhutan Achieves 44.3% Surge in Tourist Arrivals in 2025 Amid Strategic Market Diversification

*Indian visitor share declines as Bhutan expands global appeal*

Bhutan recorded a remarkable 44.3 percent increase in foreign tourist arrivals in 2025, underlining the kingdom's accelerating recovery and strategic focus on market diversification. Tourist revenue also saw a significant boost, with the Sustainable Development Fee (SDF) rising over 49 percent year-on-year, according to Bhutan Tourism's recently published **Tashel Melong 2025** report.

In total, Bhutan welcomed **209,376 visitors** in 2025, a substantial increase compared to 2024. While Indian tourists have traditionally dominated inbound travel, their share of total arrivals declined as Bhutan successfully broadened its appeal to international markets. Visitors from countries other than India now constitute approximately **40 percent of arrivals**, up from 27 percent in 2019, reflecting the country's concerted



efforts to diversify source markets and attract global audiences.

“Bhutan’s year-on-year growth places it among the fastest-recovering destinations globally in 2025,” the Department of Tourism, under the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment, said in a statement. The growth outpaced average global international tourist arrivals, which rose between 4 and 12 percent.

#### Revenue Growth and Sustainable Development

Revenue generated through the **Sustainable Development Fee**, currently set at USD 100 per foreign tourist per night, reached **USD 43.31 million**, a 49.1 percent increase from 2024. The fee, a cornerstone of Bhutan’s high-value, low-impact tourism model, supports conservation initiatives, infrastructure development, and local community benefits,

reinforcing Bhutan’s commitment to sustainable tourism practices.

#### Tashel Melong 2025: A Strategic Industry Guide

The **Tashel Melong 2025** publication provides a comprehensive overview of tourism performance, including visitor arrivals, revenue, source markets, promotional initiatives, service quality, and product development. It serves as both a **reference and strategic guide** for public and private stakeholders, offering actionable insights to shape policy and investment decisions.

The report aligns with Bhutan’s **21st Century Economic Roadmap**, the **Bhutan Integrated Tourism Masterplan 2025–2034**, and the **Industrial Development Roadmap**, which collectively aim to position tourism as a core economic driver contributing 10–15 percent of GDP by 2050. These strategies emphasize a regenerative tourism model, balancing economic growth with the preservation of cultural and natural heritage and adherence to Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness philosophy.

#### New Initiatives and Digital Platforms

To support year-round tourism and equitable regional distribution

of visitors, Bhutan introduced a range of new events, attractions, and amenities in 2025. Digital infrastructure also expanded, with platforms such as the **Tourist Registration System, Tashel ZoomDu, Tourism Ideation Forum, Monthly Tourism Bulletin, dedicated social media channels, and the Tourism Services Portal** enhancing coordination between the government and industry partners.

“Tashel Melong acts as both a mirror and a compass for Bhutan’s tourism sector. It reflects the dedication and innovation of our industry, showing what has worked and guiding our next steps,” said **Damcho Rinzin, Director of the Department of Tourism**. “The 2025 snapshot demonstrates strong recovery, meaningful diversification, and our commitment to evidence-based, sustainable tourism that delivers long-term value for communities, the economy, and our cultural and natural heritage.”

As Bhutan moves forward, its focus on **high-value, sustainable tourism** and global market expansion positions the kingdom as a benchmark for regenerative travel in the region, appealing to discerning travellers seeking unique experiences while contributing to environmental and cultural stewardship.

# The Saudi Red Sea: A New Reference Point for Luxury, Space and Intentional Travel





7

There is a particular stillness that announces the Saudi Red Sea long before touchdown. Seen from the air, the landscape unfolds in elemental simplicity: sculpted desert, mineral-toned mountains, and a sea so intensely blue it feels almost imagined. It is not dramatic in the conventional sense. It does not ask for attention. Instead, it draws it—quietly, confidently—through contrast and restraint.

For India's most discerning travellers, increasingly fatigued by destinations that perform rather than endure, the Saudi Red Sea arrives as a revelation. It is not a place to be "done." It is a place to be absorbed, gradually, deliberately. And as travel planning stretches into 2026 and beyond, that distinction is becoming everything.

The global luxury travel landscape is undergoing a quiet recalibration. As seasoned travellers grow increasingly selective, destinations once viewed as aspirational have become familiar, even predictable. In this context, the Saudi Red Sea is emerging not as a trend, but as a considered alternative—defined by scale, restraint and a rare sense of intentionality.

Stretching across more than 1,800 kilometres of Saudi Arabia's western coastline, the Red Sea region encompasses over 1,000 islands, hundreds of dive sites and some of the world's most intact coral ecosystems. Its defining asset, however, is not abundance but balance: between development and preservation, experience and discretion, ambition and calm.

For Indian luxury and corporate travellers planning ahead for 2026 and beyond, the appeal lies in access to a destination that still prioritises space—physical, visual and psychological—at a time when privacy has become the ultimate marker of luxury.

#### First Impressions: A Study in Contrast

Arrival along the Red Sea coast is defined by contrast rather than spectacle. Desert landscapes unfold in sculpted, elemental forms, meeting waters of striking clarity and colour. The experience is immediate yet understated, establishing a sense of place that feels composed rather than performative.



This restraint is central to the region's growing appeal. The Saudi Red Sea does not seek attention; it rewards attentiveness. For travellers accustomed to destinations that increasingly feel over-curated, this sense of quiet confidence is significant.

#### **Jeddah: Where History Breathes Beside the Sea**

Jeddah, the historic gateway to the Red Sea, sets the tone with effortless duality. Ancient coral-stone houses line the narrow streets of Al Balad, the UNESCO-listed old town, their latticed windows filtering light much as they have for centuries. Nearby, contemporary galleries and cafés hum with quiet energy, creating a city where heritage is not preserved behind glass, but lived in.

Walking through Al Balad is an

immersion into Hijazi culture—into spice-laced kitchens, age-old trading routes, and stories shaped by the sea. Yet Jeddah is also resolutely global. Its cultural calendar, punctuated by international events such as the Formula One Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, lends the city a cosmopolitan rhythm that resonates with travellers who value depth as much as dynamism.

#### **King Abdullah Economic City: Purpose-Built Ease / The Coast Unfolds: From KAEC to Yanbu**

North of Jeddah, King Abdullah Economic City (KAEC) reveals a softer, more contemporary coastal rhythm. Originally envisioned as a commercial centre, it has evolved into a relaxed seaside enclave where sailing boats trace the horizon and mornings begin on the water. The WAMA Sailing

Club has become a natural gathering point for those drawn to the Red Sea's open expanse, while Yam Beach and surrounding green spaces invite families and extended-stay travellers to settle into unhurried routines.

Further along the coast, Yanbu introduces a different narrative—one shaped equally by marine life and history. Beneath the surface, the famed Seven Sisters reef descends in dramatic coral walls, animated by schools of fish, turtles and passing sharks. On land, the ruins of Yanbu Al Nakhal, dating back more than two millennia, remind visitors that this coastline has long been a place of exchange, migration and movement.

#### **Umluj: Where Water, Fire and Silence Meet**

In Umluj, the Red Sea reaches a kind





of quiet perfection. The water here is astonishingly clear, its stillness broken only by the slow movement of boats between scattered islands. Snorkelling becomes a form of meditation; sailing, an exercise in patience.

Volcanic mountains rise dark and imposing behind beaches of pale sand, their black lava fields framing the sea in striking contrast. Freshly caught fish is prepared simply and served by the shore, allowing flavour to speak without interruption. Inland, the desert stretches outward in sculpted sand



and ancient rock formations, offering trails that reward curiosity rather than conquest.

Each experience here—whether in water or on land—invites presence. Not adrenaline, but awareness.

### Rituals of Wellness: Hammams, Mountains and Stillness

Wellness along the Saudi Red Sea is neither ornamental nor performative. It is grounded in ritual, shaped by environment and guided by time.

At Shebara, hammam journeys unfold slowly, drawing from the sea itself. Treatments are tactile and elemental, conducted in silence that feels intentional rather than imposed. You emerge not invigorated in the conventional sense, but recalibrated—aligned with the rhythm of wind, water and light.

Further inland, Desert Rock appears almost hidden within granite mountains, its architecture dissolving into the landscape. Spa experiences here are extended, immersive and deeply private. Signature journeys trace the colours of the desert—from grounding movement practices to therapies inspired by mineral and stone. When you leave, the stillness follows.

### Riyadh: Strategic Energy and Cultural Scale

For travellers combining business, culture and leisure, Riyadh offers a compelling counterbalance to the Red Sea's calm. The capital has positioned itself as a centre for heritage, contemporary art, sport and luxury retail. Diriyah, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, anchors the city's historical narrative, while initiatives such as Riyadh Art transform public spaces into curated cultural environments.

Dining, retail and entertainment are increasingly international in scope, while the city's growing sports calendar attracts global audiences. Looking ahead, the introduction of wellness-focused developments such as Rosewood AMAALA signals Riyadh's expanding role in long-term lifestyle travel.

### Defined Luxury: Discretion

#### Over Display / Quiet Opulence, Thoughtfully Delivered

Luxury hospitality along the Red Sea is defined by discretion and intention. At Nujuma, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, villas are carefully spaced to preserve solitude. The St. Regis Red Sea Resort offers timeless refinement, expansive views and signature service, while Shebara's futuristic, sustainability-first villas shimmer above turquoise waters like reflections rather than structures.

In the Tabuk region, Six Senses Southern Dunes presents an intimate desert retreat—private cinema nights, cooking rituals and guided explorations designed to deepen connection rather than distract from it. Sindalah Island, NEOM's first luxury destination, introduces Michelin-led dining, superyacht marinas and exclusive beach clubs, signalling the future with quiet assurance.

### Under the Dark Sky

When night falls, the Red Sea reveals one of its most poetic dimensions. Free from light pollution, the sky opens fully—constellations sharpen, meteor showers streak overhead, and the Milky Way appears with rare clarity. It is a reminder of scale, of perspective, of how small luxury can feel when placed against the infinite.

### A Destination That Lingers

Improved connectivity and simplified visas may explain why the Saudi Red Sea is increasingly on the radar of Indian travellers. But they do not explain why it stays.

This is a destination that does not overwhelm, but unfolds. That does not demand attention, but rewards it. It offers adventure without excess, wellness without theatre, and luxury without noise.

For travellers who measure journeys not by how much they see, but by how deeply they feel, the Saudi Red Sea is not simply having a moment. It is defining a new way of arriving—and of remembering.



# UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar Power GCC Outbound Tourism Boom, Set to Reach USD 138 Billion by 2033

Outbound tourism from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is entering a decisive growth phase, with the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Qatar emerging as the primary engines of expansion. According to market forecasts, the GCC outbound tourism sector is projected to nearly double in value—from USD

70.46 billion in 2024 to USD 138.06 billion by 2033—growing at a robust compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.1 percent between 2025 and 2033.

This sustained rise reflects a fundamental shift in how GCC nationals travel. Increasing disposable incomes, greater air connectivity and evolving lifestyle aspirations are reshaping

outbound travel patterns, with travellers gravitating towards premium experiences, wellness-focused journeys and culturally immersive holidays rather than conventional leisure trips.

## Aviation Expansion Fuels Global Reach

At the core of this growth lies

the GCC's rapidly expanding aviation ecosystem. Major hubs such as Dubai International Airport, King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh and Hamad International Airport in Doha have cemented their positions among the world's leading global gateways. These airports now offer unparalleled connectivity to Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas, significantly reducing travel times and enhancing destination accessibility.

The scale and efficiency of these hubs have transformed outbound travel into a seamless experience, encouraging both frequent and first-time international travellers. Enhanced route networks and increased flight frequencies have played a pivotal role in supporting outbound demand from across the region.

### Budget Airlines Democratise International Travel

The rise of low-cost carriers has further accelerated outbound tourism growth. Airlines such as flynas, Air Arabia and flydubai have opened new international routes at competitive price points, making overseas travel increasingly accessible to younger travellers and middle-income families.

This shift has democratised outbound tourism, allowing travellers to explore destinations that were previously considered premium or out of reach. The flexibility and affordability offered by budget airlines have also encouraged short-haul international trips, weekend getaways and multi-destination itineraries.

### Easier Visas and Digital Innovation Drive Momentum

Simplified visa regimes and digital travel platforms have removed long-standing barriers to outbound travel. The rollout of e-visas, visa-on-arrival policies and streamlined documentation processes across key destination markets has significantly reduced friction for GCC travellers.

Within the region, initiatives such as the Unified GCC Tourist Visa—covering the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar,

Kuwait and Bahrain—are enhancing regional mobility and encouraging more integrated travel planning. At the same time, online travel agencies and mobile booking apps have transformed the way travellers research, book and manage their journeys, offering transparency, convenience and greater confidence in travel decisions.

### A Shift Towards Wellness and Experiential Travel

Changing consumer preferences are redefining the nature of outbound tourism from the GCC. Today's travellers, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, are prioritising experiences over traditional sightseeing. Wellness tourism, cultural immersion and personalised luxury experiences are increasingly shaping travel choices.

High-end wellness retreats, health-focused resorts, spiritual journeys and curated cultural tours are witnessing rising demand. Rather than standard beach holidays, travellers are seeking meaningful engagement with destinations—whether through gastronomy, heritage, nature or holistic well-being.

### Preferred Destinations Reflect Diverse Aspirations

Southeast Asia continues to gain strong traction among GCC travellers, with Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia benefiting from visa-friendly policies, luxury hospitality and culturally resonant offerings. Europe remains a perennial favourite, particularly destinations such as Switzerland, France and Italy, which appeal to high-spending travellers seeking luxury retail, wellness experiences and rich cultural heritage.

North America, led by the United States and Canada, also retains its appeal, driven by educational travel, shopping, long-stay visits and premium tourism experiences. In response, global destinations are increasingly tailoring products and services to GCC preferences, offering halal-friendly amenities, Arabic-speaking staff and bespoke luxury packages.

### Technology Shapes Travel Behaviour

Digitalisation is playing a defining role in the evolution of GCC outbound tourism. Mobile apps and online platforms enable travellers to compare prices, access real-time reviews and customise itineraries with ease. This access to information has empowered consumers, increased transparency and fostered confidence in travel spending.

Social media and influencer-driven content are also influencing destination discovery, particularly among younger travellers, accelerating trends and shaping demand for experiential and visually distinctive travel experiences.

### Challenges on the Horizon

Despite strong growth prospects, the GCC outbound tourism market faces several challenges. Visa restrictions in select regions, sustainability concerns linked to increased travel volumes and exposure to global economic fluctuations remain key considerations. Geopolitical developments and security perceptions can also influence travel behaviour.

In response, destination marketers and tourism boards are placing greater emphasis on sustainable tourism practices, safety assurances and diversified offerings to maintain GCC traveller confidence.

### Outlook: A Transformative Decade Ahead

The outlook for GCC outbound tourism remains overwhelmingly positive. With market value expected to reach USD 138.06 billion by 2033, the sector is poised to play an increasingly influential role in shaping global tourism flows.

Driven by aviation innovation, digital transformation and evolving consumer preferences, GCC travellers are redefining international travel trends. As spending power and mobility continue to rise, outbound tourism from the region will not only benefit established destinations but also create opportunities for emerging markets worldwide—signalling a transformative decade ahead for global travel.

Where Treasure Hunting Is Real:

# The Only Place in America Where You Can Find a Diamond — and Keep It

In an era where experiential travel defines luxury, few experiences rival the thrill of unearthing a gemstone with your own hands. In the quiet town of **Murfreesboro, Arkansas**, about **two hours southwest of Little Rock**, lies one of the most extraordinary travel experiences in the United States — **Crater of Diamonds State Park**, the only public diamond-bearing site in the world where visitors are legally allowed to keep what they find.

Spread across **911 acres**, this remarkable park sits on the eroded surface of an ancient volcanic crater — a geological rarity that has transformed Arkansas into an unlikely but compelling destination for adventure-seeking travellers and curious families alike.



### A Discovery That Changed the Land

The story begins in **1906**, when a local farmer, **John Huddleston**, stumbled upon sparkling stones on his property — stones that would later be confirmed as diamonds. Since that moment, the site has yielded **more than 35,000 diamonds**, including the **largest diamond ever discovered in the United States**, the legendary

### 40-carat "Uncle Sam" diamond.

Recognising its uniqueness, the State of Arkansas acquired the land, and in **1972** it officially opened as **Crater of Diamonds State Park**. Today, visitors from around the world arrive with a mix of curiosity, optimism and childlike excitement — because here, treasure hunting is not metaphorical.

### The 37-Acre Search Field: A Rare Luxury of Discovery

At the heart of the park lies a **37-acre ploughed field**, continuously replenished by natural erosion, where guests can dig, sift and search. The park is known for three main types of diamonds — **white, yellow and brown** — though other minerals such as **quartz, jasper, agate and garnet**





are also commonly found.

Find something valuable? It's yours. Park rangers even assist with **identification and certification**, turning a simple holiday moment into a documented life memory.

The park's **Diamond Discovery Centre** houses a "Hall of Fame" honouring significant finds. As recently as **May 2025**, a visitor from Minnesota uncovered a **3.81-carat brown diamond**, the largest discovery at the park that year — a reminder that the earth here still holds surprises.

### Timing, Technique and a Touch of Luck

According to park officials, the most promising time to search is **after rainfall**. Rain naturally washes away lighter soil, revealing heavier stones and minerals — sometimes leaving diamonds visible on the surface. It's one of those rare travel experiences where nature itself becomes your guide.

Visitors may bring their own tools or rent equipment on-site, including **screens, shovels, buckets, wagons and traditional sarucas** — bowl-shaped sifting tools used in gemstone

regions worldwide. Local Murfreesboro stores also cater to serious hobbyists with specialised gear.

Admission for diamond searching is modest — **USD 15 for adults** and **USD 7 for children** — making this one of the few luxury travel experiences defined not by cost, but by possibility.

### More Than a Mine

While the prospect of diamonds draws the crowds, the park offers more than excavation. There are **miles of hiking trails**, a **seasonal water playground**, and some of the region's **best stargazing**, thanks to minimal light pollution. Travellers can extend their stay at the shaded campground, which features **47 full-service sites for RVs and tents**, plus additional basic tent sites, with modern bath house facilities.

It's the kind of destination where days are spent under open skies and evenings under constellations — a rare pause from the velocity of modern travel.

### The True Value of the Experience

Not every visitor leaves with a diamond, but nearly everyone leaves with a story. The joy lies as much in

the search as in the discovery — a reminder that luxury today often means engagement, authenticity and moments of genuine wonder.

At Crater of Diamonds State Park, the treasure isn't just buried in the soil. It's in the experience of kneeling on volcanic earth, scanning the ground, and believing — even for a moment — that the next stone you turn over might change everything.

#### Travel Planner | Crater of Diamonds State Park, Arkansas

##### Location

Murfreesboro, Arkansas, USA — approximately **2 hours southwest of Little Rock** by road.

##### Nearest Gateway

Bill and Hillary Clinton National Airport (Little Rock). From there, a scenic self-drive through rural Arkansas leads to the park.

##### Best Time to Visit

- **Spring (March–May)** and **Autumn (September–November)** for comfortable temperatures.
- **After rainfall** is ideal for diamond

searching, as erosion can expose stones on the surface.

- Summers can be hot, but mornings are productive for mining.

##### Ideal Duration

- **Half-day** for a casual visit
- **1–2 days** for serious diamond hunting
- **Weekend stay** if combining mining, hiking, stargazing, and relaxation

##### The Experience

The only public site in the world where visitors can search for diamonds in their natural volcanic source — and legally **keep whatever they find**.

##### Entry Fees (Diamond Search Area)

- Adults: **USD 15**
- Children: **USD 7**

(Equipment rental available on-site)

##### What to Bring

- Comfortable outdoor clothing
- Sun protection (hat, sunscreen)
- Water and snacks
- Gloves and sturdy footwear

Tools can be rented at the park if you prefer to travel light.

##### Where to Stay

Shaded campground within the park featuring:

- **47 full-hookup RV & tent sites**

- Additional basic tent sites

- Bathhouses with modern facilities

Nearby Murfreesboro also has small inns and lodges for travellers preferring indoor comfort.

##### Beyond Diamond Hunting

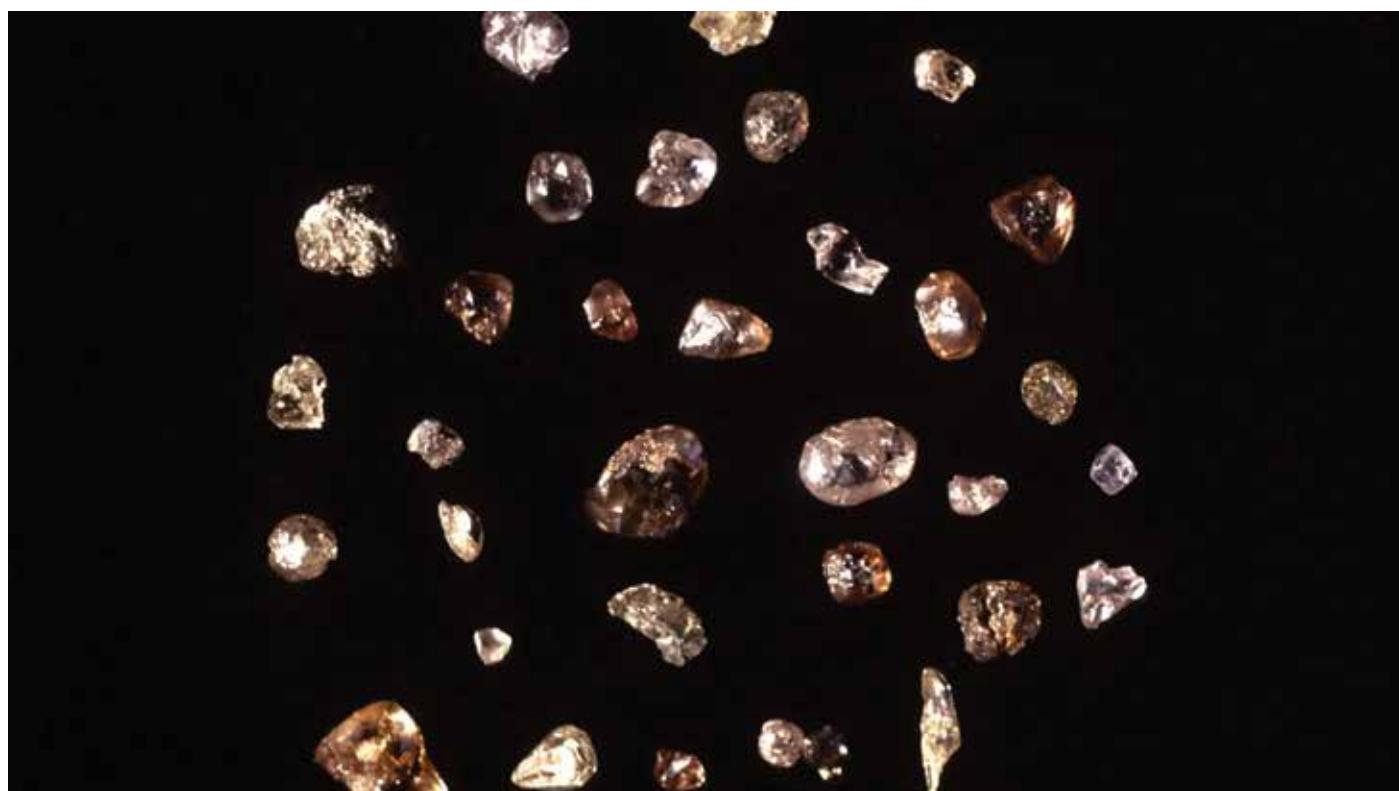
- Hiking trails
- Seasonal water playground
- Wildlife spotting
- Exceptional **stargazing** due to low light pollution

##### Who It Suits

Experience-driven luxury travellers  
Families seeking educational adventure  
Nature lovers  
Corporate incentive groups looking  
for unusual team activities  
Collectors and geology enthusiasts

##### Travel Span Tip

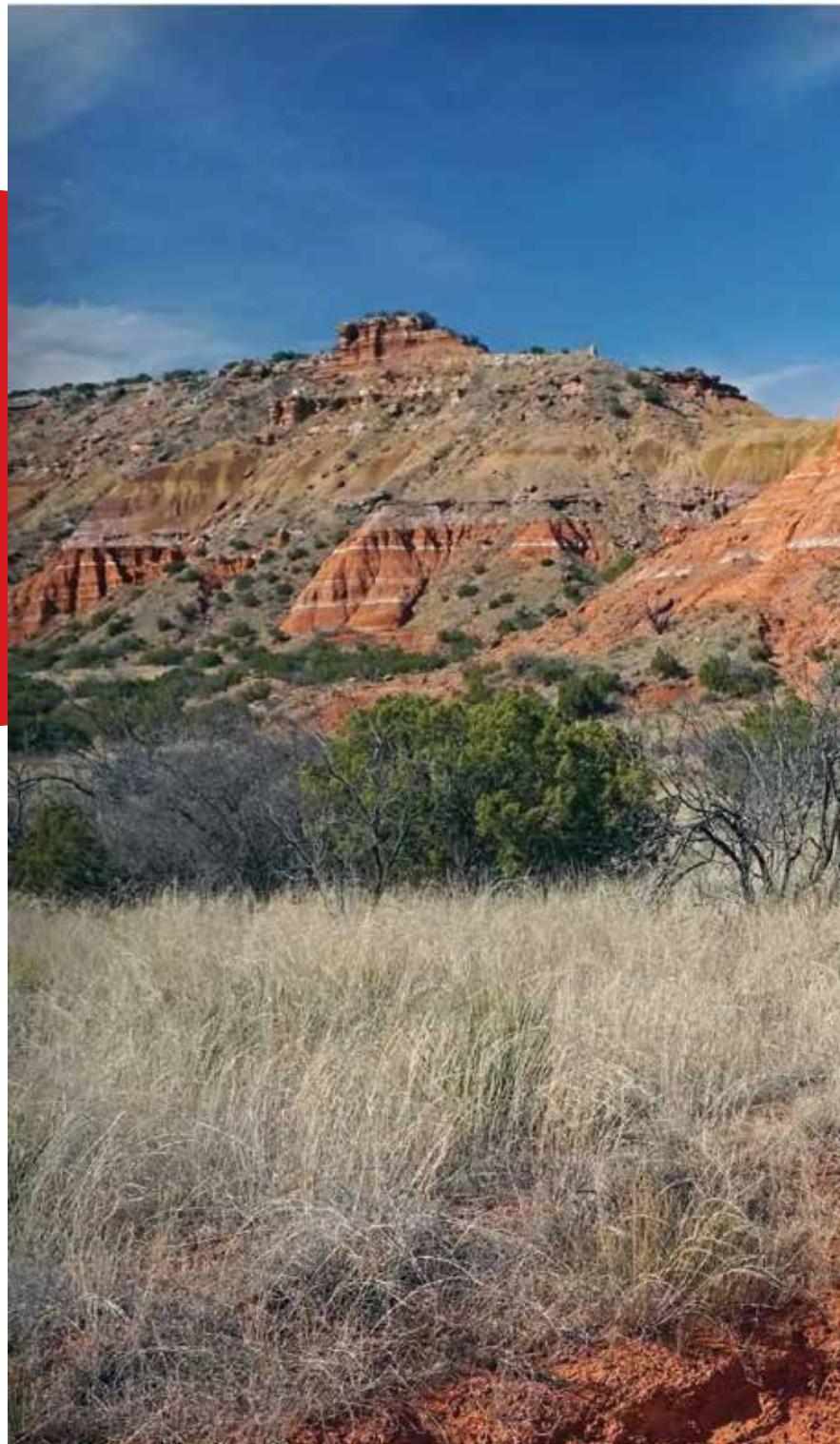
Patience pays. Scan the ground slowly, especially after rain — some of the park's largest diamonds have been found lying right on the surface.



# Texas' Hidden Canyons:

From  
Rugged  
Desert  
Roads to  
the Grand  
Canyon  
of the  
Panhandle

*An exclusive Travel Span feature  
exploring the natural grandeur,  
history, and luxury experiences of  
Pinto Canyon Road and Palo Duro  
Canyon State Park.*



**T**exas is a land of contrasts. Its vast deserts, rugged canyons, and wide-open skies offer a sense of scale and freedom that few destinations can match. While the Lone Star State is often associated with wide highways and big cities, it also harbors some of the most **dramatic, off-the-beaten-path landscapes** in the United States. Among these, **Pinto Canyon Road** in Far West Texas and **Palo Duro Canyon State Park** in the Panhandle stand out as destinations that blend adventure, history, and immersive natural beauty, appealing to travellers seeking both exploration and refined experiences.



### Pinto Canyon Road: A Desert Drive Into the Otherworldly

Stretching between **Marfa** and **Presidio**, Pinto Canyon Road (Ranch Road 2810) is one of Texas' most breathtaking and rugged drives.

Departing Marfa, the journey begins on gently rolling plains, where **green and golden grasses sway under vast skies**, and cattle dot the horizon. The landscape seems endless, but about **32 miles (51 km) southwest of Marfa**,

the pavement ends, the ground drops sharply, and the gentle plains give way to **jagged volcanic peaks and steep canyon walls**.

David Keller, author of *In the Shadow of the Chinatis*, describes the experience:

"You wind around the hills above the canyon, which was part of an ancient caldera... and then you drop down into it. The land opens up—you can see all the way into Mexico. It's kind of otherworldly."

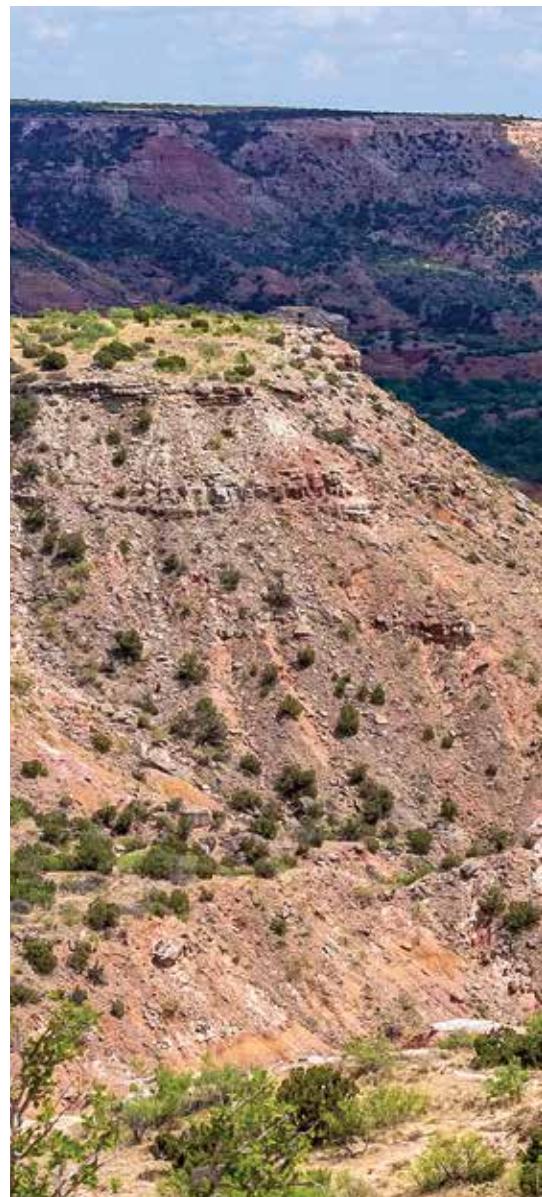
This canyon, born from a volcanic eruption far larger than Mount St. Helens, offers a **dramatic landscape shaped by millennia of erosion and tectonic activity**. The descent into Pinto Canyon reveals not only geological marvels but also the region's human history—from **Apache**

**strongholds** to ranching pioneers like **Jose Prieto**, whose 12,000-acre ranch tells a story of resilience in this harsh desert environment.

#### Must-See Highlights

- **Chinati Mountains:** Chinati Peak rises to 7,728 feet, the highest point in Presidio County, named from the Apache word *ch'iná'itíh*, meaning "mountain pass."

- **Chinati Hot Springs:** Relax in geothermal pools heated to 113°F, nestled beneath cottonwoods—advance reservations recommended.



- **Ruidosa Church:** A historic riverside church built in 1915, now under careful restoration by local preservation groups.

#### Travel Span Tips:

- Drive a high-clearance, all-wheel-drive vehicle.
- Avoid the canyon during flash floods (July–September).
- Bring water, download maps offline, and allow **2 hours** from Marfa to Chinati Hot Springs.

#### Palo Duro Canyon: The Grand Canyon of Texas

From the rugged deserts of Far West



Texas, a few hundred miles northeast lies **Palo Duro Canyon State Park, the second-largest canyon in the United States**. Carved over millions of years, the canyon stretches **29,000 acres** with cliffs in brilliant shades of red, orange, and yellow. Often called the **Grand Canyon of Texas**, it blends dramatic scenery with deep historical and cultural significance.

Visitors can explore the canyon **on foot, by mountain bike, horseback, or car**, traversing over **30 miles of trails** that wind along cliffs and descend to the canyon floor. For those seeking luxury, Palo Duro offers **glamping sites with air**

**conditioning, private porches, fire pits, and rustic-chic furnishings**, as well as rim cabins and Cow Camp cabins on the canyon floor for an intimate experience.

#### Cultural and Historical Highlights

- **Civilian Conservation Corps**

**Legacy:** Trails, pavilions, and other park infrastructure were built by the CCC during the 1930s.

- **TEXAS Outdoor Musical:**

A summer tradition at the Pioneer Amphitheater, bringing early settlers' stories to life with singing, dancing, and fireworks.

- **Ranger Programs & Junior**

**Naturalist Initiative:** Explore wildlife, geology, and pioneer history with guided tours and educational programs.

Nearby attractions complement the visit: **Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument, and Lake Meredith National Recreation Area.**

#### Luxury Travel Tips:

- Reserve glamping or cabin stays well in advance.
- Visit in spring for wildflowers along trails, including Big Bend bluebonnets.
- Combine horseback riding



and guided ranger tours for a fully immersive experience.

#### **Curating a Texan Canyon Adventure**

For travellers seeking **contrast, adventure, and curated luxury**, a journey through Texas' canyons offers unmatched variety:

- **Day 1:** Explore Marfa's art galleries and boutique hotels, then drive **Pinto Canyon Road** for sunset at Chinati Hot Springs.

- **Day 2:** Travel north to **Palo Duro Canyon**, hike rim trails, indulge in glamping or cabins, and attend the **TEXAS Outdoor Musical**.

- **Optional Extension:** Drive the **River Road (FM 170)** along the Rio Grande for more desert vistas, hoodoos, and Big Bend hikes.

#### **Travel Span Highlights:**

- **Pinto Canyon Road:** Volcanic peaks, Chinati Mountains, ranching relics, hot springs

- **Palo Duro Canyon:** Colorful cliffs, glamping, horseback riding, **TEXAS Outdoor Musical**

- **Nearby Attractions:** Panhandle-Plains Museum, Alibates Flint Quarries, Lake Meredith, Big Bend Ranch State Park

This exclusive Travel Span feature celebrates the **intersection of rugged adventure, cultural depth, and curated luxury**, inviting discerning travellers to experience the hidden grandeur of Texas' canyons

# EXPERIENCE

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