

LUXURY AND LIFESTYLE TRAVEL MAGAZINE

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to Boost U.S. Tourism Spend

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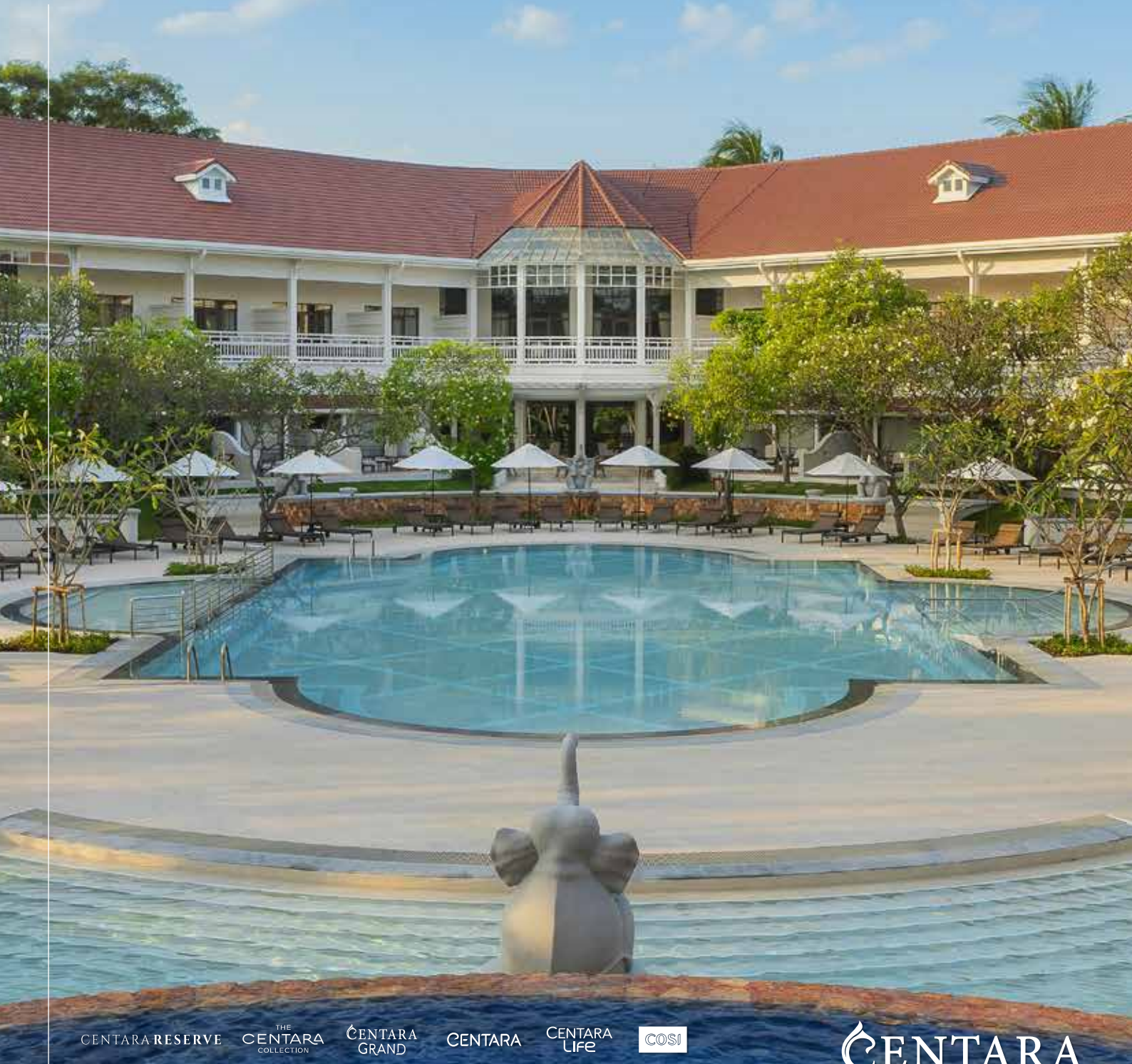
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EDITOR'S LETTER

Hong Kong Charts Path to Tourism Revival with Strategic Market Focus: WTTC

Hong Kong SAR is poised to reassert itself as one of the world's leading travel destinations, provided it sharpens its focus on key international markets and diversifies its tourism strategy, according to new research by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC).

In its report, "*Travel & Tourism in Hong Kong SAR, China: Recovery, Gaps, and the Road Ahead*," WTTC outlines a roadmap for revitalising the city's global tourism appeal, emphasising the need to rebalance its visitor mix and expand into higher-yield segments. Central to this strategy is reducing reliance on mainland China and increasing outreach to long-haul

and emerging markets, including ASEAN countries, the Middle East and India.

The recommendation comes against the backdrop of a highly concentrated visitor base. In 2025, 76 percent of inbound travellers to Hong Kong originated from Mainland China, with only 24 percent coming from the rest of the world. While total arrivals are estimated to have reached 50.3 million in 2025, this remains significantly below the pre-pandemic peak of 65.3 million recorded in 2018—a decline of nearly 23 percent.

Business travel, a key pillar of Hong Kong's tourism economy, has also yet to fully recover. Spending by business

travellers is projected to remain 16.8 percent below 2018 levels, reflecting the lingering effects of the 2019 civil unrest followed by the global disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite these challenges, the sector continues to play a vital role in the city's economy. WTTC estimates that travel and tourism contributed approximately USD 56.4 billion to Hong Kong's GDP in 2025, accounting for 13.6 percent of total economic output and supporting around 587,000 jobs. The recovery has been largely driven by domestic demand, which has grown by 15.5 percent compared to 2018 levels, helping the sector reach 98.5 percent of its pre-pandemic size.

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However, international visitor spending remains subdued, trailing 15 percent below 2018 figures. This contrasts with regional competitors such as Singapore and Macao SAR, both of which are projected to surpass their pre-pandemic tourism benchmarks in 2025.

To accelerate recovery and regain its competitive edge, WTTC has outlined five strategic priorities. These include revitalising business travel by reinforcing Hong Kong’s position as a global hub for meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE); rebuilding long-haul demand through stronger airline partnerships and targeted marketing in Western markets such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Europe; and reimagining the city’s tourism proposition to highlight its cultural heritage, culinary excellence and signature events.

The report also calls for initiatives to enhance visitor value and extend length of stay, reversing a downward trend from an average of 3.3 nights in 2019 to a projected 3.1 nights in 2025. Additionally, it stresses the importance of deeper collaboration between the

government, the Hong Kong Tourism Board and private sector stakeholders to ensure a unified and effective tourism strategy.

Gloria Guevara highlighted Hong Kong’s enduring strengths, noting that its world-class infrastructure and unique cultural positioning as a bridge between East and West remain key assets. She emphasised that sustained recovery will depend on strategic investment and strong public-private partnerships.

Backing this approach, the Hong Kong government has committed HKD 1.6 billion in tourism funding for 2026–27, aimed at expanding flagship events, strengthening global promotion and supporting the growth of cruise tourism and MICE activities. The Hong Kong Tourism Board is also stepping up efforts to target new mainland cities beyond Guangdong, as well as emerging international markets.

The WTTC report comes at a time when the city’s aviation infrastructure is also gaining momentum. Hong Kong International Airport was ranked the world’s fastest-growing airport by seat capacity in 2025, while the Hong

Kong–Taipei corridor emerged as the busiest international air route globally, according to industry data.

As Hong Kong navigates its post-pandemic recovery, the emphasis is shifting from volume to value—leveraging its global connectivity, cultural depth and strategic investments to reclaim its position as a premier destination for both leisure and business travellers.



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Lufthansa's New Premium On-Board Experience: FOX Launches in First Class

- Successful launch of FOX on March 29 in First Class
- On long-haul routes, First Class guests now enjoy fine dining by a star chef, new champagne, and premium skincare
- Starting in May, guests will also experience FOX in Business, Premium Economy, and Economy Class

Lufthansa's new premium onboard experience, FOX (Future Onboard Experience), launched successfully in First Class on March 29. FOX represents one of the largest investments in the onboard customer experience in Lufthansa's history. FOX was developed over a period of two years, involving more than 110 test flights, and incorporated feedback from over 500 crew members and more than 9,000 guests. With its new service concept, Lufthansa is revamping all service elements and processes on board – on all long-haul flights and in all travel classes. First Class is leading the way.

“To mark our 100th anniversary, we are redefining onboard service with FOX – in all classes and on all long-haul flights. We are investing more than 70 million euros in our long-haul service and, with it, in the customer experience. Our new offering combines outstanding comfort with the highest degree of individuality, creating moments that are truly unique. Every detail of our new onboard experience has been designed with the aim of setting new standards in premium travel – not only in First Class, but in all four travel classes,” says Jens Ritter, CEO of Lufthansa Airlines.



New in First Class:

In addition to new tableware, a varied gourmet breakfast – including caviar upon request – and an expanded beverage menu featuring new cocktails, long drinks, and mocktails, the First Class menus in particular are set to be a memorable experience: They showcase modern, light fine dining – conceived by two-Michelin-starred chef Christoph Kunz. With his restaurant Komu in Munich, he is one of the defining voices of modern and creative haute cuisine. With FOX, First Class travelers enjoy a curated selection of smaller courses, consisting of trilogies for the amuse-bouche, the appetizer, and the dessert. For the main course, guests have a choice and can decide between a single dish and a tasting menu. Together, Christoph Kunz and Lufthansa have created a high-quality yet surprising concept.

Aside from the new FOX menus, First Class travelers on Lufthansa will continue to enjoy the popular caviar service, which has been one of the “Lufthansa Signature Moments” since the introduction of First Class. In addition to the excellent caviar served with the traditional accompaniments of lemon, egg, shallot, and crème fraîche, blinis are now also served – traditionally on a mother-of-pearl spoon, which is also new on board.

Lufthansa is also offering First Class guests an even more premium champagne selection: For the first time, the airline is serving the exquisite Prestige cuvée La Grande Dame from the renowned Veuve Clicquot. In addition to the rotating selection of premium champagnes, which will continue to be offered as before, First Class guests can now enjoy the exceptional quality of La Grande Dame on every flight.

The innovative amenity kit from BABOR rounds out the premium travel experience in FOX First Class. With the amenity menu, guests can individually select cosmetics and skincare products that perfectly suit them and their skin’s needs. The crew then brings guests the chosen products directly to their seats.

The new FOX Premium Service is available on all long-haul flights.



Star Alliance Strengthens Global Connectivity with New Connection Centre at Los Angeles International Airport

In a strategic move to enhance the efficiency of global air travel, Star Alliance has inaugurated a new Star Connection Centre (SCC) at Los Angeles International Airport, one of the busiest aviation hubs in the world. The facility marks the ninth such centre globally and reflects the alliance’s continued focus on improving the end-to-end passenger experience across multi-airline journeys.

Designed to streamline transfers for more than 350,000 connecting passengers annually, the newly launched SCC plays a critical role in ensuring seamless coordination between member airlines operating through Los Angeles. The initiative underscores the growing importance of hub efficiency in an increasingly interconnected global aviation network.

Proactive Support for Tight Connections

At the core of the Star Connection Centre’s functionality is its ability to proactively identify passengers at risk of missing onward flights due to delays. Using advanced tracking systems, dedicated teams monitor inbound and outbound connections in real time. When tight connections arise, trained personnel intervene—



meeting passengers at arrival gates and expediting their transfer through the airport to ensure they reach their next flight on time.

This behind-the-scenes coordination allows passengers travelling across multiple alliance carriers to experience a smooth, unified journey, regardless of the airlines involved.

Commenting on the development, Ambar Franco, Vice President of Customer Experience at Star Alliance, emphasised that the initiative reflects the alliance’s commitment to delivering a seamless travel experience. She noted that the Connection Centres embody the alliance’s philosophy of collaboration, where member airlines operate cohesively to support passengers throughout their journey.

Expanding a Proven Global Model

The Los Angeles facility builds on a well-

established network of Star Connection Centres that have been operational for over a decade. Similar passenger-focused centres are currently located in major international hubs such as Brussels, Chicago, Frankfurt, and Toronto. In addition, specialised baggage coordination facilities operate in key North American gateways, including Houston, Newark, Washington Dulles, and San Francisco.

Together, these centres form an integrated support system that enhances both passenger transfers and baggage handling across the alliance’s extensive global footprint.

A Key Hub in the Star Alliance Network

Los Angeles International Airport serves as a critical gateway for Star Alliance operations. Currently, 16 member airlines operate from the airport, including

global carriers such as Air Canada, Lufthansa, Singapore Airlines, and United Airlines. Collectively, these airlines offer more than 2,000 weekly flights, connecting Los Angeles to over 80 destinations across more than 20 countries.

The introduction of the SCC at LAX is expected to significantly enhance transfer reliability and passenger satisfaction, particularly for long-haul and intercontinental travellers navigating complex itineraries.

Elevating the Connected Travel Experience

As global air travel continues to rebound and passenger volumes rise, the emphasis on seamless connectivity has become more critical than ever. By investing in infrastructure that supports real-time coordination and personalised assistance, Star Alliance is setting new benchmarks in alliance-driven travel.

The opening of the Star Connection Centre at Los Angeles not only strengthens operational efficiency but also reinforces the alliance’s commitment to delivering a consistent, high-quality experience across its global network—ensuring that even the most complex journeys feel effortless for travellers.

Air China to Resume Beijing–Delhi Flights, Signalling Renewed Momentum in India–China Connectivity



In a significant development for regional aviation and bilateral engagement, Air China has announced the resumption of its direct flight services between Beijing and New Delhi from April 21. The move marks another step in the gradual restoration of air connectivity between India and China after a prolonged suspension.

The reinstatement of direct services is expected to play a pivotal role in reviving travel, trade, tourism, and business exchanges between the two Asian giants, reflecting a broader thaw in bilateral relations.

Rebuilding a Critical Air Corridor

The Beijing–Delhi route has historically been a key air corridor linking two of the world’s largest economies. Its resumption comes at a time when both countries are working to normalise connectivity disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent geopolitical tensions.

The renewed service will offer both Business and Economy Class cabins, catering to a mix of corporate travellers, government officials, and leisure passengers. The return of regular direct flights is also expected to

ease travel logistics, reducing reliance on indirect routes and improving overall passenger convenience.

Diplomatic and Economic Significance

The announcement carries implications that extend beyond aviation. According to Yu Jing, spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi, the resumption of flights symbolises a broader revival of engagement between the two nations.

The development is being viewed as a positive signal for strengthening cooperation across multiple domains, including trade, tourism, and people-to-people exchanges. It also aligns with ongoing collaboration within multilateral frameworks such as Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and BRICS.

Gradual Restoration of Air Links

Direct air services between India and China were suspended for over four years following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Galwan Valley clash in June 2020. The restoration process began in late 2024, following diplomatic engagements and

agreements aimed at stabilising border conditions and improving bilateral ties.

Since then, several airlines have cautiously resumed operations. Indian carrier IndiGo operated the first post-restoration flight between Kolkata and Guangzhou in October 2024, while services on routes such as Delhi–Shanghai have also resumed through carriers including Air India and China Eastern Airlines.

Strategic Implications for Aviation

Air China’s decision to reinstate the Beijing–Delhi route underscores growing confidence in the recovery of one of Asia’s most strategically important aviation markets. The move is expected to stimulate passenger demand, facilitate business travel, and support tourism flows between the two countries.

For the aviation industry, the reopening of such routes signals a broader recovery trajectory in international air travel, particularly in regions where geopolitical and public health challenges had previously constrained growth.

Looking Ahead

As airlines continue to rebuild networks and restore capacity, the resumption of direct flights between Beijing and Delhi represents a meaningful step toward normalisation. While challenges remain, particularly in navigating geopolitical sensitivities, the development reflects a shared interest in strengthening connectivity and fostering economic cooperation.

With demand expected to gradually pick up, the route is poised to once again become a vital link in the Asia aviation landscape, supporting deeper engagement between India and China in the years ahead.

Ethiopian Airlines to Resume Direct Flights Between Addis Ababa and Atlanta from May 21

Set to Debut in Fall 2026, the Viking Libra Meets Water for the First Time



Ethiopian Airlines has confirmed it will resume daily direct passenger flights between Addis Ababa Bole International Airport (ADD) and Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport from **May 21, 2026**, restoring a vital transatlantic air link that had been temporarily suspended earlier this year. The announcement underscores the airline’s commitment to strengthening air connectivity between Africa and the United States, supporting a mix of business, leisure and diaspora-driven travel demand.

The route had been paused since February 2026, but its reinstatement is seen as a strategic response to rising demand for direct travel between two major global hubs. The service will once again place Atlanta among the key U.S. destinations served by Ethiopian, enhancing seamless access for travellers to the airline’s expansive

network across Africa, Europe and beyond.

Reconnecting Key Markets and Travel Segments

Atlanta, a major economic and cultural centre, is home to one of the largest African diaspora communities in the United States — a factor that has been central to demand for direct services. The resumed flights are expected to benefit a broad spectrum of passengers, including business travellers seeking efficient transatlantic links, tourists headed for either continent, and diaspora travellers visiting friends and family.

In remarks shared as part of the announcement, Mesfin Tasew, Group Chief Executive Officer at Ethiopian Airlines, described Atlanta as “one of the most vibrant markets in the United States,” and highlighted the importance of reconnecting these two hubs to

support both commercial links and cultural ties.

Strategic Network Benefits

The route resumption enhances connectivity not only between Addis Ababa and Atlanta, but also across Ethiopian’s broader hub-and-spoke network. Passengers flying into Atlanta will gain easier access to destinations across the southeastern United States, while those travelling from the U.S. can connect onward to dozens of cities throughout Africa via Ethiopian’s central hub in Addis Ababa. The direct service offers an alternative to routing via Europe or the Middle East, potentially reducing total travel time and improving convenience for longhaul passengers.

Ethiopian Airlines currently operates flights to several U.S. cities and continues to prioritise expansion of its transatlantic network as part of its longterm growth strategy. The Atlanta service resumption reinforces the carrier’s role as a pivotal link between Africa and global markets, and aligns with broader aviation trends in restoring and enhancing key international connections following pandemic-related disruptions.

Booking and Passenger Options

Travelers planning to use the reinstated route can book tickets through Ethiopian Airlines’ official website and mobile app, as well as via its global ticket offices, authorised travel agents and customer interaction centres. The airline is expected to deploy longhaul aircraft such as the Boeing 787 Dreamliner or Airbus A350 on the transatlantic route, consistent with its modern fleet strategy that emphasises passenger comfort and operational efficiency.

ITA Airways Joins Star Alliance

- *Star Alliance welcomes Italy's flag carrier*
- *Enabling seamless journeys for customers worldwide*

Star Alliance officially welcomed ITA Airways as its newest member, marking the completion of the Italian carrier's integration into the world's largest airline alliance.

ITA Airways marked its entry into the Alliance during a ceremony held at the Piazza di Spagna Lounge, Rome Fiumicino Airport Terminal 3. The ceremony was presided over by ITA Airways Chief Executive Officer and General Manager Joerg Eberhart, Star Alliance Chief Executive Officer Theo Panagiotoulis, and Lufthansa Group Chief Commercial Officer Dieter Vranckx, in the presence of media and institutional guests.

Starting April 1, ITA Airways will be fully connected into the Alliance's global network, linking its Rome Fiumicino hub and Milan Linate airport, served by 17 Star Alliance members collectively, with more than 1,150 destinations worldwide. Customers travelling across the network can now benefit from through check-in, reciprocal frequent flyer recognition and access to Star Alliance lounges, creating a more seamless customer experience, in and out of Italy.

Celebrating the milestone, Star Alliance Chief Executive Officer Theo Panagiotoulis said: "On behalf of our members, I am delighted to welcome ITA Airways as the 26th member of Star Alliance. This is the result of a focused and collaborative integration effort. With ITA Airways on board, we not only expand our network to and from Italy, but also elevate the connected experience of our customers when travelling across multiple airlines, through access to the world's largest



network of airport lounges, more comprehensive loyalty benefits, and other benefits like baggage tracking - all designed to enhance the journey at every step."

Joerg Eberhart, CEO and General Manager of ITA Airways,

said: "Joining Star Alliance marks a historic milestone for ITA Airways and a defining step in our growth. By becoming part of the world's largest and most established global airline network, we significantly expand our international reach while offering our passengers a more seamless, consistent and highquality travel experience, with access to over 1,150 destinations worldwide, smoother connections, integrated services and a stronger premium proposition. At the same time, we enter Star Alliance bringing with us our distinctive Italian identity, enriching the Alliance and reinforcing ITA Airways' role in connecting Italy with the world, combining global standards of excellence with the warmth and elegance that define the Italian way of flying."

ITA Airways' induction into the Alliance has been mentored by the Lufthansa Group, and expert teams across the group airlines have facilitated an intense integration programme over the last several months.

Dieter Vranckx, Chief Commercial Officer of Lufthansa

Group, said: "The Star Alliance membership is only possible thanks to the strong commitment and close collaboration of dedicated teams at ITA Airways, Lufthansa Group and Star Alliance. We are pleased to introduce ITA Airways as fully fledged hub airline into the Lufthansa Group and into the Alliance, expanding options for travellers across Europe and the world. Together, ITA Airways and the Lufthansa Group, are unlocking a joint value proposition that will benefit our customers, our partners, and the Star Alliance ecosystem."

ITA Airways, which flies over 16 million customers every year, adds more than 350 daily flights to the Alliance network, supported by a strong domestic and regional footprint. The addition expands travel options across Italy and Europe, while improving connectivity between Southern Europe and key international markets.

As part of its membership, eligible customers can enjoy priority services, lounge access across the Alliance network, and reciprocal frequent flyer programme recognition, including earning and redeeming miles. Star Alliance Gold customers will also have access to ITA Airways lounges in Rome, Milan and Catania.

With the addition of ITA Airways, Star Alliance now comprises 26 member airlines, offering more than 17,500 daily flights across a global network spanning over 190 countries.

United Airlines Unveils Historic Fleet Expansion Plan with 250+ Aircraft Deliveries by 2028

In a decisive move to strengthen its market leadership and redefine passenger experience, United Airlines has announced plans to induct more than 250 new aircraft into its fleet by April 2028. The initiative marks what the airline describes as the largest two-year aircraft delivery programme in aviation history, underscoring a bold acceleration of its long-term fleet modernisation strategy.

The expansion reflects the airline’s continued commitment to enhancing operational efficiency while elevating onboard comfort across all travel classes. As one of the world’s largest carriers, United’s latest investment signals a strategic push to align capacity growth with evolving passenger expectations, particularly in the premium travel segment.

A New Era of Fleet and Product Innovation

Central to the expansion is the introduction of new aircraft variants, upgraded subfleets, and refined cabin configurations. Among the most notable developments is the rollout of the airline’s ‘Coastliner’ subfleet based on the Airbus A321neo platform, alongside the long-range Airbus A321XLR.

These aircraft are designed to deliver a widebody-style experience on narrowbody routes, particularly on premium transcontinental services connecting key hubs such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Newark/ New York. The Coastliner fleet will feature enhanced interiors, including a redesigned United Polaris cabin with all-aisle-access lie-flat seating, improved spatial design, and elevated privacy features.

The A321XLR, expected to enter service soon, will offer increased



premium seating capacity compared to the Boeing 757 aircraft it replaces, further strengthening United’s long-haul narrowbody capabilities.

Strengthening Regional and International Connectivity

United’s fleet strategy also extends to regional operations with the introduction of the CRJ450, a reconfigured version of the Bombardier CRJ200. Operated by SkyWest Airlines, these aircraft are tailored to connect smaller cities with major hubs such as Denver and Chicago, offering upgraded interiors and a more spacious cabin layout.

On the international front, the airline is preparing to deploy new Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft featuring its next-generation interior. A highlight of this upgrade is the introduction of the Polaris Studio—an ultra-premium cabin concept that includes larger suites with privacy doors, companion seating options, curated dining experiences, and

advanced in-flight technology such as wireless charging and 4K OLED entertainment screens.

Building on the ‘United Next’ Vision

The announcement builds upon the airline’s ambitious ‘United Next’ programme launched in 2021. Since its inception, United has significantly expanded and upgraded its fleet, including the addition of numerous Boeing 737 MAX jets and Airbus A321neo aircraft, while retrofitting a majority of its existing narrowbody fleet.

The airline has also made notable strides in enhancing its premium offerings, increasing premium seat availability across North American routes and modernising regional operations by transitioning to larger aircraft.

Leadership Perspective

Commenting on the development, Scott Kirby emphasised

that sustained investments in product innovation, service quality, and technology have strengthened customer loyalty and positioned the airline for long-term growth.

Meanwhile, Andrew Nocella highlighted the scale of innovation embedded in the expansion, noting that the new fleet will provide passengers with a broader range of premium options while reinforcing

United's competitive edge in global aviation.

Strategic Implications

With over 250 aircraft scheduled for delivery—including Boeing 787-9 Dreamliners, Airbus A321neos, A321XLRs, and Boeing 737 MAX jets—the expansion represents a transformative phase for United Airlines. It not only enhances fleet

efficiency but also signals a broader industry shift toward premiumisation, sustainability, and passenger-centric innovation.

As airlines worldwide navigate a rapidly evolving travel landscape, United's aggressive fleet modernisation programme positions it at the forefront of next-generation aviation, setting new benchmarks in scale, comfort, and operational excellence.

La Mamounia Strengthens India Outreach with Strategic Engagements in Mumbai and New Delhi

In a focused effort to deepen its presence in one of the world's fastest-growing outbound luxury travel markets, La Mamounia has successfully concluded a high-impact India mission, engaging key stakeholders across Mumbai and New Delhi. The initiative underscores the iconic Marrakech-based palace hotel's long-term commitment to cultivating relationships within India's premium travel, hospitality, and destination wedding segments.

Located in the historic city of Marrakech, La Mamounia has long been synonymous with refined Moroccan elegance, blending heritage architecture with contemporary luxury. The India mission served as a platform to showcase the property's evolving offerings, including its enhanced culinary experiences, award-winning wellness and spa facilities, and its growing appeal as a destination for high-end weddings and bespoke celebrations.

The delegation was led by senior leadership, including Pierre Jochem, General Manager; Denys Courtier,



Deputy General Manager overseeing Marketing, Commercial, CSR and Sustainable Development; and Mokhtar El Achak, Director of Commercial and Marketing. The team conducted a series of one-on-one meetings with leading travel advisors, luxury tour operators, media representatives, and destination wedding planners, offering insights into the hotel's strategic direction and guest experiences.

In Mumbai, the engagement featured curated interactions with industry stakeholders, culminating in an exclusive evening event that brought together members of the travel trade and media. Similar interactions were held in New Delhi, where the delegation

continued its outreach through targeted meetings and a networking event attended by travel professionals, designers, and wedding specialists.

Speaking during the visit, Jochem highlighted the steady rise in Indian clientele at the property. Over the past year, the share of Indian guests has more than doubled, reflecting a growing affinity for immersive, culturally rich luxury experiences. He emphasised that La Mamounia's strategy in India is centred on building sustained partnerships rather than pursuing rapid expansion, ensuring long-term brand alignment with discerning Indian travellers.

The mission also spotlighted the hotel's positioning as a premier venue for destination weddings, with its expansive gardens, intricate interiors, and bespoke service offerings resonating strongly with Indian wedding planners seeking unique international locations.

Looking ahead, the leadership team shared updates on future developments, including the restoration and reopening of Palais Jamai in Fes, a historic 19th-century palace being reimagined as a luxury hospitality destination. This expansion reflects the brand's broader vision of blending cultural heritage with modern hospitality across Morocco.

As Indian outbound travel continues to evolve, La Mamounia's targeted engagement signals a strategic alignment with a market that values experiential luxury, personalised service, and culturally immersive stays.

Global Air Passenger Demand Set to More Than Double by 2050, Says IATA

Global air travel demand is projected to more than double by mid-century, underscoring the long-term resilience and expansion potential of the aviation sector. According to the latest long-term outlook released by International Air Transport Association (IATA), passenger traffic could reach **20.8 trillion Revenue Passenger Kilometres (RPKs) by 2050**, up from approximately **9 trillion RPKs in 2024**, under a mid-range growth scenario.

This trajectory reflects a **compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 3.1 per cent** over the period, signalling sustained expansion despite structural changes in the global aviation landscape.

Multiple Growth Scenarios Reflect Market Uncertainty

IATA's projections outline a range of possible outcomes depending on macroeconomic and industry variables. Under a high-growth scenario, global passenger demand could rise to **21.9**

trillion RPKs by 2050, while a more conservative outlook places demand at **19.5 trillion RPKs**. These scenarios incorporate varying assumptions around economic growth, demographic trends, fuel prices, energy transition pathways and aviation capacity development.

Willie Walsh, Director General of IATA, emphasised the enduring appeal of air travel, noting that demand is expected to expand significantly across all scenarios. He highlighted aviation's broader economic role, pointing out that growth in air connectivity



supports job creation, trade and global development, while also calling for supportive policy frameworks to enable sustainable expansion.

Emerging Markets to Power Future Growth

The report indicates that **growth will be uneven across regions**, with emerging markets expected to drive the next phase of expansion.

- **Asia Pacific** and **Africa** are forecast to be the fastest-growing regions, with CAGRs of approximately **3.8 per cent and 3.6 per cent**, respectively.

- The **Middle East** is also expected to play a significant role, supported by its strategic position as a global transit hub.

- In contrast, more mature markets such as **Europe** and **North America** are projected to grow at comparatively slower rates of **2.5 per cent and 2.8 per cent**.

Despite slower growth, Asia Pacific, Europe and North America are expected to remain the **three largest aviation markets by absolute traffic volumes** in 2050.

Strongest Growth in Inter-Regional Markets

At a route level, the most dynamic growth is anticipated in emerging market corridors. Key high-growth segments include:

- **Intra-Africa routes**, projected to

According to the latest long-term outlook released by International Air Transport Association (IATA), passenger traffic could reach 20.8 trillion Revenue Passenger Kilometres (RPKs) by 2050, up from approximately 9 trillion RPKs in 2024, under a mid-range growth scenario.

expand at up to 5.2 per cent CAGR

- **Africa-Asia Pacific connections**, reflecting deepening economic ties

- **Intra-Asia Pacific travel**, driven by rising middle-class demand and regional connectivity

Conversely, traditional high-traffic corridors such as **intra-Europe** and **Europe-North America** are expected to grow at more modest rates, reflecting market maturity and stabilised demand patterns.

Structural Shifts and Moderating Growth Rates

While the long-term outlook remains robust, IATA notes a gradual moderation in growth rates over time. Historical data shows that global air travel demand grew at:

- **6.1 per cent CAGR (1972-1998)**

- **4.5 per cent CAGR (1998-2024)**

- **3.1 per cent CAGR projected (2024-2050)**

This slowdown reflects increasing market maturity rather than weakening demand, as total passenger volumes continue to rise significantly in absolute terms.

The report also highlights a **lasting structural shift following the COVID-19 pandemic**, with aviation demand unlikely to fully return to its earlier trajectory aligned strictly with global GDP growth. Instead, evolving travel behaviours, sustainability considerations and policy frameworks are expected to shape future demand patterns.

Implications for the Aviation Ecosystem

The projected doubling of passenger demand presents both opportunities and challenges for the aviation industry. Infrastructure development, regulatory harmonisation, sustainable fuel adoption and capacity expansion will be critical to accommodating future growth.

As airlines, airports and governments plan for the decades ahead, the findings reinforce the need for **long-term strategic investment** to ensure that the global aviation system can support rising demand while transitioning toward a more sustainable and efficient future.

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Lufthansa Marks Centenary of Its First Flights with Commemorative Operations from Berlin



Germany's flagship carrier Lufthansa has commemorated a landmark moment in aviation history, celebrating 100 years since its inaugural flights departed from Berlin. The centenary pays tribute to April 6, 1926, when the airline's earliest operations connected the German capital with key European destinations, laying the foundation for what would become one of the world's leading aviation groups.

To honor the occasion, Lufthansa operated special anniversary flights retracing the historic routes first flown a century ago. On the anniversary date, commemorative services departed Berlin bound for Zurich and Cologne—two cities that featured prominently in the airline's original network. These flights served not only as a symbolic nod to the past but also as a showcase of Lufthansa's evolution into a modern, global carrier.

Speaking at the centenary event,

Jens Ritter, Chief Executive Officer of Lufthansa Airlines, highlighted the significance of Berlin in the airline's origins. "Driven by a pioneering spirit, it all began here in Berlin," Ritter said, underscoring the city's role as the birthplace of Lufthansa's operational history and its enduring importance within the airline's network.

As part of the celebrations, Lufthansa also unveiled a Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner bearing the name "Berlin," further cementing the city's historical and contemporary relevance to the airline. The aircraft was formally named by Berlin's Governing Mayor, Kai Wegner, in a ceremony that brought together aviation leaders, government

officials, and industry stakeholders.

The anniversary not only reflects on Lufthansa's storied past but also signals its forward-looking ambitions. By pairing heritage-inspired commemorations with one of the most advanced aircraft in its fleet, Lufthansa is emphasizing its commitment to innovation, sustainability, and premium passenger experience—key pillars shaping the future of aviation, business travel, and global tourism.

As the airline enters its second century, the Berlin celebrations serve as both a tribute to its pioneering beginnings and a reaffirmation of its role in connecting markets, cultures, and economies worldwide.

Meet Boston Appoints Sartha Global Marketing as India Representative to Tap High-Growth Outbound Market

Meeet Boston has appointed Sartha Global Marketing as its official in-market representative in India, marking a strategic move to strengthen its presence in one of the world's fastest-growing outbound travel markets.

The partnership is aimed at boosting visitor arrivals from India while enhancing the visibility of Boston—a leading education, innovation and cultural hub in the northeastern United States. With dedicated representation on the ground, Meet Boston is seeking to deepen engagement with the Indian travel trade, media and consumer segments.

Under the mandate, Sartha Global Marketing will lead public relations, trade outreach and integrated marketing initiatives designed to position Boston as a compelling destination for Indian travellers. The focus will include building stronger relationships with tour operators, increasing brand awareness, and driving demand across both leisure and business travel segments.

The move comes as India emerges as a key international source market for Boston. According to official figures, the city welcomed approximately 106,000 visitors from

India in 2024, making it the third-largest overseas market after the United Kingdom and China. Indian visitors contributed an estimated USD 165 million to the local visitor economy, underscoring the market's growing economic significance.

Industry stakeholders note that Boston's strong appeal among Indian travellers is supported by multiple factors, including a well-established Indian diaspora, robust academic links, and consistent year-round travel demand. The city is home to globally renowned universities, a vibrant cultural scene, and a diverse culinary landscape—elements that resonate strongly with Indian audiences.

Martha Sheridan, President and CEO of Meet Boston, emphasised the importance of the partnership, noting that India represents a high-potential market for the destination. She highlighted recent trade and media engagements in India as evidence of growing interest, expressing confidence that Sartha Global Marketing's local expertise will help elevate Boston's positioning.

"India represents one of the most dynamic and high-growth international in-bound leisure markets



for Boston," added **Meet Boston SVP of Sales and Services Nik Pereira**.

"This partnership with Sartha Global Marketing is an important step in strengthening our presence on the ground. With increasing connectivity, a strong cultural and educational connection, we see tremendous opportunity to welcome more Indian travelers to experience all that Greater Boston has to offer."

Sunil Puri, Joint Managing Director of Sartha Global Marketing, said the destination's blend of history, culture, outdoor experiences, gastronomy and sports makes it highly attractive to Indian visitors.

He added that targeted efforts will be made to build awareness and inspire travel to Boston.

Looking ahead, Boston is also set to gain further global visibility as a host city for the FIFA World Cup 2026, where it will stage multiple matches. The event is expected to act as a catalyst for international arrivals, including from India, further reinforcing the city's appeal on the global tourism map.

With this partnership, Meet Boston is positioning itself to capitalise on India's outbound travel momentum, leveraging local expertise to drive sustained growth and deepen market engagement in the years ahead.

Cape Town International Airport Surpasses 11 Million Passengers in 2025, Signalling Tourism Surge

Cape Town International Airport has achieved a major milestone, recording a historic 11.1 million two-way passengers in 2025, underscoring the strong resurgence of tourism to South Africa and the growing global appeal of Cape Town as a premier travel destination.

According to Airports Company South Africa (ACSA), which manages the country's key aviation hubs, the latest figures surpass 2024 totals and mark the highest annual passenger throughput in the airport's history. The

growth reflects a steady rebound in both international and domestic travel, driven by improved connectivity and rising visitor demand.

International traffic showed particularly strong momentum, with 3.3 million two-way passengers passing through the airport's international terminal in 2025—a 7 percent increase year-on-year. Domestic travel also mirrored this upward trajectory, with passenger volumes rising by 7 percent to reach 7.8 million over the same period.

The airport's performance peaked during the year-end travel season. December 2025 alone recorded a record 1.1 million two-way passengers, an 8 percent increase compared to December 2024. Within this, international passenger traffic rose by 10 percent to 364,000, while domestic travel climbed 7 percent to 754,000 passengers—highlighting sustained demand across both segments.

Industry stakeholders attribute this growth to a coordinated effort to





expand air connectivity and enhance Cape Town's accessibility. Wrenelle Stander, CEO of Wesgro and official spokesperson for Cape Town Air Access, noted that the milestone aligns with the Western Cape's broader ambition to double tourism by 2035 under its Growth for Jobs Strategy. She emphasised that the record-breaking figures demonstrate tangible progress toward achieving this long-term vision.

Looking ahead, the route development pipeline remains robust. Latin American carrier LATAM Airlines is set to launch three weekly flights to Cape Town from July 2026, opening new connections to South America. The 2025/26 summer season has already seen increased frequencies from major

international carriers including United Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Condor, KLM, Norse Atlantic Airways, Air France, TAAG Angola Airlines and Proflight Zambia.

Further strengthening regional connectivity, Air Tanzania has introduced a new triangular route linking Dar es Salaam, Victoria Falls and Cape Town, enhancing access between Southern and East Africa. Meanwhile, leading global carriers such as Emirates, Qatar Airways and Ethiopian Airlines are expected to increase frequencies to Cape Town in 2026, further boosting capacity.

For city officials, the milestone is more than a statistical achievement—it is a reflection of tourism's growing economic significance. James Vos,

Member of the Mayoral Committee for Economic Growth, highlighted the critical role of aviation in driving the city's tourism economy. He noted that increased air access translates directly into higher visitor spending across hotels, restaurants and small businesses, supporting employment and local enterprise.

With tourism already accounting for nearly 7 percent of Cape Town's workforce, the city aims to push this figure beyond 10 percent in the coming years. As new routes are added and passenger numbers continue to climb, Cape Town International Airport is poised to remain a key gateway powering both tourism growth and broader economic development in the region.

EU to Fully Roll Out Entry/Exit System Across External Borders by April 10



points within participating countries are expected to be fully equipped to handle EES procedures, including self-service kiosks and automated gates.

Enhancing Efficiency and Security

The European Commission highlights that the EES is designed to streamline border procedures while strengthening security. By replacing manual passport stamps, the system aims to reduce processing times and improve the overall traveller experience.

At the same time, it introduces enhanced monitoring capabilities, helping authorities detect overstays, identity fraud, and misuse of visa-free travel. The availability of real-time data will also support law enforcement agencies in identifying potential security risks and combating serious cross-border crime.

What It Means for Travellers

For international visitors, the transition to EES will bring both convenience and new procedural requirements. While travellers may benefit from faster processing through automated systems and the option to pre-submit information, they will also need to comply with biometric data collection at entry points.

The system applies to all non-EU nationals, regardless of whether they require a visa or are eligible for visa-free travel within the Schengen area.

As Europe continues to modernise its border infrastructure, the full implementation of the Entry/Exit System signals a new era of digital mobility—balancing seamless travel with heightened security across one of the world's most visited regions.



The European Commission has confirmed that the European Union's long-anticipated Entry/Exit System (EES) will be fully implemented across all external borders by April 10, marking a significant transformation in how non-European travellers enter and exit the region.

The system, which has been gradually introduced since October last year, will now be operational across all participating countries, including EU member states as well as Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein—all part of the wider Schengen travel area.

A Digital Shift in Border Management

The Entry/Exit System represents a major shift from traditional passport stamping to a fully automated, digital border control process. Designed as an IT-based system, EES will record the entry, exit, and refusal of entry of non-EU nationals travelling for short stays—defined as up to 90 days within a 180-day period across the Schengen zone.

Under the new system, travellers' biometric data, including fingerprints and facial images, will be collected and stored securely. Each crossing of an external border will be electronically logged, enabling authorities to monitor travel patterns more accurately and efficiently.

Phased Rollout to Full Implementation

Since its initial rollout in October, the system has been introduced in stages at various border checkpoints. This phased approach has allowed authorities and infrastructure providers to adapt to the new technology, ensuring operational readiness ahead of full-scale deployment.

With the April 10 deadline, all external border crossing

Indian Visitor Numbers to the United States Dip 6 % in 2025 After Years of Growth

For the first time since the postpandemic rebound began, Indian arrivals to the United States declined in 2025, signalling a notable shift in one of the most dynamic outbound travel markets. According to data released by the United States' **National Travel and Tourism Office (NTTO)**, the total number of Indian visitors dropped to **2.06 million in 2025**, down nearly **6 per cent from 2.19 million in 2024** — a decline of roughly **130,000 travellers**.

This downturn comes after several years of **doubledigit growth** for Indian outbound travel to the U.S., which had accelerated strongly following pandemic disruptions. Despite the 2025 decrease, the total arrival figure remains higher than any year before 2024, and significantly above preCOVID levels when **1.47 million Indians visited the U.S. in 2019**.

Monthly Trends Reflect Seasonal Shifts

A breakdown of the NTTO monthly data shows that Indian arrivals in 2025 exceeded 2024 levels only in **January**

and **April**, with most other months posting modest singledigit declines. These variations illustrate how travel patterns, visa processing timelines, and seasonal preferences can influence inbound tourism figures.

Broader Decline in U.S. International Tourism

The dip in Indian visitor numbers mirrors a wider trend of subdued international travel to the United States last year. Overall **international visitor arrivals to the U.S. declined about 5.5 per cent in 2025**, totalling approximately **68.3 million international visitors** — equivalent to around 86 per cent of prepandemic 2019 levels.

According to NTTO data, some of the largest international source markets — including Mexico, Canada, the United Kingdom, Brazil and Japan — continued to lead overall arrivals, representing nearly 60 per cent of total inbound visitor volume. On the other hand, markets such as Canada experienced sharp reductions, attributed in part to diplomatic challenges and shifting travel preferences.

Context Behind Shifting Travel Patterns

The Indian outbound market had been one of the fastestgrowing segments for U.S. tourism in the years immediately following the pandemic, fueled by rising disposable incomes, expanding air connectivity, and demand for longhaul experiences. However, recent visitor trends indicate a plateau and slight contraction in 2025, consistent with broader moderation in international travel to the U.S. Factors such as global economic conditions, evolving travel policies, and competitive alternatives in other regions may be contributing to the slowdown.

Seasonal nuances in the data also reflect how specific months, such as June and July, experienced sharper drops — including an 8 per cent decline in Indian arrivals in June 2025 compared with June 2024 — breaking a longstanding pattern of yearoveryear increases for that month.

The Road Ahead for Indian Outbound Travel

While the decline in 2025 marks a pause in the prolonged growth trajectory, Indian travel to the U.S. remains robust relative to historical figures. With evolving global travel dynamics, continued economic growth in India and renewed marketing efforts by destination and tourism bodies, the U.S. will likely continue to be an important destination for Indian travellers — particularly those visiting friends and relatives, conducting business, or pursuing educational opportunities.

Tourism analysts will be watching 2026 figures closely to assess whether this decline represents a shortterm fluctuation or the start of a longer trend in international travel patterns.





Cape Town Records Over 121,000 February Arrivals as Global Travel Demand Strengthens: StatsSA

Cape Town continues to reinforce its status as one of Africa’s most sought-after tourism destinations, recording 121,612 international arrivals at Cape Town International Airport in February, according to the latest data released by Statistics South Africa (StatsSA).

The figures highlight sustained

global demand for the destination, with Europe maintaining its dominance as the primary source market, while emerging regions—particularly in Asia—are beginning to show encouraging growth, pointing to a gradual diversification of inbound travel.

StatsSA data reveals that European

travellers accounted for 72.5 percent of all overseas arrivals during the month, with 161,707 visitors from the region entering South Africa. Of these, a significant 90,427 travellers arrived directly in Cape Town, underlining the city’s enduring appeal among long-haul European tourists.

Key European source markets



included the United Kingdom and Germany, which contributed 45,404 and 39,866 visitors respectively, followed by the Netherlands and France. The continued strength of these markets reflects well-established travel patterns, supported by strong air connectivity and destination familiarity.

At the same time, the data points to evolving global travel dynamics. Rising outbound travel from Asian economies is beginning to translate into higher visitor numbers for South Africa. In February, 3,792 travellers from Asia flew directly into Cape Town, while the broader region accounted for 15,804 arrivals nationwide. This trend is being driven in part by expanding middle-class populations and increasing propensity for long-haul travel in countries such as India and China.

Air connectivity remains a critical enabler of this growth. An overwhelming 94.6 percent of overseas tourists arrived by air, underscoring

the importance of international flight networks in sustaining inbound tourism. Overall, South Africa recorded 2.7 million travellers passing through its ports of entry in February, including 2.1 million foreign travellers and 594,114 returning residents.

Regionally, Europe led inbound tourism, followed by North America with 28,206 visitors, Asia (15,804), Central and South America (8,146), Australasia (7,111), and the Middle East (2,004). In total, foreign arrivals reached 1.1 million during the month, alongside 935,359 departures and 33,875 transit travellers.

The latest figures reaffirm Cape Town's resilience and global appeal, while also signalling a broader shift in travel patterns. As traditional markets remain robust and new ones steadily expand, the city is well-positioned to benefit from a more diverse and dynamic international visitor base in the years ahead.





Thailand Reinforces Sustainable Tourism Leadership with Global Conference in Phuket

Thailand is set to strengthen its global standing in sustainable tourism as Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), in collaboration with international and domestic partners, confirms its readiness to host the Global Sustainable Tourism Conference 2026 in Phuket from April 21 to 24, 2026.

The announcement reflects a coordinated effort between TAT, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, local authorities, and industry stakeholders to position Thailand as a leading destination for responsible travel and high-impact global events. The conference is expected to bring together policymakers, tourism leaders, academics, and sustainability experts from over 30 countries.

A Strategic Milestone for Sustainable Tourism

The hosting of GSTC 2026 marks a significant step in Thailand's long-term

tourism strategy, which increasingly prioritises environmental stewardship, community engagement, and economic resilience. According to TAT leadership, the event will serve as a platform to advance global dialogue on sustainable tourism practices while reinforcing Thailand's commitment to international standards.

Phuket, one of the country's most prominent tourism hubs, has been selected as the host destination due to its established infrastructure, global connectivity, and ongoing sustainability initiatives. Local authorities have implemented comprehensive preparations, including enhanced safety protocols, public health readiness, and strengthened environmental management systems.

Phuket's Readiness on the Global Stage

Hosting the conference underscores Phuket's evolution



from a mass tourism hotspot to a destination focused on quality, sustainability, and resilience. The province has undertaken coordinated efforts involving tourism police, administrative bodies, and environmental agencies to ensure seamless event delivery.

Initiatives such as improved waste management systems, public space maintenance, and sustainable urban planning are central to Phuket's preparations. These measures not only support the conference but also contribute to long-term destination management and community well-being.

A Platform for Global Collaboration

The conference will be hosted across key venues, including leading

hospitality properties in Phuket, and is expected to attract around 600 delegates. The programme will focus on critical themes shaping the future of tourism, including:

- Carbon reduction and climate action
- Sustainable destination management
- Biodiversity conservation
- Community-based tourism development
- Technology-driven solutions for green travel

In line with its sustainability focus, the event will adopt responsible event management practices, including zero-waste initiatives, reduced paper usage through digital solutions, and the use of environmentally friendly materials.

Driving Long-Term Impact

Beyond its immediate economic contribution, GSTC 2026 is expected to deliver lasting benefits for Thailand's tourism ecosystem. The event will facilitate knowledge exchange, strengthen international partnerships, and enhance the capabilities of local tourism operators.

By aligning global expertise with local implementation, Thailand aims to create a more balanced tourism model—one that supports economic growth while preserving cultural and natural assets.

As global travel continues to evolve, Thailand's proactive approach positions it as a benchmark destination where sustainability and tourism development go hand in hand, offering a blueprint for other destinations navigating similar transitions.

ATM 2026 rescheduled to August at the Dubai World Trade Centre



Organisers of Arabian Travel Market have announced a significant change to the schedule for its 2026 edition, rescheduling the event to **August 17–20, 2026**, instead of the previously planned May 4–7 dates at the Dubai World Trade Centre. The decision reflects evolving considerations around safety and participation certainty for the global travel community.

Now in its 33rd year, Arabian Travel Market (ATM) remains one of the foremost global platforms for the travel, tourism and hospitality sectors. The event traditionally draws thousands of industry professionals, including destination marketing organisations, airlines, technology providers, hospitality groups and travel suppliers from across the world.

Prioritising Safety and Attendance Flexibility

Event organiser RX, a global exhibitions and events company, confirmed that the date shift aims

to place the highest priority on the safety and wellbeing of attendees, partners and staff, while also providing greater confidence and flexibility for international participants planning their travel and engagement at the show.

Organisers highlighted that the rescheduling will allow exhibitors and delegates more time to adjust logistics and travel plans, particularly in a context of ongoing regional and industry uncertainties that have affected travel trade calendars. The revised dates are intended to support stronger global attendance and meaningful engagement across the key sectors represented at ATM.

A Central Forum for Travel Industry Engagement

Arabian Travel Market has long served as a strategic meeting point for the broader travel ecosystem, enabling destinations and brands to showcase new products, forge partnerships, and explore emerging trends in inbound and outbound travel. The platform

also traditionally hosts a range of colocated events, including insights on travel technology and business events management, reinforcing Dubai's role as a hub for international tourism commerce.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said: "Arabian Travel Market has long served as a vital platform for bringing the global travel and tourism community together in Dubai, enabling destinations, suppliers and industry leaders to connect, collaborate and shape the future of the sector. "The safety and well-being of our customers, partners and colleagues remains our highest priority, and the decision to reschedule ATM 2026 to August reflects our commitment to ensuring that everyone can participate at this important industry gathering. We look forward to welcoming the international travel community back to Dubai later this year."

Strategic Implications for the Travel Sector

The postponement of ATM 2026 is expected to have a ripple effect on related events and planning cycles within the travel industry, especially for stakeholders across the Middle East, Europe and Asia who depend on the show as a premier venue for networking, product launches and business development. By shifting the dates to August, organisers aim to maximise participation and provide a more stable lead time for international travel arrangements.

As the event approaches, participants will be looking to ATM 2026 to deliver renewed opportunities for growth, partnership and insight into the evolving travel landscape, reinforcing its longstanding status as a cornerstone event in the global tourism calendar.

Thailand Travel Mart Plus 2026 to Boost Global Tourism Partnerships in Pattaya



Thailand is set to reinforce its position as a leading global tourism and MICE destination with the return of Thailand Travel Mart Plus (TTM+) 2026, the country's flagship B2B travel trade event. Organised by the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the 23rd edition of the event will be held from June 10 to 12, 2026, at the NICE Pattaya Convention and Exhibition Center in Chon Buri.

Positioned as a key platform for international tourism collaboration, TTM+ 2026 is expected to bring together over 400 Thai tourism suppliers and an equal number of international buyers from more than 50 countries. The event is projected to facilitate upwards of 11,000 pre-scheduled business meetings, underscoring its role as a catalyst for global partnerships and tourism investment.

Strengthening Thailand's Global Tourism Position

According to Thapanee Kiatphaibool, Governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the event plays a central role in connecting global travel buyers with the breadth and diversity of Thailand's

tourism offerings. Hosting the event in Chon Buri allows stakeholders to experience a wide spectrum of products, ranging from established destinations to emerging tourism clusters.

The 2026 edition will be held under the theme "Healing is the New Luxury," reflecting a strategic shift towards wellness-driven, experience-led travel. The theme aligns with Thailand's broader "New Thailand" vision, which prioritises sustainable tourism development, enhanced service standards, and long-term value creation for local communities.

Platform for Innovation, Sustainability and Growth

TTM+ 2026 will feature a comprehensive programme including product showcases, curated networking sessions, and knowledge-sharing forums. These discussions will focus on key global tourism trends such as sustainability, digital transformation, and evolving traveller preferences, providing valuable insights for industry stakeholders.

The event is also expected to highlight Thailand's commitment to

responsible tourism practices, with a strong emphasis on environmental sustainability, cultural preservation, and community engagement.

Chon Buri Showcases Diverse Tourism Experiences

The choice of Chon Buri as the host destination reflects Thailand's intent to promote regional tourism beyond traditional hotspots. Known for its coastal attractions and proximity to Pattaya, the province offers a blend of leisure, culture and business infrastructure, making it an ideal setting for an international trade event of this scale.

Delegates attending TTM+ 2026 will have the opportunity to participate in curated experiences that showcase local culture, craftsmanship and nature-based tourism. These immersive elements are designed to complement business interactions, reinforcing Thailand's positioning as a destination that seamlessly integrates commerce with meaningful travel experiences.

Driving Economic Impact and Industry Confidence

Beyond networking and partnerships, TTM+ 2026 is expected to generate significant economic benefits across Thailand's tourism value chain. Increased business activity, strengthened international ties and enhanced destination visibility are likely to contribute to sustained growth in visitor arrivals and tourism revenue.

As global travel demand continues to evolve, Thailand's proactive approach through platforms like TTM+ highlights its commitment to innovation, resilience and sustainable development. The event is poised to play a pivotal role in shaping the future trajectory of Thailand's tourism sector while fostering deeper international collaboration.

Sanya to Host PATA Annual Summit 2027, Spotlighting Asia Pacific Tourism Trends



Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) has announced that its 2027 Annual Summit will be hosted in Sanya, a leading coastal destination in China. The three-day event, scheduled from May 17 to 19, will be in partnership with the Sanya Tourism Board, bringing together global tourism leaders, policymakers and industry stakeholders.

According to PATA, the summit will feature a comprehensive programme designed to address key issues shaping the Asia Pacific travel landscape. Central to the event will be a one-and-a-half-day conference focusing on emerging trends, challenges and opportunities across the region's tourism sector. The agenda will also include Executive Board and Board meetings, a Chapter meeting, a Youth Symposium and a series of technical tours aimed at showcasing local tourism offerings and best practices.

For Sanya, hosting the summit represents a strategic opportunity to elevate its profile among international tourism stakeholders. The Sanya Tourism Board noted that the event will enable the city to highlight its diverse tourism portfolio while strengthening engagement with the wider Asia Pacific travel community.

The announcement comes amid strong tourism momentum for the destination. In November 2025, Sanya recorded more than 2.24 million overnight domestic and international visitors, reflecting a steady recovery in travel demand alongside ongoing efforts to expand air connectivity and visitor infrastructure.

Noor Ahmad Hamid, CEO of PATA, emphasised the long-standing collaboration between the association and the Sanya Tourism Board, noting that the destination's world-class infrastructure and diverse offerings—ranging from cultural experiences and

wellness tourism to community-based initiatives—make it well-suited to host a global industry gathering of this scale.

A spokesperson for the Sanya Tourism Board described the opportunity as both an honour and a platform to showcase the city's distinctive appeal. Known for its tropical coastline, pristine beaches and rich cultural heritage, Sanya aims to leverage the summit to promote sustainable tourism development while fostering international partnerships.

As one of the Asia Pacific's key tourism forums, the PATA Annual Summit is expected to draw delegates from across the globe, providing a platform for dialogue, collaboration and knowledge exchange. With Sanya as host, the 2027 edition is set to highlight not only regional industry priorities but also the growing prominence of emerging destinations within the global tourism landscape.

Seven Sisters Cliffs Designated as England's Newest National Nature Reserve



In a significant move to safeguard one of the United Kingdom's most iconic coastal landscapes, Natural England has officially designated the Seven Sisters Cliffs as England's newest National Nature Reserve. The announcement recognises the ecological, geological and cultural importance of the site, located within the South Downs National Park, and reinforces ongoing efforts to protect and enhance the country's natural heritage.

Spanning approximately **1,500 hectares**, the newly declared reserve encompasses dramatic chalk cliffs, rolling downland, river valleys and coastal ecosystems, making it one of the most visually striking and environmentally significant landscapes in southern England.

A Landscape Shaped by Millions of Years

The Seven Sisters Cliffs are renowned for their distinctive **chalk formations**, created over millions of years from the compressed remains of ancient marine organisms. This geological foundation forms part of a vast chalk aquifer system — one of the largest in Britain — which plays a crucial role in supplying **clean drinking water** to surrounding

communities while supporting a range of interconnected ecosystems.

Flowing through the reserve, the Cuckmere River adds to the region's ecological and scenic value as it meanders through floodplains before meeting the English Channel.

Biodiversity Hotspot with Rare Habitats

The designation highlights the area's importance as a biodiversity hotspot, supporting **globally rare habitats** such as chalk grasslands, heathlands and floodplain meadows. These ecosystems provide refuge to a diverse array of species, including the chalkhill blue butterfly, skylark, yellowhammer and bee orchid.

According to Tony Juniper, the reserve represents a "nature-rich landscape" that combines ecological diversity with essential natural resources. He emphasised that the new status will create a more connected and resilient environment for wildlife while strengthening conservation efforts across the region.

Balancing Conservation and Tourism

The Seven Sisters area attracts **up to one million visitors annually**, making it one of England's most popular coastal destinations. With its

new designation, authorities aim to strike a balance between **enhancing public access** and **carefully managing visitor impact**, ensuring the landscape remains protected for future generations.

Mary Creagh described the site as one of England's most treasured landscapes, highlighting its ecological importance and role in supporting both biodiversity and local communities.

Part of a National Conservation Vision

The reserve forms part of the **King's Series of National Nature Reserves**, an initiative supported by Charles III, which aims to create or expand **25 nature reserves by 2028**. Seven Sisters becomes the **13th site** in this programme, contributing to a growing network that spans approximately **17,000 hectares** and benefits communities across the country.

Management of the reserve will be delivered through a collaborative partnership involving organisations such as the National Trust, Forestry England, Sussex Wildlife Trust and the South Downs National Park Authority.

Siôn McGeever highlighted the importance of this partnership in delivering long-term outcomes, including improved biodiversity, cleaner water systems, healthier soils and stronger community engagement.

A Model for Sustainable Tourism

The designation of Seven Sisters as a National Nature Reserve not only secures protection for a landscape of global significance but also positions it as a model for **sustainable tourism and conservation-led development**. By integrating ecological preservation with visitor experience, the initiative underscores the growing importance of nature-based tourism in shaping the future of travel.

Italy's Cultural Tourism Drives Strong Demand in 2025, Reinforcing Global Appeal



Italy's enduring appeal as a global cultural destination remained firmly intact in 2025, with heritage, gastronomy and immersive travel experiences continuing to shape visitor demand. According to a joint analysis by The Data Appeal Company and Mabrian, the country recorded 16.8 million cultural tourism arrivals during the year, underlining the resilience and depth of its tourism economy.

The report highlights a particularly strong performance during peak summer, with June alone accounting for more than 59 million overnight stays and generating a tourism surplus of €3.6 billion. This growth reflects

the sustained global interest in Italy's cultural assets, supported by its 61 UNESCO World Heritage Sites and a diverse offering that blends art, history, cuisine and local traditions.

Culture and Cuisine Lead Travel Motivations

Cultural experiences remain the primary driver of travel to Italy. Between September 2024 and 2025, 34.7 per cent of international visitors cited arts and heritage as their main motivation for travel, followed by gastronomy at 16.2 per cent. Other contributing factors included family travel (9.9 per cent), nature (8.9 per cent), shopping

(8.2 per cent) and active lifestyle experiences (8.1 per cent).

The data also reveals that cultural tourism in Italy is largely social in nature, with couples accounting for 43 per cent of travellers and families representing 28 per cent. Solo travel continues to gain traction, rising to 16 per cent, while group travel makes up 12 per cent of total visitors.

Iconic Landmarks Continue to Dominate

Italy's most recognised cultural landmarks continue to attract high engagement and strong visitor sentiment. In Rome, the Trevi Fountain

and the Colosseum remain among the most visited attractions, with both recording significant growth in visitor reviews and maintaining high satisfaction scores.

Other leading attractions include Milan Cathedral in Milan, as well as the Pantheon and St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City. Together, Rome and Vatican City account for the majority of Italy's top cultural attractions, reinforcing their central role in the country's tourism landscape.

Museums and cultural institutions also continue to perform strongly. The Vatican Museums and Uffizi Gallery remain key draws, while destinations such as the Pompeii Archaeological Park and Leaning Tower of Pisa maintain steady global interest.

Emerging Destinations and Changing Preferences

Beyond the major cultural hubs, secondary cities and lesser-explored

destinations are gaining traction. Cities such as Siena, Assisi, Bari and Caserta are reporting rising visitor satisfaction, indicating a gradual diversification of tourist flows. Attractions like Juliet's House in Verona and the Museo Cappella Sansevero in Naples have also recorded notable growth in engagement, reflecting increasing interest in narrative-driven and experiential tourism.

The report points to a broader shift in traveller expectations, with a growing demand for interactive and immersive experiences, particularly within museums and heritage sites. Culinary experiences continue to score highly in visitor satisfaction, achieving one of the strongest sentiment ratings across all categories.

Opportunities and Challenges Ahead

While Italy's cultural tourism sector remains robust, the analysis highlights

ongoing challenges related to pricing sensitivity, infrastructure and visitor management. Concerns around queue management, cleanliness and amenities such as Wi-Fi were noted, particularly among domestic travellers, while international visitors continue to prioritise artistic and emotional value.

At the same time, evolving travel patterns suggest a gradual shift toward off-peak travel, with shoulder and low-season periods gaining popularity due to more favourable pricing and milder weather conditions. This trend is expected to support more balanced tourism distribution across the year.

Overall, Italy's cultural tourism performance in 2025 underscores its continued global leadership in heritage-driven travel. By combining iconic landmarks with evolving experiential offerings, the country remains well-positioned to meet the changing expectations of international travellers while sustaining long-term growth.





FIFA World Cup 2026 Set to Drive High-Value Tourism Spend in the US: U.S. Travel Association



International visitors to the FIFA World Cup 2026 could spend over USD 5,000 per person

The FIFA World Cup 2026 is poised to deliver a significant boost to the United States' travel economy, with international visitors expected to spend more than USD 5,000 per trip—substantially higher than average inbound travel expenditure—according to a new study by the U.S. Travel Association (USTA).

The report positions the tournament as a high-impact economic opportunity, highlighting that visitors are likely to spend approximately 1.7 times more than typical international travellers. In addition to higher spending, travel



patterns are also expected to shift, with one in three visitors planning to stay in the country for more than two weeks—well above the average duration of international visits.

Crucially, the benefits of the event are projected to extend beyond host cities. More than 80 percent of surveyed fans indicated a willingness to travel outside primary gateway destinations, suggesting that tourism revenue could be widely distributed across secondary cities and regional destinations. This trend could help amplify the broader economic impact of the tournament across the country.

The study draws on travel intent data from key source markets across North America, Europe and Latin America, and underscores strong underlying demand for the event. However, it also points to several challenges that could influence final visitor numbers and overall economic outcomes.

Safety concerns remain a notable factor among potential travellers, alongside apprehensions around entry procedures. Approximately 34 percent of respondents expressed concern about possible increases in visa fees, while 32 percent cited unease over proposed social media disclosure requirements associated with travel authorisation systems.

In response, the U.S. Travel Association has called for clearer communication around visa processes and entry requirements, as well as stronger coordination between government agencies and industry stakeholders to ensure a seamless visitor experience.

The organisation has also emphasised the need to restore funding for Brand USA, the country's official destination marketing body, and to address entry barriers in order to fully capitalise on the surge in global attention the tournament will bring.

According to **Geoff Freeman**,

President and CEO of USTA, the World Cup represents a defining moment for the nation's travel and tourism sector. He noted that visitors are not only attending matches but are also seeking to experience the diversity of destinations across the United States—creating opportunities for sustained economic impact. The report concludes that while demand for the FIFA World Cup 2026 remains strong, the scale of its economic contribution will ultimately depend on how effectively the United States addresses policy concerns, enhances visitor confidence, and prepares its travel infrastructure to accommodate the influx.

As one of the largest sporting events ever hosted in the country, the tournament offers a rare opportunity to showcase the United States on a global stage—provided the enabling conditions are in place to welcome the world.

Norwegian Cruise

Line Targets Indian Travellers

with New Ships and Brand Strategy

Cruise operator Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) is intensifying its focus on the Indian travel market, leveraging fleet expansion, refreshed brand positioning and strengthened trade collaborations to capture growing demand for international cruising. With a strategic emphasis on flycruise itineraries to destinations such as Europe, the Caribbean and Alaska, NCL is positioning cruise holidays as a flexible, multigenerational travel option for Indian guests.

The renewed push coincides with increasing global interest in cruising and reflects the company's broader ambition to deepen engagement with travel partners and consumers in South Asia, amid a competitive international cruise landscape.

New Ships Drive Momentum

Senior Director of Sales Strategy and Operations, Asia Pacific, Damian Borg, said 2025 was a strong year for NCL globally and across the Asia Pacific region, with India emerging as a key contributor. He highlighted the performance of the **Norwegian Aqua**,

part of the Primaclass series, which surpassed the commercial results of its predecessors — *Prima* and *Viva* — following its deployment in the Caribbean. The ship's expanded deck space, larger cabins and enhanced dining venues have been credited with elevating guest satisfaction and booking performance.

Looking ahead, the next Prima

Plus class vessel, **Norwegian Luna**, will continue this evolution with approximately 500 more berths than earlier Primaclass ships, catering to increased demand for new experiences. Another sister ship, **Norwegian Aura**, scheduled for launch in June 2027, is already open for sale and is set to become **NCL's largest vessel to date**.





Although Norwegian Aura will accommodate around 3,800 passengers — slightly fewer than some of the larger Breakaway Plus class ships that exceed 4,000 guests — Borg noted that the design prioritises passenger comfort, expansive recreational areas and diverse onboard experiences over sheer capacity.

Across the broader fleet, including sister brands such as Regent and Oceania, **17 ships are currently on order**, signalling a long-term commitment to fleet growth and innovation. Further ship classes planned from 2030 onwards are expected to introduce additional design enhancements and guest amenities.

Global Deployment with an Indian Focus

While the Caribbean remains a core deployment region due to its scale and established demand base, NCL plans greater regional diversity as its fleet expands. The company's strategy includes repositioning ships from Europe to Miami for Caribbean seasons and exploring enhanced deployment opportunities in the Asia Pacific as market conditions evolve.

Borg reported strong interest from Indian travellers in **European itineraries**, particularly in the Mediterranean and Northern Europe, with Alaska also emerging as a sought-after destination. Notably, interest in **Caribbean sailings** has grown, especially for shorter three to four-night cruises that offer accessible international experiences following the pandemic recovery.

Despite local demand for shorter sailings closer to India, Borg noted that NCL's global model centres on **international flycruise experiences**, tailored to travellers with longer vacation windows and a willingness to explore beyond regional waters. He emphasised that NCL's flycruise strategy encourages travel agents to present cruise options alongside traditional long-haul destinations such as the U.S. and Europe, thereby positioning cruising as a compelling alternative for global travel.

MultiGenerational Travel and Demographic Trends

NCL's offerings resonate strongly with **multigenerational travel groups**, with families appreciating the convenience and variety that cruise holidays provide. Additionally, the **60plus age segment** has emerged as a key contributor to demand, driven by preference for premium experiences, destination variety and longer holiday durations.

Brand Refresh and Market Positioning

A central element of NCL's India strategy is a refreshed global brand platform, **"It's Different Out Here,"**



which replaces the previous *More* campaign. The new messaging seeks to return to NCL's roots of **freestyle cruising** — emphasising choice, casual onboard environments, flexible dining times, port-intensive itineraries and longer time ashore in destination ports.

Borg explained that earlier value-driven messaging had blurred the clarity of what distinguishes NCL, prompting a shift back to a platform that articulates the brand's core differentiators. The refreshed identity includes a softer visual palette, a revamped website with improved functionality, and upcoming AI-driven features to enhance customer engagement and trip planning. Early feedback from travel partners indicates improved digital engagement and stronger lead generation.

Trade Partnerships and Agents at the Core

Trade partnerships remain foundational to NCL's India strategy, with approximately **80 percent of bookings generated through travel agents** and 20 per cent via

direct channels. Recognising the importance of agents, NCL has made structural changes to incentivise the trade, including the removal of **noncommissionable fares (NCFs)** and converting those earnings into commissionable revenue, providing agents with improved margin potential.

Borg outlined efforts to engage more deeply with subagents through webinars, training programmes and enhanced communication, with the objective of increasing product knowledge and sales confidence within the broader travel distribution ecosystem.

Product, Itineraries and Consumer Appeal

While new ships attract attention, Borg stressed that NCL's **existing fleet remains a valuable part of the overall offering**, with many vessels recently refurbished to ensure consistency in design, service and onboard experience. He noted that Indian travellers often show a preference for newer ships, but that well-executed experiences on older ships continue to drive positive guest

satisfaction and repeat bookings.

For the 2026–27 season, NCL has introduced **shorter, seven-day European itineraries** designed to align with Indian travel patterns, featuring **port-intensive schedules with minimal sea days and extended time ashore**. These itineraries have generated strong interest, particularly for departures in the popular shoulder months of September and October.

LongTerm Outlook

With its growing global fleet and renewed strategic focus on India, NCL is positioning itself to capture a larger share of Indian outbound cruise demand. The expansion of Prima Plus and successor ship classes, a sharpened brand identity, and deepened travel trade engagement together signal a long-term commitment to the market. As cruise interest continues to evolve, NCL's strategic investments and product innovations aim to make cruising a compelling choice for Indian travellers seeking global exploration.

Viking Marks Major Milestone with Float-Out of World's First Hydrogen-Powered Cruise Ship

In a defining moment for sustainable maritime innovation, Viking has announced the float-out of the *Viking Libra*, the world's first hydrogen-powered cruise ship capable of operating with zero emissions. The milestone, achieved at the Ancona shipyard of Fincantieri, represents the vessel's first contact with water and signals its transition into the final phase of construction.

Scheduled for delivery in November 2026, the *Viking Libra* will embark on its inaugural season with itineraries across the Mediterranean and Northern Europe—two regions increasingly focused on sustainable tourism and stricter environmental standards.

The float-out ceremony, a longstanding maritime tradition, marks a critical step in shipbuilding. Initiated by the ceremonial cutting of a cord to allow water into the dry dock, the process unfolded over two days before the vessel was fully afloat. The ship will now be transferred to an outfitting dock, where final construction, systems integration, and interior design will be completed.

Speaking at the event, **Torstein Hagen, Chairman and CEO of Viking**, underscored the strategic and environmental significance of the project. He emphasized that the company's ship design philosophy has long prioritized fuel efficiency and sustainability, with the *Viking Libra* representing its most ambitious step yet. By investing in hydrogen propulsion, Hagen noted, Viking is advancing a "principled choice" toward achieving true zero-emission cruising.

Designed in line with Viking's signature small-ship concept, the *Viking Libra* will have a gross tonnage of approximately 54,300 tons and accommodate up to 998 guests across



499 staterooms. While maintaining the refined Scandinavian design and destination-focused ethos of Viking's ocean fleet, the vessel introduces a breakthrough hybrid propulsion system. Combining liquefied hydrogen with advanced fuel cells, the ship will be capable of generating up to six megawatts of power, enabling silent, emission-free navigation—particularly critical for environmentally sensitive regions.

This next-generation technology is being delivered in collaboration with Isotta Fraschini Motori, a Fincantieri subsidiary specializing in fuel cell innovation. The propulsion system positions the *Viking Libra* at the forefront of a broader industry shift toward decarbonization and responsible tourism.

The company's commitment to hydrogen does not end here.

Its subsequent vessel, the *Viking Astrea*, currently under construction and slated for delivery in 2027, will also feature hydrogen-powered capabilities, reinforcing Viking's long-term investment in sustainable fleet development.

Beyond technological innovation, Viking continues to solidify its position as a leader in the premium travel segment. The brand's focused approach—marketed as catering "For The Thinking Person™"—has resonated strongly with discerning travelers. As global tourism increasingly prioritizes sustainability without compromising experience, the float-out of the *Viking Libra* signals a pivotal shift. For the cruise industry—and for travelers seeking environmentally responsible journeys—it marks the arrival of a new era where innovation and exploration sail hand in hand.

Virgin Voyages

to Debut Indian Fine Dining Concept 'Ariya' Aboard Valiant Lady

In a move reflecting the rising global appreciation for Indian cuisine, Virgin Voyages has announced the launch of an all-new fine dining restaurant, *Ariya*, aboard its ship *Valiant Lady*. The concept, developed in collaboration with acclaimed chef Maneet Chauhan, is set to debut in May following the vessel's scheduled dry dock refurbishment.

Positioned as a contemporary interpretation of India's diverse culinary heritage, *Ariya* has been created in partnership with Indie Culinaire and aims to deliver a refined dining experience that celebrates the depth and regional richness of Indian gastronomy. The menu is designed to traverse the country's culinary landscape, blending saffron-infused classics with coastal flavours and

vibrant regional specialities, presented with modern finesse.

The restaurant's name carries a personal and historical narrative. According to the company, *Ariya* was the great-great-grandmother of Richard Branson, chairman of the Virgin Group, and is said to have originated from the coastal town of Cuddalore. Her legacy as a traveller who embraced cultural exchange through food forms the conceptual foundation of the dining experience, symbolising the idea that cuisine can transcend borders and connect cultures.

Each evening, *Ariya* will transform the ship's existing dining venue, *Razzle Dazzle*, into a 220-seat immersive restaurant space. The interiors draw inspiration from the vibrancy of Indian spice markets, incorporating



layered textures, warm wood tones, and accents of hammered metal and woven cane. The design seeks to evoke both intimacy and energy, creating a setting that reflects India's rich sensory traditions.

Distinct spatial elements further enhance the experience, including private booth seating inspired by Cuddalore's coastal charm and a semi-private dining area designed to resemble the intricate detailing



of a traditional jewellery box. A central feature bar complements the ambience, accompanied by a curated soundtrack blending Bollywood, Punjabi pop and global music influences.

Ariya represents the latest addition to Virgin Voyages' portfolio of chef-led dining concepts, which the brand has consistently positioned as a key differentiator in the cruise industry. The introduction of a high-end

Indian restaurant underscores the growing international demand for authentic yet elevated Indian culinary experiences.

Commenting on the launch, Nirmal Saverimuttu, CEO of Virgin Voyages, emphasised that Ariya marks a significant evolution in the brand's culinary journey, highlighting its commitment to delivering distinctive and globally inspired dining at sea. Chef Levi Mezick, Senior Director of Culinary

Programme Development, added that the restaurant aims to showcase Indian cuisine at its finest, offering guests a sensory experience defined by bold spices, layered flavours and innovative presentation.

With Ariya, Virgin Voyages not only expands its gastronomic offerings but also reinforces the global positioning of Indian cuisine as a sophisticated and compelling element of contemporary luxury travel experiences.



Cruise Tourism Generates USD 98.5 Billion for Global Economy, Emerges as Catalyst for Sustainable Growth: WTTC



Cruise tourism is fast consolidating its position as a major engine of global economic growth and community development, contributing an estimated USD 98.5 billion to global GDP while supporting 1.8 million jobs worldwide, according to a new report by the World Travel &

Tourism Council (WTTC).

The report underscores the sector's expanding role beyond leisure travel, highlighting its growing influence in strengthening local economies, generating employment, and creating long-term value for coastal and port destinations. As per WTTC, cruise tourism today stands as a significant enabler of inclusive economic opportunity, benefiting communities across the tourism value chain.

In 2024 alone, the cruise sector delivered a total economic output of USD 199 billion globally, while contributing USD 60.1 billion in wages—figures that reflect both its scale and its socio-economic impact. A substantial USD 93 billion in direct cruise-related expenditure flowed into local economies, supporting entrepreneurs, small businesses, and micro-enterprises that form the backbone of tourism-driven regions.

The report, drawing on data from Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), also reveals the sector's strong multiplier effect on destination marketing and repeat visitation. More than 60 percent of cruise travellers return to destinations they first encountered via cruise itineraries, reinforcing the industry's role in sustaining long-term tourism demand and deepening destination engagement.

A key highlight is the sector's robust employment footprint. Cruise tourism supports over 1.4 million onshore jobs globally, with one full-time job created for every 20 cruise passengers—demonstrating a direct link between visitor volumes and livelihood generation in host destinations.

Beyond economic metrics, the WTTC report outlines cruise tourism's broader societal contributions across seven strategic pillars: employment and skills development, diversity and inclusion, community enrichment, cultural preservation, infrastructure development, environmental innovation, and crisis support. These dimensions collectively position the sector as a holistic contributor to sustainable tourism growth.

More than 60 percent of cruise travellers return to destinations they first encountered via cruise itineraries, reinforcing the industry's role in sustaining long-term tourism demand and deepening destination engagement.

According to Gloria Guevara, President and CEO of WTTC, cruise tourism's impact extends well beyond immediate economic gains. She notes that the sector fosters enduring connections between travellers and destinations, often translating into repeat visits that sustain local businesses and reinforce community resilience.

"These outcomes are being driven through close collaboration between destinations, communities and industry stakeholders," WTTC said in its statement, adding that such partnerships are critical to ensuring that future growth remains inclusive, responsible and sustainable.

Looking ahead, the sector's trajectory appears firmly upward. With global cruise passenger capacity projected to grow by 19 percent between 2022 and 2028, cruise tourism is expected to play an increasingly pivotal role in shaping the future of travel—delivering shared value for destinations, communities, and the global tourism economy at large.



Hilton to Double Lifestyle Portfolio in EMEA, Surpassing 200 Properties

“Having surpassed 100 lifestyle hotels trading across EMEA, we expect to more than double our presence in the years ahead. Today’s seven signings, including the first Motto by Hilton in France and Tapestry Collection by Hilton in Germany, reflect both the breadth of opportunity and the strong confidence owners have in Hilton.”

Simon Vincent

Executive Vice President and President, EMEA, HiltonGlobal hospitality leader Hilton is accelerating its expansion across Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA), with plans to grow its lifestyle portfolio to more than 200 operational and pipeline properties. The announcement follows a period of sustained growth, with

the company already surpassing 100 trading lifestyle hotels in the region—positioning the segment as one of Hilton’s most dynamic growth drivers.

The expansion reflects a broader shift in traveller preferences towards experience-led stays, where design, local character, and community integration are becoming central to hospitality offerings.

Lifestyle Segment Gains Strategic Importance

Hilton’s lifestyle and collection brands have more than doubled their presence across EMEA over the past three years, supported by a combination of new-build developments and adaptive reuse projects. These properties span major urban centres, resort destinations, and



culturally significant locations, catering to a new generation of travellers seeking immersive and locally inspired experiences.

According to Simon Vincent, Executive Vice President and President, EMEA, the segment continues to demonstrate strong momentum, driven by both owner confidence and evolving guest expectations. He emphasised that the latest wave of signings highlights the flexibility and scalability of Hilton's lifestyle portfolio across diverse markets.

New Signings and Brand Debuts Across Europe

As part of this growth strategy, Hilton has announced multiple new signings across its lifestyle and collection brands. Notably, Motto by Hilton will make its debut in France with a new development in Paris, while Tapestry Collection by Hilton is set to enter the German market with a property in Cologne.

Additional projects include new openings in key destinations such as Saint-Tropez, Cork, Plymouth, and Paris, each designed to reflect the unique cultural and architectural identity of their locations. These developments underscore Hilton's strategy of blending global standards with local storytelling, a defining feature of its lifestyle brands.

The expansion of Curio Collection by

Hilton further reinforces this approach, with the brand having more than doubled its footprint in EMEA over the past five years. Known for its one-of-a-kind properties, Curio Collection continues to attract owners seeking individuality alongside the benefits of Hilton's global platform.

Strengthening a Diverse Lifestyle Portfolio

Hilton is also scaling up other lifestyle offerings, including Canopy by Hilton, which now has 32 properties trading or in development across the region. Meanwhile, Tempo by Hilton, introduced to EMEA in 2025, is gaining traction with a growing pipeline, including its Middle East debut in Riyadh.

This multi-brand strategy allows Hilton to cater to a wide spectrum of travellers—from design-conscious urban explorers to long-stay guests and wellness-focused consumers—while maintaining consistency in service delivery.

Loyalty and Strategic Partnerships Driving Growth

A key enabler of Hilton's expansion is its global loyalty ecosystem, Hilton Honors, which now serves nearly 250 million members worldwide. The programme offers a range of benefits, including points accrual, digital check-in with room selection, and

exclusive member discounts, enhancing customer engagement and brand loyalty across its portfolio.

Further strengthening its position in the lifestyle segment, Hilton has entered into an exclusive agreement with YOTEL under its newly launched Select by Hilton platform. This partnership is designed to address evolving traveller needs by offering innovative, design-forward accommodations that bridge the gap between traditional hotels and modern, tech-enabled stays.

Outlook: Capturing the Future of Experiential Travel

Hilton's ambitious plan to double its lifestyle portfolio in EMEA signals a clear strategic focus on experiential hospitality—one of the fastest-growing segments in the global travel industry. By combining distinctive, locally rooted experiences with the operational strength of a global brand, the company is positioning itself to capitalise on shifting consumer expectations.

As competition intensifies and travellers increasingly prioritise authenticity and personalisation, Hilton's expanding lifestyle portfolio is set to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of hospitality across the region.



European Hospitality Growth Accelerates as Major Hotel Brands Expand Lifestyle and Collection Portfolios



Europe is witnessing a dynamic expansion in lifestyle and collection hospitality, with major global hotel groups — Marriott International, Hilton, IHG Hotels & Resorts, and Accor — actively scaling their operations across the continent. The growth reflects rising traveller demand for experience-driven stays, combined with strategic brand

development, conversions, and new-build projects across key urban, resort, and culturally significant destinations.

Marriott Introduces Series by Marriott to Europe

Marriott International is set to introduce its Series by Marriott brand in Europe following the signing of 11 projects across Italy and the U.K. in

partnership with Rome-based Amapa Group and Splendid Hospitality Group from Watford, England. The Series by Marriott, launched in May 2025, spans the midscale to upscale segments and focuses on delivering locally inspired, flexible, and socially engaging guest experiences.

In Italy, six properties in Montesilvano, Peschici, Pomezia, Rimini, Valmontone, and Venice will join the Series portfolio, including five conversions and one new-build in Valmontone. Amapa currently operates 21 hotels across Italy and has previously collaborated with Marriott on the Courtyard by Marriott Milan Linate and Residence Inn by Marriott Milan Linate.

In the U.K., five properties in London’s Earls Court, Euston, Kings Cross, and other regional locations will join the Series brand. Splendid Hospitality Group, one of the U.K.’s fastest-growing privately owned hotel groups with 24 properties and over 2,500 rooms, first partnered with Marriott in 2023 to introduce the Four Points Flex by Sheraton brand in the U.K. Discussions for additional Series by Marriott projects are ongoing.

Hilton Doubles Lifestyle Portfolio in EMEA

Hilton continues to expand its lifestyle portfolio in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa (EMEA), having already surpassed 100 operational lifestyle hotels. Over the past three years, Hilton has more than doubled its portfolio through a combination of new-build developments and conversions.

The company recently announced seven new signings in Europe, including:

- **Motto by Hilton Paris La Villette** (153 keys), marking the



brand's debut in France. Developed by Groupe Galia, it will feature flexible guest rooms, connecting rooms, and social-centric F&B spaces.

- **Hotel Ventura Saint-Tropez, Tapestry Collection by Hilton** (97 keys), opening this summer in the Côte d'Azur, offering a leisure-focused experience.

- **Quiete Taormina Naxos, Tapestry Collection by Hilton** (103 keys), set to open in 2026 in Italy with a beach club, spa, and multiple dining options.

- **Cologne City Centre, Tapestry Collection by Hilton** (183 keys), marking Tapestry's German debut in 2027.

- **Cork City Centre, Tapestry Collection by Hilton** (103 keys), expected in 2027.

- **Hotel Paris Vaugirard, Tapestry Collection by Hilton**

(89 keys), scheduled for 2027 after a historic Haussmann-style refurbishment.

- **New Continental Plymouth, Tapestry Collection by Hilton** (120 keys), opening in spring 2027 in the U.K.

Both Curio Collection by Hilton and Tapestry Collection by Hilton have seen strong growth across EMEA, with Curio more than doubling in five years and Tapestry doubling in three years, reflecting owner interest in unique, locally anchored properties supported by Hilton's global platform.

IHG Hotels & Resorts Expands by 27%

IHG Hotels & Resorts has also aggressively grown its European footprint, adding over 32,800 rooms in the past three years — a 27% increase. Last year, IHG opened 102

hotels, signed 117 properties, and acquired Ruby, a premium European urban lifestyle brand. Its current portfolio spans more than 1,230 open and pipeline hotels across 40-plus countries, with Germany as a central growth market, representing over 20% of open and pipeline rooms.

Accor Accelerates Collection Brand Expansion

Accor continues to grow its collection brands, which now comprise over 180 hotels worldwide across Emblems Collection, MGallery Collection, and Handwritten Collection, as well as Morgans Originals and Paris Society Hotel Collection under Ennismore. Over 125 additional hotels are in the pipeline, reflecting more than 65% growth.

Key developments include:

- **Emblems Collection**, targeting 60 global properties by 2032, with Lucknam Park Hotel & Spa in the U.K. opening in 2025.

- **MGallery Collection**, with 125 operating hotels and 50-plus in the pipeline, continues strong expansion in France, Greece, and Albania.

- **Handwritten Collection**, launched in 2023, has surpassed 40 operational hotels with 45-plus in the pipeline across Europe.

- **Ennismore lifestyle brands**, Morgans Originals and Paris Society Hotel Collection, are expanding internationally, including Greece and India, with LUURA Paros and Roswyn Mumbai opening this year.

Outlook: Europe's Lifestyle Hospitality Booms

With Marriott introducing Series by Marriott, Hilton doubling its EMEA lifestyle footprint, IHG growing by 27%, and Accor expanding its collection brands, Europe is experiencing a significant lifestyle hospitality boom. The expansion reflects shifting traveller preferences for unique, locally inspired, and experience-led stays while highlighting the strategic importance of conversions, new-builds, and global brand partnerships.

IHG Accelerates European Expansion, Growing Portfolio by 27% in Three Years



IHG Hotels & Resorts is rapidly scaling its presence across Europe, marking a period of significant growth that has seen its portfolio expand by more than a quarter over the past three years. With over 32,800 additional rooms added between 2023 and 2025, IHG's European footprint now encompasses more than **1,230 open and pipeline hotels across over 40 countries**, reflecting a sustained investment strategy and strong owner demand.

Record Expansion Amid Strong Travel Demand

The momentum behind IHG's expansion is supported by a robust European travel landscape. According to industry data, European hotel investment reached approximately **€27 billion in 2025**, while the region welcomed an estimated **793 million international arrivals** — the highest figure globally — underscoring Europe's

ongoing appeal as a premier travel destination.

In 2025 alone, IHG achieved several milestones: it opened a record **102 hotels**, signed **117 new properties**, and completed its acquisition of **Ruby Hotels**, a European-based urban lifestyle brand. These achievements have strengthened the company's portfolio across all major market segments, from luxury and lifestyle to essentials and suites.

Strategic Markets and Brand Development

Among IHG's regional markets, **Germany stands out as a core growth engine**. The country now accounts for more than **20% of IHG's open rooms in Europe** (approximately 32,700 rooms) and nearly 20% of its development pipeline. Germany's robust domestic and international travel demand has helped elevate brand

awareness and performance across IHG's European operations.

Karin Sheppard, Senior Vice President & Managing Director, Europe, IHG Hotels & Resorts, highlighted the strategic scale of the company's growth: *"Across Europe, IHG continues to build strong momentum as we purposefully scale our portfolio, surpassing 150,000 open rooms in the region — a significant milestone for our business. We are growing both new and established brands in priority markets to strengthen our presence across all four segments, underpinned by sustained investment... This achievement reflects the collective strength of our colleagues in more than 40 countries."*

Growth Across Brand Segments

IHG's expansion spans its **Luxury & Lifestyle, Premium, Essentials, and Suites** portfolios, each driving distinct segments of the company's strategy:

- **Luxury & Lifestyle:** High-profile openings and signings include flagship properties such as *Six Senses London* and *InterContinental Prague*. The *Kimpton* brand and *Vignette Collection* are also growing steadily in key European markets.
- **Premium:** IHG continues to extend its premium offerings with the launch of the *Noted Collection*, alongside notable additions such as *Crowne Plaza Marne-la-Vallée* near Disneyland Paris, and the integration of *Ruby Hotels*. The expansion of *voco* properties further underscores momentum in this segment.
- **Essentials:** The *Garni* brand is expanding into the UK, Germany, Italy, and Türkiye, while the *Holiday Inn* brand family remains a cornerstone of IHG's European estate, accounting for more than 60% of its open properties in the region.
- **Suites:** The company is entering new markets with extended-

stay brands, including the debut of *Candlewood Suites Reykjavik* in Iceland and *Staybridge Suites Milan NoLo* in Italy, catering to both leisure and business travellers seeking flexible, longer-stay options.

Conversions Drive Rapid Scale

A key element of IHG's growth strategy in Europe has been the accelerated pace of **hotel conversions**, which accounted for **84% of room openings and 61%**

of room signings in 2025. This trend underscores strong owner interest in leveraging IHG's global distribution, loyalty programme, and commercial platforms, while offering a lower-risk, faster route to market compared with ground-up development.

IHG's European pipeline spans a diverse mix of destinations and property types, with its largest markets including the **UK & Ireland (404 properties), Germany (242), France (84)** and **Spain (81).**

Outlook

As IHG continues to deepen its European footprint, the company is well positioned to capitalise on **Europe's unrivalled tourism demand**, the resurgence of urban and leisure travel, and strong investor confidence in branded hospitality. With strategic brand evolution, sustained investment, and owner partnerships at its core, IHG's rapid portfolio expansion reflects a broader competitive drive to meet rising guest expectations and market opportunities across the continent.

Air India and WestJet Forge Strategic Interline Partnership to Boost India–North America Connectivity

Air connectivity between India and North America is set to become significantly more seamless, as Air India announces a strategic interline partnership with WestJet. The agreement marks a notable expansion in travel options, enabling passengers to access more than 30 destinations across Canada and the United States via key gateways in Toronto and Vancouver.

At a time when transcontinental travel demand continues to surge—driven by strong diaspora ties, tourism flows, and growing business exchanges—this collaboration is positioned to streamline journeys for travellers seeking convenience and connectivity. The interline arrangement allows passengers to book single-ticket itineraries that combine flights operated by both carriers, ensuring coordinated baggage transfers and smoother transit experiences.

Under the partnership, travellers flying with Air India into Toronto or Vancouver can seamlessly connect to an extensive network operated by WestJet. This includes 17 destinations across Canada—such as Calgary, Montreal, Halifax, and Victoria—and 14 cities in the United States, including major hubs like San Francisco, Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Las Vegas. The

move effectively transforms Toronto and Vancouver into powerful transit gateways for passengers travelling onward across North America.

In addition to direct routes, the partnership also leverages Air India's robust European network. Select North American destinations—including Halifax, Calgary, and St. John's—will now be accessible via European hubs such as Amsterdam Airport Schiphol, Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport, Heathrow Airport, and Gatwick Airport. This multi-hub strategy enhances flexibility, offering travellers a wider array of routing options tailored to schedules and preferences.

Commenting on the development, Nipun Aggarwal, Chief Commercial Officer at Air India, underscored Canada's importance as a key market, citing deep-rooted cultural connections and increasing economic engagement between the two countries. He noted that the partnership significantly improves accessibility and simplifies the travel experience through integrated services and expanded destination choices.

Echoing this sentiment, John Weatherill, Executive Vice-President and Chief Commercial Officer of the WestJet Group, highlighted the

strategic alignment between the two airlines. He emphasised that the collaboration bridges Air India's long-haul capabilities with WestJet's strong regional footprint, creating a more cohesive travel ecosystem for passengers moving between India and North America.

Currently, Air India operates 17 weekly non-stop flights to Canada, including 10 services to Toronto and seven to Vancouver. Complementing this, the airline maintains a strong European presence with 75 weekly flights to major hubs that facilitate onward connectivity. These include 49 weekly flights to London Heathrow, five to London Gatwick, 14 to Paris Charles de Gaulle, and seven to Amsterdam Schiphol.

Bookings for interline itineraries are now available through Air India's official website, mobile application, and authorised travel agents worldwide, offering travellers immediate access to this expanded network.

As airlines continue to prioritise integrated travel experiences, partnerships like this underscore a broader shift in global aviation—one that places passenger convenience, network synergy, and seamless mobility at the forefront of international travel.

Centara Expands Japan Footprint with Opening of Lifestyle Hotel in Osaka's Namba District



Centara Hotels & Resorts has marked a significant milestone in its international expansion with the grand opening of Centara Life Namba Hotel Osaka, its second property in Japan. The new lifestyle hotel officially opened its doors on April 10, 2026, welcoming global travellers to the vibrant heart of Osaka.

Strategically located in the bustling Namba district, the hotel is

positioned to cater to both leisure and business travellers seeking accessibility and immersive urban experiences. Situated within close proximity to major transport hubs, including Nankai Shin-Imamiya Station and Namba Station, the property offers seamless connectivity to key city attractions and surrounding regions.

Guests staying at the hotel can easily explore some of Osaka's most

iconic landmarks and experiences, including the neon-lit entertainment district of Dotonbori, the historic Osaka Castle, and the lively shopping and dining precincts of Shinsaibashi. Local culinary experiences, such as those found in the inner alleys of Namba and at the Kizu Wholesale Market, further enhance the destination's appeal.

The newly opened property features 300 contemporary, non-



smoking rooms designed to meet the needs of a diverse range of travellers, from solo visitors and couples to families. Interiors incorporate Osaka-inspired design elements, blending modern aesthetics with comfort and functionality. Rooms are equipped with high-speed Wi-Fi, flat-screen televisions and dedicated workspaces, while family-friendly configurations, including bunk-bed options, and accessible rooms ensure inclusivity.

Dining and social experiences form a key part of the hotel's offering. The all-day venue DINING serves

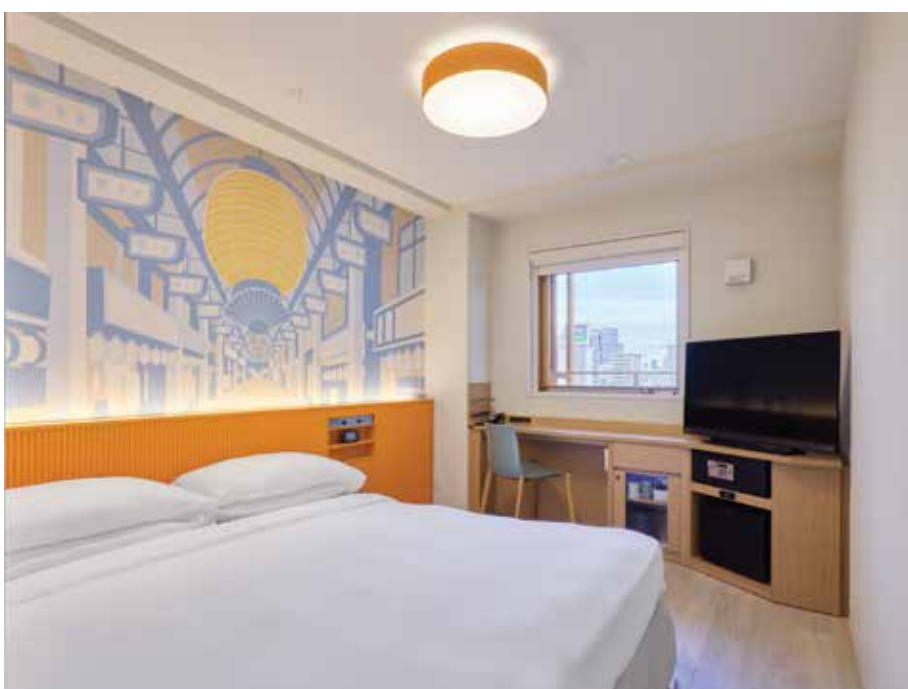
a breakfast buffet that combines international selections with regional Osaka flavours, while the rooftop lounge SORA provides panoramic views of the city skyline, including landmarks

such as Tsutenkaku Tower and Abeno Harukas. Flexible communal spaces throughout the hotel are designed to accommodate work, relaxation and social interaction.

According to Andy Noh, Cluster General Manager of Centara Grand Hotel Osaka and Centara Life Namba Hotel Osaka, the property reflects the brand's commitment to delivering lifestyle-driven hospitality tailored to modern travellers. He highlighted the focus on design, flexibility and service, underpinned by Centara's signature Thai-inspired hospitality.

To mark the launch, Centara is offering promotional benefits through its loyalty programme, CentaraThe1, including discounted room rates and bonus points for stays booked within a limited period.

The opening of Centara Life Namba Hotel Osaka reinforces Centara's growing presence in Japan and signals its intent to capitalise on the country's strong inbound tourism recovery, particularly in major urban destinations such as Osaka.



Kissimmee in Spring 2026

A Refined Evolution of
Central Florida's
Premier Leisure Destination





In Spring 2026, Kissimmee emerges with renewed sophistication, blending world-class entertainment, culinary innovation, and elevated hospitality into a destination increasingly attuned to the expectations of the global luxury traveler. Long celebrated for its proximity to Central Florida's iconic theme parks, Kissimmee is now defining itself through curated experiences, immersive storytelling, and a growing portfolio of high-end offerings that extend well beyond traditional tourism.

A New Era of Immersive Entertainment

This season is marked by the highly anticipated return of the Blue Man Group, unveiling a reimagined residency at ICON Park. Designed for a



contemporary audience, the production integrates advanced visual technology with the troupe's signature avant-garde performance style, offering a refined, multi-sensory spectacle that resonates across generations.

Across Walt Disney World Resort, a series of thoughtful enhancements signals a continued commitment to innovation. At Magic Kingdom Park, legacy attractions such as Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin and Big Thunder Mountain Railroad return with

upgraded ride systems and narrative depth, seamlessly marrying nostalgia with modern engineering.

At Disney's Hollywood Studios, the evolution of immersive storytelling continues with a new mission at Millennium Falcon: Smugglers Run, featuring Din Djarin and Grogu—a strategic expansion that reinforces the enduring global appeal of the Star Wars universe.

Meanwhile, EPCOT presents its International Flower & Garden Festival,

where botanical artistry, culinary kiosks, and the Garden Rocks Concert Series converge in an elegant celebration of seasonal beauty.

At SeaWorld Orlando, the Seven Seas Food Festival continues to redefine theme park dining with an expansive offering of globally inspired cuisine. With curated tasting experiences, chef-led dinners, and wine pairings, the event reflects a broader shift toward gastronomic sophistication within experiential travel.

Universal Orlando Resort complements this momentum with its internationally inspired Mardi Gras celebration—an immersive fusion of culture, cuisine, and live entertainment—while simultaneously investing in future-forward attractions, including a next-generation roller coaster inspired by the Fast & Furious franchise.

Heritage, Innovation and Cultural Programming

Kissimmee's identity is equally shaped by its ability to honour heritage while embracing innovation. The Old Town Entertainment District celebrates its 40th anniversary, offering a nostalgic counterpoint to the region's high-tech attractions with its classic Americana aesthetic, vintage car cruises, and enduring community traditions.

In contrast, WonderWorks Orlando introduces forward-looking experiences such as AI-powered interactive exhibits and immersive simulators, underscoring the destination's appeal to a tech-savvy, experience-driven audience.

The performing arts further enrich the spring calendar. Orlando Ballet presents a nuanced repertoire that includes *The Great Gatsby*, merging literary heritage with contemporary choreography. Simultaneously, Orlando Family Stagecurates thoughtfully designed productions that engage younger audiences without compromising artistic integrity.

Culinary Craftsmanship and Experiential Dining

Kissimmee's culinary narrative is increasingly defined by authenticity,







locality, and experiential depth. At Paddlefish, a renewed beverage programme complements its seafood-forward menu with seasonal precision, while JoJo's ShakeBAR introduces playful yet sophisticated interpretations of nostalgic American flavours, including its bespoke "dirty soda" concept.

Private, bespoke experiences are also gaining traction. Caribbean Moonshine now offers in-residence mixology sessions, catering to discerning travellers seeking exclusivity and personalization.

At Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center, the introduction of a signature honey-infused lager—developed in collaboration with Crooked Can Brewing Company—reflects a growing emphasis on terroir-driven offerings, with ingredients





sourced directly from the property's own apiary.

A defining highlight of the season is the Latin Culinary Trail, an initiative by Experience Kissimmee in partnership with Atlas Obscura. This curated gastronomic journey invites travellers to explore the rich Hispanic and Latino heritage of the region through a network of independently owned eateries, enhanced by digital storytelling that deepens cultural engagement.

Sport, Spectacle and Strategic Growth

Looking beyond the immediate season, Kissimmee is strategically expanding its appeal through sports tourism. The forthcoming presence of the Jacksonville Jaguars in Central Florida is poised to attract an international audience, adding a

compelling dimension to the region's already diverse portfolio of experiences.

Elevated Hospitality and Destination Living

Accommodation in Kissimmee is undergoing a notable transformation, aligning with the expectations of affluent global travellers. New developments such as Visions Resort & Spa promise a synthesis of wellness, technology, and design, offering a highly curated residential-style experience.

At Nickelodeon Hotels & Resorts Orlando, the forthcoming Everest Place introduces an immersive, family-oriented luxury concept, combining themed entertainment with high-end amenities. Complementing this is the addition of a Mysk by Shaza property, bringing a refined interpretation of Arabian hospitality to Central Florida.

Further reinforcing the destination's evolution is the planned Ovation Entertainment District—a large-scale, mixed-use development integrating retail, dining, cultural programming, and accommodation. Conceived as a lifestyle hub, it reflects a broader shift toward experiential urban design within resort destinations.

Spring 2026 positions Kissimmee not merely as a gateway to Orlando's attractions, but as a destination of distinction in its own right—where innovation, culture, and hospitality converge with increasing sophistication. For the discerning global traveller, it offers a compelling blend of familiarity and discovery, underscored by a clear ambition: to redefine the Central Florida experience for a new era of travel.



Outletcity Metzingen Reaffirms Leadership

as Germany's Premier Luxury Retail Destination

Outletcity Metzingen has once again cemented its status as a leading force in Europe's luxury retail landscape, securing the top position in Germany in the *Outlet Centre Performance Report Europe 2025*. The annual report, published by ecostra in collaboration with French research institute magdus, also ranks the destination among the continent's top-performing outlet centres.

Renowned for blending high-end retail with destination-led experiences, Outletcity Metzingen's continued dominance underscores its evolution beyond a traditional shopping hub into a sophisticated lifestyle and travel destination.

Excellence in Management and Brand Partnerships

A standout achievement in this year's report is the recognition of Outletcity AG as Europe's best outlet operator—an accolade it has now secured for the sixth time since the study's inception. The operator evaluation is widely regarded as a key industry benchmark, assessing the quality of centre management, economic attractiveness for brands, and the strength of collaboration between operators and tenants.

This consistent recognition reflects the high level of trust international luxury and premium brands place in the management expertise of Outletcity AG. The destination has cultivated a reputation for delivering strong commercial performance

while maintaining a premium brand environment aligned with global retail standards.

Regine Schöllkopf-Pinakidis, CEO of Outletcity AG, attributed the achievement to a sustained commitment to excellence across all facets of the business, including brand curation, service quality and long-term location development.

Among Europe's Top-Performing Retail Destinations

Beyond its national leadership, Outletcity Metzingen continues to perform strongly on the European stage. In the 2025 report, it ranks among the top ten in the category of "Most Economically Successful Outlet Centre in Europe," based on comprehensive tenant evaluations.

This distinction places Metzingen alongside the continent's most influential retail destinations, highlighting its ability to generate consistent value for both brands and visitors in an increasingly competitive market.

A Benchmark for Luxury Outlet Experiences

Located in Metzingen, the destination has built its global reputation on an exceptional portfolio of premium and luxury brands, complemented by a carefully curated retail environment. A key highlight is the presence of the world's largest BOSS store, reinforcing Metzingen's positioning as a flagship shopping

destination for discerning travellers.

As Europe's largest outlet centre, Outletcity Metzingen has consistently set benchmarks in destination retail, combining physical retail excellence with digital innovation. Its integrated approach—spanning omnichannel retail, personalised services and experiential offerings—has helped redefine the outlet model for a new generation of global consumers.

Sustained Growth and Global Appeal

The latest recognition reflects the success of a long-term strategy focused on quality, innovation and brand strength. Outletcity Metzingen's ability to attract and retain leading international brands has resulted in a level of engagement unmatched by other outlet centres in Germany.

This sustained competitive advantage is underpinned by strong economic performance, high visitor appeal and a forward-looking approach to retail development. As shopping increasingly becomes an integral part of travel experiences, destinations like Metzingen are playing a pivotal role in shaping the intersection of luxury, lifestyle and tourism.

For international travellers seeking a refined retail experience within Europe, Outletcity Metzingen continues to stand out—not only as Germany's leading outlet centre, but as a benchmark for destination-driven luxury shopping worldwide.



Outletcity Metzingen:

Europe's Ultimate
Luxury Shopping
Destination
Blending Retail,
Lifestyle and Travel



Building on its recognition as Germany's leading outlet destination, Outletcity Metzingen continues to redefine the concept of experiential retail, offering a seamless blend of luxury shopping, lifestyle amenities and destination appeal in the heart of Metzingen.

Positioned as Europe's largest designer outlet, the destination features an impressive portfolio of over 170 premium and luxury brands. From globally renowned labels such as Coach, Dolce & Gabbana and Giorgio Armani to Karl Lagerfeld, Salvatore Ferragamo, Swarovski and Tumi, the outlet presents a curated selection of flagship stores—anchored by the world's largest BOSS outlet. With year-round savings of up to 70 percent, the

destination offers a compelling value proposition for global travellers seeking luxury at accessible price points.

A Destination Beyond Shopping

What sets Outletcity Metzingen apart is not only the breadth of its retail offering but also its positioning as a lifestyle destination comparable to leading fashion capitals. Located in the hometown of Hugo Boss, the pedestrian-friendly precinct combines contemporary architecture with heritage elements, creating an immersive retail environment where design, culture and commerce intersect.

The destination's accessibility further enhances its appeal. Situated just 20 minutes from Stuttgart Airport

and well connected to major European cities such as Munich, Frankfurt and Zurich, it serves as an easily reachable stop on any European travel itinerary. Shuttle services from Stuttgart city centre and airport, along with private limousine and helicopter transfers, cater to both convenience and luxury.

Elevated Visitor Experience

Outletcity Metzingen places strong emphasis on delivering a seamless and inclusive visitor experience. A multilingual Welcome Center assists international travellers with planning and navigation, while complimentary Wi-Fi and extensive parking facilities—including electric vehicle charging—ensure ease of access.

For international visitors, tax-free





Culinary Experiences to Match

Complementing the retail offering is a diverse culinary landscape that caters to global tastes. Visitors can enjoy alpine-inspired cuisine at Almresi, authentic Italian fare at L'Osteria, or fresh, market-style dining at Marché Mövenpick. Asian flavours are showcased at Champa, while indulgent breaks can be found at Starbucks and Amorino.

For a more refined experience, the Bollicine Champagne Bar offers a sophisticated setting for premium beverages and gourmet bites, while food trucks across the destination provide a casual yet diverse culinary mix.

Stay in the Heart of the Action

For travellers seeking to extend their visit, Moxy Outletcity Metzingen offers a contemporary stay within the retail complex. Featuring 203 rooms, the hotel blends modern design with a vibrant social atmosphere. Guests can unwind in communal lounges, enjoy interactive games, or maintain fitness routines at the on-site gym, while the 24/7 bar ensures a lively post-shopping experience.

Exploring Beyond Retail

Beyond shopping, Metzingen offers a rich cultural and natural landscape. Visitors can explore the town's textile heritage at the historic Hugo Boss factory site, now a museum, or venture into the surrounding Swabian Alb, known for its scenic trails, vineyards and orchards.

Nearby attractions include the Hohenzollern Castle, one of Germany's most iconic landmarks, as well as local museums chronicling regional wine production and agricultural traditions. Seasonal experiences, such as fruit picking in local orchards, add to the destination's year-round appeal.

With its combination of luxury retail, curated experiences and strong connectivity, Outletcity Metzingen continues to set new benchmarks for destination-led shopping in Europe—offering travellers not just a place to shop, but a compelling reason to visit.



shopping offers an additional saving of up to 14.5 percent, with streamlined processing available on-site. Families benefit from the dedicated Kids Camp facility, providing supervised activities for children, while thoughtful amenities such as prayer rooms and diverse dining options—including halal offerings—underscore the destination's

inclusive approach.

Premium services further elevate the experience, with VIP lounges offering personalised attention, lockers for secure storage, and concierge-style support. The presence of specialised facilities such as the Enzian Clinic adds an additional layer to the destination's lifestyle positioning.

Tourism New Zealand Appoints Tishtar Parakh as India Country Manager, Signalling Renewed Focus on a High-Growth Market



In a strategic move underscoring the importance of the Indian outbound travel market, Tourism New Zealand has appointed industry veteran Tishtar Parakh as its new Country Manager for India. Based in Mumbai, Parakh will spearhead efforts to strengthen New Zealand's positioning in India, currently its fifth-largest source market for international visitors.

Parakh joins Tourism New Zealand after a distinguished tenure with VisitBritain, where she served for over six and a half years as Manager – Industry Relations and Partnerships. During her time there, she played a pivotal role in shaping destination marketing strategies across both trade and consumer segments in India, co-leading campaigns that enhanced

Britain's visibility and engagement among Indian travellers.

Her appointment comes at a time when New Zealand is sharpening its focus on high-value, experience-driven tourism. According to Tourism New Zealand, Parakh brings extensive expertise in developing strategic campaigns, forging trade partnerships, and executing industry events aimed at boosting visitor arrivals and spend. Her deep understanding of the Indian travel ecosystem is expected to be instrumental in unlocking the market's untapped potential.

Tourism continues to be a cornerstone of New Zealand's economy, ranking as its second-largest export earner. Within this framework, India represents a

critical growth market, particularly as evolving traveller preferences tilt toward immersive, authentic experiences. Parakh will work closely with airlines, travel trade partners, and other stakeholders to inspire Indian travellers to explore the diverse landscapes and cultural richness that New Zealand offers.

Recent data highlights both the resilience and promise of the Indian market. In the 12 months ending January 2026, New Zealand welcomed over 81,228 visitors from India, accounting for approximately 2.3 percent of total international arrivals. While this marks a marginal decline of 1.3 percent compared to the previous year, the broader trajectory remains positive: Indian visitor numbers have rebounded to nearly 122 percent of pre-pandemic levels recorded in the year ending January 2019. In contrast, overall international tourism to New Zealand has recovered to about 96 percent of pre-pandemic volumes.

Financial indicators further reinforce the sector's recovery. For the fiscal year ending March 2025, international visitor expenditure rose by 3 percent year-on-year to reach NZD 12.5 billion (USD 7.3 billion), while total arrivals increased by 6 percent to 3.51 million. Among key source markets, Australia led in visitor spend at NZD 3.8 billion, followed by the United States at NZD 1.9 billion and China at NZD 1.1 billion.

Against this backdrop, Parakh's appointment signals a renewed commitment to deepening engagement with Indian travellers—one of the fastest-growing outbound segments globally. As New Zealand continues its tourism recovery, India is poised to play an increasingly influential role in shaping the destination's future growth story.

Gürok Group Elevates Duygu Tatar to Lead Brand and Marketing Communications Across Tourism Portfolio



In a strategic leadership move, Gürok Group has appointed Duygu Tatar as Group Tourism Director of Brand and Marketing Communications, expanding her current responsibilities within the group’s growing hospitality portfolio.

Tatar, who currently serves as Senior Cluster Director of Marketing Communications for JOALI,

will now oversee brand and communications strategy across multiple tourism assets under the group. In addition to JOALI, her expanded mandate includes Ali Bey Hotels & Resorts—a long-established name in the sector with nearly 35 years of experience—and BIJAL, positioned as a pioneering villa-style luxury

hospitality concept in the Mediterranean.

The appointment reflects Gürok Group’s broader ambition to strengthen its global brand positioning and align its diverse tourism offerings under a cohesive marketing and communications vision.

With over 15 years of experience in marketing and brand strategy, Tatar began her career within the group at LAV, gaining early experience in brand development and communications. She later played a pivotal role in shaping the identity and global positioning of JOALI’s flagship properties, including JOALI Maldives and JOALI BEING.

Her tenure has been marked by a series of international recognitions for the JOALI brand, including accolades among Asia’s leading luxury resorts and inclusion in prestigious global rankings of top-tier hospitality experiences. She has also contributed to the conceptualisation and branding of award-winning culinary venues within the resorts, reinforcing JOALI’s positioning as a design-led lifestyle brand.

Rooted in the philosophy of *joie de vivre*—the celebration of the joy of living—JOALI has carved a niche in the luxury travel segment through its focus on art, design

and immersive guest experiences. Its flagship property, JOALI Maldives, is conceived as a “living gallery,” where architecture, curated art installations and experiential dining converge to create a distinctive sense of place.

Complementing this is JOALI BEING, a wellness-focused island retreat centred on holistic wellbeing. Built around four pillars—mind, skin, microbiome and energy—the resort integrates biophilic design with a blend of ancient healing traditions and modern science to offer personalised wellness journeys.

Within this evolving portfolio, Tatar’s expanded role is seen as a natural progression, given her long-standing involvement in shaping the JOALI brand narrative from its inception. Her leadership is expected to further strengthen brand coherence across the group’s tourism vertical while enhancing global visibility in an increasingly competitive luxury travel market.

As Gürok Group continues to scale its presence in international hospitality, the appointment underscores the growing importance of integrated brand strategy in defining destination-led experiences and sustaining long-term growth.

Turkish Airlines Announces Leadership Reshuffle to Drive Next Phase of Global Growth



Murat Şeker



Ahmet Olmuştur

Turkish Airlines has unveiled a significant restructuring of its executive leadership, signalling a strategic shift as the airline strengthens its position in global aviation and aligns with its long-term growth objectives.

As part of the changes, Murat Şeker, a long-serving senior executive within the airline, has been appointed Chairman of the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee. Şeker succeeds to the role after an extensive tenure overseeing the carrier's financial strategy as Chief Financial Officer (CFO), a position he has held since 2016.

With a strong academic and professional background, Şeker holds a degree in Industrial Engineering from Marmara University, a master's degree in Economics from Sabancı University, and a PhD in Economics from the University of Minnesota. His international experience includes a tenure as an economist at the World Bank between 2008 and 2013, where he contributed to policy research on

global trade, innovation and economic development.

Prior to joining Turkish Airlines' executive leadership, Şeker held senior roles at Ziraat Bank, where he managed international funding and investor relations, and served on the boards of several financial subsidiaries. Within Turkish Airlines, he has also been a member of the Board and Executive Committee since 2021, while contributing to affiliated entities such as Turkish Technic and SunExpress.

Şeker's influence extends to the global aviation ecosystem through his role with the International Air Transport Association (IATA), where he has been a member of the Financial Advisory Council since 2024 and currently serves as its Chair. His appointment is widely seen as reinforcing financial discipline and strategic oversight at a time of continued industry transformation.

In a parallel move, Ahmet Olmuştur has been appointed Chief Executive Officer, marking a notable internal elevation that underscores the

airline's emphasis on continuity and institutional knowledge.

Olmuştur brings over two decades of experience within Turkish Airlines, having begun his career with the company in 2000 as a part-time employee at its call centre. Over the years, he has held a series of key roles across revenue management, pricing, and global distribution, eventually rising to lead critical commercial functions.

Since 2014, he has played a central role in shaping the airline's commercial strategy, initially as Chief Marketing and Sales Officer and more recently, from 2024, as Chief Commercial Officer. His contributions span network planning, revenue optimisation, customer experience and the development of the airline's loyalty programme, Miles&Smiles.

Beyond his executive responsibilities, Olmuştur also serves on the boards of Turkish Technic and SunExpress, and is a member of IATA's Distribution Advisory Council. His broader engagement with industry and cultural institutions reflects a multidimensional leadership profile aligned with the airline's global ambitions.

The leadership transition comes at a time when Turkish Airlines continues to expand its footprint as the carrier flying to the highest number of countries worldwide. The airline has emphasised that the new management structure is designed to support sustainable growth, enhance operational efficiency and maintain a strong focus on passenger experience.

With a combination of financial expertise at the board level and deep commercial insight at the executive helm, Turkish Airlines is positioning itself to navigate evolving market dynamics while reinforcing its status as a leading global aviation brand.

JW Marriott Mussoorie Walnut Grove Resort & Spa Appoints Gaurav Issar as General Manager



JW Marriott Mussoorie Walnut Grove Resort & Spa has announced the appointment of Gaurav Issar as its new General Manager, marking a strategic leadership move as the luxury resort strengthens its positioning in one of North India's most sought-after hill destinations.

Issar brings over 25 years of experience in the hospitality industry, with a career spanning leading

global and Indian hotel brands, including Hyatt and The Oberoi Group. Known for his strong operational expertise and commercial acumen, he has built a reputation for delivering high-performance outcomes while maintaining a sharp focus on guest experience.

Prior to joining JW Marriott Mussoorie, Issar served as General Manager at The Oberoi Sukhvilas Spa Resort, where he led

the property to achieve its highest levels of revenue and operating profitability. His leadership across multiple properties—including The Oberoi Cecil Wildflower Hall—has been recognised within the industry, earning him accolades such as 'General Manager of the Year – North'.

In his new role, Issar is expected to leverage his deep understanding

of resort operations and evolving luxury travel trends to further elevate the guest experience. His leadership approach, centred on attention to detail, authenticity and personalised service, aligns closely with the brand ethos of Marriott International.

Set amidst the scenic landscapes of Mussoorie, the resort caters to both leisure and experiential travellers seeking immersive stays in the Himalayan foothills. Industry observers note that Issar's appointment comes at a time when demand for premium resort experiences and destination-driven travel continues to grow in India.

Commenting on his new role, Issar highlighted Mussoorie's enduring appeal as a destination that encourages travellers to slow down and reconnect, adding that he aims to curate experiences that are both luxurious and deeply personalised.

With new leadership in place, JW Marriott Mussoorie Walnut Grove Resort & Spa is expected to enter its next phase of growth, focusing on innovation, service excellence and enhanced guest engagement, while reinforcing its standing as a leading luxury retreat in the region.

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