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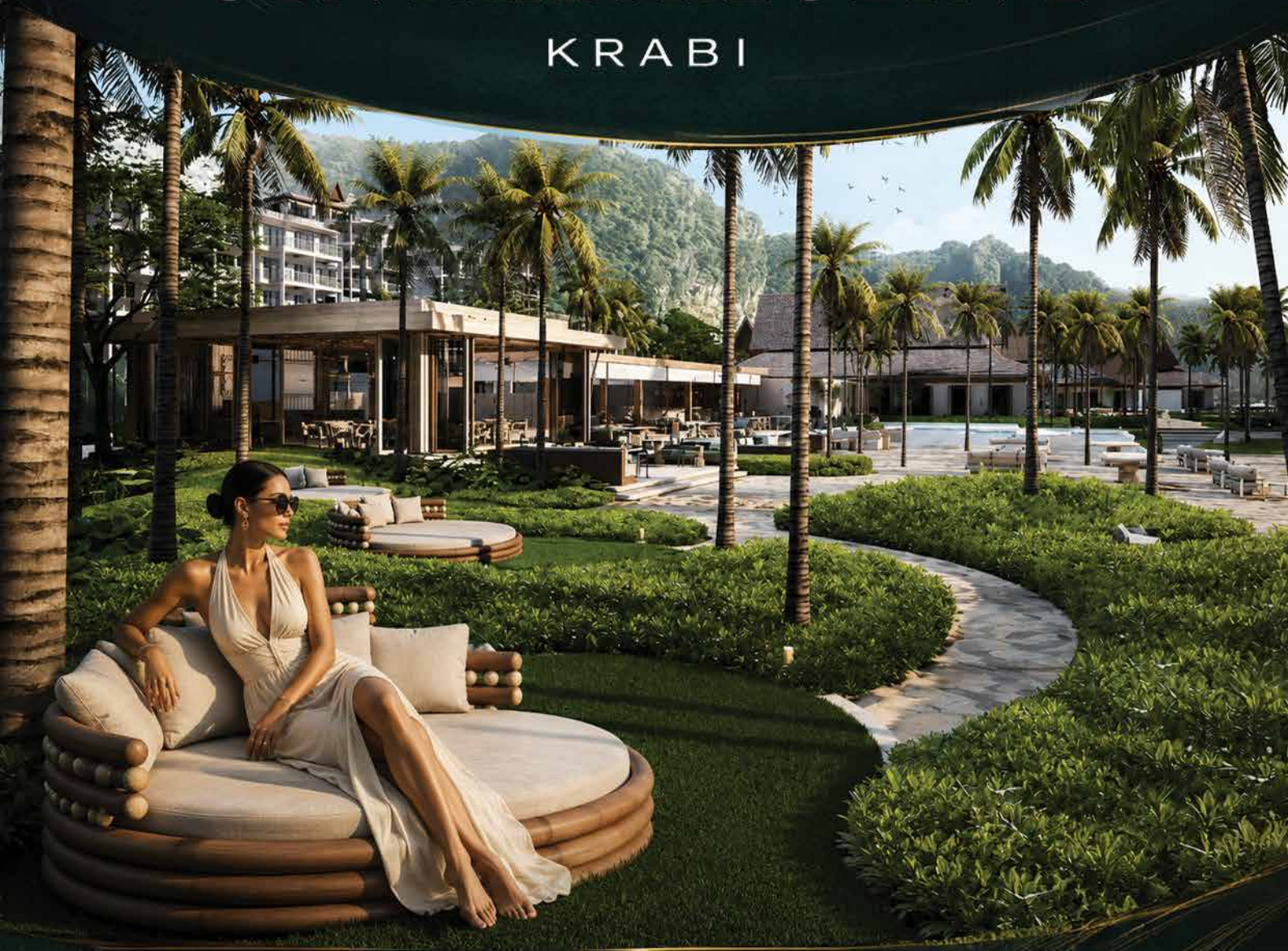
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EDITOR'S LETTER

Andhra Pradesh brings a new travel story to the fore with IATO convention, as TAFI prepares to take India's travel fraternity to Rhodes

Andhra Pradesh takes centre stage with the IATO Convention, as TAFI prepares to bring India's travel fraternity together in Rhodes

There is a certain energy in the Indian travel industry at this time of year. Destinations are reinventing themselves, travel businesses are looking beyond traditional markets, and industry associations are creating new platforms

for dialogue, collaboration and growth. This September, that momentum finds a compelling expression in **Andhra Pradesh**, even as the industry looks ahead to **Rhodes, Greece**, for the next major gathering of India's travel fraternity.

Andhra Pradesh has long been a destination of considerable depth, but its tourism story is increasingly being viewed through a wider lens. Its long coastline, spiritual heritage, historic cities, forests and hills offer an impressive diversity of





experiences. From the cultural richness of Vijayawada and Amaravati to the beaches of Visakhapatnam, the coffee plantations and landscapes of Araku Valley, and the dramatic canyon country of Gandikota, the state has the ingredients to appeal to both the traditional traveller and the growing

experiential market.

The **IATO Convention in Andhra Pradesh** provides an important opportunity to place that diversity directly before the travel trade. Conventions such as these are more than annual industry gatherings. They create a meeting point between

destinations and the people who ultimately take those destinations to the traveller — tour operators, travel advisors, hoteliers, airlines, DMCs and other stakeholders.

For Andhra Pradesh, the convention comes at an opportune moment. The state has an opportunity to demonstrate that its tourism proposition extends well beyond individual attractions. Its strength lies in the ability to combine multiple experiences into one itinerary — culture and cuisine, spirituality and heritage, nature and adventure, coastline and countryside.

For the trade, that creates a different conversation:

how do we turn destination potential into compelling, marketable experiences?

That question will continue to resonate as the industry turns its attention from the Eastern Ghats to the Aegean.

In October, the **Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI)** will take its 40th-anniversary convention to **Rhodes, Greece**, from **4–7 October 2026**, under the theme “*Connecting Legacies,*

Crafting Futures.” The convention is expected to bring together Indian travel professionals and international tourism stakeholders at a time when outbound travel from India continues to evolve in both scale and sophistication.

Rhodes offers an especially appropriate setting for that

conversation. A destination where history, culture, beaches, gastronomy and contemporary tourism coexist, the Greek island provides Indian travel professionals with an opportunity to explore a destination while engaging directly with its tourism ecosystem.

The TAFI convention also underlines a broader shift in the travel business. International destination relationships are no longer simply about selling a place. They are increasingly about creating partnerships, developing niche and thematic products, understanding changing traveller expectations and building stronger connections between destination suppliers and the Indian travel trade.

That makes the journey from **Andhra Pradesh to Rhodes** more than a geographical one.

At one end is an Indian state seeking to showcase its diverse tourism potential to the domestic and international trade. At the other is an established Mediterranean destination seeking deeper engagement with one of the world's fastest-growing outbound travel markets. In between lies the travel fraternity — the people who connect destinations, experiences and travellers.

This is also where the role of industry associations becomes significant. IATO and TAFI, in their respective conventions, provide platforms for the industry to exchange ideas, build relationships and examine where travel is heading next.

And travel is certainly heading somewhere different.

The traveller today is looking for more than a checklist of attractions. Authentic experiences, local engagement, wellness, nature, gastronomy, culture and responsible tourism are becoming increasingly important components of the journey. For destinations, the challenge is to package these experiences without losing their character. For the travel trade, the opportunity is to tell those stories in ways that inspire travellers to go beyond the familiar.

Andhra Pradesh has a story waiting to be told. Rhodes has a story that continues to evolve. And the Indian travel fraternity is increasingly becoming the bridge between the two.

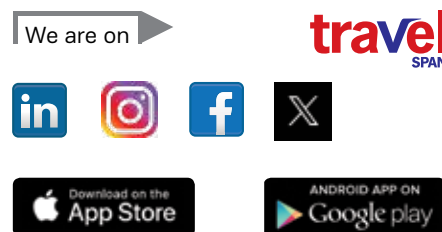
As we enter another busy season for the industry, perhaps that is the most encouraging development of all: destinations are opening their doors,

the trade is expanding its horizons, and conversations that begin at conventions can ultimately translate into journeys that connect people and places.

From the landscapes of Andhra Pradesh to the shores of Rhodes, the industry is moving forward — **connecting legacies, discovering possibilities and crafting the future of travel.**



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Andhra Pradesh Tourism Seeks Stronger IATO Partnership to Convert Destination Potential into Global Visitor Growth

Tourism Minister Kandula Durgesh calls for closer government–industry collaboration as Andhra Pradesh prepares to host the 41st IATO Annual Convention in Visakhapatnam

TRAVEL SPAN NEWS NETWORK : Andhra Pradesh is seeking to deepen its partnership with India's inbound travel trade as the state looks to translate its diverse tourism assets into commercially viable products, stronger international visibility and increased visitor flows.

Addressing an interactive meeting of the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) in New Delhi, **Kandula Durgesh, Minister for Tourism, Culture & Cinematography, Government of Andhra Pradesh**, called for greater collaboration

between government, tour operators and private-sector stakeholders to accelerate tourism development across the state.

The meeting also provided an industry platform ahead of the **41st IATO Annual Convention**, which will be held in **Visakhapatnam from September 10–13, 2026**, with the support of the Government of Andhra Pradesh. IATO has confirmed Visakhapatnam's Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach as the principal venue, while the programme will include business sessions, an Indian Tourism Fair and post-convention tours

to destinations across the state.

From destination promotion to experience creation

A key message from the Minister was that tourism development needs to move beyond simply increasing visitor numbers. Destinations, he indicated, must offer compelling, integrated experiences that encourage travellers to stay longer, explore beyond established attractions and engage with local communities and businesses.

For Andhra Pradesh, this means converting its combination of **coastal attractions, beaches, heritage, culture, cuisine, nature, Buddhist**



international markets

The partnership with IATO is particularly significant because inbound tour operators play a key role in taking destinations from promotional campaigns into international travel programmes.

Ravi Gosain, President, IATO, welcomed Andhra Pradesh's engagement with the association and said the convention would provide an opportunity to move beyond showcasing the state and focus on developing products that can be incorporated into overseas itineraries.

"Andhra Pradesh has all the ingredients to become a major international tourism destination. Our objective through this convention is not only to showcase the State, but to enable our members to create new products and take Andhra Pradesh into the itineraries of overseas travellers," Gosain said.

The approach aligns with the broader objectives of the Visakhapatnam convention, which IATO says will bring together tourism professionals, policymakers and stakeholders to examine opportunities and challenges facing Indian tourism. The convention is expected to attract around **900-1,000 delegates**, according to the official Incredible India event listing.

Travel trade response gathers momentum

sites and other experiences into structured tourism products that can be marketed through domestic and international distribution channels.

The emphasis on experience-led tourism also places a greater

responsibility on the travel trade to identify opportunities for combining attractions and developing itineraries that are commercially attractive to international visitors.

IATO partnership seen as a route to



Sunil Mishra, Honorary Secretary, IATO, said registrations for the convention had already crossed **350**, reflecting growing interest from the travel trade in Andhra Pradesh as an emerging tourism destination.

The convention is expected to give tour operators an opportunity to assess the state's tourism infrastructure and attractions directly, while identifying opportunities to create new packages and itineraries.

The event will also feature the **Indian Tourism Fair on September 11 and 12**, creating a dedicated business platform for destination promotion and industry networking. IATO has also planned post-convention tours from September 13 onwards, allowing participating delegates to explore destinations across Andhra Pradesh.

Technology, sustainability and new tourism opportunities on the agenda **Sanjay Razdan, Vice President, IATO**, said the convention programme would examine several issues shaping the future of tourism, including **artificial intelligence and technology, sustainable tourism, emerging high-growth segments and partnerships for tourism development**.

Cultural programmes featuring artists from Andhra Pradesh will form another component of the convention, providing delegates with an opportunity to experience the state's cultural heritage alongside the business programme.

Rajnish Kaistha, Senior Vice President, IATO, highlighted the importance of government-industry cooperation in turning tourism potential into actual visitor growth and acknowledged the support being extended by the Government of Andhra Pradesh for the convention.

Andhra Pradesh looks to strengthen its international tourism proposition

The state's engagement with IATO comes as Andhra Pradesh seeks to strengthen its position in India's increasingly competitive tourism landscape.

Its tourism proposition extends across several segments, allowing the state to target different international and domestic traveller profiles. Coastal tourism and beaches can support leisure demand, while heritage and cultural attractions offer opportunities for experiential and cultural travel. Nature, wellness, cuisine and Buddhist heritage provide additional possibilities for specialised itineraries.

The challenge, however, lies in bringing these individual assets together through stronger connectivity, accommodation, visitor infrastructure, destination management and travel-trade distribution.

The IATO partnership could help bridge that gap by bringing destination authorities closer to operators who understand international market requirements and can translate attractions into bookable products.

Visakhapatnam convention to put Andhra Pradesh in the global tourism spotlight

The **41st IATO Annual Convention** is therefore being positioned as more than an industry gathering. For Andhra Pradesh, it represents an opportunity to place the state directly before a large community of inbound tour operators and tourism stakeholders and encourage them to develop new business around the destination.

IATO's official announcement confirms that the convention will be hosted with the full support of the Andhra Pradesh Government and will feature participation from tourism officials and representatives of around **17-18 state tourism departments**.

The state government's objective will ultimately be to convert the heightened industry attention into tangible outcomes — new itineraries, stronger international distribution, increased private-sector participation and higher visitor arrivals.

For IATO, the convention provides an opportunity to demonstrate how the inbound travel trade can work with state governments to develop destinations rather than simply promote them.

As Andhra Pradesh prepares to welcome the travel industry to Visakhapatnam in September, the emerging message is clear: **the next phase of tourism growth will depend on turning destination assets into experiences, experiences into products, and products into globally marketable journeys**.

Can IATO 2026 Define India's Next Tourism Chapter?



TRAVEL SPAN NEWS NETWORK : India's inbound tourism story is at an inflection point. The country has the destinations, heritage, diversity, experiences and scale to emerge as one of the world's most compelling tourism markets. What it needs now is a sharper strategy to convert that potential into sustained international demand.

That conversation takes centre stage in Visakhapatnam this September as the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) hosts its 41st Annual Convention, from September 10 to 13, under the theme **"India: The World's Next Tourism Opportunity."**

For an industry navigating changing traveller expectations, connectivity challenges, sustainability imperatives and intense global competition, the timing could not be more relevant.

IATO describes its annual convention as one of the most important gatherings on India's travel calendar, a forum where tourism stakeholders, government representatives and industry leaders come together to exchange ideas and shape strategies for the year ahead. The 2026 edition is expected

to bring together participation from the Ministry of Tourism, state tourism departments, tour operators, hospitality, aviation and other segments of the travel ecosystem.

The opening business session, *"India – World's Next Tourism Opportunity: Strategy and Policy,"* will bring state tourism leaders and industry voices together to examine how India can translate its tourism potential into opportunity.

The bigger questions are: How can India become easier to sell? How can emerging destinations be integrated into international itineraries? How can air connectivity, infrastructure and visitor experiences improve? And how can tourism growth benefit local communities while protecting the destinations that attract travellers in the first place?

That cross-sector approach may prove to be one of the most important themes of the convention.

India's tourism growth cannot be driven by one stakeholder alone. Destination promotion needs to connect with airlines. Hotels need to work with tour operators. State tourism boards need stronger international distribution. Policymakers need to understand the operational realities faced by the trade.

VISAKHAPATNAM: THE DESTINATION ON SHOW

For Andhra Pradesh, hosting IATO 2026 is equally strategic.

Visakhapatnam is often described as the "City of Destiny" and the "Jewel of the East Coast" as it offers a compelling combination of coastline, nature, heritage and access to lesser-known tourism experiences.

Post-convention itineraries include Bojjanakonda, Araku Valley and Borra Caves, Rayagada, and the Kakinada, Rajahmundry, Vijayawada circuit, giving tour operators an opportunity to experience destinations that could potentially find a place in future domestic and international itineraries.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM TAKES CENTRE STAGE

IATO 2026 also puts responsible tourism firmly on the agenda. The IATO Run for Responsible Tourism returns as part of the convention, while IATO is scheduled to sign an MoU with the Indian School of Nature for a carbon audit of the 41st convention.

Tourism growth today is increasingly measured not simply by how many people visit a destination, but by how responsibly that growth is managed. For India, with its Himalayan landscapes, wildlife habitats, coastlines, heritage sites and culturally sensitive communities the conversation around sustainability can no longer remain peripheral.

FROM NETWORKING TO NEW BUSINESS

The convention also brings the business of tourism into focus through the IATO Convention Travel Mart, state tourism presentations, B2B networking and industry interactions.

With tourism boards from multiple states participating, the event provides a platform for India's destinations to compete not just for attention, but for inclusion in the product portfolios of tour operators.

That is particularly important for destinations beyond the traditional Golden Triangle and established circuits.

Andhra Pradesh Positions Itself as Emerging Tourism Hub at 41st IATO Convention



TRAVEL SPAN NEWS NETWORK : Visakhapatnam:

Andhra Pradesh is stepping up efforts to establish itself as a major domestic and international tourism destination, using the 41st annual convention of the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) in Visakhapatnam to showcase its diverse tourism assets, attract investment and strengthen its presence in global travel markets.

More than **1,000 tourism stakeholders from across India** are converging on Visakhapatnam for the three-day convention, being held from **September 10 to 13** under the theme **“India – The World’s Next Tourism Opportunity.”** The convention is focused on expanding India’s inbound tourism potential while positioning Andhra Pradesh as an emerging international destination.

Speaking at a curtain-raiser in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh Tourism Minister **Kandula Durgesh** said the state was pursuing a strategy centred on responsible and eco-friendly tourism, with the objective of taking Andhra Pradesh to international markets.

₹20,000 Crore Tourism Investment Attracted

Durgesh said Andhra Pradesh had attracted approximately **₹20,000 crore in tourism investments over the past two years**, reflecting growing investor confidence in the sector.

Visakhapatnam is emerging as a particular focus of the investment drive. According to the minister, **16 tourism projects worth ₹5,529 crore** have been approved in the city. Together, the projects are expected to add around **950 hotel rooms** and generate approximately **10,000 direct jobs**.

The government is also attempting to strengthen participation by local travel businesses. Eligible tourism operators from Andhra Pradesh joining IATO will have the association’s **one-time admission fee of ₹10,000 plus GST waived until December 31**. The convention registration fee for Andhra Pradesh representatives has also been

reduced to ₹3,000, compared with as much as ₹8,500 for other participants.

Building a Broader Tourism Portfolio

The state is seeking to move beyond conventional tourism products by developing a wider range of experiences spanning its coastline, forests, hill destinations, spiritual centres and cultural attractions.

Among the emerging segments being promoted are **wellness, eco-tourism, adventure tourism, heli-tourism and seaplane services**.

Wellness tourism, including yoga and Ayurveda, is being developed along Andhra Pradesh's **1,058-kilometre coastline**, while infrastructure development is being advanced in destinations such as **Araku, Lambasingi and Maredumilli**.

The government has also accorded tourism industry status and introduced incentives under its **2024-29 tourism policy**, with measures supporting areas such as caravan tourism, homestays, land allocation and employment generation.

Godavari Pushkarams Positioned as Major Tourism Opportunity

A key element of Andhra Pradesh's tourism strategy is the **Godavari Pushkarams in 2027**, which the state intends to develop as a major spiritual and cultural tourism event.

The government is accelerating the **₹94.44-crore Akhanda Godavari project** with the aim of completing it before the Pushkarams. The state is also exploring **cruise and seaplane services** and expanding its homestay network. **More than 850 people have reportedly expressed interest in establishing homestay facilities**, according to the tourism minister.

Seven tourism circuits are being developed around the Godavari catchment to offer visitors a combination of spiritual, cultural and heritage experiences. These include the **Pancharama Kshetras, Shakti Peethas, Vaishnava Divya Kshetras, heritage temples, Pushkar ghats and the Akhanda Godavari region**.

Proposed itineraries are expected

More than 1,000 tourism stakeholders from across India are converging on Visakhapatnam for the three-day convention, being held from September 10 to 13 under the theme "India – The World's Next Tourism Opportunity." The convention is focused on expanding India's inbound tourism potential while positioning Andhra Pradesh as an emerging international destination.

to connect attractions including **Havelock Bridge, Papikondalu, Antarvedi, Vadapalli, Appanapalli, Mandapalli, Samarlakota, Draksharamam and Palakollu**.

The strategy is designed to transform the Pushkarams from a primarily religious gathering into a broader tourism opportunity capable of generating longer stays and encouraging travellers to explore multiple destinations across the state.

Aviation Connectivity to Drive Tourism Growth

Union Civil Aviation Minister **Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu** has highlighted Andhra Pradesh's natural, spiritual and cultural resources and the potential for the state to emerge as a world-class tourism destination.

Improved aviation connectivity is expected to be central to this ambition. The state is looking to strengthen connections to Visakhapatnam and other destinations while exploring new airports and seaplane services.

The expansion of air connectivity could make it easier for international visitors to combine coastal destinations with the state's hill, wildlife, heritage and religious attractions, creating more comprehensive multi-day itineraries.

IATO Backs International Promotion

IATO President **Ravi Gosain** said Andhra Pradesh possessed a diverse tourism portfolio that remained largely unexplored by international travellers.

The association intends to use

the convention as a platform to showcase the state's tourism products and encourage its members across India to promote Andhra Pradesh in international markets.

Specialised tour packages are expected to be developed around **the Andhra Pradesh coast, Araku, Papikondalu and the Godavari Pushkarams**, giving travel companies a wider range of products to market to both domestic and overseas visitors.

Visakhapatnam Takes Centre Stage

The choice of Visakhapatnam as host city puts one of Andhra Pradesh's most prominent coastal destinations at the heart of the national tourism conversation.

With its beaches, urban infrastructure and proximity to destinations such as Araku and other parts of coastal and northern Andhra Pradesh, Visakhapatnam is being positioned as a gateway to the state's wider tourism offering.

The investment pipeline, new tourism products, improved connectivity and preparations for the Godavari Pushkarams together reflect Andhra Pradesh's ambition to build a more competitive and internationally marketable tourism ecosystem.

For the state, the IATO convention represents more than an industry gathering. It provides an opportunity to connect government initiatives and private investment with the travel trade that can ultimately take Andhra Pradesh's tourism story to international markets.



Mauritius

Deepens India Engagement as Indian Arrivals Rise

—Devender Grover, Editor in Chief Travel Span

“India is much more than an important tourism market for Mauritius; it is a market with which we share deep cultural and historical connections. The warmth and familiarity between our two countries create a natural bond that extends into travel. Our engagement across Pune, Chennai, Kolkata and Hyderabad was an opportunity to strengthen this relationship, understand the evolving Indian traveller and showcase the different facets of Mauritius. By engaging with the market ahead of the travel season, we wanted to give our partners the time and confidence to plan and promote Mauritius more effectively.”

Benoit Harter, Director – India, Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority.

Mauritius is strengthening its engagement with India as visitor numbers continue to grow, with a renewed focus on luxury, wellness, family holidays, MICE, gastronomy and experiential travel.

Mauritius is stepping up its engagement with the Indian travel market, taking its latest destination campaign to **Pune, Chennai, Kolkata and Hyderabad** as the island seeks to build on a strong rise in Indian visitor arrivals.

The four-city initiative, organised by the **Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA)**, marked the authority's third marketing operation in India since January 2026. The programme brought together more than 20 tourism partners from Mauritius, including hotels, destination management companies and airlines, for direct engagement with travel professionals across the four cities.

The timing comes as Mauritius records continued growth from the Indian market. Between January and July 2026, the island welcomed **51,005 Indian visitors**, representing a **14.5 per cent year-on-year increase**. The figures point to sustained demand while also reflecting changing preferences among Indian travellers, who are increasingly looking beyond traditional beach holidays and honeymoons.

Beyond the Beach

While Mauritius remains closely associated with its beaches, lagoons and luxury resorts, the latest India strategy is focused on presenting a broader picture of the destination. Travel professionals were introduced to opportunities spanning **leisure, family travel, luxury, MICE, wellness, golf, gastronomy and adventure**.

The approach reflects the changing nature of Indian outbound travel, with travellers increasingly seeking experiences that combine relaxation with culture, nature, food, wellness and adventure. Mauritius offers a diverse portfolio that extends well beyond its coastline, including cultural and

natural attractions such as **Grand Bassin, Aapravasi Ghat, Chamarel, Black River Gorges, Le Morne Brabant and Casela**. The Mauritius government's tourism information also highlights the island's multicultural heritage and varied landscape as important elements of its visitor experience.

important tourism market for Mauritius; it is a market with which we share deep cultural and historical connections," Harter said.

The MTPA plans to continue its India strategy through trade partnerships, familiarisation trips, media activity and targeted campaigns across established and emerging markets. The objective

The four-city initiative, organised by the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA), marked the authority's third marketing operation in India since January 2026. The programme brought together more than 20 tourism partners from Mauritius, including hotels, destination management companies and airlines, for direct engagement with travel professionals across the four cities.

For luxury travellers, the island's established hospitality infrastructure provides a natural foundation for high-end holidays, while its event facilities and resort offering continue to support destination weddings and the MICE sector. Wellness, golf, gastronomy and adventure are also gaining greater prominence within the destination's broader tourism proposition.

Strengthening India-Mauritius Connections

Beyond commercial tourism objectives, the MTPA has emphasised the longstanding cultural and historical relationship between Mauritius and India.

Benoit Harter, Director – India, Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority, said the organisation's latest engagement was intended to deepen its understanding of the evolving Indian traveller while giving travel partners greater opportunity to present the destination beyond its traditional image.

"India is much more than an

is to position Mauritius as a diverse, accessible and year-round destination for Indian travellers.

Travel Made Easier

Mauritius also benefits from an established tourism infrastructure and a multicultural environment in which Indian cuisine, cultural traditions and places of worship are readily accessible.

Entry requirements should, however, be checked before travel. Mauritius' official Passport and Immigration Office states that visa requirements depend on nationality and that admission remains subject to immigration clearance and applicable entry conditions.

With Indian arrivals continuing to rise and traveller interests becoming increasingly diverse, Mauritius is positioning itself for a new phase of engagement with one of its important international markets — one that places equal emphasis on the island's beaches, culture, nature, hospitality and experiences beyond the traditional holiday.

Abu Dhabi to Host 27th IIFA Weekend and Awards on January 22–23, 2027



Yas Island to welcome IIFA for its fourth Abu Dhabi showcase, with Etihad Arena set to host two days of Indian cinema, music and entertainment

Abu Dhabi is set to welcome the **27th International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) Weekend & Awards** on January 22–23, 2027, as the high-profile celebration of Indian cinema returns to Yas Island for its fourth showcase in the emirate.

The two-day event will take place at **Etihad Arena**, Yas Island, bringing together leading personalities from Indian cinema, live entertainment and the wider creative industries. IIFA has announced the event in partnership with the **Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi)** and **Miral**, the Abu Dhabi-based

developer and operator of immersive destinations and experiences.

The return was officially announced in September, with IIFA describing the 2027 edition as its biggest yet. The event will combine awards, live performances, music and celebrity appearances, positioning Yas Island once again as the setting for a major international Indian entertainment event.

IIFA returns to Yas Island

The 2027 edition marks the **fourth IIFA showcase in Abu Dhabi**, reinforcing the event's continuing relationship with the emirate.

For Yas Island, the partnership places Indian cinema and entertainment alongside its established portfolio of theme parks, attractions, hotels, dining and major live events. IIFA's official 2027 campaign presents the island as the host destination for a weekend combining cinema, culture, music and fan experiences.

The event also forms part of Abu Dhabi's wider strategy of attracting major international cultural and entertainment events. DCT Abu Dhabi Director General for Tourism **Saleh Mohamed Al Geziry** said the return of IIFA reflects the emirate's relationship with India and contributes to Abu Dhabi's profile as an international destination for entertainment and culture.

Indian cinema takes centre stage

The 2027 programme is expected to bring a strong Bollywood presence to Yas

Island, with IIFA announcing a line-up that includes **Salman Khan, Karan Johar, Shahid Kapoor, Varun Dhawan, Kareena Kapoor Khan, Janhvi Kapoor, Pankaj Tripathi and Ali Fazal**.

The announced personalities are set to contribute to the two-day programme of performances, awards and entertainment, although IIFA has indicated that further programme and event details will be announced as they are confirmed.

The event will extend beyond the main awards ceremony, with IIFA's 2027 programme highlighting fan experiences, live entertainment, hospitality and other activities across Yas Island. The official event platform says detailed schedules and additional announcements will be released progressively.

Strengthening Abu Dhabi's India connection

IIFA's return comes as Abu Dhabi continues to build its position as a destination for international cultural and entertainment events.

The emirate offers a combination of major attractions, cultural institutions, hospitality, beaches and entertainment venues, while Yas Island has developed into one of its principal leisure and entertainment districts.

The IIFA weekend provides an additional platform through which Abu Dhabi can connect with Indian travellers and audiences interested in Bollywood, entertainment and destination experiences.

Miral Executive Director – Marketing, Communications and Events **Taghrid Alsaeed** said the continued partnership with IIFA is intended to bring Indian cinema and its audiences to Yas Island while strengthening the destination's international entertainment profile.

A global platform for Indian cinema

IIFA has spent more than two decades taking Indian cinema to international audiences through its travelling awards format.

The organisation describes the Abu Dhabi partnership as part of that international journey, with the emirate providing a global stage for Indian film, entertainment and cultural exchange. The 2027 edition is expected to attract film personalities, fans, media and visitors from India and international markets.

IIFA Founder and Director **Andre Timmins** said the return to Yas Island represents another step in the event's international growth, with the organisers planning larger experiences, increased fan engagement

and a celebration extending beyond the arena.

Tourism opportunity for Abu Dhabi

From a tourism perspective, the IIFA weekend offers Abu Dhabi an opportunity to connect a major entertainment event with the wider destination experience.

Visitors attending the awards can combine the event with Yas Island's attractions and hospitality, while extending their stay to explore Abu Dhabi's cultural, waterfront and leisure offerings. IIFA's official 2027 destination platform specifically promotes the wider Abu Dhabi experience, including architecture, culture, beaches, desert activities and dining.

The event also provides a platform for Abu Dhabi to engage with India's large international travel and entertainment audience, linking the visibility generated by Indian cinema with destination promotion.

Tickets and further announcements

IIFA announced that tickets for the 2027 event were scheduled to go on sale from **18 September 2026**, with further announcements expected covering the programme, performers, accommodation and other event details.

With its return to Etihad Arena on January 22–23, IIFA 2027 is set to bring Indian cinema back to the centre of Yas Island's international entertainment calendar, combining a major film awards event with Abu Dhabi's broader tourism and leisure offering.

The two-day event will take place at Etihad Arena, Yas Island, bringing together leading personalities from Indian cinema, live entertainment and the wider creative industries.

Experiments can Fail. Experience Won't. That's Why a Travel Protection Specialist Matters



Dev Karvat

Travel today is built around convenience. A few clicks can take a traveller from browsing to boarding, with flights, hotels, visas, transfers and a host of other travel services available through an increasingly connected ecosystem.

Travel protection has become part

of that ecosystem too. But there is an important distinction that deserves greater attention: **travel protection is not simply another travel product to be added to a booking journey anymore. It is a service that is tested when something goes wrong.**

And when something this important is being recommended to a traveller, **is it something to experiment with — or something to entrust to experience?**

That changes the question that travellers and, even more importantly, travel advisors should be asking. It is not simply, “Does this offer protection while travelling?” It is: “**Who is behind that protection and how dependable are they?**”

Because when a flight is cancelled, baggage is delayed, a traveller needs medical assistance overseas, or a claim needs to be resolved, **travel protection moves from being a product to being a critical responsibility.** Its true value is not measured when it is purchased, but when it is called upon. **And that is where expertise, experience and the right specialist make all the difference.**

WHY SPECIALISATION MATTERS IN TRAVEL PROTECTION

In travel protection domain depth matters as much as the size of the organisation. A specialist travel protection provider builds its business around a core vision- **to serve a purpose and solve a specific problem.** That focus demands more than an understanding of risk; it requires a deep understanding of the realities of travel and the people navigating it.

Over time, this creates expertise that extends far beyond product features. It means knowing how travellers move, where disruptions are likely to occur, what travel advisors need, how assistance should be delivered, and how claims must be handled when circumstances are anything but straightforward. That depth of understanding is difficult to replicate by simply adding travel protection to a broader portfolio of services.

And in today's environment, where technology has made access easier and product distribution faster, **the real differentiator is increasingly - what sits behind the transaction.**

TRUST, ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE TRAVEL TRADE

For the travel trade, recommending a protection provider is also a matter of professional accountability. A travel advisor is putting its own reputation behind the solutions it recommends to its customers. This makes reliability, their own data security and service accountability critical considerations. A trusted travel protection partner therefore needs to demonstrate more than a product catalogue. It needs to demonstrate that customer information is handled responsibly, that service is accessible when needed and that claims are approached with accountability.

For a travel advisor, these are not secondary considerations. They directly influence the confidence with which travel protection can be recommended. The relationship does not end when the policy is issued. In many ways, that is when the real responsibility begins.

At Asego, our focus has been on becoming a dedicated travel protection and global assistance partner for the B2B travel ecosystem. That means building our capabilities around the needs of travel trade partners rather than treating them as simply another distribution channel. For us, the travel advisor is not just a route to the traveller. **The travel advisor is a partner whose business growth matters.** That distinction influences everything from product development



Over time, this creates expertise that extends far beyond product features. It means knowing how travellers move, where disruptions are likely to occur, what travel advisors need, how assistance should be delivered, and how claims must be handled when circumstances are anything but straightforward.



and servicing to technology investments.

TECHNOLOGY SHOULD SOLVE FOR THE PARTNER, NOT JUST IMPRESS THE USER

Technology in travel has evolved rapidly. But technology for the sake of technology does not create meaningful value. The real question is: **what problem does it solve?**

The answer should be simple — enable growth and make it easier for the partner to sell, service, manage and support travel protection. That is why investments in technology need to be designed around the realities of the travel trade. The objective is not to create another digital layer. It is to remove friction from the existing customer experience.

The travel protection market will continue to evolve. Technology will become more deeply embedded across the ecosystem, product choices will

expand, and distribution will become increasingly seamless. **All of this is positive. But as the market grows, the value of specialisation becomes greater, not less.**

At Asego, global assistance & travel insurance have been at the heart of our business for 26 years. That experience has offered us a perspective that cannot be built overnight: a deep understanding of the travel trade, its evolving challenges, its expectations and, most importantly, the moments when the promise of protection is put to the test.

Our vision has always been simple - to aim for excellence at one thing that matters — protecting travellers and enabling the partners who serve them to do so with confidence.

Because when your traveller's journey is at stake, protection shouldn't be an experiment. It should come with experience.

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TravelBullz's Great India Roadshow 2026 Brings Thailand Closer to North India's Next Wave of Travellers

TRAVEL SPAN NEWS

NETWORK : The growing appetite for international travel beyond India's traditional metropolitan markets took centre stage as TravelBullz's three-city Great India Roadshow 2026, held in association with the Tourism Authority of Thailand under the Amazing Thailand banner, concluded in New Delhi on August 14.

Beginning in Lucknow on August 10, moving to Chandigarh on August 12 and culminating in the national capital two days later, the B2B networking roadshow brought together Thai hospitality and tourism suppliers with Indian travel trade partners. The Delhi finale drew more than 250 attendees, underlining the scale of interest in Thailand among travel agents and outbound specialists in North India.

At its heart, the roadshow was about a market that is rapidly changing: Indian travellers from Tier 2 and Tier

3 cities are becoming increasingly important players in the international tourism economy.

Taking the Thailand Conversation Beyond the Metros

For years, India's outbound travel market has been heavily associated with large metropolitan centres. But the expansion of air connectivity, rising disposable incomes, greater digital exposure and a growing appetite for experiential travel are broadening the geography of international tourism.

TravelBullz's Great India Roadshow sought to tap directly into that shift.

By taking its B2B engagement to Lucknow and Chandigarh before concluding in Delhi, the initiative created opportunities for Thai tourism suppliers to interact with travel professionals outside the conventional

Mumbai-Delhi-Bengaluru outbound circuit.

The strategy was particularly relevant for Thailand, a destination that has long enjoyed strong brand recognition among Indian travellers but is now looking to deepen engagement with new customer segments and emerging source markets.

The roadshow brought approximately 25 leading hotel, leisure and travel trade partners from Thailand face-to-face with Indian agents. Rather than focusing solely on broad destination promotion, the discussions centred on developing commercially viable products tailored to the needs of the Indian market.

That included conversations around destination weddings, MICE travel and millennial-led leisure tourism—three segments with significant potential for Thailand.

From Destination Promotion to Product Partnerships

The format of the roadshow reflected an increasingly sophisticated outbound travel environment.

Indian travellers are no longer necessarily looking for standardised holiday packages. For high-value segments in particular, travel agents are seeking flexibility, differentiated experiences and products that can be customised according to the interests and budgets of their clients.

The presence of Thai hotels, leisure operators and other tourism partners allowed Indian agents to explore those possibilities directly.

For the wedding segment, Thailand offers an established international destination-wedding proposition, combining resorts, beaches, hospitality infrastructure and relatively easy access from India. For the corporate market, its hotels, convention facilities and varied leisure experiences make it a natural candidate for incentive and MICE programmes.

Meanwhile, younger Indian travellers are increasingly looking beyond traditional sightseeing holidays, creating opportunities for itineraries built around food, nightlife, wellness,

adventure, culture and distinctive local experiences.

The roadshow's emphasis on tailored, higher-margin itineraries therefore points to a wider change in the business of outbound travel: the travel agent is increasingly becoming a product curator rather than simply a booking intermediary.

The Tier 2 and Tier 3 Opportunity

One of the strongest messages to emerge from the roadshow was the importance of India's emerging outbound markets.

Lucknow, Chandigarh and the broader North Indian catchment represent a substantial pool of travellers whose international ambitions are expanding. As awareness of overseas destinations increases, demand is moving beyond conventional family holidays towards celebrations, group travel, corporate incentives and experience-led vacations.

For destination marketers and suppliers, these markets can offer an important next phase of growth.

The challenge, however, is not simply to create awareness. Travel trade professionals in these cities need access to the right inventory, competitive pricing, dependable ground services and products that can be confidently sold to their customers.

This is where B2B roadshows retain their relevance. Face-to-face interaction allows destination suppliers to understand the specific requirements of agents while giving agents direct access to the people responsible for hotels, experiences and destination services.

In that sense, the Great India Roadshow functioned as both a marketing platform and a marketplace for ideas.

A Stronger Outbound Business Proposition

TravelBullz founder KD Singh highlighted the scale of the company's expansion, noting a 400 per cent growth in its global hotel business over the past three years.

The figure provides a broader

context for the roadshow. TravelBullz's focus is not simply on generating destination awareness but on building a stronger ecosystem connecting international suppliers with India's expanding outbound travel trade.

Thailand is particularly well placed within that ecosystem.

Its proximity to India, established tourism infrastructure and wide range of accommodation and leisure products give travel professionals considerable room to build different kinds of itineraries. The destination can be positioned for luxury travellers, families, honeymooners, wedding groups, corporate travellers and younger leisure audiences alike.

The opportunity now lies in moving from one-size-fits-all destination selling towards more targeted propositions for individual traveller segments and source markets.

Weddings, MICE and Millennials

The three segments discussed extensively during the roadshow illustrate Thailand's breadth as an Indian outbound destination.

Destination weddings remain one of the most lucrative opportunities. Indian wedding celebrations are becoming increasingly international, with families looking for destinations capable of accommodating large groups while providing memorable venues and experiences. Thailand's resort infrastructure and diverse locations make it an attractive option for such celebrations.

MICE travel represents another significant avenue. Corporate groups increasingly expect incentive programmes to combine meetings with leisure, entertainment and authentic destination experiences. Thailand's combination of business facilities and tourism infrastructure can support that demand.

Then there is the millennial and younger leisure traveller. This audience is often less interested in conventional package tourism and more inclined towards curated experiences. From island escapes and wellness retreats

to culinary exploration, nightlife and adventure, Thailand can offer a broad portfolio from which agents can construct highly personalised holidays.

For Indian travel sellers, the ability to combine these experiences into distinctive itineraries can also create greater value than simply selling accommodation and flights.

Building Relationships at Ground Level

The significance of the Great India Roadshow lies as much in its format as in its destination focus.

Digital platforms have transformed how travel products are discovered and booked, but B2B relationships remain central to complex international travel. Weddings, MICE groups and premium holidays often involve multiple suppliers and require coordination, negotiation and local knowledge.

Bringing approximately 25 Thai hospitality and leisure partners into direct contact with Indian agents therefore created an opportunity for both sides to understand the market more closely.

For Thai suppliers, the meetings offered insight into what North Indian travellers are seeking. For Indian agents, they provided access

to a broader range of products and the possibility of negotiating more customised solutions for their customers.

That two-way exchange could ultimately be more valuable than conventional destination advertising.

Delhi Finale Signals Strong Market Interest

The final stop in New Delhi brought the three-city programme to a close with more than 250 attendees, making it the largest gathering of the roadshow.

The strong turnout reflected the continuing importance of Delhi as a major outbound travel hub, while also reinforcing the value of taking destination-led B2B engagement into surrounding Tier 2 and Tier 3 markets.

Taken together, the three stops presented a snapshot of an outbound industry in transition—one in which international travel is becoming more geographically dispersed across India and increasingly segmented by traveller profile.

For Thailand, the message is clear: the next generation of Indian visitors will not come only from the country's biggest cities or travel only for traditional holidays.

They will come from emerging urban centres, travel in groups for weddings and corporate events, seek increasingly personalised leisure experiences and expect travel professionals to design products around their individual interests.

Looking Ahead

The Great India Roadshow 2026 ultimately highlighted a simple but consequential shift in the India–Thailand travel relationship.

The opportunity is no longer merely to persuade Indians to visit Thailand. It is to give travel sellers the tools, relationships and products to sell the right Thailand experience to the right Indian traveller.

By combining the destination reach of the Tourism Authority of Thailand with TravelBullz's B2B network, the three-city roadshow created a platform for that conversation at a time when India's international travel market is expanding rapidly.

As North India's Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities become increasingly influential in outbound tourism, such trade-led initiatives could play a significant role in determining where the next wave of Indian international travellers goes—and how they experience the world beyond India's borders.

Turkish Airlines orders 150 Boeing 737 MAX aircraft

Turkish Airlines has finalised a landmark agreement with Boeing for up to 150 Boeing 737 MAX aircraft, marking a significant step in its long-term growth strategy. The deal, which has been in discussions since 2025, represents the airline's largest ever single-aisle aircraft order and aims to bolster its short- and medium-haul network.

The agreement was concluded in the presence of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of Türkiye, and includes 100 firm orders for the Boeing 737-8, with options for an additional 50 aircraft. The deal also provides substitution

rights for the Boeing 737-10, offering Turkish Airlines flexibility to meet increasing passenger demand.

"This agreement marks another significant step in the continued expansion of our fleet," said Turkish Airlines Chairman of the Board and the Executive Committee, Murat Şeker. "The new Boeing 737 MAX aircraft will bring greater efficiency and flexibility to our operations."

Boeing Commercial Airplanes CEO Stephanie Pope commented, "This order reflects the trust and shared vision that have defined our long-standing partnership with Turkish Airlines."

The new aircraft will enhance Turkish Airlines' operations on high-demand routes, with the Boeing 737-8 offering a 20% reduction in emissions and fuel consumption. Currently, Turkish Airlines operates over 200 Boeing aircraft, including the 737 MAX and 787 Dreamliner.

Additionally, Turkish Airlines and Boeing have signed a strategic Memorandum of Understanding on Industrial Participation, focusing on skill development, value creation, and business awards, further strengthening their partnership and supporting Türkiye's aviation ecosystem.

PortMiami Surpasses 10 Million Cruise Passengers, Setting New Annual Record

South Florida cruise gateway reaches historic milestone with two weeks still remaining in fiscal 2026, as infrastructure investment and expanding cruise offerings fuel continued growth

PortMiami has crossed the 10 million cruise-passenger mark for the first time, setting a new annual record with two weeks still remaining in its 2026 fiscal year.

The port welcomed its **10 millionth cruise passenger on September 14, 2026**, surpassing its previous fiscal-year record of 8,564,225 passengers recorded in FY2025. The new figure represents an increase of approximately **16.8%** over the previous record, underlining the continued expansion of cruise activity through Miami.

The 2026 fiscal year runs from **October 1, 2025, through September 30, 2026**, meaning PortMiami had two weeks of additional passenger activity remaining when it reached the milestone. The port said the achievement reflects strong demand for Miami-based sailings, continued investment in cruise-terminal infrastructure and an expanding range of cruise-line offerings.

A New Passenger Record

PortMiami's latest achievement builds on a period of sustained growth. In FY2025, the port handled 8,564,225 cruise passengers, up from 8,233,056 in FY2024—a 4.02% increase at the time. The 2025 figure had itself represented the highest annual passenger count in the port's history.

Crossing the 10 million threshold in September represents a substantial acceleration in passenger movements and establishes a new benchmark for the Miami cruise gateway.

Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava described the milestone as evidence of PortMiami's role as a global gateway and contributor to tourism, employment and local business activity.

Infrastructure Supporting Growth

PortMiami attributes part of the latest growth to major investment in its cruise infrastructure. Recently completed and upgraded terminals have been designed to accommodate some of the world's largest cruise ships while improving passenger flow and streamlining embarkation and disembarkation.

Among the port's major recent additions is **Cruise Terminal AA**, which opened in 2025 for MSC Cruises. According to PortMiami, the 490,000-square-foot facility is the world's largest cruise terminal and can accommodate up to three ships while processing as many as 36,000 passengers in a single day.

The port has also continued to expand its cruise offering. PortMiami's 2025–26 season included the arrival of new ships from several cruise brands, adding further capacity and itinerary choice for travellers departing from Miami.

Daniels: Focus on the Passenger Experience

Port Director and CEO **Jonathan Daniels**, who assumed leadership of PortMiami in August 2026, credited the port's team and cruise-industry partners for reaching the milestone.

"I'm immensely proud of our team and cruise and port partners, whose collaborative efforts made this achievement possible. Reaching 10 million passengers reflects our focus on innovation, efficiency and superior passenger experience, as we continue to modernize PortMiami's infrastructure and expand our capacity for future growth."

Daniels was appointed PortMiami's Director and CEO by Miami-Dade County



Mayor Levine Cava in June 2026. He previously led the Maryland Port Administration and Port of Baltimore and has held senior leadership positions at major U.S. ports.

Cruise Growth and Miami's Tourism Economy

The record also highlights the wider economic significance of cruise tourism to Miami-Dade County. PortMiami says cruise activity supports employment across tourism, hospitality, retail, transportation and maritime services, while cruise calls contribute to spending on hotels, restaurants, entertainment and local transportation.

PortMiami remains a major economic engine for the county, which says the port contributes approximately **\$61 billion annually to the local economy and supports more than 340,000 jobs**.

With the 10 millionth passenger already recorded and the fiscal year not yet complete, PortMiami's final FY2026 passenger total is expected to exceed the milestone figure.

The achievement further reinforces Miami's importance as a major cruise hub, while the port's continuing terminal development and cruise-line expansion position it for further growth in the years ahead.

ITB Asia 2026: 21 – 23 October 2026 in Singapore



MICE Show Asia 2026 expands exhibition space by 83.2% in Singapore



Travel Span News Network: Singapore/Berlin : MICE Show

Asia 2026 is set to expand its exhibition space by 83.2% as the business events platform returns to Singapore from 21–23 October at the Sands Expo & Convention Centre.

The event will bring together destinations, venues, MICE suppliers, meeting planners, corporate travel professionals and buyers from across the Asia-Pacific region. The expansion comes as the sector responds to changing expectations around destinations, event experiences, flexibility, technology, sustainability and measurable business value.

More than 200 MICE buyers confirmed

The 2026 edition is building a growing buyer community, with more than 200 MICE buyers confirmed

to date. Representatives from organisations including Amex GBT, Asian MICE Planner Co. Ltd, Be Event Group, ConferenceDirect, Culturebrand Luxury Travel & Events, HelmsBriscoe, International Conference Services, K.I.T. Group APAC, LamontCo, Technical Communications Intelligent Japan, TUI Travel Center, the World Association for Medical Law and the World Psychiatric Association are among those confirmed.

Confirmed exhibitors include Ayana, Festive Events, Le Meridien Phuket Beach Resort, Liberty International Tourism Group, Sapporo Convention Bureau, Sri Lanka Convention Bureau, Uganda Convention Bureau and Uniworld Boutique River Cruises.

Darren Seah, Executive Director, Messe Berlin Asia Pacific, said the event is evolving in response to changing buyer and supplier requirements, with greater attention being placed on measurable outcomes, meaningful experiences and value from business events.

New networking and professional development programmes

Beyond the exhibition floor, MICE Show Asia 2026 will introduce and expand a series of networking, experiential and professional-development initiatives.

Making its debut this year, the **Association Executive Networking Session** will provide an invitation-only setting for association executives to exchange ideas, develop industry connections and discuss shared opportunities and challenges.

The **Pinnacle Partners Experience** will return for a second edition following its 2025 debut. Curated by Uncommon Conferences, the invitation-only programme will bring together selected MICE and corporate buyers for a closed-door experiential session focused on the challenges and opportunities facing business-to-business event planners.

The event will also host the **MICE Fundamentals: Conference, Exhibition & Incentive Events Workshop**, curated by Global MICE

Collaborative. The ticketed workshop is aimed at emerging MICE professionals and new entrants, covering the fundamentals of designing and delivering conferences, exhibitions and incentive events.

Practitioners representing the International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE), Meeting Professionals International (MPI) and Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) will contribute to the workshop, which combines practical learning, real-world applications, networking and access to industry tools and resources.

Conference to examine future of MICE industry

The MICE Show Asia 2026 conference programme will bring together MICE buyers, destinations, corporate travel professionals, technology specialists and business events experts to examine trends and commercial priorities shaping the sector in Asia-Pacific.

Key themes will include the changing MICE buyer, destination selection, event experiences and business outcomes, alongside flexibility, value and personalisation. The programme will also explore how digital transformation and artificial intelligence are influencing the planning and delivery of business events.

Other areas of focus will include the changing corporate traveller, sustainability, resilience and emerging opportunities for the regional MICE industry.

Featured speakers include Pom Corpuz, VP Corporate Travel Consulting – APAC at Chase Travel Corporate Solutions; Navodit Srivastava, Hospitality Cloud Leader Asia Pacific at Cvent; Scott Noddsle, Managing Director, International, Encore EMEA & APAC; Vivek Neb, EVP & Managing Director, Travel & Tourism at Escalent; JingWen Wong, Head of SEA at FCM Meetings & Events; Errol Lim, COO of Jublia AI; Florian Jacque, Co-Founder & CEO of Midstay & MicePro; Michael Kruppe, CEO / General Manager of Shanghai New International Expo

Centre; and David Hughes, Managing Director, Asia Pacific, Uniglobe Travel International.

International and regional industry partnerships

The conference programme is supported by an international and regional network of organisations spanning business events, exhibitions, incentive travel, sustainability and market intelligence.

Key partners include the China Business Event Industry Committee (CBEIC), Global MICE Collaborative, Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), Tourism Economics and Uncommon Conferences.

Their contributions are expected to cover industry perspectives, market intelligence, trend analysis, sustainability expertise, practitioner-led discussions and workshops, as well as global best practices and regional insights.

MICE, travel and technology under one ecosystem

MICE Show Asia 2026 will take place alongside **ITB Asia and Travel Tech Asia**, bringing the business events, travel and technology communities together at the Sands Expo & Convention Centre.

The co-location is intended to give participants access to a broader cross-section of the Asia-Pacific travel industry, with opportunities to connect across MICE, tourism and travel technology.

Visitors will be able to access all three events through an **All Access Pass**, providing an integrated experience across MICE Show Asia, ITB Asia and Travel Tech Asia.

With its expanded exhibition footprint, growing buyer community, dedicated networking initiatives and conference programme focused on technology, sustainability and changing business-event requirements, MICE Show Asia 2026 is positioning its latest edition around business connections as well as professional development and industry knowledge exchange.

ITB Asia 2026: 21 – 23 October 2026 in Singapore



Travel Tech Asia 2026



expands business opportunities with new hosted buyer programme

Travel Span
News Network :
Singapore/Berlin
: Travel Tech Asia 2026
will introduce a dedicated

hosted buyer programme
when the travel technology
event returns to Singapore
from 21–23 October,
bringing technology

providers together with
travel-industry decision-
makers focused on digital
transformation, operational
efficiency and new

technology investments.
The event will take
place at the Sands Expo
& Convention Centre,
Level 1, alongside ITB

Asia and MICE Show Asia. More than 50 exhibitors are expected to showcase solutions spanning artificial intelligence, connectivity, booking and distribution, payments, hospitality technology and digital travel.

Dedicated buyer programme targets technology decision-makers

The new hosted buyer programme is designed specifically for the travel technology segment and is expected to attract around 100 buyers.

The programme will target senior technology and procurement decision-makers, including CIOs, CTOs and procurement leaders from hospitality companies, travel agencies and destination management companies.

The dedicated buyer community is intended to complement the established buyer audiences of ITB Asia and MICE Show Asia by creating a more focused environment for discussions around technology procurement, digital transformation and business solutions.

Darren Seah, Executive Director, Messe Berlin Asia Pacific, said technology is increasingly influencing innovation and growth across the travel industry, while the new programme is intended to facilitate connections between technology suppliers and buyers.

More than 50 technology exhibitors

Travel Tech Asia 2026 will feature companies

working across a broad range of travel technology categories. These include artificial intelligence, travel connectivity, booking and distribution, metasearch, hotel technology, virtual and augmented reality, data personalisation, mobile marketing, digital payments, blockchain, revenue management and optimisation, transportation and mobility, voice technology and biometrics.

The event will also examine emerging areas described by organisers as “Super Travel Tech”, reflecting the expansion of technology beyond individual travel functions towards increasingly connected digital ecosystems.

Confirmed exhibitors include **Agoda, Airalo, China Mobile International Limited, DerbySoft, DragonPass, Flywire, GoGlobal Travel, Juniper Travel Technology, Korean Tourism Startup Centre, Rakuten Travel Xchange, RateHawk, SiteMinder and Trip.com.**

The official Travel Tech Asia website describes the event as a platform connecting travel technology suppliers, startups and established travel brands with buyers and decision-makers across the travel industry.

Technology and commercial priorities on the agenda

The Travel Tech Asia Theatre will focus on the technologies and business models influencing the next stage of travel industry development.

Sessions will address

topics including the commercial value of artificial intelligence, technologies shaping the future of travel, payment innovation and revenue opportunities, and the implications of a technology-first approach to travel.

The programme will feature Laura Houldsworth, Managing Director, Asia Pacific, Booking.com; Masahiro Yamashita, Senior Director, APAC, KAYAK; Oliver Dlouhy, CEO, Kiwi.com; Mehreen Agha Suharwardy, Regional Director – Singapore & Dubai, Go City; Michele Ruberl, VP Innovation, Travel Token Marketplace; and Brett Henry, President APAC, WebBeds.

The wider conference programme will also cover developments in artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual reality, data management, blockchain, biometrics and super travel applications.

One pass for three co-located events

Travel Tech Asia will again operate alongside ITB Asia and MICE Show Asia, creating a combined platform covering travel, MICE and technology.

For 2026, visitors will be able to use a single **All Access Pass** to enter all three events. The integrated registration model provides access to the three exhibition areas, conference sessions, networking activities and the business-meetings function through the event app, according to the organisers.

The co-location is intended to allow travel professionals to move

between the tourism, business-events and technology segments and identify opportunities across the wider Asia-Pacific travel ecosystem.

Travel Tech Asia's official visitor information also identifies travel agents, tour operators and senior technology and operational decision-makers among the professionals targeted by the event, including executives responsible for technology, e-commerce, distribution, marketing and reservations.

Three days of business meetings and technology discussions

Travel Tech Asia 2026 will run for three days at Marina Bay Sands, with the official event website confirming business appointments and a conference programme throughout the 21–23 October period.

The event comes as travel companies continue to evaluate technologies across booking, distribution, payments, connectivity, hotel operations and customer engagement. The organisers' programme places particular emphasis on how AI and other emerging technologies can be applied to practical travel-industry challenges rather than treated solely as emerging concepts.

Travel Tech Asia is part of the broader ITB Asia 2026 programme, which will bring the travel trade, MICE and travel technology sectors together in Singapore from 21–23 October. The official ITB Asia website lists Travel Tech Asia as one of the co-located events for this year's edition.



Palakollu Travel Guide:

**This Quiet
Andhra
Pradesh
Town** is a
Gateway to
Temples,
Backwaters
and Beaches





For travellers looking beyond Andhra Pradesh's better-known destinations, Palakollu tourism offers a slower, more local experience, combining history, culture, nature and the landscapes of coastal Andhra.

Why Visit Palakollu?

Palakollu is an appealing destination for travellers who prefer experiences over crowded attractions. Its greatest draw is its location within a landscape shaped by the Godavari river system. Agriculture, aquaculture and waterways are central to life across West Godavari, creating a distinctly green setting around the town.

The region also has a strong religious heritage. The Ksheera Ramalingeswara Swamy Temple is a centrally protected monument and one of Andhra Pradesh's celebrated Shiva shrines. The West Godavari district administration also lists Mollaparru Beach, Perupalem Beach and Valanderarevu among the area's tourist attractions.

This combination makes Palakollu particularly suitable for a two- or three-day itinerary that mixes temple visits with countryside drives, river landscapes and coastal excursions.

Best Places to Visit in Palakollu

1. Ksheera Ramalingeswara Swamy Temple

If you visit only one attraction in Palakollu, make it the Ksheera Ramalingeswara Swamy Temple.

The historic Shiva temple is one of the Pancharama Kshetras, a group of five important Shiva temples in Andhra Pradesh. The other four are at Amaravati, Draksharamam, Samalkota and Bhimavaram.

The temple's name comes from Ksheera, meaning milk, and local religious tradition associates the shrine's Shiva lingam with a distinctive white appearance. The West Godavari district administration notes that the principal deity can be viewed from four sides through openings around the sanctum.

Beyond its religious importance, the temple offers an opportunity to appreciate the architectural traditions of coastal Andhra. Its imposing gateway, sculptural details and spacious precinct make it one of the most memorable landmarks in Palakollu, Andhra Pradesh.

Visit early in the day for a more comfortable experience, particularly during warmer months.

2. Dindi and the Godavari Backwaters

For a change of scenery, head towards Dindi, a peaceful destination associated with the waterways of the Godavari delta.

Here, the landscape shifts from temple architecture to coconut palms, waterways, village settlements and agricultural fields. Andhra Pradesh Tourism highlights Dindi as a riverside destination, with boating and houseboat experiences forming part of its appeal.

A Dindi backwaters boat ride is best approached as a slow, scenic experience. Instead of looking for a packed itinerary, spend time watching the countryside pass by and observing how closely daily life remains connected to the river.

For travellers looking for a distinctive stay, the Dindi area also offers riverside accommodation and houseboat experiences.

3. Mollaparru Beach

The West Godavari coastline provides another dimension to a Palakollu travel itinerary. Mollaparru Beach is among the beaches officially listed as tourist attractions by the district administration.

The beach is best suited to travellers looking for a quieter coastal outing rather than a heavily commercialised resort experience. Take a walk along the shore, enjoy the sea breeze and stay for the changing colours around sunset. Because coastal conditions can vary, visitors should check local conditions before swimming and follow any safety advisories.



Kolleru Lake: A Nature-Focused Day Trip

One of the most rewarding additions to a West Godavari itinerary is Kolleru Lake, particularly for birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts.

Kolleru is a large freshwater wetland between the Krishna and Godavari river systems and is recognised as a Ramsar Site, making it an important wetland of international significance.

The lake supports a diverse range of resident and migratory birds. Ramsar documentation records migratory birds arriving during the cooler months, with October to March particularly important for seasonal visitors.

Depending on the season, birdwatchers may encounter species including pelicans, storks, ibises and various waterfowl.

For the best experience, allow plenty of time rather than treating Kolleru as a quick photo stop. Bring binoculars if birdwatching is a priority, and respect local wetland and wildlife regulations.

What to Eat in Palakollu

Food is another reason to explore beyond the main tourist attractions.

Coastal Andhra cuisine is known for its bold flavours, chilli-forward dishes and tangy preparations, with seafood featuring prominently in many local menus.

When exploring Palakollu's food scene, look for regional favourites such as:

- Chepala Pulusu – a spicy and tangy fish curry
- Royyala Vepudu – Andhra-style prawn fry
- Pulihora – tamarind-flavoured rice
- Dibba Roti – a crisp-edged, soft-centred rice and lentil preparation
- Minapa Rotti – a traditional preparation made with black gram
- Pootharekulu – a delicate Andhra sweet made with wafer-thin rice starch sheets

Local sweet shops are particularly worth exploring if you want to sample traditional Andhra desserts.

Rather than relying on a fixed list of restaurants, ask locals or hotel staff about popular eateries operating during



4. Perupalem Beach

Another coastal stop is Perupalem Beach, also officially recognised as a tourist destination in West Godavari. Its setting makes it an easy addition to a wider itinerary through the region. Pair the beach with nearby villages and waterways to experience the contrast between Andhra's agricultural interior and its Bay of Bengal coastline.

5. Valanderarevu

For travellers interested in less conventional places to visit in

Palakollu's wider region, Valanderarevu near Narasapuram is worth considering. The Godavari backwater point is listed by the West Godavari district administration among the area's attractions.

The appeal here is the landscape: waterways, river views and coconut-lined surroundings provide a quieter alternative to more established tourist attractions. Local conditions and boating arrangements can vary, so confirm availability on arrival rather than relying on fixed schedules.

your visit, as restaurant availability and quality can change.

Shopping in Palakollu

Shopping in Palakollu is a local rather than luxury experience. The town's markets and bazaars are useful places to browse for clothing, everyday goods, religious items and regional products. Temple areas can also have stalls selling devotional merchandise and sweets.

Morning is generally the better time to explore local markets, when activity is lively and the heat is more manageable.

Best Time to Visit Palakollu

November to February is a comfortable period for exploring Palakollu and its surrounding attractions.

The cooler months are particularly suitable for combining temple sightseeing with outdoor excursions to the beaches, Godavari waterways and Kolleru Lake. They also overlap with the winter period when migratory birds can be seen at Kolleru.

Summer can be hot and humid, so travellers planning outdoor activities should start early and carry sufficient water and sun protection.

How to Reach Palakollu

By rail: Palakollu has its own railway station, making rail travel a convenient option for visitors arriving from other parts of Andhra Pradesh and the surrounding region.

By road: The town is connected by road with other major centres in West Godavari, and bus services operate through the regional network.

By air: Travellers arriving by air should check current flight and onward road connections. The West Godavari district administration identifies Vijayawada Airport as the nearest domestic airport for the district, while Rajahmundry is also an important gateway for exploring the wider Godavari region.

Where to Stay in Palakollu

Palakollu can work as a base for exploring the surrounding

temples, beaches and waterways, while the wider Godavari region provides additional resort-style accommodation.

The West Godavari district's official accommodation listings include Palavelli Boutique Resorts in the Palakollu area.

Dindi is another option for travellers who want a riverside setting, with Andhra Pradesh Tourism highlighting accommodation and boating experiences around the backwaters.

Always check current availability, facilities and access before booking, particularly during festival periods and peak travel seasons.

Tips for Visiting Palakollu

A little planning can make a Palakollu trip considerably more enjoyable.

Start early: Visit temples and outdoor attractions in the morning to avoid the strongest heat.

Carry water: The climate can be humid, particularly outside winter.

Dress appropriately: Lightweight clothing is useful for sightseeing, while modest attire is advisable when visiting temples.

Check boating arrangements: Boat services around backwater

destinations can be seasonal or locally operated.

Keep extra time for the countryside: Some of the most enjoyable moments come from travelling between attractions rather than rushing from one landmark to another.

Respect local communities and ecosystems: This is a landscape where agriculture, fishing, aquaculture and wetland habitats remain important to everyday life.

The Quiet Appeal of Palakollu

Palakollu may not be the first place that comes to mind when planning a trip to Andhra Pradesh. That is part of its charm.

The town brings together a spectacular historic temple, the waterways of the Godavari region and easy access to beaches and wetlands. It offers travellers the chance to experience a quieter side of the state, where rural landscapes and religious traditions remain central to the character of the destination.

For anyone searching for offbeat places in Andhra Pradesh, Palakollu is a destination worth putting on the map. Come for the Ksheerarama Temple, stay for the backwaters, beaches and countryside — and leave with a deeper appreciation of coastal Andhra beyond its better-known tourist cities.



Exploring the **Cultural Heart** of **Andhra Pradesh**

A Timeless River City of Faith, Literature, and Nature





Situated on the eastern banks of the mighty Godavari River, Gracefully set along the banks of the Godavari River, Rajahmundry is one of Andhra Pradesh's oldest and most culturally vibrant cities. Often regarded as the cultural capital of the region, the city blends literary heritage, riverine landscapes, spiritual landmarks, and a relaxed pace of life. Its scenic ghats, historic temples, and proximity to lush countryside make Rajahmundry an appealing destination for travellers seeking culture, nature, and heritage in equal measure.

One of the city's most striking landmarks is the Godavari Rail Bridge, an engineering marvel that stretches across the river and offers stunning views, especially at sunrise and sunset. Nearby, the riverfront ghats provide a serene setting for evening walks and boat rides. Spiritual seekers often visit the ISKCON Rajahmundry, known for its peaceful atmosphere and well-maintained premises. The Markandeya Temple, dedicated to Sage Markandeya, adds to the city's spiritual significance with its riverside location and traditional architecture. A short drive from the city leads to Dowleswaram Barrage, where the Godavari branches into canals that nourish the fertile delta. This area offers scenic views and insight into the region's irrigation system. Nature lovers can explore Papi Hills, a picturesque stretch of forested hills best experienced via a boat cruise on the Godavari. The journey through narrow gorges and lush landscapes is one of the most memorable experiences in the region.

Rajahmundry, officially known as Rajamahendravaram, brings together the Godavari River, centuries of literary and cultural heritage, historic engineering landmarks and the lush landscapes of eastern Andhra Pradesh. Here is a guide to the city's most rewarding attractions and nearby escapes.

Rajahmundry is a city where the Godavari is more than a geographical landmark—it is central to the region's history, culture and identity. Official district records describe Rajamahendravaram as an ancient city with more than a thousand years of history and recognise its long-standing reputation as a cultural centre of Andhra Pradesh.

Located on the banks of the Godavari, the city makes an appealing base for travellers interested in

heritage, religious tourism, river experiences and nature. Beyond the urban landscape lie the gardens and nurseries of Kadiyam, the forests around Maredumilli and the dramatic scenery of Papikondalu.

Why Rajahmundry deserves a place on your Andhra Pradesh itinerary

Rajahmundry offers a harmonious blend of culture, spirituality, and nature. Known as the birthplace of the Telugu language, the city appeals to lovers of literature and history, with its streets, bookshops, and cultural spaces reflecting centuries of Telugu heritage. The Godavari River adds a serene charm to the city. Life along the ghats moves gently, with morning rituals, quiet boat rides, and stunning sunsets. River cruises and Papikondalu trips offer peaceful, scenic experiences perfect for photographers and slow travellers.

Rajahmundry is also a spiritual hub, surrounded by revered temples such as Draksharamam, Bikkavolu, Kumararama Bheemeshwara Swamy Temple, and Sri Umakotilingeswara Swamy. The ISKCON Temple within the city provides a calm retreat with devotional programs and a welcoming atmosphere.

Pushkar Ghat: Experience the Godavari at its most atmospheric

Pushkar Ghat is one of the best-known riverfront spaces in Rajamahendravaram. The Godavari forms the backdrop for religious ceremonies and seasonal festivities, while the surrounding riverfront provides an opportunity to experience the city's relationship with the water. The Godavari Pushkaram, a major religious festival associated with the river, is held once every 12 years and



draws pilgrims from across India and beyond.

For visitors, the riverfront is particularly atmospheric around sunrise and sunset. Travellers should follow local safety guidance and use only designated areas when approaching or entering the river.

Godavari bridges: Engineering landmarks over a legendary river

Rajahmundry's bridges are among its most recognisable sights. The city has several major crossings over the Godavari, reflecting different eras of railway, road and bridge engineering. The Godavari Arch Bridge, also known as the Kovvur–Rajahmundry Bridge, was constructed between 1991 and 1997 and became operational for trains in 2003. The East Godavari district administration describes it as the latest of the three major bridges spanning the river at Rajahmundry. The older road-cum-rail bridge is another important part of the city's engineering heritage and has long been one of the defining views along the Godavari.

Papikondalu: A spectacular Godavari journey

For travellers with more time, a trip towards Papikondalu, or the Papi Hills, offers one of the region's most memorable experiences.

The hills form part of the Eastern Ghats and rise along the Godavari, where the river winds through densely forested landscapes. Andhra Pradesh Tourism describes a cruise through Papikondalu as a major scenic experience, with forested hills, river views and small settlements forming part of the journey. The East Godavari district administration also lists Papikondalu among the region's cultural-tourism experiences and provides information on organised boating routes.

Travel note: River-cruise schedules and operating conditions can change according to weather, river levels and local regulations. Check with the authorised operator or local tourism authorities before travelling.

Maredumilli: An Eco-Tourism Haven

of Forests, Waterfalls and Tribal Flavours

Set amid the lush forests of the Eastern Ghats in Andhra Pradesh, Maredumilli is a nature-rich destination known for its waterfalls, biodiversity and forest landscapes. Developed as



an eco-tourism destination, the area offers visitors a chance to experience the region's semi-evergreen forests and rolling terrain through activities such as trekking, birdwatching, camping and nature exploration. Popular attractions include the Jalatharangini, Amruthadhara and Rampa waterfalls, while Polluru Waterfalls, Bhupathipalem Reservoir, Gudisa and scenic viewpoints add to the region's appeal. Maredumilli also offers a taste of local tribal culinary traditions, with bamboo chicken and bamboo biryani among the distinctive dishes associated with the area. Located in the erstwhile East Godavari region, Maredumilli is accessible by road from Rajamahendravaram (Rajahmundry), while Rajamahendravaram Airport and railway station provide the nearest major air and rail connections. With its combination of forest trails, cascading waterfalls, local flavours and tranquil surroundings, Maredumilli offers an immersive introduction to the natural and cultural character of the Eastern Ghats.

Kadiyam: Where Rajahmundry's garden culture comes alive

One of the most distinctive experiences near Rajahmundry is

a visit to the nursery belt around Kadiyam. The East Godavari district administration identifies Kadiyam as a major nursery centre, with extensive cultivation of ornamental plants, flowers and fruit varieties. The official district tourism page places Kadiyam about 20 kilometres from Rajahmundry, while another district profile describes the nursery landscape as extending across thousands of acres.

For travellers interested in horticulture, photography or simply a slower-paced experience, the nurseries provide a colourful alternative to conventional sightseeing.

Rallabandi Subbarao Archaeological Museum

Rajahmundry's cultural story is also preserved in its museums. The Rallabandi Subbarao Archaeological Museum is among the city's heritage attractions and is specifically highlighted by the East Godavari district administration. The museum forms part of the city's wider cultural landscape along with the Damerla Rama Rao Art Gallery and the Sri Gowthami Regional Library.

A visit here can add historical context to a trip that otherwise focuses

heavily on the river and outdoor attractions.

Sir Arthur Cotton Museum and Dowleswaram Barrage

Rajahmundry's story is inseparable from the transformation of the Godavari into one of southern India's important irrigation systems. At nearby Dowleswaram, the Sir Arthur Cotton Museum explains the engineering history behind the irrigation works associated with Sir Arthur Cotton. The museum was inaugurated in 1988 and contains models, machinery and exhibits explaining the construction and operation of the barrage and related irrigation works. The district administration identifies the Dowleswaram Barrage, built under Cotton's supervision in the mid-19th century, as an important engineering landmark.

For visitors interested in the intersection of engineering, agriculture and colonial-era history, this is one of the more unusual stops around Rajahmundry.

Shri Kumararama Bheemeshwara Swamy Temple

Rising in the historic town of Samalkot, near Kakinada, Shri Kumararama Bheemeshwara Swamy Temple is one of Andhra Pradesh's five revered Pancharama Kshetras, making it an important destination on the state's Shiva pilgrimage circuit. Dedicated to Lord Shiva as Kumararama Bheemeshwara, the ancient temple blends spiritual significance with the architectural heritage of the Eastern Chalukya era. Traditionally associated with King Chalukya Bhima I, the temple is distinguished by its imposing stone architecture, expansive courtyards and intricately crafted pillars. Its most remarkable feature is the towering Shiva Linga, which extends through two levels of the temple, creating a striking vertical presence within the sanctum. For visitors, a walk through the temple reveals centuries-old stonework, spacious mandapas and a quiet atmosphere of devotion, offering a glimpse into the enduring religious and cultural traditions of coastal



Andhra. Along with Amararam at Amaravati, Daksharam at Draksharam, Ksheeraram at Palakollu and Somaram at Bhimavaram, Kumararam forms part of the sacred Pancharama tradition revered by Shiva devotees.

Golala Mamidada — A Temple Town of Towering Gopurams

Golala Mamidada, also known as Gollala Mamidada, is a prominent temple destination in Andhra Pradesh's Kakinada district, celebrated for its imposing gopurams, distinctive temple architecture and serene rural setting. The town is home to the renowned Sri Kodandarama Swamy Temple and Sri Suryanarayana Swamy Temple, drawing devotees as well as visitors interested in the region's architectural and cultural heritage. The Kodandarama Swamy Temple is particularly noted for its grand entrance towers, elaborate sculptural detailing and depictions drawn from Hindu religious traditions, while the Suryanarayana Swamy Temple is dedicated to the Sun God and forms an important part of the town's spiritual landscape. Surrounded by the fertile countryside of the Godavari region, Golala Mamidada offers a peaceful alternative to the larger pilgrimage centres of Andhra Pradesh and provides an opportunity to experience the state's living temple traditions, craftsmanship and devotional culture. The town is conveniently accessible by road from Kakinada, Rajamahendravaram (Rajahmundry) and nearby towns, with Samalkot Junction and Rajamahendravaram Airport providing rail and air connections for travellers.

A city shaped by literature and reform

Rajahmundry's appeal extends beyond conventional sightseeing. The city played an important role in the development of Telugu literary culture and social reform. The district administration notes the city's association with Nannayya and Kandukuri Veeresalingam, while also highlighting institutions such as the Sri Gowthami Regional Library and the Damerla Rama Rao Art Gallery.

That heritage gives Rajahmundry a different character from destinations that are primarily known for temples or landscapes. Here, the river, literature, art and social history are closely intertwined.

Best time to visit Rajahmundry

October to February is the peak season when the weather is pleasantly cool and ideal for sightseeing, outdoor adventures, and cultural exploration. Visitors can enjoy vibrant festivals, traditional performances, river cruises along scenic stretches, and temple visits that showcase the region's spiritual heritage. The crisp air and festive atmosphere make these months perfect for an unforgettable travel experience. Travellers should nevertheless check the forecast before planning river cruises or forest excursions, as conditions can affect access and activities.

How to reach Rajahmundry

By Air: Rajahmundry Airport is the nearest, located about 17 km from Rajahmundry city center. It connects Hyderabad, Chennai, and Bangalore. Taxis and cabs are accessible from the airport to the city center.

By Rail: Rajahmundry Railway Station 5 km from the city center. Trains from Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Chennai, and Bengaluru run frequently and conveniently.

By Road: The city is well linked via NH216 and state highways. Buses travel often from Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam, and other cities. Self-driving or taxi rentals offer the flexibility to visit neighbouring sights such as Papi Hills and Uppada Beach.

Nearest Airports :

Rajahmundry Airport (RJA)

Vijayawada Airport (VGA)

Nearest Railway Station :

Rajahmundry Railway Station (RJY)

What to know before you go

- Plan river activities carefully: Use authorised operators and follow local safety instructions.
- Respect religious customs: Dress



appropriately when visiting temples and other sacred sites.

- Allow time for excursions:

Papikondalu and Maredumilli are better experienced without a rushed schedule.

- Visit Kadiyam's nurseries:

The nursery belt offers a different perspective on the region's horticultural economy and landscape.

- Check current timings: Museum, boating and attraction schedules can change.

- Carry sun protection and water:

Daytime sightseeing can be demanding, particularly outside the cooler months.

The Rajahmundry experience

Rajahmundry is best approached not as a checklist of isolated attractions but as a destination shaped by the Godavari. The riverfront, historic bridges, irrigation works, literary heritage and surrounding forests all tell different chapters of the same story.

For travellers exploring Andhra Pradesh, Rajamahendravaram offers a compelling combination of culture, history, engineering, horticulture and nature—with the Godavari providing the thread that connects them all.

Attraction timings, transport schedules and boating operations should be reconfirmed before travel.



Virginia

A Refined Taste of the American South



Travel in Virginia is about more than discovering a destination — it is about creating memorable moments with the people who matter most. Whether the ideal escape means unwinding on a sandy Atlantic beach, hiking through the Blue Ridge Mountains, wandering historic city streets or simply slowing down over an exceptional meal, Virginia offers experiences designed to linger long after the journey ends.

For food-loving travellers, that sense of discovery continues at the table. Virginia's culinary landscape brings together the bounty of its coast and countryside, from renowned Chesapeake Bay oysters and heirloom grains to locally grown vegetables, savoury cheeses and thoughtfully crafted Southern cuisine. Across the state, chefs and local producers are giving regional ingredients a contemporary expression, creating a food scene that is as diverse as Virginia's landscapes.

The experience extends naturally into the glass. With more than 300 wineries, over 60 distilleries and a flourishing collection of breweries and cideries, Virginia offers an impressive repertoire of locally crafted beverages to complement its cuisine. From a leisurely vineyard tasting overlooking the Blue Ridge to fresh oysters enjoyed beside the Chesapeake, every experience offers another way to savour the character of the state.

For travellers seeking flavour, discovery and a deeper connection to place, Virginia invites them to explore its hidden corners, meet the people behind its food and drink, and discover the many reasons this destination is so compelling — one memorable taste at a time.

From Chesapeake oysters and elegant Virginia wines to farm-to-table cuisine and craft spirits, Virginia invites

travellers to discover the American South through its most distinctive flavours.

There is an art to experiencing Virginia slowly.

It might begin with a dozen freshly shucked oysters overlooking the Chesapeake Bay, followed by a leisurely afternoon among the vines of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Perhaps the evening unfolds over a refined farm-to-table dinner, accompanied by a Virginia wine, before continuing with a tasting of locally crafted spirits.

Across the state, food and drink have become an increasingly sophisticated expression of place. Virginia's culinary landscape brings together the traditions of the American South with contemporary cuisine, locally sourced ingredients and carefully crafted beverages, creating experiences that appeal to travellers seeking authenticity with a sense of refinement.

From coastal waters and working oyster farms to rolling vineyards, historic countryside and vibrant urban dining rooms, Virginia offers a journey where gastronomy becomes a way of discovering the destination.

The Art of Eating Like a Local **Virginia's culinary character is rooted in its people and its produce.**

Beyond acclaimed restaurants, travellers will find independent eateries, intimate dining rooms, farm-to-table establishments and local producers where the emphasis is firmly on provenance. Seasonal ingredients, traditional Southern flavours and contemporary interpretations come together in experiences that reveal the state's agricultural and cultural heritage.

For the discerning traveller, this is an opportunity to look beyond the menu and discover the stories behind it — the farmers cultivating the ingredients, the chefs interpreting regional traditions and the makers shaping Virginia's growing food and beverage culture.



The experience is often as much about setting as it is about cuisine: a relaxed meal in the countryside, a beautifully prepared dish overlooking the water, or an evening spent discovering local flavours in one of Virginia's lively towns and cities.

Chesapeake Oysters: A Taste of Place

Few culinary experiences capture Virginia's relationship with its landscape quite like an oyster enjoyed

close to the water where it was cultivated.

Harvested from the Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries and Atlantic waters, Virginia oysters reflect the character of their individual growing environments. The state recognises eight distinct oyster regions, each producing oysters with its own nuances of flavour.

The concept of “**terroir**” — the influence of water and environment on flavour — provides a fascinating lens through which to explore Virginia's



oyster culture. Depending on their origin, oysters can reveal layers of brine, sweetness, creaminess, butter and minerality.

This diversity turns an oyster tasting into something more than a meal. It becomes an exploration of Virginia's waterways and coastal identity.

The state's oyster story is also one of remarkable renewal. Virginia tourism information notes that more than 40 million oysters have been sold annually since 2016, following restoration efforts involving watermen, scientists, environmental agencies and federal officials to improve Chesapeake Bay conditions and rebuild the oyster industry.

Today, visitors can experience this heritage in increasingly immersive ways.

An Invitation to the Water

The **Virginia Oyster Trail** connects oyster producers, farmers, purveyors, seafood restaurants and raw bars throughout the state's Bay and river communities.

For travellers seeking a deeper connection with the destination, oyster excursions provide an opportunity to meet the people behind the industry and experience the shellfish at its source. Operators including Pleasure

House Oysters, SouthEast Expeditions and the Virginia Watermen's Heritage Tour Program offer experiences that bring visitors closer to Virginia's maritime traditions.

At Pleasure House Oysters, one distinctive chef-led experience takes guests onto the Lynnhaven River, where oysters can be enjoyed at an in-water picnic table while participants learn about the craft of oyster farming.

It is the kind of experience that transforms a simple tasting into a memorable encounter with place.

Eight Regions, Eight Expressions

Virginia's eight oyster regions offer culinary travellers an opportunity to taste the subtle differences created by geography.

Along the Atlantic coast of the Eastern Shore, the **Seaside** region is associated with pronounced saltiness followed by a sweeter, buttery finish. The **Upper Bay Eastern Shore** offers a balance of salt and sweetness, while the **Lower Bay Eastern Shore** is characterised by salty, creamy oysters with mellow sweetness.

On the western side of the Chesapeake, the **Upper Bay Western Shore** produces oysters associated with a lighter, sweeter cream profile.

Around the mouth of the Rappahannock River, oysters from the **Middle Bay Western Shore** offer light saltiness with cream or butter notes and hints of minerality.

Further south, the **Lower Bay Western Shore** is known for mild saltiness and a sweet finish. The **Tidewater** region combines salt and sweetness with a smooth finish, while the **Tangier/Middle Chesapeake Bay** region delivers a traditional Virginia Bay profile balancing salt and sweetness with buttery or creamy notes.

For those who appreciate provenance and nuance, comparing oysters from different regions provides an elegant introduction to Virginia's geography — one shellfish, eight expressions of the water.

Virginia Wine Country: Vineyards Framed by the Blue Ridge

If the Chesapeake provides Virginia with its maritime flavours, the state's vineyards offer another perspective on its landscape.

With more than 300 wineries, Virginia's wine country stretches across a diverse agricultural landscape, with many estates offering tastings complemented by views of mountains, valleys and countryside.

The experience is particularly evocative in autumn, when the surrounding landscape becomes a dramatic backdrop for vineyard visits and leisurely tastings.

At **Stinson Vineyards** in Crozet, guests can discover small-batch, French-style wines while taking in panoramic views of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The property also offers accommodation at The Inn at Stinson Vineyards, allowing visitors to extend the experience beyond the tasting room.

In North Garden, **Pippin Hill Farm & Vineyards**, part of the Monticello Wine Trail, brings together wine and food, with ingredients grown in its gardens contributing to the culinary experience.

Nearby, **King Family Vineyards** in Crozet combines wine with expansive views of the Blue Ridge, while Sunday polo matches through October add

another dimension to a leisurely afternoon in Virginia wine country.

Northern Virginia offers a different setting. **Stone Tower Winery** in Leesburg occupies Hogback Mountain, while **Bluemont Vineyards** sits high on the eastern slope of the Blue Ridge Mountains, overlooking the Loudoun Valley and, on clear days, towards Washington, DC.

Other wine destinations highlighted by Virginia tourism include **Barboursville Vineyards**, **Crimson Lane Vineyards**, **Upper Shirley Vineyards**, **Breaux Vineyards**, **Early Mountain Vineyards**, **Afton Mountain Vineyards**, **Glen Manor Vineyards** and **DuCard Vineyards**.

For luxury travellers, the appeal lies not simply in the tasting itself, but in the combination of wine, landscape, architecture, food and the unhurried rhythm of the countryside.

Craftsmanship in Every Glass

Virginia's beverage culture extends beyond wine.

Craft breweries, distilleries and cideries add further depth to the state's gastronomic landscape, with producers drawing on local ingredients, agricultural traditions and regional character.

A curated food-and-drink itinerary can move effortlessly between vineyard estates, breweries and distilleries, linking tastings with scenic drives, countryside escapes, farm visits and outdoor pursuits.

The result is a beverage culture that reflects the same sense of place found in Virginia's cuisine: local, distinctive and closely connected to the land.

Where Food Becomes an Experience

For today's luxury traveller, memorable dining increasingly extends beyond the restaurant table.

Virginia responds with experiences designed to engage all the senses. Food tours, oyster excursions, mushroom foraging, farm visits and hands-on seafood experiences allow visitors to participate in the culinary culture rather than simply observe it.

In destinations including Richmond,



Charlottesville and the Chesapeake Bay region, travellers can meet local makers, explore the origins of regional ingredients and discover the traditions that continue to shape Virginia's cuisine.

These encounters bring an element of intimacy to the journey. A farm visit offers insight into the ingredients that later appear on a dinner table. An oyster excursion reveals the relationship between the Bay and the food it produces. A vineyard visit connects a glass of wine with the soil, climate and landscape surrounding it.

A Journey Measured in Flavours

Virginia's culinary appeal is ultimately inseparable from its sense of place.

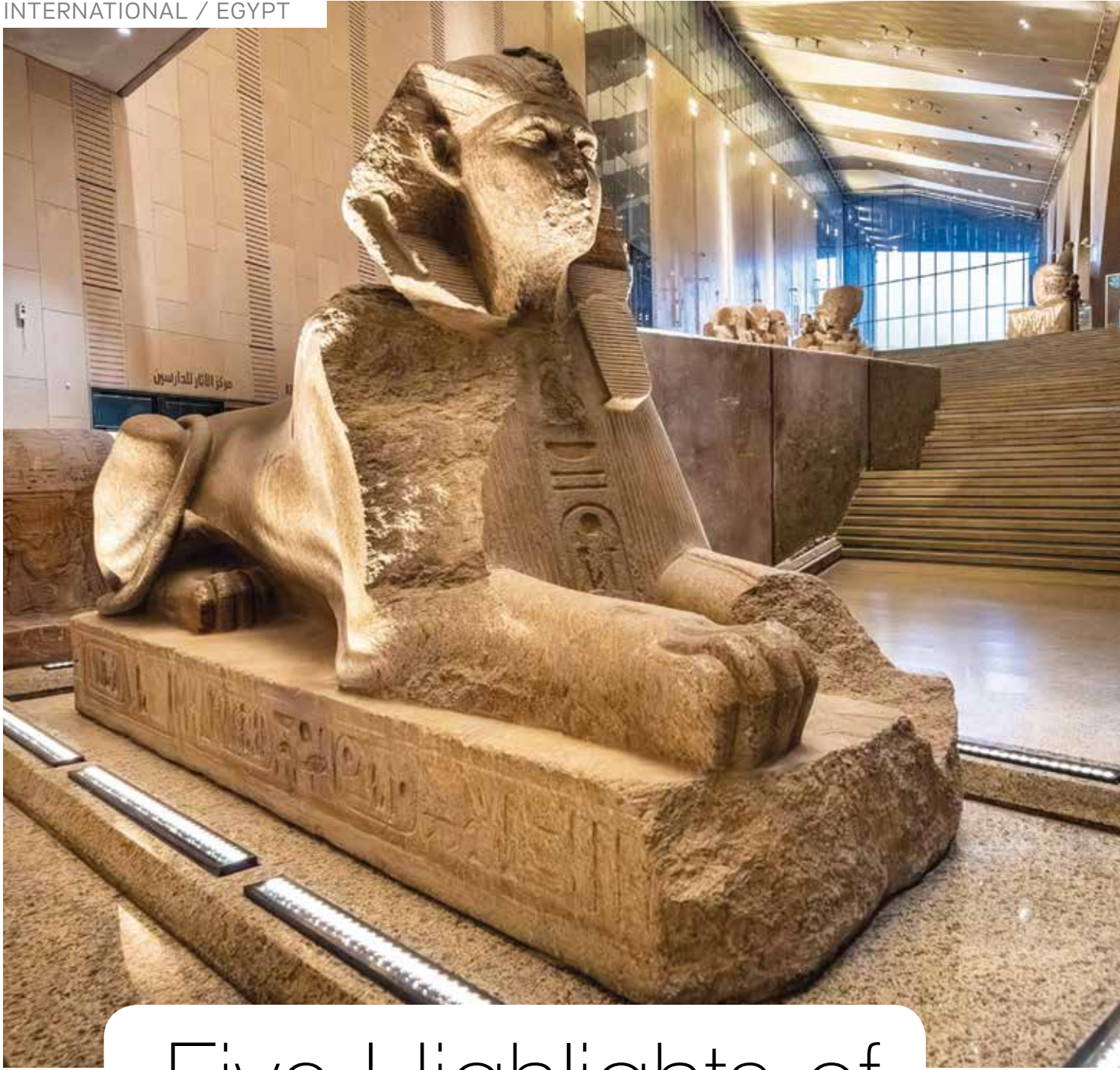
Along the Chesapeake, oysters reveal the character of different waterways. Across the Blue Ridge and

surrounding countryside, vineyards offer wine framed by expansive landscapes. In towns and cities, chefs reinterpret Southern traditions, while breweries, distilleries and cideries add contemporary expressions to the state's food culture.

For travellers who value authenticity, craftsmanship and meaningful experiences, Virginia offers an itinerary that can be savoured at an unhurried pace.

Here, the finest experiences are not necessarily defined by formality. They are defined by provenance, setting and connection — an oyster enjoyed on the water, wine tasted among the vines, a meal shaped by local ingredients or an encounter with the people who make Virginia's culinary traditions possible.

It is a journey through the American South, told one remarkable flavour at a time.



Five Highlights of Egypt's Grand Egyptian Museum

From colossal royal statues and Tutankhamun's golden treasures to an ancient boat and glimpses of everyday life, these are five highlights to seek out at Cairo's extraordinary new museum.



For more than two decades, the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) has been taking shape beside the Giza Plateau, culminating in its official opening on 1 November 2025. Today, the museum provides a vast new setting for exploring ancient Egypt, bringing together collections spanning from prehistory to the Greek and Roman periods.

The museum complex covers about 500,000 square metres, with the museum building itself occupying approximately 92,000 square metres.



Its collections encompass more than 50,000 artefacts, while 12 Main Gallery halls take visitors through thousands of years of Egyptian civilisation.

The scale means that even a full day offers only a glimpse of what is on display. For first-time visitors, however, a handful of remarkable objects provide an excellent introduction to the museum's collections — from monumental representations of pharaohs to finely crafted objects that reveal the personal and everyday worlds of ancient Egyptians.

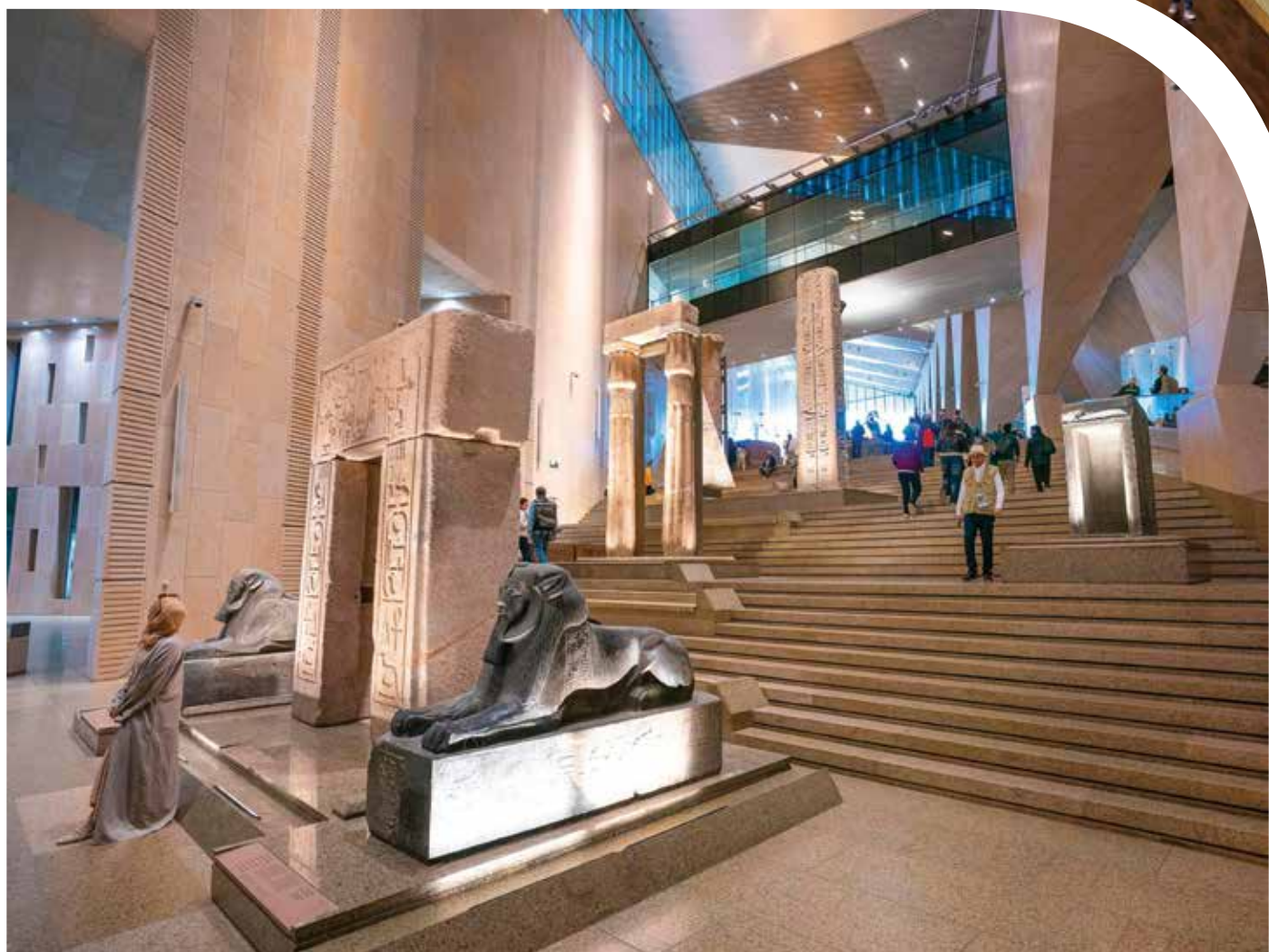
1. The Colossal Statue of Ramesses II

One of the first sights to command attention is the colossal statue of **Ramesses II**, which dominates the Grand Hall.

Standing more than 11 metres high, the granite statue dates to Egypt's New Kingdom and the 19th Dynasty. It originally stood outside the main temple of the god Ptah at Memphis, where it was associated with the king's power and divine status. Two royal children, Prince Khaemwaset and Princess Bintanath, are depicted behind the king's legs.

The statue also has a special place in the history of GEM itself. According to the museum, it became the first artefact to find a permanent home at the heart of the building in 2018, several years before the museum officially opened.

For visitors, the experience begins even before reaching the galleries: the monumental sculpture establishes the scale and ambition of the museum





while immediately connecting the modern building with one of Egypt's most celebrated rulers.

2. Tutankhamun's Golden Burial Mask

Few ancient Egyptian artefacts are as instantly recognisable as the golden burial mask of **Tutankhamun**.

The solid-gold mask was placed over the head and shoulders of the young king's mummified remains. Its highly detailed face presents Tutankhamun in idealised form, while the mask incorporates religious symbolism associated with Osiris and the sun god Re. The back carries an inscription invoking divine protection.

The mask forms part of GEM's Tutankhamun galleries, where the museum has brought together more than 5,000 objects from the celebrated royal tomb. The collection includes not

only spectacular pieces of gold and jewellery, but also furniture, clothing, weapons, ceremonial objects and personal possessions, providing a broader picture of royal life and ancient Egyptian beliefs about death and the afterlife.

The result is an opportunity to see Tutankhamun's treasures not as isolated masterpieces, but as part of a much larger story surrounding the young pharaoh.

3. Khufu's Solar Boat

Few objects at GEM demonstrate the engineering capabilities of ancient Egypt quite like **Khufu's Solar Boat**.

Dating to around 2,500 BCE, the ancient wooden vessel was discovered in 1954 in a pit beside the Great Pyramid of Khufu. After being reconstructed and displayed near the pyramid for decades, the

boat was transferred to the Grand Egyptian Museum in 2021 in a complex engineering operation. Egypt's State Information Service reported that the 43-metre-long vessel was moved to its new home using a specialised remotely controlled vehicle.

The boat is now housed in the dedicated **Khufu's Boats Museum**, one of the principal visitor experiences within the GEM complex.

The term "solar boat" reflects ancient Egyptian beliefs surrounding the journey of the deceased king and the sun god. Its extraordinary preservation and scale offer a rare insight into the craftsmanship and technological capabilities of Egypt's Old Kingdom.

Standing alongside such an ancient vessel also provides a striking reminder that the world of the pyramids was not defined solely by monumental

stone architecture. Ancient Egypt possessed sophisticated knowledge of woodworking, transportation and boatbuilding — skills captured in this remarkable survivor.

4. The Statue of Queen Hatshepsut

The **statue of Queen Hatshepsut** offers a different perspective on ancient Egyptian kingship.

Hatshepsut, a daughter of King Thutmose I and chief royal wife of Thutmose II, initially served as regent for her stepson, Thutmose III. She subsequently assumed the position of king. Her official representations increasingly adopted the visual language traditionally associated with male pharaohs, including the nemes headcloth, royal kilt and false beard.

The GEM statue, carved from red granite, combines feminine features with these masculine royal symbols. It was discovered in 1928 at Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahari in West Thebes, modern-day Luxor.

The sculpture is displayed on the Grand Stairs, where it forms part of a collection of 59 significant artefacts. The staircase provides an imposing transition into the museum's chronological and thematic galleries, with royal statues, columns, stelae and sarcophagi placed along the visitor route.

Hatshepsut's presence is particularly compelling because the statue illustrates how royal imagery could be carefully constructed to communicate authority, legitimacy and divine kingship.

5. Objects That Reveal Everyday Life

The grandeur of ancient Egypt can easily make its rulers the centre of attention, but some of the most revealing museum objects are those that illuminate ordinary life.

Across the Main Galleries, visitors encounter artefacts illustrating work, administration, religion, domestic activities and social life. The museum's approach deliberately moves beyond royal monuments, organising the Main Galleries around three broad themes



— Kingship, Society and Beliefs

— while taking visitors chronologically from prehistoric Egypt to the Roman period.

Among the collection are objects that provide glimpses of everyday activity, including a painted wooden statuette from the Old Kingdom depicting a servant roasting a bird. The museum explains that such servant figures were placed in elite burials to represent activities that would support

the deceased in the afterlife.

New Kingdom material also offers insight into the lives of workers and communities. A limestone stela in the collection, for example, records the religious devotion of two men connected with the Theban necropolis and its workforce.

These objects provide a useful counterpoint to the colossal statues and royal treasures. They bring the visitor closer to the people who lived,



worked, worshipped and built their lives within the civilisation that produced Egypt's most famous monuments.

A Museum Built for a New Generation of Visitors

The Grand Egyptian Museum is more than a collection of ancient objects. Its design and visitor experience seek to place ancient Egyptian heritage within a contemporary setting, combining archaeological collections with modern

museum technology, educational facilities, gardens, dining and retail spaces.

Its location, overlooking the Giza Plateau and close to the pyramids, creates another layer to the experience. Visitors can move between the monumental landscape of ancient Memphis and the museum's purpose-built galleries, encountering thousands of years of history under one roof.

For travellers planning a first visit, the museum's scale makes selective

exploration worthwhile. The colossal Ramesses II provides a dramatic introduction; Tutankhamun's treasures offer an intimate encounter with royal life; Khufu's boat reveals ancient engineering; Hatshepsut's statue tells a story of power and representation; and the everyday objects bring the civilisation down to a human scale.

Together, they offer five very different ways of understanding ancient Egypt — and a compelling reason to linger.

Seven Remarkable Egyptian Treasures

to Discover Beyond the Grand Egyptian Museum

From the Rosetta Stone in London to the celebrated bust of Nefertiti in Berlin, these extraordinary Egyptian antiquities offer travellers another way to explore the legacy of one of the world's great ancient civilisations.





The opening of the **Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM)** has created a spectacular new gateway to ancient Egypt, bringing together thousands of remarkable objects in a purpose-built setting overlooking the Giza Plateau.

The museum's Main Galleries take visitors on a chronological journey through Egyptian civilisation, while the Tutankhamun Galleries bring together more than 5,000 objects from the young king's tomb. The complex also includes the Grand Hall, Grand Stairs, Khufu's Boats Museum and extensive visitor facilities.

Yet the story of ancient Egypt extends well beyond Cairo.

Important Egyptian antiquities can be found in museums and public spaces around the world, giving travellers another opportunity to encounter masterpieces of ancient art, science, craftsmanship and daily life. From monumental architecture and royal



sculpture to a 5,000-year-old garment, these objects offer fascinating insights into the civilisation that developed along the Nile.

For travellers planning cultural journeys through Europe and North America, here are seven remarkable Egyptian treasures worth seeking out.

1. The Rosetta Stone

British Museum, London

Few objects have played such an important role in the modern understanding of ancient Egypt as the **Rosetta Stone**.

Dating to 196 BCE, the granodiorite stela carries a decree written in three scripts: hieroglyphic, Demotic and ancient Greek. The presence of the three versions helped scholars decipher Egyptian hieroglyphs, opening a new chapter in the study of the country's ancient language, history and culture.

Discovered in 1799 near the town of Rashid, or Rosetta, the stone has been part of the British Museum's collection since 1802. It is displayed in the Egyptian sculpture gallery, where visitors can view the inscriptions at close range.

For travellers interested in the history of Egyptology, the Rosetta Stone provides an especially compelling starting point. Its three inscriptions transformed scholars' ability to read ancient Egyptian texts and helped reveal thousands of years of history that had remained largely inaccessible to modern readers.

2. The Luxor Obelisk

Place de la Concorde, Paris

A striking piece of ancient Egypt stands at the heart of modern Paris.

The **Luxor Obelisk**, a monumental red-granite structure more than 3,000 years old, originally stood at the entrance to Luxor Temple on the east bank of the Nile.

The obelisk in Paris is one of a pair that once marked the entrance to the temple. Today, its counterpart remains at Luxor, creating an intriguing connection between two destinations separated by thousands of kilometres.

Standing in the centre of the Place de la Concorde, the Paris obelisk is a reminder of the extraordinary scale and craftsmanship of ancient Egyptian monuments.

For visitors combining Egypt with a European city break, it offers the unusual experience of encountering an ancient Egyptian monument in one of Paris's most recognisable public spaces.



3. The Dendera Zodiac

Louvre Museum, Paris

The **Dendera Zodiac** provides a fascinating glimpse into the astronomical knowledge and religious traditions of ancient Egypt.

The sandstone relief dates to the Ptolemaic period and was

discovered at the Temple of Hathor at Dendera in Upper Egypt. Its intricate design depicts zodiacal signs, constellations and celestial figures, reflecting the interaction of Egyptian and Greek traditions during the later period of ancient Egyptian civilisation.



The relief is currently displayed in the Louvre's Department of Egyptian Antiquities, where visitors can examine its detailed carvings and celestial imagery. The museum records the object as dating to the reigns of Cleopatra VII and Ptolemy XIII, around 50 BCE.

Seeing the Zodiac in Paris can also inspire travellers to include Dendera in an Egypt itinerary. The Temple of Hathor remains one of the country's most distinctive ancient sites, allowing visitors to experience the architectural setting associated with the celebrated celestial relief.

4. The Sarcophagus of Seti I

Sir John Soane's Museum, London

In the atmospheric surroundings of **Sir John Soane's Museum** in London, visitors can encounter one of the most remarkable surviving royal burial objects from ancient Egypt: the sarcophagus of Pharaoh **Seti I**.

Seti I died around 1279 BCE and was buried in a richly decorated tomb in the Valley of the Kings. His alabaster sarcophagus is decorated inside and outside with hieroglyphic inscriptions from the **Book of Gates**, a collection of funerary texts associated with the journey of the deceased through the underworld. A representation of the sky goddess Nut appears inside the sarcophagus.

The translucent quality of the alabaster adds to the object's visual impact, while the finely carved inscriptions provide a window into ancient Egyptian beliefs about death and the afterlife.

The sarcophagus was discovered in 1817 and subsequently acquired by architect and collector Sir John Soane. It became one of the most important objects in his collection and remains a centrepiece of the museum's Sepulchral Chamber.

For visitors exploring London's cultural attractions, the experience offers an intimate encounter with the funerary traditions of one of Egypt's most important pharaohs.

5. The Bust of Nefertiti

Neues Museum, Berlin

The elegant painted bust of **Queen Nefertiti** is among the most recognisable portraits from the ancient world.

Created during Egypt's 18th Dynasty, the limestone bust represents Nefertiti with a distinctive blue crown and finely painted features. It was discovered in 1912 at Amarna, the ancient city associated with Pharaoh Akhenaten.

Today, the bust is displayed at Berlin's Neues Museum, where it forms one of the highlights of the Egyptian collection.



Its appeal lies in the remarkable combination of artistry and individuality. The carefully modelled face, painted details and distinctive crown provide a vivid impression of how royal portraiture was used during one of the most fascinating periods of ancient Egyptian history.

For travellers visiting Berlin, the Neues Museum provides an opportunity to place Nefertiti's celebrated portrait

within a broader collection of Egyptian antiquities and explore the artistic and cultural world of the Amarna period.

6. The Tarkhan Dress

Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, London

Not all ancient treasures are monumental.

At London's **Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology**, the **Tarkhan**

Dress offers an extraordinarily intimate connection with life in ancient Egypt.

Made from linen and excavated at Tarkhan south of Cairo, the dress was first recovered in 1913. Radiocarbon testing later established that the linen dates to between approximately 3482 and 3102 BCE, confirming it as the world's oldest known woven garment.

The garment retains carefully made pleats around the sleeves and bodice, while signs of wear provide clues about its use during life. Its survival is particularly remarkable given the fragility of ancient textiles.

The Tarkhan Dress also illustrates the diversity of Egypt's archaeological heritage. While monumental temples and royal tombs often dominate the visitor experience, a simple linen garment can provide an equally compelling connection with the people who lived along the Nile thousands of years ago.

The Petrie Museum houses more than 80,000 objects representing many aspects of life in the Nile Valley, making it a rewarding destination for travellers seeking a more intimate perspective on ancient Egypt.





7. The Bust of Prince Ankhhaf

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

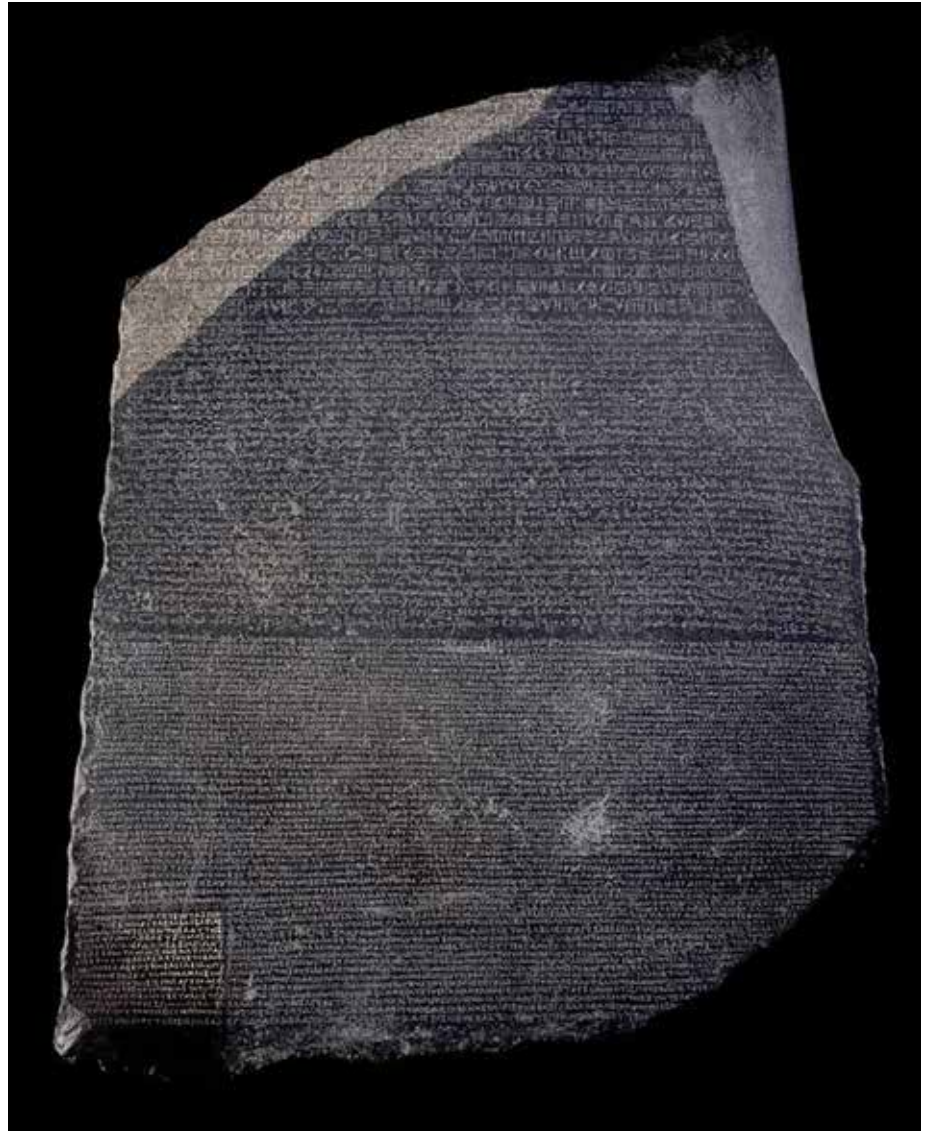
At Boston's **Museum of Fine Arts**, the painted limestone bust of **Prince Ankhhaf** offers a remarkable portrait from the age of the pyramids.

Ankhhaf lived during Egypt's 4th Dynasty, around the period of the construction of the great pyramids at Giza. The sculpture is particularly celebrated for its naturalistic treatment of the human face.

The Museum of Fine Arts describes the bust as the most convincing surviving example of realistic portraiture from the Old Kingdom. It forms part of the museum's collection of masterpieces from Egypt's Pyramid Age, alongside other important works excavated at Giza.

The sculpture provides an intriguing contrast to the highly idealised representations often associated with Egyptian royal art. Its realistic features create an unusually direct sense of the individual behind the ancient name.

For visitors exploring Boston's cultural institutions, the Ankhhaf bust offers a fascinating link to the world of Giza and the people who lived during



the period when Egypt's most famous pyramids were being created.

A World of Egyptian History

The Grand Egyptian Museum has established a spectacular new home for ancient Egyptian heritage, but the story does not end at the Giza Plateau.

Across London, Paris and Berlin, and as far afield as Boston, travellers can encounter remarkable Egyptian objects that illuminate different aspects of the civilisation — its writing, astronomy, royal traditions, art, craftsmanship and everyday life.

The Rosetta Stone reveals the breakthrough that allowed modern scholars to read hieroglyphs. The Dendera Zodiac offers an extraordinary glimpse into ancient ideas about the

heavens. The sarcophagus of Seti I reflects beliefs surrounding the afterlife, while the Tarkhan Dress brings the visitor closer to the everyday world of people who lived thousands of years ago.

Together with the collections of the Grand Egyptian Museum and the archaeological sites of Egypt itself, these treasures form part of a remarkable global journey through one of history's most enduring civilisations.

For travellers fascinated by culture, history and archaeology, following the story of ancient Egypt can therefore extend well beyond a single destination — from the banks of the Nile to the galleries of some of the world's great cities.



Nine Greek Islands

for Food-Loving
Travellers

From Cretan olive oil and Naxos cheeses to Santorini's volcanic produce and Samos Muscat, Greece's islands offer a culinary journey as diverse as their landscapes.

Greek island-hopping is traditionally associated with sun-drenched beaches, whitewashed villages and long evenings beside the Aegean or Ionian Sea. But for travellers who plan their journeys around food, each island offers another reason to linger.

Local climates, soils, farming traditions and centuries of cultural exchange have created distinctive culinary identities across the Greek archipelago. Olive oil, fresh seafood, honey and seasonal vegetables form a common thread, while individual islands bring their own cheeses, wines, spirits, fruits and traditional recipes to the table.

From the mountains of Crete to the vineyards of Santorini and the mastic groves of Chios, these nine islands offer particularly rewarding destinations for gastronomic travellers.

1. Crete: A culinary tradition rooted in antiquity

As Greece's largest island, Crete has one of the country's most distinctive food cultures. Its cuisine is built around vegetables, pulses, herbs, olive oil, local cheeses, seafood and meat, with many recipes drawing on ingredients that have been part of the island's food culture for centuries.

Extra-virgin olive oil remains central to Cretan cooking, while graviera, a

PDO cheese, is among the island's best-known dairy products. Visitors can also encounter dishes such as dakos — barley rusks topped with tomato and cheese — as well as snails, rabbit, wild greens and a variety of savoury pies. Honey features prominently in Cretan sweets.

Wine is another important part of the island's identity. Crete has a winemaking tradition stretching back about 4,000 years, with indigenous varieties including Vidiano, Vilana, Dafni, Thrapsathiri, Kotsifali and Mandilari. The island's wineries, particularly around Heraklion and Chania, provide opportunities to explore this modern revival of an ancient tradition.

Don't leave without trying: Cretan extra-virgin olive oil, graviera, dakos, local wines and tsikoudia.

2. Naxos: The Cyclades' fertile food basket

Naxos stands apart from many of its Cycladic neighbours for its fertile agricultural landscape. The island's mountains, plains, vineyards and livestock farms support a broad range of local products.

Its culinary reputation is closely associated with **Naxos potatoes**, as well as cheeses including graviera, arseniko and xinotyro. The island also produces kitron, a liqueur made from the leaves of the citron tree, and a range of other agricultural products.

The combination of farming and cheesemaking gives Naxos a cuisine with a distinctly substantial character. Local dishes make generous use of potatoes, meat, cheese, vegetables and wine, while traditional sweets and spoon sweets provide a sweeter conclusion to a meal.





Don't leave without trying: Naxos potatoes, graviera and arseniko cheese, along with a glass of locally produced kitron.

3. Tinos: Artichokes, cheese and island produce

Tinos is increasingly recognised for a food culture that reflects its agricultural and pastoral traditions. The island's distinctive terraced landscape supports vineyards and crops, while livestock farming and fishing contribute to its culinary identity.

Artichokes are among Tinos' signature ingredients, alongside capers, barley, figs and thyme honey. Local cheesemakers produce a range of dairy products, while indigenous grape varieties add another dimension to the island's food-and-wine culture.

Traditional Cycladic cooking on Tinos includes artichoke pie and meat with celery, while local sweets such as skaltsounia offer a taste of the island's baking traditions.

Beyond food, Tinos is known for its traditional villages, marble craftsmanship and network of walking trails, making it possible to combine culinary discoveries with cultural exploration.



Don't leave without trying: Artichoke-based dishes, local cheeses, thyme honey and Tinian wine.

4. Santorini: Volcanic soils and distinctive wines

Santorini's spectacular caldera is only part of the island's appeal. Its volcanic landscape has helped shape a culinary tradition based on crops capable of thriving in challenging conditions.

One of its most celebrated products is **Santorini fava**, a PDO product made from yellow split peas. Official tourism information notes that the crop has been cultivated on the island for thousands of years. Traditionally served as a smooth purée with ingredients such as onion, capers and olive oil, it remains one of Santorini's signature dishes.

The island is equally important on Greece's wine map. Assyrtiko is its best-known grape variety, producing white wines noted for their acidity and mineral character, while Vinsanto represents one of Santorini's traditional sweet-wine styles.

Santorini's culinary repertoire also includes capers, cherry tomatoes, white aubergines and traditional tomato fritters, ingredients that reflect the island's dry, windswept environment.

Don't leave without trying: Santorini fava, tomato fritters, capers, white aubergine and an Assyrtiko.

5. Chios: The island of mastic

Chios has a culinary ingredient unlike almost anywhere else in Greece: **mastic**.



Produced from the mastic trees of southern Chios, the aromatic resin is used in sweets, baked goods, liqueurs and other foods. The product is so closely associated with the island that the historic Mastihohoria — the fortified mastic villages of southern Chios — form an important part of its cultural landscape.

The island's culinary identity extends well beyond mastic. Chios is known for its intensely aromatic mandarins, oranges and lemon blossoms, which are used in spoon sweets, preserves and drinks. Local cheeses, handmade pasta and seasonal mushrooms also feature in the island's food culture.

Don't leave without trying: Mastic liqueur or sweets, Chios mandarins and traditional spoon sweets.

6. Lesvos: Ouzo, olive oil and meze

Lesvos offers a particularly sociable approach to food, with its cuisine closely linked to olive oil, seafood and **ouzo**.

The island is home to a strong olive-growing tradition and is particularly associated with ouzo production. Plomari, on the southern coast, is one of the places most closely identified with the spirit.

Ouzo is traditionally enjoyed alongside small dishes, making a visit to a local ouzo establishment as much a social experience as a meal. Fish, octopus and other seafood work naturally alongside the spirit, while local olive oil provides a foundation for many dishes.



Lesvos also offers an opportunity to combine food with nature and culture: the entire island forms a UNESCO Global Geopark, encompassing landscapes ranging from wetlands to the famous Petrified Forest.

Don't leave without trying: Local ouzo accompanied by seafood and meze, plus the island's extra-virgin olive oil.

7. Corfu: Ionian flavours with Venetian influences

Corfu's cuisine reflects the island's long history at the crossroads of Mediterranean cultures. Its lush landscape supports extensive olive groves, vineyards and citrus cultivation, while its culinary traditions reveal strong Venetian and wider European influences.

The island's enormous olive grove, with millions of trees, produces olive oil as well as olives and other olive-based products. Corfu is also associated with **kumquat**, a small citrus fruit introduced to the island and now produced as a PGI product. It appears in liqueurs, preserves and sweets.

Traditional dishes include **pastitsada**, in which rooster or beef is cooked in a richly seasoned tomato sauce and served with thick pasta, as well as **sofrito** and **bourdeto**. The island also has its own ginger-and-lemon soft drink, known as **tsitsibira**.

Don't leave without trying: Pastitsada, kumquat liqueur or preserves, local olive oil and Corfiot wines.

8. Samos: A destination for wine lovers

Samos has a long-established reputation for wine, particularly wines made from the **Muscat** grape.

The island's vineyards occupy mountainous and hilly terrain, while the local wine industry has preserved a strong connection between agriculture, community and tourism. The United Winemaking Agricultural Cooperative of Samos identifies Muscat as the dominant grape planted across the island, and visitors can explore the island's winemaking heritage through wineries and wine-related attractions.

Samos wines are especially associated with aromatic sweet styles, making them natural companions to desserts, fruit and cheese. The island's broader agricultural landscape also produces olive oil, citrus and tomatoes.

For travellers interested in history as well as gastronomy, Samos offers another major attraction: the Tunnel of Eupalinos, an extraordinary ancient engineering achievement.

Don't leave without trying: Samos Muscat, particularly alongside local cheese or dessert.

9. Rhodes: A crossroads of Mediterranean flavours

Rhodes' location in the southeastern Aegean has made it a meeting point for culinary influences over many centuries. Ottoman, Venetian and Italian traditions have all contributed to the island's food culture, which remains firmly rooted in Mediterranean ingredients.

Local cooking makes use of wheat, olive oil, wild greens, herbs, handmade pasta and cheeses, while traditional Dodecanese dishes include **kapamas**, or stuffed baby goat, and a range of sweets such as **xerotigana** and **pastelaries**—dried figs prepared with almonds and sesame.

Rhodes also offers a useful reminder that gastronomy is inseparable from the island's history. Its medieval city, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, reflects centuries of cultural exchange and provides a compelling backdrop for exploring traditional food.

Don't leave without trying: Kapamas, xerotigana, pastelaries and local wine.

A culinary journey through the Greek islands

Greek island cuisine is not a single culinary tradition but a collection of regional food cultures shaped by geography, climate, agriculture and history. A meal in Crete tells a different story from one in Santorini; the mastic of Chios has little in common with the kumquat of Corfu, while Samos' Muscat and Santorini's Assyrtiko demonstrate the remarkable diversity of Greek wine.

For travellers, that diversity makes island-hopping about more than beaches and scenery. Following local produce from vineyard and olive grove to village taverna can provide another way to understand the character of each destination — one plate, glass and regional ingredient at a time.



VFS Global Expands Korea Visa Services Across South Asia to Six Centres across India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh

VFS Global has been the trusted partner of the Government of the Republic of Korea for visa processing services in India since 2011, operating existing centres in New Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai and Bengaluru

VFS Global, the global leader in trusted technology services, empowering secure mobility for governments and citizens, has announced the expansion of South Korea visa services across six centres in South Asia. In India, VFS Global operates state-of-the-art Korea Visa Application Centres in New Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Kolkata. To further enhance the visa application experience for travellers, VFS Global is inaugurating

a new visa centre, providing applicants with a more personalised and convenient visa application submission experience.

With the recent opening of Korea Visa Application Centres in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Colombo, Sri Lanka, VFS Global now manages six Korea Visa Application Centres across three countries in South Asia, making a total of nine centres across six countries globally. This expansion comes as VFS Global celebrates 25 years of enabling global

mobility and connecting people, businesses and governments through trusted visa, passport and citizen services worldwide.

The new Visa Application Center in New Delhi was inaugurated on 15 September 2026 by **H.E. Mr. Lee Seong-ho, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to India.**

Commenting on the launch, **H.E. Mr. Lee Seong-ho, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to India**, said, "This is an important step in further strengthening

the relationship between the Republic of Korea and India. The new centre has been designed to provide applicants with seamless, efficient, and accessible application experience. We appreciate VFS Global's continued support and look forward to further strengthening our collaboration to facilitate travel and promote greater people to people exchanges between the Republic of Korea and India."

Ms. Yummi Talwar, Chief Operating Officer - South Asia, VFS Global, said, "Reaching six Korea Visa Application Centres across three countries in South Asia is a significant milestone in our partnership with the Republic of Korea and reflects the growing demand for Korea visas among travellers across the region. This milestone also underscores our commitment to continually enhancing the visa application experience through upgraded services, modern facilities, and highly trained teams, making the journey more seamless and convenient for every applicant across South Asia."

VFS Global's role in the visa application process is limited to front-end administrative tasks only, which include collecting visa application forms and required documentation as per the checklist, and enrolling biometrics. VFS Global has no role in the decision-making process of granting or refusing a visa. The decision to grant or refuse a visa is the sole prerogative and sole responsibility of the concerned Embassy.

Atmosphere Core signs 10th Maldives resort with ONE BANYAN debut

Atmosphere Core is expanding its Maldives portfolio with the signing of ONE BANYAN Amaraa Faru An Atmosphere Hotel, a 118-villa island resort in Kaafu Atoll scheduled to open in March 2027.

The property will become Atmosphere Core's 10th resort in the Maldives and the first under its new ONE BANYAN co-branded island resort concept. It will operate within Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts under the "An Atmosphere Hotel" sub-brand.

The ONE BANYAN concept is designed to give individual resorts their own identity while connecting them through the wider Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts portfolio.

Salil Panigrahi, co-founder and managing director of Atmosphere Core, said the new resort was being developed in response to changing traveller preferences, with greater emphasis on personalised stays and destination-led experiences.

New resort in Kaafu Atoll

ONE BANYAN Amaraa Faru will be located in Kaafu Atoll, approximately 45 minutes by speedboat from Velana International Airport.

The resort's name combines two cultural references. "Amaraa" is inspired by a Sanskrit term associated with eternity or immortality, while "Faru" means reef in Dhivehi, reflecting the property's connection with the surrounding marine environment.

The resort will offer Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts' Holiday Plan, covering dining, wellness, snorkelling and other tropical activities.

118 beach and overwater villas

The accommodation will comprise 118 beach and overwater villas, with private pools across the categories announced by the developer.

Standard beach villas will measure 100 square metres, while family beach villas will extend to 164 square metres. The 117-square-metre overwater villas will also feature private pools.

The design will draw on the marine environment and traditional Maldivian palm-leaf craftsmanship, combined with natural materials, locally influenced textures, Art Deco details and eco-conscious finishes. Cream and soft green tones will form part of the planned design palette.

Indoor and outdoor spaces will be integrated to maintain a connection with the island environment.

Dining and wellness take centre stage

The resort's food and beverage programme will include an all-day dining restaurant, a main pool bar and three speciality restaurants.



The announced concepts will include Argentinian cuisine and an overwater Japanese dining venue.

Other facilities will include a children's club, an ocean-view gym and fitness centre, a dive and water sports centre and a promenade-style retail area.

The wellness offering will be operated by Atmosphere Core's ELE|NA Ayur brand. The spa will feature overwater treatment rooms, a 40-square-metre saltwater pool, sauna and steam facilities.

Technology and sustainability

Technology is planned to be integrated throughout the guest journey, while the resort's service model will combine digital solutions with a more relaxed approach to hospitality.

Sustainability measures will include solar energy solutions, water conservation systems and a no-plastics approach. The property will also produce drinking water in-house using glass bottles.

The measures form part of Atmosphere Core's wider sustainability strategy across its portfolio.

Expanding Maldives and international portfolio

Founded in 2013, Atmosphere Core currently operates nine resorts in the Maldives across three brands, according to the company. ONE BANYAN Amaraa Faru will bring the group's Maldives portfolio to 10 properties when it opens.

The company also has an international presence, with heritage hotels in India and Italy, and says it has more than 20 properties planned across Europe and South Asia.

The March 2027 opening of ONE BANYAN Amaraa Faru will introduce a new brand format to the company's Maldives portfolio while adding another large-scale island resort to the destination's growing hospitality pipeline.

Centara Hotels & Resorts partners with Plaza Premium Group to expand CentaraThe1 travel benefits



Reciprocal benefits for members

The partnership also establishes reciprocal privileges between CentaraThe1 and Plaza Premium Group's loyalty ecosystem.

Members of the participating programmes will be able to access special discounts and benefits across participating Centara hotels and resorts and Plaza Premium Lounge services.

The arrangement is intended to create additional opportunities for both companies to engage their respective customer bases while providing loyalty members with benefits across accommodation and airport hospitality services.

Expanding CentaraThe1 beyond hotels

Centara said the partnership represents another step in the development of CentaraThe1, which has nearly nine million members worldwide.

The hotel group has been expanding the scope of the loyalty programme through partnerships with companies across the travel and lifestyle sectors. Its stated objective is to provide members with benefits that extend beyond accommodation and into other parts of the travel experience.

Centara Hotels & Resorts has entered into a strategic partnership with Plaza Premium Group (PPG) to broaden the travel benefits available to members of its CentaraThe1 loyalty programme, linking hotel rewards with airport lounge access across Plaza Premium Group's global network.

The partnership will give nearly nine million CentaraThe1 members worldwide additional ways to use points earned through hotel stays, including the opportunity to redeem points for access to participating Plaza Premium First and Plaza Premium Lounge locations at airports

across Asia, Mainland China, Canada, Europe, the Middle East and Africa, and Oceania.

The agreement expands CentaraThe1 beyond traditional hotel-related rewards by introducing airport hospitality benefits at multiple points of the customer journey.

Airport lounge access through loyalty points

Under the new partnership, CentaraThe1 members can redeem loyalty points for access to participating Plaza Premium First and Plaza Premium Lounge facilities.

The arrangement provides members with the option to use rewards

accumulated through Centara stays towards airport lounge experiences, giving the hotel loyalty programme a wider travel focus.

In addition to point redemption, CentaraThe1 members can purchase access at special member rates at the newly opened Plaza Premium Lounge at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport (BKK).

The lounge provides travellers with an airport environment designed around comfort and convenience before departure, extending the CentaraThe1 proposition from the hotel stay to the airport stage of the journey.



Claudio Roscigno, Executive Vice President of Commercial at Centara Hotels & Resorts, said loyalty remains an important part of the company's commercial strategy and its efforts to build longer-term relationships with guests. He said the partnership with Plaza Premium Group would help develop CentaraThe1 as a broader travel and lifestyle ecosystem while extending the brand experience beyond Centara's hotels and resorts.

Roscigno added that the collaboration would expand Centara's presence across additional travel touchpoints and provide benefits for members of both programmes.

Pannarat Tantrativud, Assistant Vice President of CRM & Customer Service at Centara Hotels & Resorts, said the company continues to seek partnerships that make CentaraThe1 more relevant to its members. CentaraThe1's existing partner portfolio includes banks, credit card providers,

airlines, travel companies and lifestyle brands. The Plaza Premium Group agreement adds airport lounge services to that network, allowing members to use points earned from hotel stays for lounge access in Thailand and international markets.

Plaza Premium Group expands airport hospitality reach

For Plaza Premium Group, the agreement provides access to a large hotel loyalty membership base while extending its relationship with travellers beyond individual airport visits.

The group operates airport hospitality facilities in markets spanning Asia and other international regions. Through the CentaraThe1 partnership, eligible members will be able to access participating Plaza Premium Lounge and Plaza Premium First locations across a network covering Asia, Mainland China, Canada, Europe, the

Middle East and Africa, and Oceania.

Wu WeiQiang, Area General Manager at Plaza Premium Group, said the two companies share a focus on creating travel experiences across different stages of the journey. He said the partnership would allow Plaza Premium Group to welcome CentaraThe1 members to its airport hospitality facilities in Thailand and other international markets, while providing reciprocal benefits to members of both programmes.

Suvarnabhumi lounge adds local benefit

A key element of the partnership for travellers departing from Thailand is the special CentaraThe1 rate available at Plaza Premium Lounge at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport.

The facility gives CentaraThe1 members another opportunity to use their programme benefits before departure, complementing rewards and

services available during their hotel stays.

The airport lounge arrangement also strengthens the connection between Centara's hotel network and Plaza Premium Group's airport hospitality operations at one of Thailand's principal international gateways.

Broader travel and lifestyle proposition

The partnership reflects a wider trend among hotel loyalty programmes to expand their value proposition beyond room stays by connecting members with services across the travel journey.

For CentaraThe1, the agreement adds airport lounge access to a growing range of travel and lifestyle benefits. For Plaza Premium Group, it creates another channel through which travellers can discover and access its airport hospitality services.

Centara said the collaboration forms part of its continuing effort to develop CentaraThe1 as a broader travel and lifestyle ecosystem, with partnerships designed to provide members with additional choice, convenience and opportunities to use the value accumulated through their hotel stays.

The partnership between Centara Hotels & Resorts and Plaza Premium Group therefore brings together two elements of the travel experience — accommodation and airport hospitality — while providing members of both programmes with reciprocal benefits across the participating networks.



Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai Earns a Michelin Key for its Contemporary take on Luxury

MICHELIN Guide recognition highlights the hotel's contemporary design, Arabian Sea views and wellness offering

— Devender Grover, Editor in Chief Travel Span

Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai has been awarded a **MICHELIN Key** in the MICHELIN Guide's 2026 hotel selection, recognising the Worli property among the guide's distinguished hotel stays.

The recognition adds to Mumbai's growing profile as a destination for luxury hospitality, with the MICHELIN Guide highlighting the hotel's contemporary design, location and focus on views and guest comfort.

The guide's current listing describes Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai as a contemporary property set in South Mumbai's Worli district.

The MICHELIN Guide notes that, unlike some of Mumbai's grand historic palace hotels, Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai takes a distinctly modern approach to luxury. Its glass tower and stone-clad lobby are complemented by interiors in subdued, natural tones, while the guest rooms place greater emphasis on views than on elaborate decorative styling.

For rooms overlooking the **Arabian Sea**, the outlook becomes a central part of the experience. The MICHELIN Guide also highlights marble bathrooms with separate soaking tubs, oversized televisions and other five-star amenities.

Contemporary luxury in Worli

The hotel's location in **Worli**, one of Mumbai's key commercial and

residential districts, is another factor highlighted by the MICHELIN Guide. Its position makes the property particularly convenient for business travellers while also providing access to the city's wider leisure and cultural attractions.

Wellness is an important part of the offering. The property features a two-floor spa and daily yoga sessions, providing guests with options for relaxation alongside the energy of Mumbai.

Nitesh Gandhi, General Manager, Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai, said the MICHELIN Key was meaningful recognition for the hotel's team and reflected the property's contemporary design and approach to guest comfort.

What the MICHELIN Key represents

The **MICHELIN Key** is the MICHELIN Guide's distinction for hotels, broadly serving as its hotel equivalent to the MICHELIN Star system for restaurants. The guide says its hotel inspectors assess properties based on their overall experience and identify stays that stand out for qualities including design, service, personality and the character of the guest experience.

The MICHELIN Guide currently describes its hotel selection as an evolving global collection of more than 9,000 hotels, with the Key identifying properties considered particularly memorable within that selection.

For Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai, the distinction places its contemporary interpretation of luxury in the context of Mumbai's established high-end hotel landscape.

Dining and rooftop experiences

The hotel's hospitality offering extends beyond accommodation and wellness.

Its dining portfolio includes **Opus**, the all-day dining venue, while **AER**, the rooftop bar, offers panoramic views across Mumbai and towards the Arabian Sea. The hotel's official website positions the property around contemporary luxury, sea views and a collection of dining experiences.

The hotel is also preparing for the next stage of its culinary offering

with **SanQi**, its upcoming restaurant, adding another dimension to its dining portfolio, according to the property's announcement.

A contemporary address for Mumbai travellers

The MICHELIN Key comes at a time when Mumbai continues to develop its positioning as a destination for luxury, business and leisure travel.

For international visitors, Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai combines a modern hotel environment with access to the city's cultural, culinary and entertainment landscape. The property also offers curated experiences designed to connect guests with

Mumbai, ranging from city explorations to experiences around local culture and neighbourhoods.

The MICHELIN Guide recognition further places the hotel within an increasingly international framework for evaluating high-end stays, where design, location, service and the overall character of the guest experience are considered alongside traditional measures of luxury.

With its contemporary architecture, Arabian Sea-facing rooms, wellness facilities, rooftop experiences and personalised hospitality, Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai's MICHELIN Key provides another international marker for Mumbai's evolving luxury-hotel sector.



Greece's Tourism Growth Gets a Cruise Boost as Piraeus Goes Greener

Greece's tourism industry is gaining further momentum from the continued expansion of cruise travel, with Piraeus strengthening its role as a major Mediterranean gateway while the country prepares for a new generation of greener cruise ships and smarter port infrastructure.

Greece's appeal as a tourism destination has traditionally been built around its islands, ancient heritage, coastline, gastronomy and distinctive Mediterranean lifestyle. Increasingly, cruise tourism is becoming an important part of that proposition, bringing millions of international visitors through the country's ports and connecting them with Athens, the islands and destinations across the mainland.

At the centre of this growth is Piraeus, where rising cruise traffic is reinforcing the port's importance not only to the maritime economy but also to the wider tourism industry.

The port handled approximately **1.85 million cruise passengers and 863 cruise-ship calls in 2025**, according to the Piraeus Port Authority (PPA), marking a new passenger record. The result underlines Piraeus' growing importance as a cruise gateway to Athens and the wider Attica region.

The growth comes at a time when Greece is seeking to strengthen tourism activity while spreading its benefits across a wider range of destinations.

Piraeus connects cruise passengers with Athens

Piraeus is more than a port of arrival and departure. Its proximity to Athens gives cruise passengers access to some of Greece's most recognisable cultural and tourism attractions within a short distance of the ship.

The Acropolis and its archaeological monuments, museums, restaurants, shopping districts, contemporary cultural attractions and the Athenian Riviera all form part of the visitor

experience available to cruise passengers.

For the tourism industry, this creates opportunities that extend well beyond the port gates.

Cruise passengers spend on transportation, organised excursions, food and beverages, shopping, cultural attractions and entertainment. Their visits can therefore generate economic activity across a broad network of tourism businesses.

Piraeus also provides access to Attica and nearby islands, making it an important link between cruise travel and Greece's wider destination offering.

The port's transformation over the past decade has further strengthened its position in the international maritime network. Today, Piraeus operates as a multifunctional port, combining cruise operations with container and vehicle handling, coastal shipping, shipbuilding and repair and other maritime services.

That diversification has helped establish Piraeus as an important economic centre while simultaneously strengthening its role in Greece's international tourism infrastructure.

Cruise tourism adds another dimension to Greece's tourism growth

The importance of cruise tourism is increasing as international cruise travel continues to expand.

According to CLIA, global ocean-cruise passenger numbers reached **37.2 million in 2025**, with the figure expected to rise to **38.3 million in 2026**.

Greece is among Europe's leading cruise destinations, benefiting from its



significant for destinations that can connect cruise passengers with local experiences — from archaeology and museums to gastronomy, shopping, nature and cultural activities.

The next opportunity: bringing more Greek destinations into the cruise network

While Piraeus remains one of the country's most important cruise

gateways, Greece has ambitions to broaden the geographical distribution of cruise tourism.

Thessaloniki, Kavala, Corfu and other ports are part of a wider discussion about developing additional cruise destinations and attracting more calls outside the country's best-established gateways.

The objective is not simply to increase ship arrivals. A broader network could distribute tourism expenditure more widely and create new opportunities for regional tourism economies.

Developing new cruise destinations, however, requires more than suitable berths.

Cruise lines plan itineraries years in advance and consider factors including

sailing times, fuel consumption, passenger demand, shore excursions, port facilities and the overall attractiveness of a destination.

For emerging Greek cruise ports, investment in infrastructure and destination development will therefore need to be accompanied by effective cooperation between port authorities, government agencies, cruise companies and local tourism businesses.

Piraeus enters a greener phase

The expansion of cruise tourism is taking place alongside a major technological transformation within the cruise industry.

Cruise companies are investing in ships designed to operate more



efficiently and to accommodate a broader range of fuels and energy technologies.

For Piraeus, the next phase of development is consequently not only about handling more passengers. It is also about preparing the port for a changing fleet.

According to PPA, the port's development is increasingly focused on **green and digital transformation**, including greater energy efficiency, renewable energy, digitalised services and shore-side electrification.

Shore power is particularly important. The technology enables ships to connect to the electricity grid while alongside, allowing them to reduce or switch off onboard engine use during port stays.

The availability of shore power is becoming increasingly relevant as cruise companies equip more vessels with the necessary technology.

Ships are getting greener — but ports must keep pace

CLIA's latest environmental report highlights the speed of change within the cruise fleet.

The number of cruise ships operated by CLIA member companies with shore-power capability has increased from **55 in 2018 to 193**, representing approximately 65% of the reporting fleet and 72.5% of its capacity. CLIA expects that number to reach 279 ships by 2039.

But the availability of compatible infrastructure at ports remains considerably lower.

CLIA currently identifies 40 cruise ports worldwide with at least one berth equipped with shore power, representing less than 3% of ports visited by cruise ships.

This creates an important issue for destinations such as Greece.

Investment in cleaner ships needs to be accompanied by investment on land. Ports need appropriate electrical infrastructure, sufficient grid capacity and systems capable of supplying ships efficiently.

As more cruise ships become capable of using shore power, access to the technology could

increasingly become an element of port competitiveness.

Beyond emissions: water and waste

The sustainability conversation also extends beyond carbon emissions.

For Greece, water management is particularly significant. Several popular island destinations experience substantial pressure on freshwater resources during the peak tourism season.

Modern cruise ships are increasingly capable of producing freshwater onboard, reducing their reliance on destination supplies.

CLIA reports that **293 cruise ships can currently produce potable water onboard**, while 218 can theoretically meet all their water requirements without replenishing supplies at their destinations.

Wastewater treatment is also advancing. The number of cruise ships equipped with advanced wastewater treatment systems has increased substantially since 2018, reflecting wider investment in onboard environmental technologies.

For Greece, these developments are relevant not only to the ships themselves but to the sustainability of destinations receiving large numbers of visitors.

Port reception facilities, waste management, recycling, electricity supply and water infrastructure will all play a role in determining how successfully cruise tourism can expand.

A more sustainable tourism opportunity for Greece

The development of greener cruise tourism comes at an important moment for Greece.

The country is already one of the Mediterranean's best-known tourism destinations, but its future growth will increasingly depend on how effectively it balances visitor demand with infrastructure, environmental protection and the needs of local communities.

Cruise tourism can contribute to that effort by bringing visitors to established destinations while creating

opportunities for emerging ports and regional tourism economies.

Piraeus illustrates both sides of the story.

Its record **1.85 million cruise passengers in 2025** demonstrate the strength of demand for Greece, while its focus on digitalisation, energy efficiency and shore-side electrification points towards the infrastructure that will be required as the cruise fleet changes.

The opportunity now extends across Greece.

From Athens and Piraeus to Thessaloniki, the islands and smaller regional ports, the country has the potential to make cruise tourism a broader contributor to its tourism economy.

From more visitors to better tourism value

For Greece, the next chapter of cruise tourism is therefore not simply about attracting more ships.

It is about creating greater value from every visitor while ensuring that destinations have the infrastructure to cope with growth.

That means connecting cruise passengers with local tourism businesses, encouraging longer and more meaningful visitor experiences, developing new destinations, investing in ports and preparing for cleaner ships.

It also means ensuring that tourism growth and environmental progress move together.

Piraeus' latest passenger record shows that the appetite for Greece remains strong. The industry's rapid investment in greener ships shows that cruise tourism itself is changing.

The opportunity for Greece is to bring these two trends together — **more cruise tourism, more destinations and a greener maritime future.**

If the necessary investment and coordination continue, cruise tourism could become an increasingly important part of Greece's wider tourism story, linking the country's ancient heritage and Mediterranean appeal with a new generation of more sustainable travel.

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