

LUXURY AND LIFESTYLE TRAVEL MAGAZINE

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to Rhodes

Athens

Beyond The
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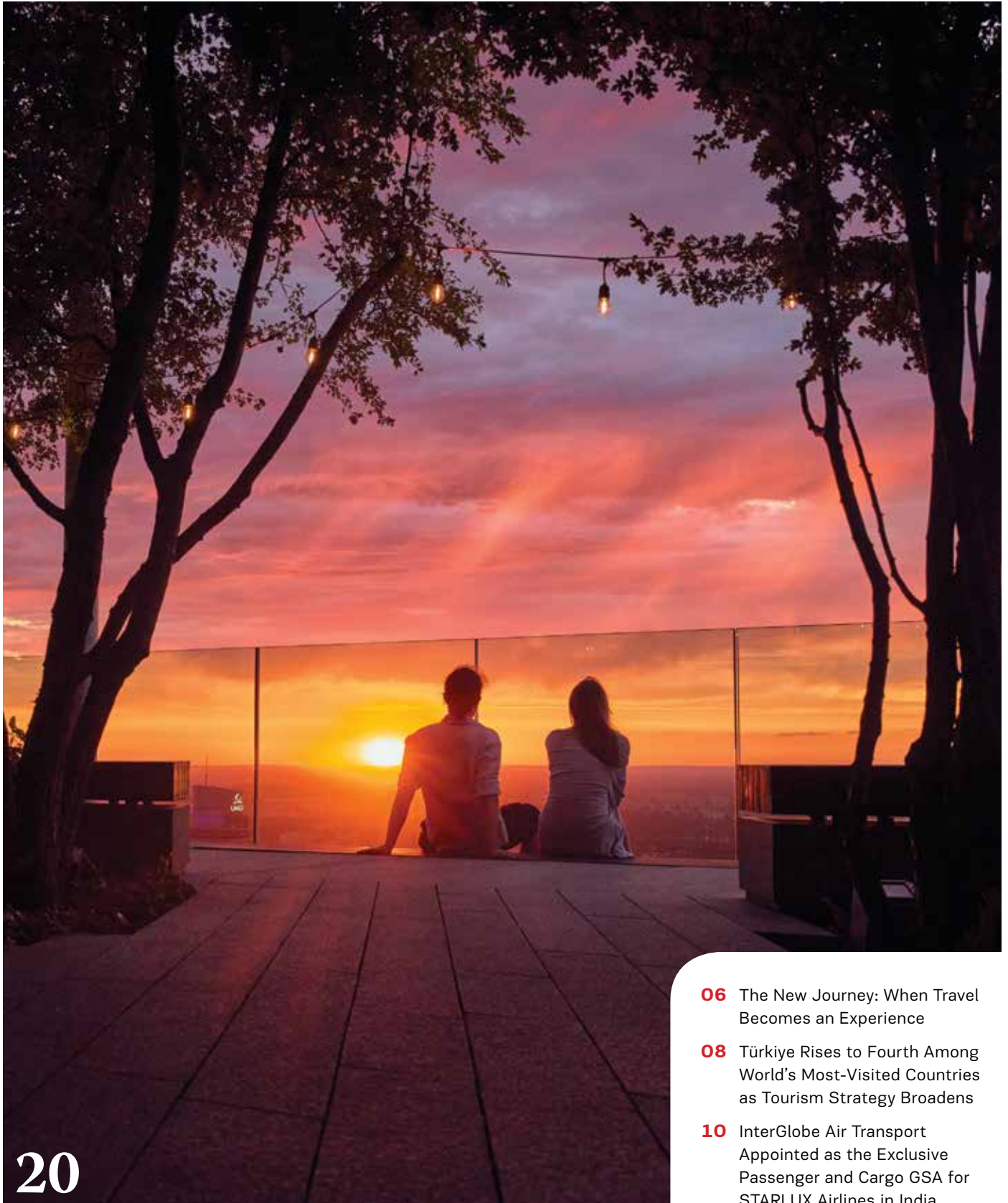


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TITLIS Tower becomes youngest member of the World Federation of Great Towers



The TITLIS Tower has been admitted as the youngest member of the World Federation of Great Towers. Accepted into the exclusive association at the 2026 Annual Conference in Kuala Lumpur, it now takes its place alongside icons such as the Eiffel Tower, Empire State Building and Burj Khalifa.

At the World Federation of Great Towers Annual Conference, held from 14 to 18 September in Kuala Lumpur, the TITLIS Tower, which opened in June 2026, was admitted as the youngest member of the exclusive international association of iconic towers. At 76 metres in height, the TITLIS Tower is not the tallest, but at an elevation of 3,020 m.a.s.l. it is the highest-situated tower in the Federation.

With its admission to the Federation, the TITLIS Tower now joins a rank of iconic structures such as the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Empire State Building in New York, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur, the Berlin TV Tower and other renowned towers across four continents.

"Being admitted to the World Federation of Great Towers fills us with great pride. It confirms the international significance of the TITLIS Tower as an architectural landmark of the Alps and underlines our position as a leading alpine destination at a global level," says André Sidler, Head of Marketing & Sales and member of the Executive Board of TITLIS Cableways.

Jean-Yves Ghazi, Executive Director of the WFGT, adds: "The TITLIS Tower is a truly remarkable landmark in the heart of Europe. We are very pleased about this special addition and now welcome our first member in Switzerland. The exchange with the TITLIS Tower will enrich our global community."

The TITLIS Tower is part of the "Projekt TITLIS" conceived by Herzog

& de Meuron and, together with the new mountain station (opening 2029), represents an architectural highlight and a milestone for alpine tourism with global reach.

TITLIS Cableways

TITLIS Bergbahnen provides access to the year-round accessible glacier area around Mount Titlis at 3,020 m.a.s.l., the highest excursion mountain in Central Switzerland and an internationally renowned destination for guests from all over the world. The listed company includes the cableways, two hotels, the TITLIS Resort and several restaurants in Engelberg. As part of the "Projekt TITLIS" conceived by Herzog & de Meuron, TITLIS Bergbahnen is realising the TITLIS Tower (opened June 2026) and the new mountain station (opening 2029) – an architectural highlight and a milestone for alpine tourism with global reach.

The World Federation of Great Towers (WFGT)

The World Federation of Great Towers (WFGT) is the exclusive alliance of the world's most iconic towers, founded in Paris in 1989 and today comprising over 50 members across four continents. The Federation includes icons such as the Eiffel Tower (Paris), Tokyo Skytree, Shanghai Tower, Burj Khalifa (Dubai), Empire State Building and Rockefeller Center (New York), as well as the Petronas Twin Towers (Kuala Lumpur). The WFGT brings together nearly 45 million visitors annually, creates global visibility through joint campaigns and partnerships, and promotes the exchange of best practices in marketing, technology and guest experience. As a non-profit association, it strengthens its members as leading brands in international tourism.

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EDITOR'S LETTER

The New Journey: When Travel Becomes an Experience

There was a time when travel was defined largely by the destination. Paris, Dubai, Athens, Switzerland or Seychelles could, in themselves, sell a journey. An itinerary was built around landmarks, hotels and flights, while success was measured by how much a traveller could see.

That model is changing.

The stories in this issue reflect a travel industry moving beyond the simple business of getting people from one place to another. The destination remains central, but the experience around it is becoming equally important. Hotels, airlines, food, culture, connectivity and travel protection together shape how a journey is remembered.

The journey itself increasingly matters for the modern traveller.

Rhodes: Where Business Meets Discovery

TAFI's 40th Anniversary Convention in Rhodes, Greece, from October 4 to 7, captures this shift. More than 400 Indian travel professionals are gathering under the theme **"Connecting Legacies, Crafting Futures"**, combining business meetings, networking, destination discovery and engagement with Greek tourism suppliers.

For the trade, the value goes beyond a convention. First-hand destination knowledge can help agents create stronger programmes for Indian travellers across leisure, luxury, weddings, MICE and experiential travel.

Rhodes offers medieval heritage, beaches, gastronomy, nature and established resort infrastructure. Improved India-Greece air connectivity strengthens its potential, allowing

travellers to combine Athens with island experiences.

Destination promotion is about relationships, product development and turning a place into an experience that can be sold and sustained.

Luxury is Becoming Personal

Luxury travel is undergoing a similar transformation. The definition is moving beyond five-star hotels, large suites and premium air travel towards privacy, personalisation, authenticity and access.

The latest MICHELIN Key selections in India reflect this landscape, bringing together urban hotels, wildlife resorts, heritage properties, farm stays, vineyards and mountain escapes. Their settings differ, but they share a strong sense of place.

A luxury tent in a tiger reserve tells a different story from a landmark hotel.

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Yet both can belong to the same luxury conversation because today's traveller is buying more than accommodation: they are buying atmosphere, access, memory and connection. Service and design remain essential. So are the landscape outside the window, the meal on the table and the story taken home.

Connectivity: The Infrastructure No One Sees

Travel dreams depend on practical realities. A destination may have remarkable beaches, museums, cuisine or heritage, but difficult access can turn desire into hesitation.

New routes, better aircraft, improved airport experiences and smoother visa processes rarely dominate destination advertising, yet they can determine whether a journey is easy to book.

This issue looks at that infrastructure through Air India's upgraded Delhi–Melbourne service, airport lounge developments and the changing aviation landscape. The low-cost sector is evolving too, with travellers judging airlines on reliability and overall journey quality.

Travel protection belongs to the same ecosystem. As Asego founder and CEO Dev Karvat explains, its value is often understood when something goes wrong—when a flight is cancelled, baggage is delayed or assistance is required abroad. The expectation is simple: disruption should be handled with as little friction as possible.

Beyond The Postcard

Strong destinations are learning that their most recognisable icons should be a beginning. Athens offers a useful example. The Acropolis remains central, but visitors can explore museums, contemporary galleries, architecture, food and urban culture.

Türkiye is pursuing a similar approach, placing archaeology, gastronomy, faith, cycling, sport and cultural experiences alongside its coastline. Night Museums offer new ways to experience familiar heritage.

What The Travel Trade is Seeing

Across the travel-trade conversations

featured in this issue, there is a clear shift in thinking. The focus is moving from visitor numbers to **longer stays, higher-value experiences, destination readiness and greater value for local communities.**

The industry is calling for stronger collaboration between the government and the travel trade, particularly around connectivity, infrastructure, destination development, skills and ease of doing business. There is also a push to make India's destinations more commercially viable, bookable and sustainable, especially beyond the major metros.

Perhaps most significantly, the definition of luxury is changing. **Personalised, purposeful, experiential and luxury travel** is gaining ground over conventional sightseeing, with travellers seeking authenticity, access and deeper connections with a destination.

The message from the trade is clear: **the next phase of tourism will be about value, experience and meaningful engagement—not simply volume.**

The New Indian Traveller

India's growing importance in international tourism is another defining theme. Seychelles, Malaysia, Greece, Belarus and the Nordic region feature in the issue's destination stories, while airlines continue to expand or restore links between India and international gateways.

Seychelles provides an instructive example. The destination recorded 34,987 international visitors in August 2026, an increase of 14.1 per cent over August 2025. Yet arrivals for January to August remained below the previous year's level, even as tourism earnings increased.

Tourism's future cannot be understood simply through arrival numbers. The questions are how long visitors stay, what they experience, what they spend and whether destinations can manage growth responsibly.

From Arrivals to Meaning

Tourism now faces bigger questions: how destinations can grow without

being overwhelmed by success; how hotels can deliver luxury without losing a sense of place; how airlines can make long journeys less exhausting; and how communities can share in tourism's value.

The next phase of travel will depend on an ecosystem working together—airlines, hotels, travel advisors, tourism boards, technology companies, governments and communities.

Taken together, the stories capture that transition. Hospitality is becoming more personalised. Destinations are adding layers to familiar identities. Connectivity is becoming central to destination strategy. The Indian outbound traveller is becoming more discerning, while the trade focuses increasingly on value and experience.

Perhaps the most important change is also the simplest. Travellers are no longer satisfied merely with going somewhere. They want the hotel to have a personality, the meal to have a story, the landscape to mean something, the journey to feel comfortable and the culture to feel accessible.

The most valuable traveller may therefore be the one who stays longer, looks closer, meets people, connects with the place and returns home with deeper understanding. That may be the new luxury of travel. Not simply having been there but having truly experienced it.



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Türkiye

Rises to Fourth Among World's Most-Visited Countries as Tourism Strategy Broadens



Türkiye strengthened its position among the world's leading tourism destinations in 2024, ranking **fourth globally for international visitor arrivals**, according to the May 2025 World Tourism Barometer published by **UN Tourism**.

The country welcomed **56.7**

million international visitors in 2024, moving up from fifth place in the global ranking and overtaking Italy. Türkiye's total visitor count reached **62.3 million**, including Turkish citizens residing abroad, while tourism revenue climbed to a record **US\$61.1 billion**.

The results marked another

milestone for Türkiye's tourism industry and came as the country continued to expand its tourism offer beyond traditional coastal holidays. Culture, archaeology, gastronomy, religious tourism, cycling, sports, cruise travel and MICE are increasingly being incorporated into the country's destination strategy.

Record Performance and Ambitious Targets

Türkiye entered 2025 following a record year in which both visitor numbers and tourism income exceeded the government's previous targets. The country had initially set 2024 targets of 60 million visitors and US\$60 billion in tourism revenue.

For 2025, Türkiye set a new target of **65 million visitors and US\$64 billion in tourism income**, reflecting its strategy of sustaining growth while broadening the country's tourism product and geographical reach.

The international ranking also underscores Türkiye's growing importance in the global tourism market. UN Tourism's May 2025 data placed **France, Spain, the United States, Türkiye and Italy** among the five leading destinations by international tourist arrivals in 2024.

Diversifying Tourism Beyond the Coast

While Türkiye remains well known for its Mediterranean and Aegean resorts, authorities are placing increasing emphasis on tourism experiences that can attract visitors throughout the year.

The country is promoting a broad range of experiences spanning cultural heritage, gastronomy, faith-based travel, cycling, sports, cruise tourism, meetings and events, as well as traditional sea-and-sun holidays.

The strategy is also designed to spread tourism activity geographically, encouraging travellers to explore destinations beyond the country's best-known gateways and resort centres.

Türkiye's official tourism investment information highlights the country's **8,300-kilometre coastline** and its position as the world's third-ranked country for Blue Flag beaches, with **577 Blue Flag beaches** cited in current government tourism data.

Archaeology Takes Centre Stage

Archaeology has become a major component of Türkiye's cultural tourism strategy.

The country designated 2024 as a **"Golden Age of Archaeology"**,

with the number of archaeological excavation and research projects reaching **765**, up from 720 in 2023. Under the **Legacy for the Future** programme, Türkiye has expanded archaeological work across the country and throughout the year, with a target of reaching **800 projects by 2026**.

The initiative is intended not only to uncover new archaeological discoveries but also to strengthen conservation, restoration and public access to Türkiye's extensive cultural heritage.

The country has simultaneously continued efforts to recover cultural property taken abroad. Turkish authorities reported that **1,149 cultural assets were repatriated in 2024**, adding to a wider programme of international cooperation aimed at returning objects considered to have been removed illegally from Türkiye.

Heritage After Dark

Türkiye has also been experimenting with new ways of presenting its cultural heritage to visitors.

The **Night Museums Project**, launched to allow selected museums and archaeological sites to welcome visitors during evening hours, has become part of the country's strategy to diversify the visitor experience and spread tourist traffic beyond conventional daytime hours.

In 2025, the programme expanded to **27 cultural sites**, offering evening access at locations including Ephesus, Hierapolis, Cappadocia's underground cities and sites in Istanbul and other regions.

For 2026, the project entered its third season with **20 museums and archaeological sites** scheduled for evening visits between June 1 and October 1. GoTürkiye reported that the programme attracted more than one million visitors during 2025.

The initiative also forms part of a wider effort to manage visitor flows and encourage travellers to experience major heritage attractions outside peak daytime periods.

Expanding the UNESCO Heritage Portfolio

Cultural heritage remains central

to Türkiye's international tourism profile. The country currently has **22 properties inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List**, according to UNESCO's World Heritage Centre.

Among them are internationally recognised sites such as Ephesus, Göbekli Tepe, Troy, Cappadocia, Pamukkale-Hierapolis, Gordion and the Historic Areas of Istanbul.

Türkiye also maintains an extensive UNESCO Tentative List, providing a pipeline of sites that could potentially be considered for future World Heritage inscription. UNESCO currently lists **80 sites on Türkiye's Tentative List**.

This expanding heritage portfolio complements the country's established appeal for beach holidays and reinforces its positioning as a destination where cultural, historical and leisure experiences can be combined within a single itinerary.

A Four-Season Tourism Strategy

Türkiye's tourism development strategy increasingly centres on extending the visitor season, diversifying destinations and creating reasons for travellers to explore different parts of the country throughout the year.

The 2024 performance provides a strong foundation for that approach. With **56.7 million international visitors**, record tourism revenue of **US\$61.1 billion** and a fourth-place global ranking for international arrivals, Türkiye enters the next phase of its tourism development with an emphasis on diversification, cultural heritage, sustainability and year-round travel.

Rather than relying solely on its established coastal tourism market, the country is increasingly presenting Türkiye as a destination that combines ancient civilisations, culinary traditions, religious heritage, nature, adventure, sport and contemporary cultural experiences.

That broader positioning is expected to remain central to Türkiye's efforts to attract new markets, encourage longer stays and distribute tourism activity across more destinations and seasons.

InterGlobe Air Transport Appointed as the Exclusive Passenger and Cargo GSA for STARLUX Airlines in India

InterGlobe Air Transport, one of India's largest General Sales Agents (GSA), has been appointed as the exclusive Passenger and Cargo GSA for STARLUX Airlines in India. This strategic collaboration will provide travellers and trade partners with streamlined access to the boutique airline's premium network, marking a significant milestone in STARLUX's expansion strategy and significantly strengthening its brand presence across the country.

As Taiwan's premier boutique international airline, STARLUX is renowned for delivering exceptional service, innovative products, and a refined travel experience. Operating a modern fleet and serving destinations across Asia, North America, and beyond, STARLUX combines luxury, comfort, and reliability to redefine premium air travel. The airline currently connects travellers to key destinations from Taiwan, including the United States, Czechia, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Macau, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia.

To support the airline's expansion and commercial objectives in India, InterGlobe Air Transport will provide comprehensive sales, marketing, distribution, operational support and regulatory clearances for both passenger and cargo segments. Leveraging its extensive market expertise, nationwide reach, and strong trade relationships, the company will spearhead STARLUX's commercial strategy in India, focussing on building brand awareness, driving passenger demand, expanding trade partnerships, and developing cargo opportunities in the region.

Simon Liu, Chief Strategy Officer, STARLUX Airlines, said, "India is one of the world's fastest-



growing aviation markets and an important region in STARLUX Airlines' long-term network development strategy. We are pleased to partner with InterGlobe Air Transport, whose extensive experience, strong market presence, and deep industry relationships make them an ideal partner to represent STARLUX in India. Together, we look forward to introducing more Indian travellers and cargo customers to STARLUX's award-winning service and premium travel experience across our growing global network."

JB Singh, Director, InterGlobe Air Transport, said, "We are delighted to represent STARLUX Airlines in India and support the growth of one of the world's most admired premium carriers. The airline has built a strong reputation for redefining the travel experience through its customer-centric approach, modern fleet, and commitment to excellence. This collaboration aligns

perfectly with our commitment to introducing high-quality, global travel options to Indian consumers. Our focus will be on building strong brand visibility, expanding market reach, driving passenger demand, and developing cargo opportunities across key Indian markets."

The partnership comes at a pivotal time as India's outbound travel and international trade sectors continue to witness strong growth. Taiwan is also emerging as a high-potential destination for Indian travellers, offering a compelling mix of cultural heritage, scenic landscapes, and expanding business opportunities. Together, STARLUX Airlines and InterGlobe Air Transport aim to strengthen connectivity between India, Taiwan, and beyond while expanding access, choice, and efficient passenger and cargo solutions.



SAS to Resume India Operations with Copenhagen–Mumbai Nonstop Service from October 1

Five weekly flights mark Scandinavian Airlines' return to India after a 17-year absence, reconnecting Mumbai with Copenhagen and SAS's wider European and North American network

Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) is set to resume nonstop services to India with the launch of a year-round Copenhagen–Mumbai route on October 1, 2026. The five-times-weekly service will mark the airline's return to the Indian market after a 17-year absence and restore a direct air link between Scandinavia and Mumbai, one of India's major commercial and financial centres.

The route, operated under flight numbers **SK969 and SK970**, will be served by an **Airbus A330 with 266 seats**. SAS says the new connection is designed to support leisure and business travel while strengthening links between Northern Europe and India.

The service was initially announced for June 2026, but SAS subsequently revised the launch date. In its latest announcement on August 17, the airline confirmed that operations will officially begin on October 1, 2026. The first Mumbai-to-Copenhagen service is scheduled for October 3.

Five flights a week between Copenhagen and Mumbai

Under the revised schedule, **SK969** will depart Copenhagen Airport at **16:10** and arrive at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport at **04:30 the following day**. The Copenhagen–Mumbai service will operate on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

The return service, **SK970**, will depart Mumbai at **06:30** and arrive in Copenhagen at **12:15**. Flights will

operate on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

The nonstop service will give passengers from India direct access to Copenhagen while also providing onward connectivity through SAS's network. The airline highlights connections via Copenhagen to destinations in Europe and North America, including **New York, Boston and Toronto**.

SAS's current India destination information also confirms that Mumbai is part of its network and that travellers can fly to the city from or via Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm.

Strengthening India–Scandinavia connectivity

SAS says the Mumbai route is strategically important because of India's economic growth and Mumbai's role as a major financial and business centre. The airline expects the direct connection to support increased travel, commercial activity and cultural exchange between India and Scandinavia.

For Copenhagen, the service further reinforces the airport's position as SAS's principal international gateway. The airline operates its wider network from Copenhagen, with onward connections across Europe, the United States and Canada.

Paul Verhagen, Chief Commercial Officer of SAS, described the Mumbai service as an important milestone as the airline reconnects Scandinavia with India. He also noted that the launch coincides with SAS's 80th anniversary and represents a return to a market the carrier

has been absent from for 17 years.

The airline's India partnership is also being supported by InterGlobe Air Transport. J. B. Singh, Director of InterGlobe Air Transport, said the return of SAS would provide a direct connection between Mumbai and Copenhagen and support stronger business, trade and cultural links between India and Scandinavia.

A new option for India–Nordic travel

The Copenhagen–Mumbai service will give travellers a new nonstop option between India and Scandinavia while allowing passengers to connect onward through SAS's Copenhagen hub. With flights scheduled five times a week and year-round service planned, the route is positioned to serve both business and leisure demand.

The return also expands SAS's long-haul presence in Asia and restores a direct connection that had been absent from the Indian market for nearly two decades.

Travellers should check the latest SAS timetable and flight status before departure, as operating schedules can be subject to change.

Route: Copenhagen (CPH) – Mumbai (BOM)

Airline: Scandinavian Airlines (SAS)

Flight numbers: SK969 / SK970

Frequency: Five times weekly

Aircraft: Airbus A330, 266 seats

Launch: October 1, 2026

Copenhagen departure: 16:10

Mumbai arrival: 04:30 (+1 day)

Mumbai departure: 06:30

Copenhagen arrival: 12:15

Skytrax Reveals the World's Best Airport Lounges for 2026



Plaza Premium Lounge at Dubai International Airport ranks among the world's top independent lounges, while Qatar Airways' Al Mourjan Business Lounge – The Garden in Doha takes the global business-class lounge title



Airport lounges are increasingly becoming an important part of the premium travel experience, offering passengers a place to dine, work, relax or unwind before a flight. The 2026 Skytrax World Airline Awards have highlighted two Middle Eastern

lounges among the global leaders: Plaza Premium Lounge at Dubai International Airport and Qatar Airways' Al Mourjan Business Lounge – The Garden at Hamad International Airport in Doha.

The rankings form part of Skytrax's

annual passenger satisfaction survey, conducted between September 2025 and August 2026. The survey included travellers from more than 100 nationalities and evaluates passenger experiences across the airline industry.

Plaza Premium Lounge, Dubai International Airport

Plaza Premium Group was named the **World's Best Independent Airport Lounge Group** at the 2026 World Airline Awards, while its Plaza Premium Lounge at Dubai International Airport ranked **10th in the World's Best Independent Airport Lounges** category.

The individual award went to the Chase Sapphire Lounge at New York LaGuardia Airport. Plaza Premium Lounge at Rome Fiumicino ranked second, followed by the Chase Sapphire Lounge at Hong Kong International Airport. Plaza Premium also placed fourth with its London Heathrow Terminal 4 lounge.

The Dubai lounge is located in the international departures area of Terminal 3 at Dubai International Airport. Unlike airline-operated lounges that are generally linked to a particular carrier or cabin class, Plaza Premium operates as an independent lounge, allowing eligible travellers to purchase access. Its Dubai facility offers food and beverage services, Wi-Fi, flight information, private resting areas, family facilities, a prayer room and shower facilities.

The Dubai lounge also forms part of Plaza Premium Group's wider independent lounge network, which spans airports across multiple international markets.

Song Hoi See, Founder and CEO of Plaza Premium Group, said in Skytrax's testimonials: "Twenty-six years ago, we introduced the world's first independent airport lounge concept, and we have come a long way."

Skytrax World's Best Independent Airport Lounges 2026

1. Chase Sapphire Lounge – New York LaGuardia
2. Plaza Premium – Rome Fiumicino
3. Chase Sapphire Lounge – Hong Kong
4. Plaza Premium – London Heathrow Terminal 4
5. Capital One – New York JFK
6. American Express Centurion – New York JFK
7. Coral Cosmo Lounge – Bangkok
8. The Pearl – Bahrain
9. Primeclass Lounge – Muscat
10. Plaza Premium – Dubai International Airport



Al Mourjan Business Lounge – The Garden, Doha

Doha secured the top position in the airline-operated business-class lounge category, with Qatar Airways' **Al Mourjan Business Lounge – The Garden** at Hamad International Airport named the **World's Best Business Class Airline Lounge 2026**.

The award forms part of a strong showing for Qatar Airways in the 2026 business-class categories. The airline was also named the World's Best Business Class Airline, while its Qsuite was recognised as the World's Best Business Class Seat.

Located in the northern expansion of Hamad International Airport, The Garden spans 7,390 square metres and can accommodate up to 707 passengers. Its design incorporates natural light and extensive greenery, reflecting the tropical gardens and water features of The Orchard below.

The lounge includes 24 quiet rooms, seven spa treatment rooms, a fitness studio and relaxation areas overlooking The Orchard. Dining options range from hot and cold buffets and sushi to salads, coffee and patisserie, cocktails and bistro offerings, as well as à la carte dining.

Access is complimentary for eligible Qatar Airways First and Business Class passengers, as well as qualifying oneworld First and Business Class passengers. Qatar Airways also permits Business Class Lite and Economy Class



passengers to purchase lounge access, subject to the airline's applicable terms.

The lounge's positioning around wellness, greenery and relaxation reflects the growing role of airport lounges as destinations in their own right rather than simply waiting areas between flights.

Hamad Al Khater, Qatar Airways Group CEO, said: "These awards belong to our people. Sixty thousand colleagues deliver the best experience in the world for our passengers every day."

Skytrax World's Best Business Class Airline Lounges 2026

1. Qatar Airways – Doha
2. Air Canada – Toronto Pearson
3. Cathay Pacific – Hong Kong

4. Virgin Atlantic – London Heathrow
5. Singapore Airlines – Singapore Changi
6. Iberia – Madrid
7. Delta Air Lines – New York JFK
8. Turkish Airlines – Istanbul
9. Air France – Paris Charles de Gaulle
10. United Airlines – Chicago O'Hare

The 2026 results underline the increasingly differentiated role of airport lounges across the premium travel landscape. From independent facilities accessible regardless of airline or cabin to expansive airline-operated spaces combining dining, wellness and private relaxation, lounges are becoming an increasingly important component of the overall passenger experience.

Etihad Unveils New A330 First Class Suites with Closing Doors and 32-Inch Screens

New First Class cabin will debut in September 2027, with four private suites on each aircraft as Etihad expands its premium offering across regional and medium-haul routes



Four-Suite First Class Cabin

At the front of the A330, Etihad will offer just four First Class suites, creating an intimate premium cabin. Each suite will feature a closing door for enhanced privacy and enough space for a companion to join the guest for dining or socialising during the flight.

The suites will be equipped with 32-inch entertainment screens, wireless charging, dedicated storage compartments and a personal powder station stocked with premium amenities. Etihad said guests will be able to use the amenities during the journey and take them away afterwards.

The design incorporates elements inspired by Abu Dhabi's natural landscape and architecture. Etihad describes the design philosophy as "from sand to superstructure", combining bright, calm interiors with contemporary detailing.

Leather seating with precision perforation, sculptural sconce lighting inspired by the geometric facet pattern used in Etihad's branding and discreet First Class seat numbers projected

Etihad Airways has unveiled a new First Class cabin for its Airbus A330 fleet, introducing four private suites with closing doors, 32-inch entertainment screens and dedicated personal space as the Abu Dhabi-based carrier expands its premium offering

across regional and medium-haul markets.

The new A330 is scheduled to enter service in September 2027, with 15 aircraft planned to join the Etihad fleet over five years. The aircraft will feature three cabin classes and will be deployed on high-demand

routes across Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

The new cabin forms part of Etihad's **Beyond Borders** product and experience, a new design and service concept that the airline says will progressively extend across its aircraft, lounges and wider guest journey.

onto the cabin floor are among the design details.

The new aesthetic is intended to create a more consistent visual identity across Etihad's aircraft and premium spaces as the airline develops its Beyond Borders concept.

Business Class with Direct Aisle Access

Behind the First Class cabin, the new A330 will feature 24 Business Class seats.

All Business Class seats will face forward, provide direct aisle access and convert into fully flat beds. Sliding doors will give passengers the option of creating a more private personal space.

Each seat will feature a 17.3-inch entertainment screen, wireless and wired charging, a large table and dedicated personal storage.

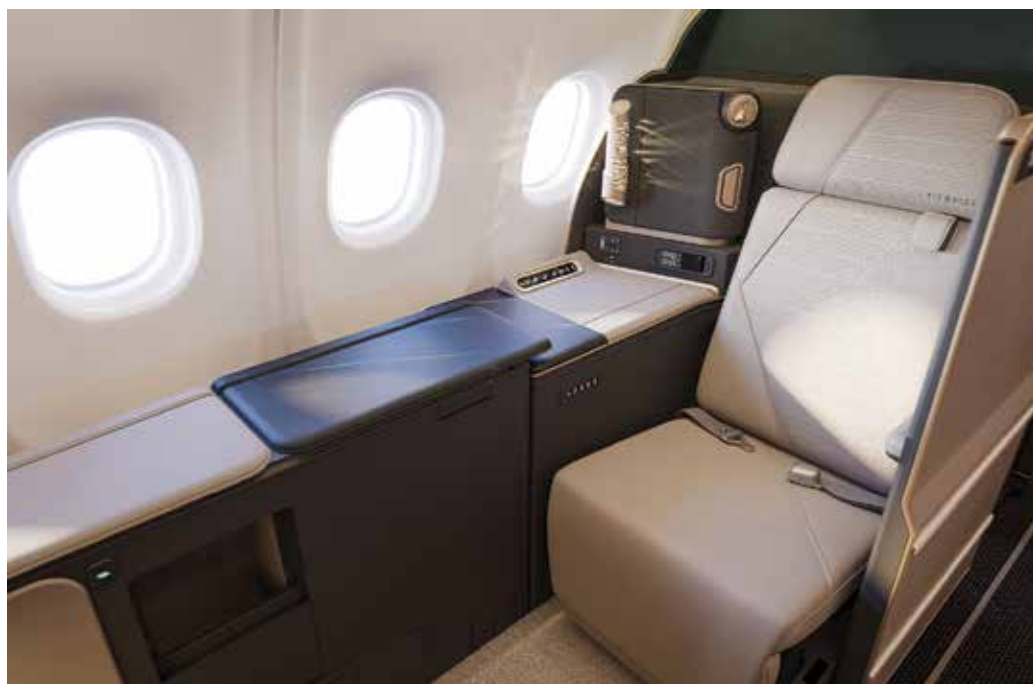
The configuration represents Etihad's intention to bring a premium three-cabin proposition to routes where a widebody aircraft can provide additional capacity while also supporting demand for First and Business Class travel.

252 Economy Seats

Economy Class will account for 252 seats, with the cabin incorporating Etihad's fixed-wing headrest, 13.3-inch 4K touchscreen entertainment systems and personal charging.

A dedicated Extra Legroom section will offer 32 seats, each with four additional inches of pitch compared with the standard Economy configuration.

The three-cabin layout is designed to give the A330 flexibility across Etihad's



regional and medium-haul network, particularly on routes where the airline sees demand for premium travel alongside additional capacity.

Etihad has not yet announced the specific destinations that will receive the new A330 when the aircraft enters service in September 2027. The airline said the aircraft will support growth across Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

First Class Expansion

The new A330 First Class product is part of Etihad's broader plan to increase the availability of First Class across its fleet over the next five years.

The airline's flagship First Class Apartments and The Residence will remain associated with its Airbus A380. Etihad, however, is expanding First Class beyond its traditional long-haul widebody proposition, following the introduction of First Class suites on its Airbus A321LR.

Etihad said the A330 represents the next stage of this strategy, bringing a distinctive First Class experience to its regional and medium-haul widebody network.

Antonoaldo Neves, Chief Executive Officer of Etihad Airways, said the airline was "doubling down on First" by bringing the experience to more aircraft, routes and guests.

"Beyond Borders goes beyond the aircraft and the seat. It is about the entire journey – our cabins, lounges, food, wellbeing, connectivity and the way we look after our guests," Neves said.

Beyond Borders Design

Beyond Borders will serve as the overarching design and guest-experience concept connecting Etihad's next generation of aircraft interiors with its premium ground experience.

The airline has already announced that its

renovated London Heathrow lounge, scheduled to reopen in summer 2027, will be the first Etihad lounge to introduce the new Beyond Borders design language. The concept uses common materials, textures, lighting and design details to create greater continuity between aircraft and lounges while allowing individual spaces to retain their own character.

Etihad is investing **US\$20 billion in new aircraft and customer experience**, including a **US\$1 billion fleet retrofit programme**, as it continues its fleet and network expansion.

The new A330 is therefore positioned not simply as an additional aircraft type but as a major component of Etihad's evolving premium strategy, extending private First Class suites, fully flat Business Class and the Beyond Borders design language to a wider range of routes from Abu Dhabi.



Skytrax Names AirAsia World's Best Low-Cost Airline for 17th Consecutive Year

Scoot ranks second globally and retains the World's Best Long Haul Low-Cost Airline title, while flynas and IndiGo lead their respective Middle East and India & South Asia categories

AirAsia has retained its position as the **World's Best Low-Cost Airline**, extending its winning streak to 17 consecutive years at the 2026 Skytrax World Airline Awards. Singapore Airlines' low-cost subsidiary Scoot ranked second globally and was again named the **World's Best Long Haul Low-Cost Airline**, while Spain's Vueling Airlines took third place and the title of **Best Low-Cost Airline in Europe**.

The annual rankings are based on Skytrax's global

passenger satisfaction survey, which ran from September 2025 to August 2026. More than 100 customer nationalities participated, with more than 300 airlines included in the survey. Singapore Airlines, in a separate announcement confirming Scoot's award, said more than 24.8 million travellers took part in the 2026 survey.

AirAsia Retains Global Low-Cost Airline Crown

AirAsia once again topped the global low-cost airline rankings, marking

its 17th consecutive win in the category. The Kuala Lumpur-based group said the recognition coincides with its 25th anniversary and described the award as a passenger-voted acknowledgement of its focus on making air travel more accessible.

Scoot, the low-cost arm of Singapore Airlines, followed in second place. Alongside its global ranking, Scoot was named **World's Best Long Haul Low-Cost Airline** for the sixth consecutive year. Singapore Airlines confirmed the dual

recognition following the awards ceremony in London on September 18, 2026.

Vueling completed the global top three and also secured the award for **Best Low-Cost Airline in Europe**. The remaining positions in the top seven went to Eurowings, Iberia Express, Volotea and Transavia France.

flynas Leads Middle East

Saudi Arabia's flynas ranked eighth in the global list and was named **Best Low-Cost Airline in the Middle East** for 2026.

The regional ranking placed flydubai second, followed by flyadeal, Air Arabia and SalamAir.

The recognition comes after flynas received a four-star Low-Cost Airline rating from Skytrax in June 2026 following a professional audit covering airport and onboard service standards. The airline said the assessment examined areas including seat comfort, cabin cleanliness, food and beverage quality, and cabin and ground-staff service.

flydubai ranked 18th in the global low-cost airline table and second in the Middle East category.

IndiGo Leads India and South Asia

India's IndiGo placed ninth globally and was named **Best Low-Cost Airline in India & South Asia**. It topped a regional category that also included Akasa Air, Air India Express, SpiceJet and airblue.

IndiGo's ninth-place global ranking puts it among the highest-positioned Asian low-cost carriers in the 2026 table, behind AirAsia and Scoot. AirAsia also led the broader **Best Low-Cost Airlines in Asia** category,

with Scoot second and IndiGo third.

The 2026 Global Top 20

Skytrax's 2026 ranking of the World's Best Low-Cost Airlines is:

1. AirAsia
2. Scoot
3. Vueling Airlines
4. Eurowings
5. Iberia Express
6. Volotea
7. Transavia France
8. flynas
9. IndiGo
10. Allegiant Air
11. Ryanair
12. Jet2.com
13. easyJet
14. HK Express
15. Peach
16. JetSMART Airlines
17. FlyArystan
18. flydubai
19. Sun Country Airlines
20. airBaltic

Among the other regional winners, Allegiant Air was named Best Low-Cost Airline in North America, JetSMART Airlines took the South American title, FlySafair led Africa, FlyArystan topped Central Asia & CIS, and Jetstar Airways was named Best Low-Cost Airline in Australia.



How the Skytrax Rankings Are Determined

The World Airline Awards are based on Skytrax's annual passenger satisfaction survey. The 2025/2026 survey was open to customers worldwide rather than being restricted to member airlines or a pre-selected group of carriers. Respondents were asked to make their own choices and rate their satisfaction with different aspects of the travel experience.

Skytrax says survey entries are screened to identify duplicate or ineligible submissions, while the survey itself is funded entirely by Skytrax.

More than 100 nationalities participated and more than 300 airlines were included in the 2026 results. No payment or reward is made to survey respondents, according to Skytrax's published methodology.

The 2026 results underline the continuing importance of the low-cost carrier segment across major aviation markets. With carriers from Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North America and other regions represented in the global top 20, the rankings reflect the increasing international reach of budget and long-haul low-cost aviation.

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Asego: Combining 26 Years of Expertise, Technology and Trust to Redefine Travel Protection



*Dev Karvat, Founder
and CEO - ASEGO*

Beyond the Policy: Expertise Behind Every Journey

In an era when travel is increasingly seamless, connected and technology-led, the expectations surrounding travel protection are changing too. For today's traveller, protection is no longer simply an add-on to a booking; it is a promise of support when the unexpected disrupts the journey. Whether it is a cancelled trip, delayed baggage, a medical emergency or the need for immediate assistance abroad, the real measure of protection is often found in the moments when travellers need it most.

For Asego, that understanding has been shaped by 26 years of experience in global assistance and travel insurance. Its approach is rooted in the belief that meaningful travel protection requires more than sophisticated technology or a policy document. It demands specialist knowledge of the travel ecosystem, a deep understanding of the needs of travel advisors and, above all, the ability to deliver dependable support when circumstances change.

As technology continues to transform how protection is sold, serviced and experienced, Asego

sees innovation as an enabler—one that should make protection more accessible, efficient and intuitive for both travel partners and their customers. At the heart of that proposition, however, remains expertise, trust and accountability.

In this exclusive conversation, Asego explores why specialisation continues to matter in a rapidly evolving travel landscape, how technology can strengthen the protection experience, and what 26 years of industry experience means for the company's vision of the future.

Q Travel today is increasingly seamless and technology-led. Where does travel protection fit into this evolving ecosystem?

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 services connected through an increasingly seamless ecosystem. Travel protection has naturally become an important part of this journey.

However, there is a fundamental difference between travel protection and most other travel products. Its value is not truly experienced at the time of purchase; it is tested when something goes wrong. When a flight is cancelled, baggage is delayed, a traveller requires medical assistance overseas or a claim needs to be resolved, protection moves from being a product to becoming a critical responsibility.

That is why the question should not simply be, "Does this offer protection?" It should be, "Who stands behind that protection, and how dependable are they?"

Q Why does specialisation matter in travel protection?

In travel protection, domain depth matters as much as organisational scale. A specialist provider builds its business around a clear purpose—to understand travel, anticipate its risks and support travellers when circumstances do not go as planned.

Over time, that focus creates expertise that extends far beyond product features. It means understanding how travellers move, where disruptions are likely to occur, what travel advisors need, how assistance should be delivered and how claims need to be handled when situations are complex or unexpected.

Technology can make access to protection faster and distribution more seamless, but what sits behind that transaction ultimately determines the experience. That depth of understanding is difficult to replicate simply by adding travel protection to a broader portfolio.

Q What does trust and accountability mean when it comes to travel protection?

For a travel advisor, recommending a protection provider is also a matter of professional accountability. Their reputation is intrinsically connected to the solutions they recommend to their customers. So, reliability, responsible handling of customer information, accessibility of service and accountability in claims are not secondary considerations—they are fundamental to the relationship.

A trusted protection partner has to demonstrate that it will be there when the traveller actually needs it. The relationship does not end when a policy is issued; in many ways, that is when the real responsibility begins.

Q How does Asego approach its relationship with the travel trade?

At Asego, our focus has always 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 simply as another distribution channel.

For us, a travel advisor is not just a route to the traveller. They are a partner whose business growth matters. That distinction influences everything we do—from product development and servicing to the technology we invest in. Our objective is to give partners the confidence to recommend protection because they know there is meaningful expertise and capability supporting that recommendation.

Q Technology is transforming travel rapidly. What role should it play in travel protection?

Technology should solve for the partner, not simply impress the user. The real question should always be: what problem does it solve?

For us, technology needs to make it easier for partners to sell, service, manage and support travel protection while removing friction from the customer experience. It should simplify the journey rather than add another digital layer to it. The travel protection market will continue to evolve. Technology will become more deeply embedded, 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. Technology can enable the experience, but expertise gives that experience substance.

Q What does 26 years of expertise mean for Asego?

At Asego, global assistance and travel insurance have been at the heart of our business for 26 years. That experience has given us something 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.

For us, those 26 years are not simply a measure of longevity. They represent the learnings accumulated from being deeply invested in one domain and continuously understanding what travellers and travel partners need as the industry evolves. Our vision has always been simple: to pursue excellence in one thing that matters—protecting travellers and enabling the partners who serve them to do so with confidence.

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

Looking Ahead: Experience That Builds Confidence

As the travel industry continues to evolve, the expectations surrounding travel protection are becoming more sophisticated. Technology is making protection more accessible and integrated into the travel journey, but the conversation with Asego highlights a broader point: meaningful protection ultimately depends on the expertise, accountability and support behind the technology.

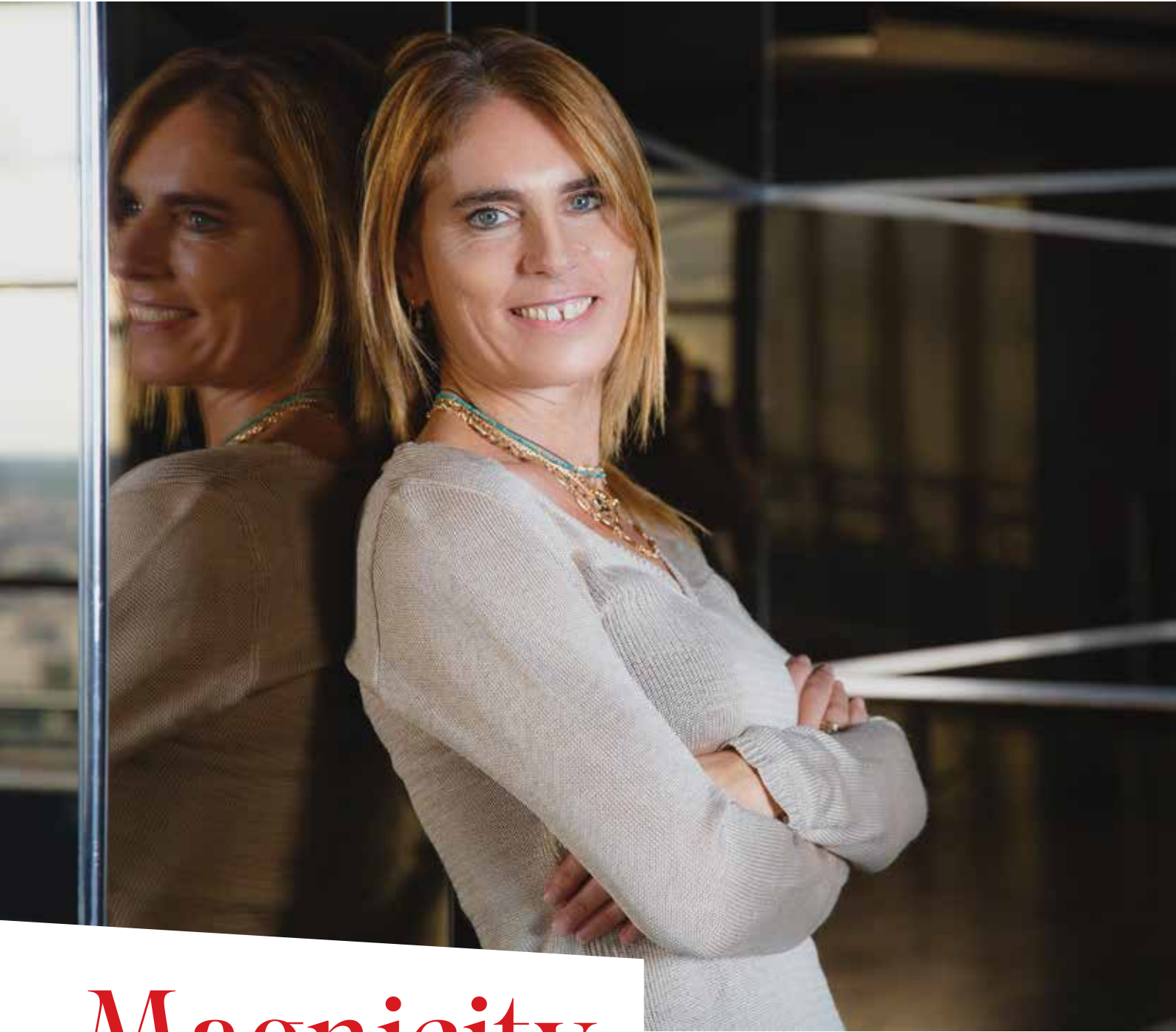
Asego's 26-year journey reflects a continued focus on understanding the travel ecosystem and the needs of both travellers and travel advisors. Its emphasis on specialisation, trusted partnerships and technology with a practical purpose positions experience as an important foundation for navigating the next phase of travel protection.

For travel advisors, the value of a protection partner extends beyond the point of sale. It is measured by the confidence they have in recommending a solution and by the support available when their customers need it most. For travellers, it is about knowing that protection represents more than a policy—it represents access to expertise and assistance when the unexpected happens.

As travel becomes increasingly digital and connected, Asego's message remains clear: technology may enable the journey, but experience, expertise and trust are what give travel protection its enduring value.

INTERVIEW

Beyond the View



Magnicity

on reimagining urban tourism
for the modern traveller

— Gaura Grover Bahl



In a travel landscape increasingly shaped by experience, discovery and the desire to see destinations differently, the traditional observation deck is taking on a new role. No longer simply a stop for a panoramic photograph, today's urban viewpoint is becoming a gateway to understanding the city itself — its history, culture, architecture, people and evolving identity.

This philosophy sits at the heart of **Magnicity**, the global operator behind a portfolio of iconic observation and urban experiences in cities including Chicago, Berlin, Rotterdam and Warsaw. Its approach brings together spectacular views with immersive storytelling, gastronomy, technology and cultural experiences, creating attractions designed to become an integral part of the visitor journey.

The proposition is particularly relevant to the Indian outbound market, where travellers are increasingly seeking experiences that are memorable, photographable and easy to incorporate into carefully planned itineraries. From families and honeymooners to luxury travellers and MICE groups, the demand is moving beyond simply ticking off landmarks



towards experiences that can be shared and remembered long after the journey.

Magnicity is also looking to the next generation of urban tourism through **Highline Warsaw**, located at Varso Tower, where panoramic views meet immersive technology, contemporary design and the character of one of Europe's most dynamic capitals.

In this exclusive conversation with **Travel Span, Alexia Vettier, CEO, Magnicity**, discusses the changing expectations of today's traveller, the strategic importance of India, the influence of social media, the evolution of observation experiences, and how technology, sustainability and local connections are shaping the company's global vision.

At the centre of the conversation is a compelling idea: **the view may**

bring travellers to the top, but the experience is what connects them to the city.



What is the vision behind Magnicity, and what sets Magnicity apart?

Magnicity was created from a simple belief: a city should not only be seen even from above, it should be felt. Our mission is to transform iconic observation decks into "gateways" to urban discovery, where visitors connect with a city's culture, history, lifestyle and energy.

What makes Magnicity different is that we go beyond the view. Every experience always combines spectacular panoramas with immersive storytelling, gastronomy and cultural experiences. Whether you are in Chicago, Berlin, Rotterdam or Warsaw, our goal is always



the same: to help visitors understand the soul of the city from above and inspire them to explore it further.

How important is the Indian traveler to Magnicity's growth strategy?



India is one of the most exciting outbound travel markets in the world today. Indian travelers are increasingly looking for memorable experiences rather than simply visiting landmarks, and that aligns perfectly with our vision.

We see strong growth potential from India, particularly among multi-generational families, young professionals, luxury travelers and corporate groups. Indian travelers value

iconic attractions, high-quality service, great photography opportunities and experiences that can be enjoyed together. These are exactly the strengths of the Magnicity portfolio.

As we continue to expand our relationships with the Indian travel trade, India will remain a key strategic market for us.



Why have panoramic experiences become essential to modern travel?

Observation decks have become the perfect first-stop experience in a destination. In a relatively short amount of time, visitors gain an understanding of the city's geography, landmarks, architecture and character.



Modern travelers want experiences that combine emotion, learning and convenience. An Observation deck delivers all three. It gives visitors a powerful first impression of the city and helps them decide what they want to discover after, during their stay.

In many ways, seeing a city from above has become an essential chapter in the travel experience.



How do Instagram-worthy experiences influence traveler decisions?

Travel is increasingly driven by visual inspiration. Before booking a destination, travelers often discover places through social media, UGC (user-generated content) and they search for recommendations.

Observation decks naturally create shareable moments. Whether it's the city skyline at sunset, a rooftop cocktail, or an attraction like TILT in Chicago, these experiences generate emotional reactions that travelers want to capture and share on social media.

For travel advisors, this is particularly valuable because iconic experiences not only drive customer satisfaction but also create lasting memories that travelers associate with the destination

itself. Happy customers become repeat travelers and powerful advocates.



Why are Magnicity attractions appealing to Indian travelers?

One of our strengths is versatility.

Families appreciate the accessibility, safety and educational aspects of our attractions. Couples enjoy the romantic atmosphere of rooftop terraces, sunset views and premium dining experiences. Luxury travelers seek unique perspectives, exclusive venues and memorable moments. MICE groups value our extraordinary event spaces and efficient visitor flow.

Most importantly, our experiences are easy to include in itineraries and universally appealing. A great city view transcends language, age and cultural differences.



Which experiences resonate most with Indian travelers?

Indian travelers often look for experiences that feel both iconic and personal. Our sites provide some of the most spectacular settings for family photos, celebration trips, honeymoon memories and group travel moments, creating memories that are not only shared in the moment but associated with the destination long after the journey ends.

At 360 CHICAGO, TILT is particularly popular because it offers a unique thrill experience unlike anything else in the city. In Berlin, travelers appreciate the historical significance of the TV Tower and the incredible perspective it provides on the city's past and present. In Rotterdam, visitors are often fascinated by the city's bold modern architecture and dynamic and innovative spirit.

Highline Warsaw, located at the top of Varso Tower, the tallest building in the European Union, is also already generating strong interest because it combines contemporary architecture, immersive technology, rooftop experiences and spectacular views of one of Europe's fastest-growing capitals.





How do observation towers fit into busy itineraries?

Today's travelers want maximum value from their time.

A Magnicity experience can typically be enjoyed in 60 to 90 minutes, making it easy to integrate into a busy sightseeing schedule. Yet despite the short duration, visitors often leave with a completely new understanding of the city.

You can visit before dinner, after a museum, between meetings or at sunset. It is a highly efficient experience that delivers a strong emotional impact without requiring a large time commitment.



What support do you offer Indian travel agents and MICE planners?

Travel partners are a critical part of our success.

We provide dedicated trade support, group booking solutions, commissionable products, tailored packages, MICE opportunities and marketing resources. Many of our sites also offer private event spaces, VIP experiences and customized group programs.

Our objective is simple: make Magnicity products easy to sell, easy to integrate into itineraries and easy to enjoy for travelers.



How immersive technology, responsible tourism, and projects like the new Varso Tower observatory are shaping the company's future?

These three pillars are central to our future, not only for new developments but also for the way we continue to evolve our existing destinations across the Magnicity portfolio.

Technology and innovation allow us to create richer storytelling through immersive content, augmented reality and interactive experiences. Across our sites, they help us move beyond the traditional observation deck model by giving visitors new ways to understand the city, its landmarks, its history and its contemporary culture.

Responsible tourism guides how we operate, from supporting local communities, local artists and businesses to developing attractions that respect their urban environment. This also means creating experiences that are deeply connected to their city, that encourage visitors to discover more of the destination, and that generate positive value for local ecosystems.

Highline Warsaw perfectly illustrates this vision, but it is part of a broader evolution. In Chicago, Berlin and Rotterdam, we are also continuously enhancing the visitor journey through more engaging content, more meaningful local partnerships and experiences that connect iconic views with the identity of each city. Highline Warsaw brings this ambition to life in a particularly complete way, combining panoramic views, immersive experiences, rooftop gardens, local culture and sustainable design within Europe's tallest tower. It represents the next generation of urban tourism experiences and serves as a model for future projects.



What is your vision for Magnicity's global expansion and your message to the Indian travel trade?

Our ambition is to continue building a global network of iconic urban experiences in the world's most exciting iconic cities.

We believe the future of tourism lies in experiences that are immersive, authentic and emotionally meaningful. As we grow, we will continue to invest in innovation, sustainability and local partnerships to bring each city's unique story to life.

To the Indian travel trade and the readers of Travel Span, I would say this: modern cities reveal their true character when seen and "felt" from above. We look forward to welcoming more Indian travelers to our destinations and helping them discover some of the world's most iconic cities from a completely new perspective.

"At Magnicity, we don't just offer a view. We offer unique ways of experiencing a city from above."

Conclusion

The conversation with Magnicity reflects a broader shift taking place across urban tourism: travellers are no longer satisfied with simply seeing a destination; they want to experience it, understand it and take away a story of their own.

A panoramic view may be the initial attraction, but it is the experience around that view that can turn a brief visit into a lasting memory. Magnicity's approach — combining iconic skylines with storytelling, technology, gastronomy, culture and local connections — reflects this changing expectation and offers a fresh perspective on the role observation attractions can play within a destination.

For the Indian travel trade, this evolution presents an interesting opportunity. As travellers increasingly look for experiences that can add emotion and character to an itinerary, attractions that appeal to families, couples, luxury travellers and MICE groups can become meaningful additions to the way a city is presented and sold.

The development of **Highline Warsaw**, alongside Magnicity's existing experiences in Chicago, Berlin and Rotterdam, illustrates how the traditional observation deck is being reimagined for a new generation. The emphasis is no longer only on reaching the highest point, but on creating a deeper connection between the visitor and the city below.

For travel advisors, the opportunity is equally compelling: to move beyond a list of landmarks and curate moments that give travellers a different perspective on familiar destinations.

Ultimately, Magnicity's philosophy comes down to a simple thought — **a view can show travellers a city, but an experience can help them connect with it.**

And perhaps that is where the future of urban tourism lies: not simply in taking travellers higher, but in giving them **more reasons to look, discover and feel.**



Air India Appoints Tewolde Gebremariam as Chief Executive Officer & Managing Director

The Board of Directors of Air India have announced the appointment of Tewolde Gebremariam as the airline's Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, succeeding Campbell Wilson. This executive transition marks a pivotal juncture in Air India's transformation journey to become a world-class, leading global airline.

The Board conducted a comprehensive search to identify the next leader for Air India, overseen by a dedicated Board committee. The committee rigorously evaluated internal as well as highly accomplished external candidates from across the world.

The objective of the Board was to identify a leader with a proven record of managing mega-scale airline turnarounds, delivering operational excellence, fostering a strong culture of safety and service, and driving profitable expansion. Following an intensive evaluation process, the Board unanimously concluded that Mr. Gebremariam possesses the ideal combination of leadership, deep operational expertise, and strategic execution capability required for Air India's next phase of growth.

Tewolde Gebremariam is widely recognized as one of the most successful aviation chief executives. During his decade-plus tenure as CEO of Ethiopian Airlines Group, he spearheaded a multi-billion-dollar expansion, transforming a regional carrier into Africa's largest, most profitable, and decorated airline group—growing revenue by more than fourfold and fleet size nearly threefold.

His unique strength lies in managing complex operational landscapes, driving cultural transformation, building competitive global hubs, and developing world-class MRO (Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul) and aviation training infrastructure.

As Air India shifts from its foundational turnaround phase into a high growth & profitable execution phase, Mr. Gebremariam brings crucial capabilities required for Air India's next leg of journey. He has strong experience in expanding international long-haul networks and building world-class hub operations, an unrelenting commitment to safety standards, engineering quality, and operational reliability. He also has a track record of driving sustained profitability while navigating

complex economic cycles and dynamic global markets together with a deep experience in workforce upskilling, talent development, and embedding a high-performance, customer-first service culture.

N. Chandrasekaran, Chairman of Tata Sons and Air India, said: *"On behalf of the Board, I am delighted to welcome Tewolde to Air India. Having completed the initial phase of stabilization, integration, and fleet commitments under Campbell's guidance, Air India is now entering a critical execution and expansion era. Tewolde's track record in building one of the world's most efficient and profitable airline groups makes him uniquely suited to lead Air India. His operational expertise, commitment to safety, and vision for hub development will be instrumental as we establish Air India as a premier global carrier and a source of national pride."*

Tewolde Gebremariam, Incoming CEO & Managing Director, said: *"It is a profound honour to be entrusted with leading Air India at such a historic moment in its journey. Air India carries an incredible legacy, and the opportunity to build a world-class global airline that reflects India's extraordinary economic potential is uniquely exciting. I look forward to working closely with Chairman Chandrasekaran, the Board, our employees, and all government and industry partners to deliver exceptional operational reliability, warm Indian hospitality, and sustained long-term growth."*

This leadership transition reinforces Air India's alignment with national priorities and stakeholder expectations. Air India remains steadfastly committed to supporting India's civil aviation ambitions and national economic vision. Under Mr. Gebremariam's leadership, Air India will work closely with civil aviation authorities and regulators to strengthen India's position as a premier global aviation hub, enhance international connectivity, and maintain the highest benchmarks of aviation safety and compliance.

People are the backbone of this transformation. Mr. Gebremariam's leadership philosophy places people at the centre of organizational success. Employees across all divisions—flight crew, ground operations, engineering, and corporate—can look forward to a continued emphasis on training, exciting career pathways, and an empowering work environment built on merit, accountability, and pride in our national carrier.

Air India belongs to India and represents India to the world and is committed to building a reliable, warm, and world-class airline that every Indian can be immensely proud of. Passengers will see an accelerated push toward on-time performance, modern aircraft cabins, elevated hospitality, and seamless global connectivity.

The Board also thanked Campbell Wilson for his leadership over the past phase of Air India's revitalization. He successfully oversaw complex merger and integration processes, initiated massive fleet modernization programs, established new corporate governance standards, and laid the foundations that were necessary for the future.

With a solid foundation now in place, Air India enters its next era with clear strategic clarity, robust capital backing, and world-class leadership at the helm. The Board is fully confident that under Tewolde Gebremariam, Air India will realize its full potential as a premier global aviation power.

Seychelles Tourism Rebounds as August Visitor Arrivals Rise 14.1%

Strongest August performance in four years as improved air connectivity supports recovery

— Devender Grover, Editor in Chief Travel Span



Seychelles recorded its strongest August for international visitor arrivals in at least four years, welcoming **34,987 visitors in August 2026**, up **14.1%** from 30,667 arrivals during the same month in 2025.

The latest figures from the **Seychelles National Bureau of Statistics (NBS)** point to a significant improvement in tourism activity following a challenging first half of the year. August arrivals also exceeded the totals recorded in August 2023 and 2024, when the Indian Ocean destination received 28,177 and 28,282 visitors respectively.

The August increase marked the **second consecutive month of year-on-year growth**, following a 1.8% rise in July. The improvement comes after sharp declines between March and June, when arrivals fell 37.2% in March, 28.4% in April, 3.4% in May and 24.8% in June.

Air connectivity provides a boost

The stronger August performance coincided with improved international air connectivity, with additional capacity returning to the destination ahead of the peak summer travel period.

Seychelles Tourism Board Chief Executive Officer **Vesna Rakić**, appointed to the position in May 2026, attributed part of the improvement to increased air access. Tourism Seychelles confirmed that **Turkish Airlines resumed summer services in June**, operating three weekly flights, while **Aeroflot resumed two weekly services from July 8**.

Qatar Airways also resumed services in June with four weekly flights, further strengthening connectivity through

Doha. Tourism Seychelles said the additional capacity was intended to improve access from Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Russia during the summer season.

Russia recorded the largest increase in visitor numbers during August, with 1,858 additional arrivals compared with the same month last year. The United Arab Emirates followed with an increase of 852 visitors, while France contributed 626 additional arrivals.

Recovery remains uneven

Despite the strong August result, Seychelles' tourism performance for the year to date remained below 2025 levels.

The country recorded **232,970 international visitors between January and August 2026**, compared with 254,142 during the corresponding period of 2025, representing an 8.3% decline. However, the 2026 total remained slightly above the 230,299 arrivals recorded during the first eight months of 2024 and the 229,205 recorded in 2023.

The figures underline the uneven nature of Seychelles' tourism recovery. Visitor numbers rose in January and February before falling sharply during the spring and early summer, before returning to growth in July and August.

Rakić has described the recent improvement as encouraging while stressing the need to assess the recovery against the broader year-to-date performance.

Europe remains the leading source region

Europe continued to dominate Seychelles' international visitor market in August, accounting for **23,301 arrivals, or 66.6% of the monthly total**.

Asia followed with 7,401 visitors, representing 21.2%, while Africa contributed 2,963 arrivals.

For the January-August period, however, arrivals from most major source regions were lower than a year earlier. European arrivals declined 8.2% to 161,592, while Asian arrivals fell 13.4% to 41,204.

Arrivals from the Americas declined 15.5%, while Oceania recorded a 6% decrease.

Africa was the only major region to register year-to-date growth,

with arrivals increasing 9.1% to 18,788. Tourism officials have pointed to gains from markets including South Africa, Nigeria, China and Turkey as part of efforts to diversify Seychelles' visitor base.

Leisure travel continues to dominate

Seychelles remained overwhelmingly a leisure destination during August.

Of the 34,987 visitors recorded during the month, **31,017 travelled for holidays**, while 2,540 were honeymooners and 656 were business travellers. Between January and August, the destination recorded 206,867 holiday visitors.

The figures also highlight Seychelles' strong appeal to first-time visitors. Some **31,948 arrivals, or 91.3% of the August total, were visiting the destination for the first time**, while 3,039 were repeat visitors.

Tourism earnings show resilience

While visitor numbers remained below 2025 levels for the first eight months, preliminary estimates indicated that **tourism earnings increased by 5.1%** over the same period.

Average length of stay in August was **9.6 nights**, compared with 9.9 nights in August 2025 and 10 nights in August 2024. The figures underline the continued importance of visitor spending and length of stay alongside headline arrival numbers when assessing tourism performance.

The pattern also supports Seychelles' wider strategy of attracting higher-value tourism while maintaining the destination's environmental and economic sustainability.

Mahé remains the principal visitor base

The island of **Mahé** remained the main base for international visitors, accounting for 67.4% of arrivals in August.

Praslin followed with 17.7%, while other islands accounted for 10.8% and

La Digue for 3.2%. Hotels, a category that includes guest houses and self-catering establishments in the NBS classification, accommodated 79.6% of visitors during the month.

The concentration of visitors on the main islands also highlights the continuing importance of spreading tourism benefits across the wider archipelago while protecting the environmental assets that underpin Seychelles' appeal.

Focus shifts to understanding the visitor

Alongside efforts to strengthen international demand, Seychelles is also seeking greater insight into traveller behaviour.

The Seychelles Tourism Board has introduced a **pilot pre-arrival survey** designed to better understand why travellers select Seychelles. A departure survey is planned to assess whether visitor expectations are being met.

The initiative is intended to provide more detailed information on traveller motivations and experiences and help shape future destination marketing and product development.

With August producing a strong rebound, Seychelles enters the next phase of 2026 with a more positive tourism trend, although the year-to-date figures remain below the previous year's level. The combination of stronger air connectivity, market diversification, visitor-spending growth and a focus on the quality of the visitor experience is likely to remain central to the destination's tourism strategy.

Tourism Seychelles has also been pursuing a broader sustainability agenda, including a focus on higher-value tourism and responsible destination development. Its current approach to cruise tourism, for example, places emphasis on economic value, environmental protection and benefits for local communities.

For Seychelles, the August figures provide a welcome indication of recovery while highlighting the importance of maintaining connectivity and strengthening demand across a diversified international market.

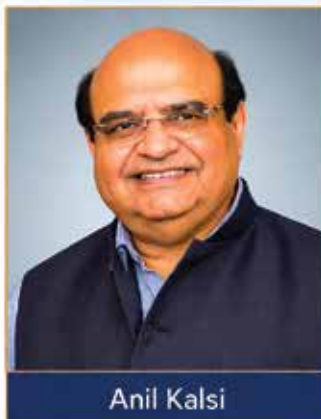


*Connecting Legacies,
Crafting Futures*

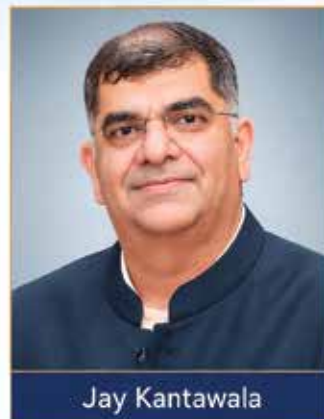
TAFI 40TH ANNIVERSARY CONVENTION
RHODES, GREECE



Abbas Moiz



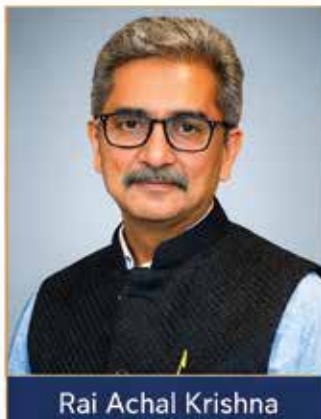
Anil Kalsi



Jay Kantawala



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Rai Achal Krishna



Ajay Prakash

TAFI Takes 40th Anniversary Convention to Rhodes

Expanding India–Greece Travel Trade Opportunities

The Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) will take its 40th Anniversary Convention to Rhodes, Greece, from October 4 to 7, bringing more than 400 Indian travel professionals to the island for four days of business sessions, networking, destination discovery and B2B engagement.

Held under the theme “**Connecting Legacies, Crafting Futures**”, the

convention is being positioned as more than a milestone celebration. TAFI intends to use the event to familiarise its members with Rhodes and identify opportunities to develop new leisure, luxury, MICE, wedding and experiential travel products for the Indian market.

TAFI had announced the Rhodes convention earlier this year, with Jay Kantawala, Chairman of the federation’s Western India Chapter,

appointed Convention Chairman. The programme is designed to combine professional engagement with cultural and destination experiences.

Bringing Rhodes closer to the Indian travel trade

TAFI President Abbas Moiz said the decision to select Rhodes was influenced by the island’s relatively limited presence in the Indian travel

market and the opportunity to expose travel professionals to a destination with a broad tourism offering.

The convention will give delegates the opportunity to experience Rhodes firsthand while engaging with tourism stakeholders and exploring potential business opportunities. According to TAFI, registrations generated strong interest, with participation reaching 430 delegates.

The federation is also seeking to develop longer-term cooperation with regional authorities, including a proposed three-year memorandum of understanding aimed at strengthening tourism ties between India and the Rhodes region.

A destination with diverse tourism potential

Rhodes combines ancient and medieval heritage with beaches, nature, gastronomy and resort infrastructure. Its UNESCO-listed medieval Old Town, historic landmarks, villages and coastal attractions provide multiple possibilities for itinerary development.

For the Indian travel trade, TAFI sees scope to build products that go beyond conventional Greece programmes. The island can be incorporated into leisure and luxury holidays as well as destination weddings, incentive travel, MICE programmes, family holidays and experiential itineraries.

The convention will provide delegates with exposure to hospitality products, attractions, event facilities, culinary experiences and excursions, enabling travel advisors to develop greater destination knowledge and create more detailed programmes for clients.

Connectivity strengthens the opportunity

Improved India–Greece air connectivity is another factor supporting the destination's growing accessibility.

IndiGo launched non-stop services between Mumbai and Athens on January 23, 2026, followed by Delhi–Athens services on January 24. The airline operates the routes three times



weekly and has described the services as its first direct connectivity between India and Greece.

AEGEAN has also expanded its India plans, announcing direct services to New Delhi from March 2026 and Mumbai from May 2026. The Greek carrier had earlier announced plans for five weekly New Delhi services and three weekly Mumbai services.

The improved connectivity gives travel professionals more options for developing Greece programmes and combining Athens with destinations such as Rhodes.

Business sessions at the centre of the programme

The convention will include dedicated B2B meetings connecting TAFI members with Greek hoteliers, destination management companies, tourism authorities, attractions and other tourism suppliers.

The objective is to move beyond destination awareness and translate firsthand experience into commercially viable products. Delegates are expected to gain product knowledge, establish supplier relationships and explore partnerships that can support future Greece programmes.

The programme will also include business discussions, expert speakers, networking opportunities and destination experiences. Industry reporting on the event indicates that

pre- and post-convention activities will provide additional exposure to Greece's cultural, nature-based, luxury and MICE offerings.

Positioning Rhodes beyond the traditional Greece itinerary

TAFI representatives see Rhodes as a destination that can complement, rather than replace, Greece's more established destinations.

Its combination of heritage and beach tourism allows travel advisors to create multi-layered itineraries, while the island's location provides access to other destinations in the southeastern Aegean and the wider Mediterranean.

The convention is therefore intended to give Indian travel professionals a practical understanding of how Rhodes can be incorporated into existing Greece itineraries and used to create new products for increasingly experienced outbound travellers.

From destination discovery to long-term business

TAFI's broader objective is to turn the convention into an ongoing platform for India–Greece tourism cooperation.

The federation has highlighted the importance of continued destination education, familiarisation visits, joint promotions and B2B engagement in building sustained business between Indian travel companies and Greek tourism suppliers.

Under the theme **“Connecting Legacies, Crafting Futures”**, discussions will also address changing traveller preferences, technology, sustainability, international partnerships and the future direction of the travel industry.

For TAFI, the Rhodes convention represents an opportunity to connect its four-decade history with emerging opportunities in India's outbound travel market. The longer-term measure of its impact will be whether destination knowledge and industry connections developed during the event translate into new itineraries, partnerships and travel business between India and Greece.

India's Next Tourism Chapter From Volume to Value

Travel-trade leaders call for stronger public-private collaboration, better connectivity, destination management and experience-led tourism as India moves towards its next phase of growth

Gaura Grover Bahl

India's tourism opportunity is increasingly shifting from attracting more visitors to creating longer stays, higher-value experiences and sustainable benefits for destinations and local communities.

India's tourism story is entering a new phase—one in which success is increasingly being measured not simply by the number of visitors arriving in the country, but by the quality and value of the experience they take away.

For the travel-trade community, the opportunity is substantial. India has

a diverse tourism portfolio spanning heritage, culture, wellness, wildlife, spirituality, gastronomy, adventure and luxury. Yet converting this breadth into sustained, high-value tourism will require closer alignment between government and industry, stronger connectivity, destination readiness, skilled manpower, easier access and more sophisticated international marketing.

Travel-trade leaders from the Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI), Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), Association

of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI) and Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) were asked a central question: **What is the one critical step that the travel-trade industry and government must take together to convert India's enormous tourism potential into sustainable, high-value growth?**

Their responses point to a common direction—moving beyond promotion and arrivals towards destination management, experience creation, longer stays, higher visitor value and responsible growth.



As India moves into a new phase of tourism growth, what is the one critical step the Travel-Trade industry and government must take together to convert India's enormous tourism potential into sustainable, high-value growth?



ANKUSH NIJHAWAN
Co-founder, TBO.com

 The one critical step is to improve connectivity and tourism infrastructure, particularly beyond India's major metros. That is what will unlock the next wave of high-value tourism demand. As air connectivity expands into Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, more first-time travellers are entering the organised travel ecosystem, and we are seeing this translate into higher demand at TBO. The opportunity is to bring government and industry closer together: government enabling connectivity and infrastructure, and the travel trade converting that access into demand through technology, distribution and local market reach. If we get this right, India can move beyond simply increasing tourist volumes to spreading tourism spend across more cities, destinations and communities—and creating significantly more value from every traveller.”

Rapid Fire:

• One destination you would never get tired of visiting?

Dubai

• One travel trend you believe will define the next five years?

Experiential Travel

• Luxury travel or experiential travel—which is the future?

Both

• One thing India needs to improve to become a truly global tourism powerhouse?

Marketing the Incredible India Story

• If you could take one trip tomorrow, where would you go and why?

The French Alps - Enjoy winter

RAVI GOSAIN
President - IATO

 The one critical step is to create a permanent, empowered public-private partnership, ideally through a National Tourism Board, where the government and travel trade jointly plan, fund and execute India's tourism growth strategy.

Government brings policy support, infrastructure, easier visas, connectivity and sustained global promotion, while the industry contributes market intelligence, international distribution networks and sellable tourism products. This partnership must work with clear targets not merely visitor numbers, but longer stays, higher spending, year-round travel, repeat visits and greater benefits for local communities. India must move from fragmented and occasional promotion to continuous, market specific and digital-first global engagement. At the same time, we should develop lesser-known destinations responsibly, protect their carrying capacity and ensure that tourism creates employment and prosperity at the local level. That is how we can convert India's enormous potential into sustainable, high-value and measurable growth.”



ANKUSH NIJHAWAN



RAVI GOSAIN

Rapid Fire:

• One destination you would never get tired of visiting?

Uttarakhand. Its mountains, spirituality, natural beauty and my personal roots in the state make every visit special.

• One travel trend you believe will define the next five years?



ANIL KALSI

represents the authentic, lesser-known India that deserves much greater global recognition.

ANIL KALSI

Vice President - TAFI



The critical step is for government and the travel industry to work together on **ROI-driven, precision targeting in international markets** rather than broad-based promotion. We should use data and algorithm-based technology to understand the interests, travel behaviour and aspirations of specific audiences in different countries, and then create and distribute highly relevant content—particularly Reels and short-form videos—through dedicated market campaigns. For luxury travel, this means showcasing the right Indian experiences to the right traveller: wellness to wellness seekers, wildlife to affluent adventure travellers, heritage to culture enthusiasts and bespoke experiences to luxury consumers. Targeted marketing will convert India's potential into measurable, high-value demand.

to unlocking its immense potential lies in strong collaboration between the government and the Travel-Trade industry. Together, we can build an ecosystem that strengthens infrastructure, connectivity, destination development and skilled talent, while creating richer and more meaningful experiences for travellers. India's incredible diversity of culture, heritage, nature and experiences gives us a unique opportunity to attract high-value travellers, encourage longer stays and create greater benefits for local communities. By bringing policy vision and industry expertise together, we can position India as a leading global destination for sustainable, experiential and high-value tourism.



Rapid Fire

• *One destination you would never get tired of visiting?*

Europe. The beauty of Europe is its diversity — every country, culture and season offers a completely different experience. There is always another story, another landscape and another reason to return.

• *One travel trend you believe will define the next five years?*

Personalised, purposeful travel. Travellers are increasingly looking beyond checklists and seeking journeys that reflect their interests, passions and pace — with authentic experiences at the heart of the journey.

• *Luxury travel or experiential travel — which is the future?*

The future is experiential luxury. Travellers will continue to value comfort and exclusivity, but the real luxury will be access — unique experiences, deeper cultural connections and moments that are truly personal.

• *One thing India needs to improve to become a truly global tourism powerhouse?*

Creating a seamless visitor experience. From connectivity and infrastructure to information and destination services, making the entire journey effortless will help India unlock its extraordinary tourism potential.



HIMANSHU PATIL

AI-enabled, highly personalised and experience-led travel, with travellers increasingly expecting journeys designed around their individual interests.

• *Luxury travel or experiential travel — which is the future?*

Experiential travel. In fact, authentic, personalised and meaningful experiences are becoming the new definition of luxury.

• *One thing India needs to improve to become a truly global tourism powerhouse?*

Consistent and adequately funded international promotion, supported by easier visas, better connectivity and a seamless visitor experience.

• *If you could take one trip tomorrow, where would you go and why?*

Northeast India - to explore its extraordinary landscapes, living cultures and community-based experiences. It

Rapid fire

• *One destination you would never get tired of visiting*

Mata Vaishno Devi

• *One travel trend you believe will define the next five years?*

Affordable luxury

• *Luxury travel or experiential travel — which is the future?*

Both

• *One thing India needs to improve to become a truly global tourism powerhouse?*

Cleanliness

• *If you could take one trip tomorrow, where would you go and why?*

I would go to a spiritual destination and seek divine blessings

HIMANSHU PATIL

President - OTOAI



India is entering an exciting new era of tourism growth, and the key

• *If you could take one trip tomorrow, where would you go and why?*

New Zealand. It offers an exceptional combination of nature, adventure, space and understated luxury. It is the kind of destination where the journey itself becomes as memorable as the destination.

RAJAT SAWHNEY

Sr. Vice President - ADTOI

 The government has a critical role to play in infrastructure, connectivity, cleanliness, safety, visa facilitation and destination development, while the travel industry brings the knowledge, international networks and understanding of what today's traveller expects. 

Rapid Fire:

• *One destination you would never get tired of visiting?*

ITALY

• *One travel trend you believe will define the next five years?*

Experiential Luxury Travel

• *Luxury travel or experiential travel - which is the future?*

The future is experiential luxury.

• *One thing India needs to improve to become a truly global tourism powerhouse.*

Get world-class infrastructure

• *If you could take one trip tomorrow, where would you go and why?*

Kashmir - Pristine Beauty, Relaxed, Close to Nature, Pollution free and Cuisine

SHRAVAN BHALLA

Vice President - OTOAI - High Flyer

 The critical step is to give the travel trade a stronger role in destination planning, product development and policy decisions, because the industry is closest to the traveller and the market. India has the destinations; what we need is a stronger mechanism to convert them into commercially viable, bookable and sustainable tourism products. Government and industry must work

together on connectivity, infrastructure, visas, destination readiness, skilled manpower and targeted international marketing. The travel trade can bring real-time market intelligence, identify demand trends, package emerging destinations and take them to global markets. The objective should be clear: move from promoting India as a destination to selling India as a compelling, high-value experience.

Rapid Fire:

• *One destination you would never get tired of visiting?*

Australia

• *One travel trend you believe will define the next five years?*

Celebration Travel

• *Luxury travel or experiential travel - which is the future?*

Experiential & Luxury both - they are a part and parcel.

• *One thing India needs to improve to become a truly global tourism powerhouse?*

The tourism board needs to be constantly engaged with the world

• *If you could take one trip tomorrow, where would you go and why?*

Srilanka. Convenient, luxurious, and economical.

MR SIDHARTH KHANNA

General Secretary - OTOAI, Khanna Enterprises (regd)

 From a luxury travel perspective, the critical step is to make India **truly experience-ready for the high-value traveller**. We need government and the travel trade to jointly develop destinations beyond infrastructure—focusing on seamless connectivity, personalised services, trained hospitality talent, sustainability and access to unique, authentic experiences. Luxury travellers are looking for privacy, exclusivity, exceptional service and experiences they cannot replicate elsewhere. The travel trade understands these expectations and can translate India's diverse heritage, wellness, wildlife, culture and gastronomy into globally marketable luxury products. The government must enable the ecosystem, while luxury travel specialists curate and



RAJAT SAWHNEY



SHRAVAN BHALLA



MR SIDHARTH KHANNA

sell it. This will increase visitor spend, length of stay and sustainable value for local communities. 

Rapid Fire

• *One destination you would never get tired of visiting?*

Thailand



MS MONIA KAPOOR



RIAZ MUNSHI

• One travel trend you believe will define the next five years?

Personalised Travel

• Luxury travel or experiential travel: which is the future?

Luxury and experiential - hand in hand

• One thing India needs to improve to become a truly global tourism powerhouse?

Tourism Infrastructure

• If you could take one trip tomorrow, where would you go and why?

Thailand due to its gastronomy

MS MONIA KAPOOR

Joint Secretary - OTOAI,
Travel O Holidays

🔥 The one critical step is establishing a joint public-private framework that bridges regulatory strategy with market realities. For the outbound sector, this means driving

growth by easing administrative and tax frictions. When government policy actively partners with travel-trade expertise to treat outbound travel as an engine of economic influence, potential transforms into measurable, long-term value -converting India's immense travel appetite into a sustainable, high-value economic driver.



Rapid Fire:

• One destination you would never get tired of visiting?

The USA. For any traveller, it offers an endless canvas. You can visit ten times and have ten completely different, emotionally resonant journeys - from deep cultural immersions in jazz-filled streets to quiet moments in massive national parks. No matter how many times I return, it gives me that intoxicating feeling of pure freedom and boundless discovery.

• One travel trend you believe will define the next five years?

Personalized Slow Travel. Indian travellers are abandoning multi-city bucket-list checkmarks in favour of longer, purpose-driven stays focused on wellness, and deep local immersion.

• Luxury travel or experiential travel- which is the future?

Experiential Travel is the new luxury! True luxury today is no longer defined by opulent thread counts, but by unscripted access, privacy, and transformational moments.

• One thing India needs to improve to become a truly global tourism powerhouse?

A global powerhouse requires frictionless end-to-end travel ecosystem integration. This means reciprocal simplified visa entry arrangements with key source markets, and enforcing uniform service benchmarks across the hospitality supply chain. When entry, transit, and on-ground logistics are effortless, high traveller intent quickly turns into high-volume, repeat global arrivals.

• If you could take one trip tomorrow, where would you go and why?

OMAN. Without a second thought.

There is something about Oman that stays with you—the soulful beauty of its mountains, the stillness of its deserts, the warmth of its people and the endless blue of its coastline. I love how effortlessly it combines authenticity, adventure and understated luxury. For me, Oman isn't just a destination I recommend; it is a destination I keep wanting to return to.

RIAZ MUNSHI

Immediate past president, OTOAI,
N.Chirag Travels



From an outbound perspective, I believe the critical step is creating a stronger public-private partnership between the government and the travel trade industry, with a clear focus on quality, value and responsible growth rather than simply increasing volumes. India is one of the fastest-growing outbound travel markets in the world, and the opportunity is enormous. However, we need greater recognition of the role of professional travel companies in driving this growth. Government policies should make international travel easier and more transparent, while the industry must continue to raise standards, improve professionalism and promote responsible travel. There should also be greater collaboration between Indian travel trade and international tourism boards, airlines, hotels and destination partners to develop experiences specifically suited to the evolving Indian traveller. The future of Indian outbound tourism is not just about more Indians travelling abroad, but about creating higher value, longer stay and more meaningful travel experiences.



Rapid Fire

• One destination you would never get tired of visiting?

Australia. It has such incredible diversity that every visit feels different, from its cities and coastline to wildlife, nature, food and unique experiences.

• One travel trend you believe will define the next five years?

Personalised, experience-led

travel. Indian travellers are increasingly looking beyond conventional sightseeing and looking for experiences that are unique, meaningful and tailored to their interests.

• *Luxury travel or experiential travel: which is the future?*

Experiential luxury. The future is about combining the comfort and exclusivity of luxury with experiences that money cannot simply buy access, authenticity, privacy and personalisation.

• *One thing India needs to improve to become a truly global tourism powerhouse?*

Ease of travel. We need a more seamless ecosystem from connectivity and visas to digital processes, infrastructure and the overall travel experience. Making travel easier will benefit both inbound and outbound tourism.

• *If you could take one trip tomorrow, where would you go and why?*

Morocco. It offers an extraordinary combination of culture, history, gastronomy, landscapes and luxury experiences. I also believe there is tremendous potential to develop Morocco further as a destination for Indian travellers, particularly in the luxury and experiential segments.

SUNIL MISHRA

Hon. Secretary, IATO

🔥 The government and travel trade need to work together on sustained international marketing, better air connectivity and easier visa access. India should expand e Visas, including to important markets such as China, and consider visa free or visa on arrival access for more countries wherever feasible. Along with stronger global promotion, improved connectivity to key tourism destinations will help convert India's enormous tourism potential into sustainable, high value growth.

Rapid Fire

• *One destination you would never get tired of visiting?*

Vietnam.

• *One travel trend you believe will define the next five years?*

Experiential travel, with travellers increasingly looking for authentic, immersive and meaningful experiences.

• *Luxury travel or experiential travel: which is the future?*

Experiential luxury travel.

• *One thing India needs to improve to become a truly global tourism powerhouse?*

Cleanliness. It is fundamental to the visitor experience. IATO has taken an initiative in this direction through its Swachh Paryatan Abhiyan, encouraging a cleaner and more responsible tourism environment.

• *If you could take one trip tomorrow, where would you go and why?*

Jaisalmer, for its serenity, desert landscape, magnificent heritage and timeless atmosphere.

SANJAY RAZDAN

Vice President - IATO

🔥 We need to shift from simply promoting India as a destination to managing India as a destination. Government and the travel trade must work together on a long-term tourism strategy that focuses on destination development, connectivity, infrastructure, skills and sustainability. At the same time, we need to take visitors beyond the well-known destinations and showcase India's lesser-known regions and authentic experiences. The objective should not simply be to bring in more tourists, but to attract the right tourists, encourage longer stays, deeper experiences and greater value for local communities. The travel trade also has a responsibility to take India to the world. At IATO, we have started taking our own roadshows to different countries and source markets, creating direct engagement with overseas tour operators and showcasing the diversity of India beyond the conventional destinations. Ultimately, the government and industry have to work as partners. Tourism growth should be measured not only by arrivals, but by the value,



SUNIL MISHRA



SANJAY RAZDAN

sustainability and impact those visitors create." 🔥

Rapid Fire

• *One destination you would never get tired of visiting?*

Ladakh - Without hesitation. Every journey there feels different. Its landscapes, culture, monasteries and people have a timeless quality that keeps drawing me back.

I have, in fact, grown with Ladakh, having visited it almost every year since 1988. It is therefore much more than a destination for me. It is a place I have watched evolve over decades and still discover something new every time I return.

• *One travel trend you believe will define the next five years?*

Meaningful and experiential travel - Travellers increasingly want

**KOMAL SETH****ADL ABDUL KAREEM**

authentic experiences, local culture, nature, wellness and responsible tourism rather than simply ticking destinations off a list. The traveller of tomorrow will want to connect with a destination, not just visit it.

• *Luxury travel or experiential travel – which is the future?*

Experiential travel – Luxury is no longer simply about five-star hotels and premium facilities. Today, luxury increasingly means exclusivity, authenticity, personalisation and access to experiences that money alone cannot easily buy. And importantly, experiential travel does not necessarily mean inexpensive travel. People are willing to pay a premium for unique, authentic and highly personalised experiences.

• *One thing India needs to improve to become a truly global tourism powerhouse*

The overall visitor experience

– *The first issue* we need to address is actually before the visitor even arrives in India — the visa process. India should seriously consider making short-duration tourist visas free, or at least making the process considerably simpler and more seamless. The cost is relatively small, but the ease of obtaining a visa can have a significant psychological impact on a traveller's decision to visit.

The second major issue is cleanliness. This needs to become a national priority — not only because tourists expect it, but because it directly affects the quality of life and wellbeing of our own citizens. Though a lot has improved over the last decade, particularly in connectivity and infrastructure, but there is still considerable room for improvement. We also need to focus on trained manpower, ease of travel and consistency of service. Every touchpoint matters. India has extraordinary attractions; now we need to make the journey between those attractions equally seamless.

• *If you could take one trip tomorrow, where would you go and why?*

Kashmir – without hesitation. It is my birthplace and my heritage, and for me, Kashmir is much more than a destination; it is an emotional connection to my roots. With its mountains, lakes, valleys and timeless beauty, I believe it is truly one of the most beautiful places on earth.

KOMAL SETH

Director - Linkin Reps Pvt Ltd

At Linkin Reps, we believe India's next phase of tourism growth should focus on creating better and more meaningful traveller experiences. India already has the culture, heritage, diversity and experiences to attract travellers globally. The priority now is stronger connectivity, better infrastructure, consistent service quality and easier access to emerging destinations. The government and travel trade must work together to make travel more seamless and

encourage visitors to explore beyond the well-known destinations. We also need to promote longer stays and repeat visits. For us, sustainable growth means not just bringing more travellers to India, but giving them reasons to stay, explore and return.

Rapid Fire:

• *One destination you would never get tired of visiting?*

Sri Lanka. It has such a beautiful mix of beaches, nature, culture and warm hospitality.

• *One travel trend you believe will define the next five years?*

Travel with experience. People are becoming more interested in experiences that connect them with the culture, people and character of a destination.

• *Luxury travel or experiential travel – which is the future?*

Experiential travel. People want comfort, but they also want experiences that feel personal and memorable.

• *One thing India needs to improve to become a truly global tourism powerhouse?*

Consistency. We have some world-class experiences, but the quality of the overall journey needs to be more consistent, from arrival and transport to information and hospitality.

• *If you could take one trip tomorrow, where would you go and why?*

Greece. I would love to explore Athens, Santorini and the Greek islands when the weather is pleasant, the landscapes are bright, and the destinations are full of life.

ADL ABDUL KAREEM

**Executive Committee Member
- OTOAI, FLYCREATIVE ONLINE
PVT LTD**

The travel trade industry and the government must work together to develop and promote responsible and experiential tourism. This involves strategies and initiatives to preserve the heritage sites, empower local communities and protect the environment.

Rapid Fire:

- One destination you would never get tired of visiting?

Kerala

- One travel trend you believe will define the next five years?

AI

- Luxury travel or experiential travel – which is the future?

Experiential travel

- One thing India needs to improve to become a truly global tourism powerhouse?

The tourism board to be constantly engaged with the world

- If you could take one trip tomorrow, where would you go and why?

Srilanka. Convenient and luxury experience and economical cost.

VINAY ARORA

Director, ATG Holidays

🔥 The most important step is for the government and the travel industry to work together to improve connectivity, infrastructure and tourist facilities. The government can focus on roads, airports, public transport, cleanliness and safety, while the travel industry can share feedback from travellers, promote responsible tourism and highlight lesser-known destinations. This partnership will create smoother travel experiences and help India achieve sustainable, high-value tourism growth. 🔥

Rapid Fire

- One destination you would never get tired of visiting?

Kashmir. The natural beauty, peaceful atmosphere and warm hospitality make every visit special.

- One travel trend you believe will define the next five years?

Experiential and personalised travel. Travellers will look for local food, culture, nature, wellness and meaningful experiences instead of just visiting famous places.

- Luxury travel or experiential travel – which is the future?

Experiential travel. Luxury will always be important, but people now

want comfort along with unique and authentic experiences.

- One thing India needs to improve to become a truly global tourism powerhouse?

We need to improve cleanliness, public facilities, last-mile connectivity and the overall **visitor experience** at tourist destinations.

- If you could take one trip tomorrow, where would you go and why?

Japan - It offers a beautiful mix of tradition, discipline, food and unforgettable travel experiences

MR GURDEEP SINGH GUJRAL

Treasurer - Gujral Tours & Travels P. Ltd.

🔥 The next phase of Indian tourism needs to move from destination promotion to destination management. The opportunity is no longer simply to bring more travellers to India, but to encourage longer stays, deeper experiences and higher-value tourism while protecting the character of the destinations themselves. This requires a much closer partnership between government and the travel trade, using industry insights and traveller data to plan infrastructure, improve last-mile connectivity, develop lesser-known destinations and establish clear carrying-capacity and sustainability frameworks. India has the diversity to offer everything from heritage and wellness to adventure, wildlife and immersive cultural experiences. The next step is to package and deliver these experiences at global standards, without diluting what makes them distinctly Indian. 🔥

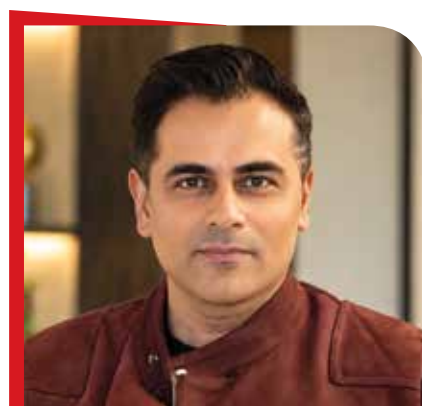
Rapid Fire

- One destination you would never get tired of visiting?

Switzerland.

- One travel trend you believe will define the next five years?

Personalised, experience-led travel.



VINAY ARORA



MR GURDEEP SINGH GUJRAL

- Luxury travel or experiential travel – which is the future?

Experiential travel. Luxury is evolving beyond hotels and amenities. Today, true luxury lies in access, authenticity, personalisation and experiences that cannot simply be replicated.

- One thing India needs to improve to become a truly global tourism powerhouse?

The overall visitor experience.

From infrastructure and last-mile connectivity to cleanliness, destination management and service standards, consistency across the journey will be crucial.

- If you could take one trip tomorrow, where would you go and why?

Japan. Its rich culture, exceptional craftsmanship, distinctive cuisine and striking landscapes make every journey there feel different. It is a destination where centuries-old



AJAY WADHAWAN

the government and the industry need to work together on more focused and measurable marketing in international markets. Instead of promoting India in a broad way, we should understand what travellers in each market are actually looking for and target them accordingly. Technology and data can help us identify these interests and create relevant content, especially Reels and short videos, for specific markets. For example, wellness can be promoted in markets where there is strong demand for it, while luxury, wildlife, culture or adventure can be promoted to the right audiences. This will help turn interest in India into actual bookings.

Rapid Fire:

• One destination you would never get tired of visiting?

Goa, Sikkim, Switzerland, Netherlands

• One travel trend you believe will define the next five years?

Indian tourism (Particularly Northeast and West Bengal)

• *Luxury travel or experiential travel- which is the future?*

Very Bright, as this category is growing a lot and don't compromise at all, Indians as well as overseas too

• *One thing India needs to improve to become a truly global tourism powerhouse?*

Cleanliness of our towns and heritage sites

• *If you could take one trip tomorrow, where would you go and why?*

Goa - Love every bit of it, best culture, beauty of beaches, liveliness of nightlife, happening pubs

VASUDHA SONDHI

Managing Director, Outbound Marketing & Connect Worldwide India

As India moves into a new phase of tourism growth, what is the one critical step the Travel-Trade industry and government must take together to convert India's enormous tourism potential into sustainable, high-value growth?

The critical step would be to identify and lay out clear policies that allow for implementation of the carrying capacity. The policy should cover all aspects like hotels, local construction design used, shops, guides & related businesses.

Rapid Fire:

• One destination you would never get tired of visiting?

Rishikesh

• One travel trend you believe will define the next five years?

Travel for experiences

• *Luxury travel or experiential travel- which is the future?*

Experiential (this includes luxury)

• *One thing India needs to improve to become a truly global tourism powerhouse?*

Get its act together on waste management.

• *If you could take one trip tomorrow, where would you go and why?*

Uttarakhand to Parvada

Bungalows is my first hospitality venture and I would like to see it achieve its potential.

DEV KARVAT

Founder & CEO, Asego

The two most critical things that can take our tourism industry to the next level are attracting more tourists to visit India, and creating more value for every traveller who does. India already has what most destinations spend decades trying to build—scale, diversity, heritage, culture and an extraordinary variety of experiences. The next step is to connect these strengths through better infrastructure, seamless connectivity, destination development, skilled talent and, most importantly, a consistent traveller experience. Government and industry have to work as partners in this journey. The government can create the infrastructure and policy environment, while the travel trade brings the market intelligence and customer understanding needed to translate that into experiences people genuinely value. I also believe we need to

traditions and modern life exist side by side, offering something new to discover each time

AJAY WADHAWAN

Executive Director, AIR iQ and Udaan Hotels & Resorts

From a travel agent's perspective,

take tourism beyond the handful of destinations that dominate the global perception of India. There is enormous potential in our emerging destinations, local communities and highly differentiated experiences. And as Indian travellers themselves become more aware, the ecosystem around travel has to mature with them. Today, travellers expect not just a great itinerary, but convenience, technology, assistance and confidence throughout the journey.



Rapid Fire:

- One destination you would never get tired of visiting?

Scandinavia.

- One travel trend you believe will define the next five years?

Real-time assistance beyond travel insurance

- Luxury travel or experiential travel—which is the future?

Experiential travel

- One thing India needs to improve to become a truly global tourism powerhouse?

There are three things I believe are important: **Infrastructure, safety and cleanliness**

- If you could take one trip tomorrow, where would you go and why?

Belgium.

Across the responses, several themes emerge repeatedly.

- The first is **connectivity**. Better air links, last-mile access and easier movement between destinations are seen as prerequisites for unlocking India's wider tourism geography.

- The second is **destination readiness**. Infrastructure alone is not sufficient. Travellers increasingly expect cleanliness, safety, trained manpower, consistent service standards, personalised experiences and seamless access.

- The third is **experience**. India's competitive advantage lies not only in its monuments and landscapes, but in the depth of experiences it can offer—from wellness and gastronomy to wildlife, spirituality, culture and luxury.

- The fourth is **value over volume**. Longer stays, higher visitor expenditure, repeat travel and greater economic participation by local communities are increasingly being positioned as more meaningful measures of tourism success than arrivals alone.

- And finally, there is a clear call for **closer government-industry collaboration**. The travel trade wants a greater role in destination development and policy, while the government remains central to infrastructure, connectivity, regulation, visas and destination development.

CONCLUSION

India's next tourism opportunity may

therefore depend less on discovering new attractions than on making existing and emerging destinations more accessible, bookable, sustainable and compelling.

The message from the travel trade is broadly consistent: the country needs to move from promotion to management, from volume to value and from conventional sightseeing to deeper, more personalised experiences.

For the government, that means creating the infrastructure, connectivity, policy environment and destination conditions that enable tourism to grow responsibly. For the industry, it means using market intelligence, technology, distribution networks and product expertise to transform those foundations into experiences that travellers are willing to seek, purchase and extend.

The opportunity is not simply to bring more people to India. It is to build a tourism ecosystem in which visitors stay longer, experience more, spend more meaningfully and contribute to destinations and communities across the country.

That shift—from **arrivals to value, promotion to destination management, and tourism products to experiences**—could define the next chapter of India's tourism story.

Albania welcomes 9.44 million foreign visitors in January–August 2026, up 5.3%

Albania welcomed 9.44 million foreign visitors in the first eight months of 2026, marking a 5.3% increase year-on-year, according to data from the country's statistical office, INSTAT.

However, growth moderated in August, with arrivals rising by just 2% to 2.43 million. While the month recorded a new high in visitor numbers, the slower pace of growth points to

changing travel patterns and evolving consumer behaviour.

Tourism operators report shorter stays, increased use of private accommodation and a shift towards self-catering, with visitors showing greater caution over discretionary spending. These trends have raised questions about whether higher arrivals are translating into stronger tourism revenues.

Despite these concerns, Albania's tourism outlook for 2027 shows encouraging signs, with an increase in guaranteed contracts in both volume and revenue. Interest from key European markets, including Poland, the Czech Republic and France, also remains strong.

For context, Albania welcomed 12.47 million foreign visitors in 2025, an increase of 6.6% over the previous year.

The key question for Albania's tourism sector is no longer just how many visitors arrive, but how long they stay and how much they spend.

India's Luxury Travel Market Gains Momentum as TBO Connects Global Suppliers with Emerging Buyers



TBO's LuxeConnect roadshow highlights growing demand for luxury travel while bringing international hotel brands closer to travel advisors across India's established and emerging source markets

India's luxury travel market is becoming increasingly important to international hospitality companies as affluent travellers broaden their spending beyond traditional premium accommodation to include personalised experiences, exclusive access and high-end leisure products.

Against this backdrop, TBO's second edition of **LuxeConnect**, its luxury travel business networking roadshow, brought together 25 luxury travel brands and more than 300 travel advisors across Mumbai and New Delhi. The initiative was designed around pre-scheduled B2B meetings, giving international suppliers and Indian travel advisors dedicated time to discuss products, market

opportunities and potential business partnerships.

The 2026 edition opened at the Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai on September 21 before moving to The Imperial, New Delhi, on September 23. The event follows the launch of LuxeConnect in 2025 and reflects the growing emphasis being placed on luxury and ultra-luxury travel within India's outbound market.

TBO describes itself as a global travel distribution platform connecting travel suppliers with buyers, including travel agencies, independent travel advisors and other travel businesses. Its platform currently provides access to more than one million hotels across more than 100 countries, including a

dedicated Platinum Collection of luxury properties.

Luxury demand expands beyond India's major metros

One of the notable features of the roadshow was the geographical spread of participating travel advisors. While Mumbai and New Delhi remain important centres for luxury travel sales, the event also brought together professionals from cities such as Pune, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai and Chandigarh, as well as emerging markets including Ranchi, Guwahati and Dimapur.

The participation of advisors from Tier-II cities and the Northeast reflects a wider opportunity for international luxury suppliers seeking to diversify their Indian distribution networks.

For hotel companies, such platforms can provide an opportunity to establish relationships with advisors outside their traditional metropolitan networks. For travel professionals, direct interaction with suppliers allows them to better understand properties, destinations and experiences before recommending them to clients.

Ankush Nijhawan, Co-Founder and Joint Managing Director of TBO, said the company sees considerable potential in India's luxury and ultra-luxury segment, particularly as spending power increases and travellers become more willing to invest in premium accommodation and experiences.

He said TBO was looking to bring together suppliers from destinations including Miami, France, Asia and the Middle East, with a focus on five-star and above properties seeking to develop their presence in India.

Nijhawan also highlighted the participation of advisors from markets

beyond Mumbai and Delhi, noting that the geographical diversity of buyers was an important component of the initiative. He indicated that there was interest in taking the concept to additional Indian cities, including Bengaluru, and expanding the number of participating exhibitors in future editions.

From luxury accommodation to personalised experiences

The evolution of India's luxury travel market is also changing the way travel advisors engage with hotel and destination suppliers.

Luxury travellers are increasingly looking beyond the conventional five-star hotel stay. Privacy, personalised service, distinctive experiences, destination access and customised itineraries are becoming important elements of the high-end travel proposition.

Rishi Kapoor, Managing Director of My Travel Box, said luxury travel was increasingly about access, experiences and personalisation rather than accommodation alone. He added that face-to-face interaction with suppliers helps advisors understand products in greater depth and develop experiences for their clients beyond what is communicated through rate sheets.

This shift has implications for hotels and resorts looking to develop their business from India. Strong distribution relationships with specialist travel advisors can be particularly relevant for products where the sales process depends on destination knowledge, personal recommendations and an understanding of the traveller's preferences.

Hotels look beyond traditional distribution networks

For participating hospitality companies, LuxeConnect provided an opportunity to strengthen existing relationships while reaching advisors from newer source markets.

Vikas Sharma, Associate Vice President, The Oberoi Group, said the platform helped the group connect with travel partners in markets that might

otherwise have been more difficult to reach directly. He pointed specifically to interactions with advisors from Guwahati, Dimapur and Ranchi, describing the expansion of luxury demand into newer markets as an important opportunity.

International hotel groups also used the event to showcase different segments of their portfolios.

Laura Vicens, Destination Manager of Global Distribution (APAC-MENA), RIU Hotels and Resorts, said participation in Mumbai and Delhi generated productive meetings and discussions around potential business from India. She indicated that the company was exploring further engagement through targeted offers, marketing initiatives, webinars and possible familiarisation trips.

For Centara Hotels & Resorts, the event provided an opportunity to promote both its broader portfolio and its high-end offering. Moumita Mukherjee Paul, Director Sales and Marketing for South Asia, said the second edition was larger and stronger than the previous year, with the company seeing value in the quality of interactions with travel professionals.

Maldives, Thailand and other luxury destinations in focus

Luxury resort companies from popular Indian outbound destinations were also represented.

Jatin Arora, Director Sales – India, Atmosphere Core, said the group used the platform to showcase its three portfolios, including Colours of OBLU, Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts and THE OZEN COLLECTION. According to Arora, the meetings helped the group strengthen relationships with existing partners while also introducing its resorts to new advisors.

The company also reported that some business had been concluded during the event, underlining the potential value of appointment-based B2B formats for suppliers and buyers.

Thailand-based White Sand Blue Sea Group, which operates four hotels in Phuket and one in Khao Lak, participated in LuxeConnect for the first

time. Varanya Pantarangsee, Director of Sales in Bangkok, said the event provided an opportunity to introduce the group's properties to travel partners in both Mumbai and Delhi and explore wider partnership opportunities.

Building a wider luxury travel ecosystem

The emergence of platforms such as LuxeConnect reflects a broader change in the structure of India's outbound travel market. As international travel becomes more accessible to affluent consumers outside the largest metropolitan areas, suppliers are increasingly looking for ways to identify specialist advisors and distribution partners in emerging markets.

For technology-led travel distributors such as TBO, the opportunity extends beyond facilitating bookings. The company's broader platform connects suppliers and buyers across hotels, air travel, holiday packages, cruises, sightseeing and other travel services, creating opportunities to combine distribution technology with direct industry engagement.

Luxury travel, however, remains a relationship-driven segment. High-value bookings often involve detailed conversations around room categories, inclusions, transfers, experiences, special occasions and personalised service. Direct engagement between suppliers and advisors can therefore play an important role alongside digital distribution.

As India's luxury travel market continues to develop, the next phase is likely to involve not only greater demand from established metropolitan markets but also a wider network of affluent travellers emerging from smaller cities and regional centres.

For international hotels, resorts and destination companies, reaching these new buyers will increasingly depend on building relationships with travel advisors who understand the local market and can translate global luxury products into highly personalised experiences for Indian travellers.

Tourism Malaysia

Deepens India Market Engagement as Visit Malaysia 2026 Campaign Extends Through 2027



Tourism Malaysia Deepens India Market Engagement as Visit Malaysia 2026 Campaign Extends Through 2027

TSNN - Tourism Malaysia is stepping up its engagement with the Indian travel market as part of a sustained international promotional drive under the extended Visit Malaysia

2026–2027 campaign.

The organisation's Sales Mission Series 2, held in **Chennai, Mumbai and New Delhi from 12 to 20 August 2026**, brought together **47 Malaysian tourism stakeholders**, including tour operators, hoteliers and airline partners. The programme focused on strengthening trade relationships, developing new business opportunities

and encouraging Indian travel partners to expand their Malaysia product portfolios.

The mission was led by **Mohd Amirul Rizal Abdul Rahim, Director General of Tourism Malaysia**, and organised in collaboration with **Batik Air**, highlighting the role of public-private partnerships in strengthening Malaysia's presence in the Indian outbound travel market.

India Remains a Key Market

Tourism Malaysia continues to regard India as an important international source market. According to the organisation, Malaysia recorded **more than 1.5 million visitor arrivals from India in 2025**, placing the country among Malaysia's five largest international source markets. Tourism Malaysia has also reported that more than **600,000 Indian visitors travelled to Malaysia between January and May 2026**.

The growth follows Malaysia's introduction of a visa-exemption facility for Indian nationals for social visits in December 2023. The Malaysian Immigration Department currently states that Indian citizens are exempt from the visa requirement **until 31 December 2026**, subject to the applicable entry conditions.

Air connectivity is another important factor supporting the market. Tourism Malaysia's August 2026 release cites **more than 190 direct flights per week between India and Malaysia, with more than 37,000 seats weekly**. A separate Tourism Malaysia update published earlier in 2026 identified Malaysia Airlines, AirAsia, Batik Air and IndiGo among the carriers connecting Malaysia with major Indian cities.

Official airline information also confirms continued connectivity between the two markets. Malaysia Airlines, for example, currently lists services and India-market operations covering cities including Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi, Ahmedabad, Amritsar, Kolkata and Trivandrum.

Moving Beyond Traditional Itineraries

A central objective of the sales mission is to encourage Indian travellers to look beyond the established Kuala Lumpur and Genting Highlands circuit.

Tourism Malaysia is promoting a broader portfolio of destinations, including **Sarawak, Langkawi, Penang, Johor and Sabah**, with an emphasis on nature, adventure,

beaches, culture, gastronomy, shopping, family attractions, MICE and destination weddings.

The strategy reflects a broader effort to diversify Malaysian itineraries and develop travel products that can appeal to different segments of the Indian market.

For travel trade partners, the expansion of destination offerings also creates opportunities to build multi-destination programmes and longer itineraries, incorporating Malaysia's islands, heritage centres, nature experiences and regional destinations alongside Kuala Lumpur.

Malaysia Airlines has likewise highlighted the importance of encouraging international visitors to travel beyond the country's principal gateway cities. Its Bonus Side Trip programme, for example, is designed to encourage travellers to add destinations such as Penang to their Malaysian itineraries.

Strengthening Trade Partnerships

The Chennai, Mumbai and New Delhi programme provided a platform for business-to-business meetings, networking and discussions between Malaysian suppliers and Indian travel trade representatives.

For Tourism Malaysia, maintaining direct engagement with travel agents, tour operators and airline partners remains an important part of converting destination awareness into bookings and packaged travel.

The organisation has indicated that its Indian-market strategy will continue to focus on market-specific travel products and stronger cooperation with the travel trade, while broadening awareness of Malaysia's regional destinations and experiences.

Visit Malaysia 2026-2027

The India initiative comes as Malaysia extends its Visit Malaysia 2026 campaign through **the end of 2027**.

Tourism Malaysia has said the extended campaign period provides additional time to sustain destination visibility, strengthen international trade

relationships and build a longer pipeline of visitors. Subsequent official releases have confirmed that the campaign is now being promoted as **Visit Malaysia 2026-2027 (VM2026-2027)**.

The extended campaign is also intended to showcase Malaysia's natural attractions, cultural heritage and diverse tourism products while supporting longer-term tourism development and industry participation.

For the Indian market, the extended promotional window gives Tourism Malaysia and its industry partners additional scope to develop destination-led itineraries, strengthen airline and trade partnerships and promote travel beyond the country's traditional entry points.

With strong air links, continued visa facilitation for Indian visitors through the end of 2026 and a growing emphasis on regional destinations, Malaysia is positioning the Indian market as an important component of its international tourism strategy for the remainder of 2026 and into 2027.

Tourism Malaysia is actively enhancing its promotional campaigns by deepening ties with the Indian market.

- Tourism Malaysia is focusing on the Indian market to boost tourism and enhance cultural connections.
- The collaboration aims to increase visitor numbers from India, which is a significant market for Malaysia.
- Strategies include targeted marketing campaigns and partnerships with Indian travel agencies.
- Efforts are directed at showcasing Malaysia's diverse tourist attractions to Indian travelers.
- Engagements with Indian stakeholders are part of the broader strategy to expand Malaysia's presence in India.

Belarus

Opens E-Visa Access
to Indian Travellers,
Plans Direct Mumbai
and Goa Links



Belarus has added India to the list of countries whose citizens are eligible to obtain an electronic visa, marking a significant change in entry procedures for Indian travellers and strengthening the country's efforts to deepen tourism and business links with India.

The decision was adopted by the **Council of Ministers of Belarus on 14 September 2026**, following an initiative by the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Belarusian Foreign Minister Maxim Ryzhenkov subsequently confirmed the move during a meeting with India's

ambassador to Belarus, describing the introduction of electronic visas for Indian citizens as a measure that could further strengthen bilateral cooperation.

The visa reform is being accompanied by plans to develop new direct air links between **Minsk**



and Mumbai and Minsk and Goa.

The proposed services have not yet begun operating, but Belarusian authorities have identified them as a potential complement to the new visa arrangements.

New E-Visa Route for Indian Passport Holders

The addition of India to Belarus's e-visa framework is intended to simplify the process of obtaining permission to enter the country by

moving the application process online.

Belarusian authorities have said the measure is designed to reduce administrative barriers, strengthen people-to-people contacts and facilitate business travel between the two countries. The Foreign Ministry has specifically linked the change to greater opportunities for **B2B negotiations, business visits, joint investment initiatives and trade projects.**

The development is particularly relevant to Indian travellers who

previously faced more complicated visa arrangements when they did not qualify for Belarus's existing visa-free entry provisions.

According to Belarus's official visa information service, Indian citizens have been able to enter Belarus visa-free for stays of up to 30 days under specific conditions, including travel through designated airports and possession of a valid multiple-entry EU or Schengen visa showing prior entry into the relevant territory. A return air



ticket and other financial and entry requirements also apply.

The new e-visa arrangement is therefore significant because it creates an additional route for eligible Indian travellers rather than simply extending the existing conditional visa-free facility.

Detailed operational information—including application procedures, fees, processing times and the precise date from which Indian applicants can submit e-visa applications—should be confirmed through Belarus's official electronic visa channels before travel.

Direct India–Belarus Flights in the Pipeline

Visa facilitation is being accompanied by efforts to strengthen air connectivity.

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry has said that plans are being developed for **direct flights from Minsk to Mumbai and Goa**. The routes are intended to improve accessibility

between Belarus and India and could support both tourism and commercial exchanges.

The proposed services should not, however, be confused with existing India–Belarus connectivity. Belarusian national carrier **Belavia** launched its Minsk–Delhi service in 2023, initially with one weekly flight and subsequently increasing the frequency to two flights per week.

As of the latest information available from Belavia, the airline has not published an official launch announcement or operating schedule for Minsk–Mumbai or Minsk–Goa. The two routes therefore remain **planned services rather than bookable scheduled flights**.

For Indian travellers, confirmation of operating dates, airline participation and schedules will be the next significant development to watch.

A Different European Experience

Belarus offers an alternative to

the more established European destinations frequently chosen by Indian travellers, combining Soviet-era urban architecture, historic castles, museums, nature and cultural attractions.

Minsk is the natural starting point for a first visit. The capital is known for its broad avenues, monumental architecture, museums, parks and landmarks including Independence Square, Victory Square and the National Library of Belarus.

Beyond the capital, the country's heritage attractions provide a different perspective on Eastern European history.

Mir Castle, a UNESCO World Heritage property, reflects a mixture of Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque architectural influences. Nearby **Nesvizh**, another UNESCO-listed site, is associated with the Radziwiłł family and includes a historic palace complex, landscaped gardens and the Corpus Christi Church.

For travellers interested in 20th-century history, **Brest Fortress** is one of Belarus's best-known landmarks and is closely associated with the defence of Brest during the Second World War.

Nature-based experiences offer another dimension to the destination. **Braslav Lakes National Park**, in northern Belarus, is characterised by forests, islands and a large network of glacial lakes, providing opportunities for boating, kayaking, hiking and other outdoor activities.

Tourism and Business Links

Belarus is positioning the visa change as more than a tourism measure.

The Foreign Ministry has linked the initiative to the broader development of bilateral economic relations, noting that

easier entry procedures can facilitate business meetings, investment discussions and trade cooperation.

For the tourism sector, improved visa access combined with additional air connectivity could make Belarus easier to incorporate into itineraries for Indian leisure travellers, group tours and specialist-interest visitors.

The proposed Mumbai and Goa links would also expand the potential Indian catchment area beyond Delhi, which currently has the established direct Minsk connection operated by Belavia.

What Indian Travellers Need to Know

The latest development can be summarised in three points:

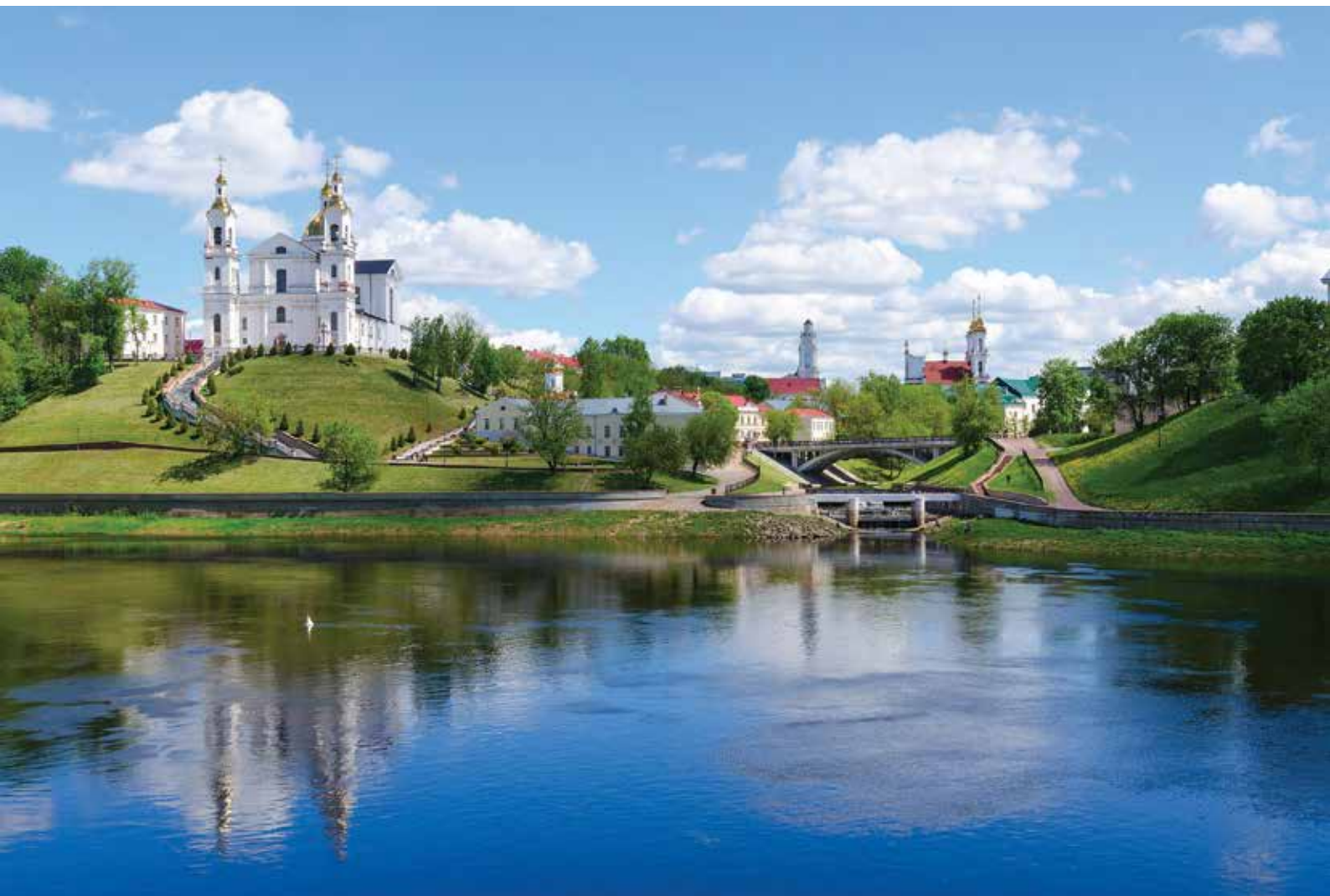
- India has been added to Belarus's e-visa eligibility list.

- Direct Minsk–Mumbai and Minsk–Goa flights are being planned but have not yet launched.

- Belavia already operates a Minsk–Delhi service, providing an existing direct air link between India and Belarus.

The practical details of the new e-visa facility and the timetable for the proposed Mumbai and Goa routes will determine how quickly the announcement translates into additional travel options.

For Indian tourists seeking destinations beyond Europe's traditional circuits, the combination of simplified visa procedures, existing Delhi connectivity and potential new services from western India could put Belarus on the radar of a wider segment of the country's outbound travel market.



Indian Travellers Show Growing Interest in Multi-Destination European Cruising

New YouGov research commissioned by Royal Caribbean finds that 67% of Indian respondents are attracted to the idea of exploring multiple European destinations by cruise, as Legend of the Seas brings the cruise line's Icon Class to the Mediterranean.



For Indian travellers looking to experience more of Europe in a single holiday, cruising is emerging as an increasingly appealing option. According to new **YouGov research commissioned by Royal Caribbean**, 67% of Indian respondents

said they find the prospect of exploring multiple European destinations on a single cruise appealing.

The findings come as **Legend of the Seas**, Royal Caribbean's newest Icon Class ship, begins its Mediterranean season, sailing

from **Barcelona and Rome (Civitavecchia)**. The ship is the third vessel in the Icon Class and is offering Western Mediterranean itineraries during the European summer.

The survey covered **6,223 adults across India, Singapore, Malaysia,**



Indonesia and the Philippines, with fieldwork conducted between May 28 and June 8, 2026. Across the five markets, 74% of respondents found multi-destination European cruising appealing. Among Indian respondents, the figure stood at 67%.

Convenience Drives the Appeal

For Indian travellers, the attraction appears closely linked to the convenience of combining several European destinations in one journey. **Forty-five per cent** identified the ability to visit multiple destinations with ease as a leading benefit of European cruising. Safety and comfort followed at 42%, while 40% valued having meals and entertainment included. Another 39% highlighted the convenience of avoiding airport procedures such as check-in, security and potential delays.

The wider survey also points to the travel friction associated with multi-country European holidays. Across the five markets, nearly nine in 10 respondents identified at least one challenge when travelling between European destinations, including flight disruptions, long layovers, luggage management and repeatedly packing and unpacking.

For Indian respondents, **Italy emerged as the most preferred European destination**, selected by 51%, followed by France at 48%, the UK at 45% and Spain at 30%. When asked about preferred ways of travelling between European destinations, trains ranked first at 25%, while cruises and short-haul flights each recorded 24%. Private cars accounted for 18%, followed by buses and coaches at 9%.

A New Way to Experience the Mediterranean

Legend of the Seas offers itineraries that combine several destinations across Spain, France and Italy. Depending on the sailing, ports include **Palma de Mallorca, Provence, Florence, Rome and Naples/Capri**, allowing travellers to explore multiple European destinations while keeping their accommodation and onboard experience in one place. Royal Caribbean confirms Barcelona and Rome as the ship's Mediterranean departure points.

The ship is also designed to make time at sea part of the holiday rather than simply a passage between ports.

Its offering includes **seven pools, eight neighbourhoods, more than 40 ways to dine and drink, live entertainment and the Category 6 waterpark**.

Among Indian respondents, **America's Got Talent LIVE on Legend of the Seas** generated the highest interest among the ship's featured experiences at 42%, followed by the family-focused Surfside Neighbourhood at 37%. Category 6 Waterpark is another of the ship's major attractions.

Dining as Part of the Journey

Food also features prominently in the onboard proposition. **Royal Railway – Legend Station** attracted interest from 28% of Indian respondents, while Hollywoodland Supper Club recorded 20%. Both concepts are positioned as immersive dining experiences, adding entertainment and storytelling to the culinary element of the cruise.

“What stood out to us from the findings is how much travellers value making the most of their time when exploring Europe,” said **Ben Bouldin, President, Greater China and Managing Director, Asia, Royal Caribbean**. He added that travellers are increasingly seeking holidays that combine convenience with enriching experiences and adventure.

The research offers a snapshot of changing travel preferences rather than a measure of actual cruise bookings. However, the findings point to growing consideration of cruising as another way for Indian travellers to experience Europe—particularly for those seeking to combine several destinations while reducing the logistical demands of a multi-country itinerary.

With *Legend of the Seas* now operating in the Mediterranean, Royal Caribbean is bringing its Icon Class proposition into one of the world's most established cruise regions, pairing European destinations with an extensive range of accommodation, dining, entertainment and leisure experiences onboard.



Athens Beyond the Acropolis: 10 Cultural Experiences to Discover



Beyond the Parthenon and the Acropolis, Athens offers a rich cultural landscape of contemporary art, performing arts, architecture, science and Greek heritage. Here are 10 places that reveal another side of the Greek capital.

Athens is synonymous with antiquity. The Acropolis, Parthenon and ancient Agora remain essential stops for first-time visitors, but the Greek capital's cultural identity extends well beyond its archaeological landmarks.

Across neighbourhoods from Kallithea and Syngrou to Kifissia, Kolonaki and Metaxourgio, museums, galleries, theatres and contemporary cultural centres offer a different perspective on the city. For travellers willing to look beyond the classical sights, these venues provide an opportunity to explore modern Greek creativity alongside the country's deep historical traditions.

1. Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center

At the southern edge of central Athens, the **Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center (SNFCC)** brings architecture, culture and open space together. Designed by Renzo Piano Building Workshop, the complex incorporates the National Library of Greece and the Greek National Opera, alongside the expansive Stavros Niarchos Park.

The park covers approximately 210,000 square metres and provides landscaped paths, gardens and open spaces that offer a striking contrast to the densely built urban centre. The cultural centre also hosts a changing

programme of events and activities, making it possible to combine sightseeing with contemporary Greek cultural life.

Don't miss: Allow time to explore the park as well as the cultural buildings; the complex is as much an urban landscape as it is a cultural destination.

2. Acropolis Museum

The **Acropolis Museum** provides an essential bridge between Athens' ancient monuments and the modern city. Located near the Acropolis, its architecture deliberately maintains a visual relationship with the Sacred Rock, while glass floors reveal archaeological remains beneath the building.

The museum's galleries trace the history of the Acropolis and its slopes, culminating in the Parthenon Gallery on the third floor. There, sculptures and architectural elements are arranged to echo the dimensions and orientation of the ancient temple, with views towards the Acropolis itself.

The museum's archaeological excavation, visible beneath the building, adds another dimension to the visit, offering a glimpse into the ancient neighbourhood that once occupied the site.

Don't miss: The Parthenon Gallery, where the museum's architecture



creates a direct visual connection with the monument.

3. National Theatre of Greece

For an introduction to Greece's performing-arts scene, visit the **National Theatre of Greece**. The institution operates several stages, including the historic Ziller Building, and presents productions ranging from classical works to contemporary theatre.

International visitors can also





find performances accompanied by English subtitles. The availability of subtitles varies by production and date, so checking the theatre's current programme before travelling is advisable.

Don't miss: A performance at the Ziller Building's Main Stage, particularly for travellers interested in experiencing Greek theatre within one of Athens' established cultural institutions.

4. Onassis Stegi

On Syngrou Avenue, **Onassis Stegi** represents a distinctly contemporary side of Athens. The building hosts theatre, dance, music, cinema, visual arts and digital performances, while its programme frequently brings Greek

artists into dialogue with international creators.

The architecture is equally notable. Designed by Architecture Studio, the building is wrapped in an illuminated white marble façade, while its interior contains 18,000 square metres of space spread across 16 levels, nine of them underground.

Its upper floors have also evolved into a destination for food and drink. The current Amphibian restaurant and rooftop bar occupy the sixth and seventh floors and offer views towards the Acropolis.

Don't miss: Checking the performance calendar before your trip, then extending the visit with the rooftop dining experience.

5. Basil & Elise Goulandris Foundation

Art lovers can explore one of Athens' major collections of modern and contemporary art at the **Basil & Elise Goulandris Foundation**.

The museum's collection includes works by internationally recognised artists including Paul Cézanne, Vincent van Gogh, Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Auguste Rodin, Pablo Picasso, Wassily Kandinsky and Joan Miró, alongside important works by modern and contemporary Greek artists.

The museum itself is an 11-storey building, with five floors below ground and exhibition spaces distributed across several levels.

Don't miss: The permanent collection, which provides an opportunity to see major European modernists alongside Greek artists within the same museum.

6. National Museum of Natural History Goulandris

Athens' cultural attractions are not limited to art and archaeology. In the northern suburb of Kifissia, the **National Museum of Natural History Goulandris** explores Greece's natural environment through collections covering zoology, entomology, herpetology, marine biology, botany, ornithology, geology and palaeontology.

The museum also addresses contemporary environmental issues through exhibitions focused on climate change and biodiversity, while its 360-degree dome experience adds an immersive element to the visit.

Don't miss: Combining the museum



visit with time in Kifissia, one of Athens' greener northern districts.

7. Museum of Cycladic Art

The **Museum of Cycladic Art** offers a journey into the prehistoric and ancient cultures of the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean.

Its permanent collections encompass around 3,000 Cycladic, ancient Greek and ancient Cypriot objects, spanning from the fourth millennium BC to approximately the sixth century AD. Particularly distinctive are the museum's Cycladic marble figurines, whose simplified forms have influenced generations of modern artists, including Constantin Brâncuși, Amedeo Modigliani, Alberto Giacometti, Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore.

Don't miss: The Cycladic marble figurines and the museum's displays explaining how these ancient objects relate to the wider artistic history of the Aegean.

8. The Breeder

In Metaxourgio, **The Breeder** offers a window into Athens' contemporary gallery scene. The gallery's history is closely connected with the neighbourhood: it moved into a former ice-cream factory at 45 Iasonos Street in 2008, transforming the industrial building into exhibition space.

Today, its programme focuses on contemporary artists and exhibitions, while the gallery continues to participate in international art events and collaborations.

Don't miss: Exploring Metaxourgio itself. The neighbourhood's industrial

architecture, street life, restaurants and contemporary-art spaces make it a useful counterpoint to central Athens' classical monuments.

9. Eleftheria Tseliou Gallery

Hidden among the streets of Kolonaki, the **Eleftheria Tseliou Gallery** provides a more intimate introduction to contemporary Greek art.

The gallery works with artists across generations and presents contemporary Greek practices including painting, drawing and sculpture. Its current artist roster includes figures such as Eozen Agopian, Antonakis, Maria Efstathiou, Iannis Ganas and Rena Papaspyrou.

The gallery occupies a relatively discreet space on Iraklitou Street, making it a destination for travellers interested in discovering Athens' smaller-scale contemporary art scene.

Don't miss: Checking the gallery's exhibition schedule before visiting, as programmes change throughout the year.

10. Benaki Museum of Greek Culture

To understand Greece beyond the classical period, the **Benaki Museum of Greek Culture** is an important stop. Housed in a neoclassical building near the National Garden and the Hellenic Parliament, the museum presents Greek culture chronologically, from prehistory through the 20th century.

Its collections encompass prehistoric, ancient Greek and Roman art, Byzantine art, historic heirlooms, post-Byzantine and Neo-Hellenic art, paintings, drawings and prints. The



museum's wider holdings also include extensive material relating to Greek cultural history and connections with other cultures.

Don't miss: The chronological presentation of Greek culture, which places the country's ancient heritage within the much longer story of its social, artistic and cultural development.

A different side of Athens

Athens is often approached through the lens of antiquity, but the city's cultural story does not end with the Acropolis. Its contemporary theatres, galleries, museums, architectural landmarks and public spaces demonstrate how ancient heritage coexists with modern artistic and cultural life.

For travellers prepared to venture beyond the classic sightseeing circuit, these venues offer a broader portrait of Athens — one in which archaeology, modern art, science, architecture, performance and everyday urban culture occupy the same city.



India's hotel landscape has expanded its presence on the global MICHELIN map, with **12 new properties joining the 2026 MICHELIN Key selection**, taking the country's total to **47 hotels** recognised across the three Key categories.

The latest additions span a notably diverse range of hospitality experiences — from a luxury wildlife resort in Bandhavgarh and a rammed-earth retreat in Ladakh to contemporary city hotels in Mumbai and Pune, a palace stay in Patiala and an organic farm retreat in Jodhpur.

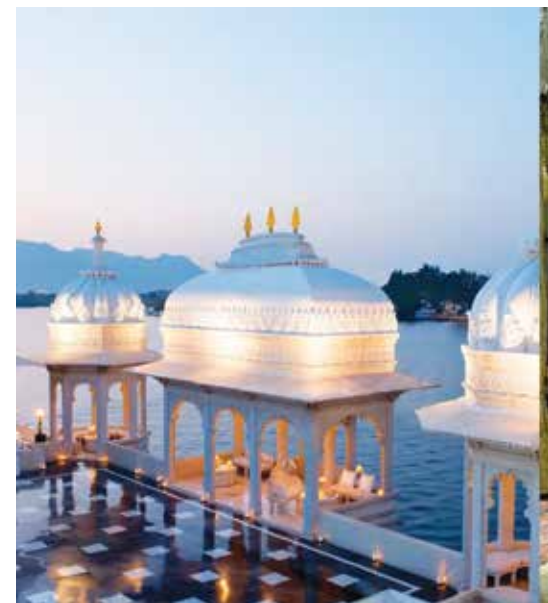
The 2026 selection underlines the breadth of India's luxury and experiential hospitality sector, extending beyond traditional palace hotels and established urban properties to include nature-led, design-focused and destination-driven stays. The MICHELIN Guide's global 2026 selection was announced on September 18.

What Is a MICHELIN Key?

The **MICHELIN Key** is the MICHELIN Guide's distinction for hotels and is separate from the MICHELIN Star system used for restaurants.

MICHELIN inspectors assess the overall hotel experience, considering elements including architecture and design, service, personality,

12 Indian Hotels
Join the 2026
MICHELIN
Key Selection,
Taking National
Total to 47





consistency, value and the relationship between the experience and the price paid. The inspections are conducted anonymously, following the Guide's established independent methodology.

The distinction is divided into three levels:

- **One MICHELIN Key:** A very special stay
- **Two MICHELIN Keys:** An exceptional stay
- **Three MICHELIN Keys:** An extraordinary stay

For 2026, **one of India's 12 new additions received Two MICHELIN Keys, while the remaining 11 received One Key.**

The Oberoi Vindhyavilas Leads the New Additions

The Oberoi Vindhyavilas Wildlife Resort, Bandhavgarh — Two MICHELIN Keys

The **Oberoi Vindhyavilas Wildlife Resort** is the only new Indian property in the 2026 selection to receive **Two MICHELIN Keys.**

Located near Bandhavgarh National Park in Madhya Pradesh, the resort combines luxury accommodation with a wildlife-focused experience. Guests can choose between air-conditioned luxury

tents and villas with private pools, while safari experiences provide access to one of central India's major tiger habitats.

The recognition also reflects a broader shift in India's luxury hospitality sector, where wilderness and nature-based experiences are increasingly being positioned alongside traditional urban and heritage stays.

Mumbai Adds Three New MICHELIN Key Hotels

Mumbai accounts for three of the latest additions to the 2026 selection.

Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai — One MICHELIN Key

Located in Worli, **Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai** has been recognised with One MICHELIN Key for its contemporary approach to luxury hospitality.

The hotel occupies a 33-storey tower overlooking the Arabian Sea and offers 207 rooms and suites, a





two-floor spa and a range of dining and lifestyle facilities. The property itself confirmed the MICHELIN Key recognition in a September 23 announcement.

Fairmont Mumbai — One MICHELIN Key

Located beside Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport's Terminal 2, **Fairmont Mumbai** brings a contemporary interpretation of Art Deco-inspired luxury to the city.

The property features 446 rooms and suites, extensive dining and event facilities, an infinity pool and a dedicated wellness offering. Its official website confirms its location adjacent to the international airport and highlights its Art Deco design approach.

The St. Regis Mumbai — One MICHELIN Key

The **St. Regis Mumbai**, located in Lower Parel, joins the 2026 selection with One Key.

The property combines contemporary accommodation with the St. Regis brand's signature personalised service and occupies a prominent position within Mumbai's Lower Parel lifestyle and retail district.

Together, the three additions reinforce Mumbai's growing representation within the MICHELIN Guide's hotel selection.

Jaipur and Pune Expand Their Presence

Anantara Jewel Bagh Jaipur — One MICHELIN Key

Anantara Jewel Bagh Jaipur brings Rajasthan's architectural and cultural character into a contemporary luxury hotel setting.

Located on the outskirts of Jaipur, the property features palace-inspired architecture, 150 rooms and suites, multiple dining venues, two swimming pools, an Anantara Spa and cultural experiences centred on Rajasthan's heritage.

The hotel is also positioned as a base for exploring Jaipur's major cultural attractions, including the City Palace, Hawa Mahal, Amber Fort and Jantar Mantar.

The Ritz-Carlton, Pune — One MICHELIN Key

In Pune, **The Ritz-Carlton, Pune** has entered the MICHELIN Key selection with One Key.

The hotel combines contemporary luxury with Art Deco-inspired design and overlooks the Poona Club Golf Course. Its 198 rooms and suites, spa, outdoor pool, dining venues and Club Lounge form part of the property's urban resort offering.

The hotel is located on Airport Road in Yerwada and provides access to both Pune's business districts and cultural attractions.

Design, Heritage and Nature Define the Other New Entries

The remaining additions demonstrate the geographical and stylistic range of the 2026 Indian MICHELIN Key selection.

Dolkhar, Ladakh — One MICHELIN Key

In Leh, **Dolkhar** takes a more intimate approach to hospitality, with rammed-earth architecture and locally influenced materials reflecting the character of Ladakh.

Hotel Irada, Pune Wine Country — One MICHELIN Key

Set within a working winery near Pune, **Hotel Irada** occupies a European-style chateau and combines wine, wellness and design-led hospitality. The property adds a wine-country dimension to India's MICHELIN Key portfolio.

Ran Baas The Palace, Patiala — One MICHELIN Key

Located within the historic **Qila Mubarak** complex, **Ran Baas The Palace** occupies a 19th-century royal guest house and offers travellers an opportunity to experience Patiala's architectural and royal heritage.

Woods At Sasan, Sasan Gir — One MICHELIN Key

Near Gir Forest in Gujarat, **Woods At Sasan** takes a nature-oriented



approach, incorporating organic food, natural materials and a slower style of hospitality into the guest experience.

Mharo Khet, Jodhpur — One MICHELIN Key

Mharo Khet offers a farm-based alternative to Rajasthan's traditional palace hotels. Built around organic farmland, the property places agriculture, farm-to-table dining and rural experiences at the centre of the stay.

Manuscript – Jhilwara Haveli, Udaipur — One MICHELIN Key

The final new addition, **Manuscript – Jhilwara Haveli**, is an intimate property housed in a restored traditional haveli near Lake Pichola. Its focus is on architecture, history and personalised hospitality.

The 12 new properties listed above are documented in the supplied source material.

India Now Has 47 MICHELIN Key Hotels

With the latest additions, India's 2026 MICHELIN Key selection comprises **47 hotels** across the three levels. The MICHELIN Guide independently confirms the national total of 47 in its 2026 global selection.

India's existing portfolio includes properties ranging from historic

palaces and luxury safari lodges to contemporary urban hotels, wellness retreats and boutique properties.

The country has **two Three-Key properties — Taj Falaknuma Palace in Hyderabad and Taj Lake Palace in Udaipur** — while the Two-Key and One-Key categories encompass properties across destinations including Rajasthan, Delhi, Mumbai,

Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and other regions.

A Broader Definition of Luxury Hospitality

The expansion of the MICHELIN Key selection reflects the increasing variety of India's high-end accommodation sector.

Alongside established palace hotels and international luxury brands, the 2026 additions include wildlife resorts, farm stays, vineyard properties, heritage residences and environmentally responsive retreats.

The result is a hotel portfolio that increasingly mirrors the diversity of the Indian travel experience itself — from tiger safaris and Himalayan landscapes to Rajasthan's royal heritage, Mumbai's contemporary urban culture and Pune's emerging wine-country circuit.

For travellers, the MICHELIN Key selection provides another international reference point for discovering distinctive accommodation across India, while the breadth of the 2026 additions highlights the growing range of experiences available beyond conventional luxury hotel stays.

New Additions to the 2026 MICHELIN Key List

- **The Oberoi Vindhyavilas Wildlife Resort** (Bandhavgarh) — Awarded **Two MICHELIN Keys**; a luxury tented safari camp set against Bandhavgarh National Park.

- **Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai** (Mumbai) — Awarded **One MICHELIN Key**; features contemporary Worli architecture, views of the Arabian Sea, and the rooftop lounge AER.

- **Anantara Jewel Bagh** (Jaipur) — Awarded **One MICHELIN Key**; Anantara's debut property in India featuring traditional Rajasthani courtyards and plunge-pool villas.

- **Hotel Irada** (Pune) — Awarded **One MICHELIN Key**; a European-style chateau situated inside a 66-acre working winery.

- **Fairmont Mumbai** (Mumbai) — Awarded **One MICHELIN Key**;

blends corporate convenience with extensive dining and leisure amenities.

- **The Ritz-Carlton, Pune** (Pune) — Awarded **One MICHELIN Key**; recognized for attentive service and design.

- **The St. Regis Mumbai** (Mumbai) — Awarded **One MICHELIN Key**.

- **Dolkhar** (Ladakh) — Awarded **One MICHELIN Key**; a distinct rammed-earth mountain retreat.

- **Woods at Sasan** (Sasan Gir) — Awarded **One MICHELIN Key**.

- **Mharo Khet** (Jodhpur) — Awarded **One MICHELIN Key**.

- **Manuscript – Jhilwara Haveli** (Udaipur) — Awarded **One MICHELIN Key**.

- **Suján The Serai** (Jaisalmer) — Awarded **One MICHELIN Key**

Pride of Agra:

Arts & Life

Where Centuries-Old Marble Craft Meets Contemporary Design

— Gaura Grover Bahl



Siddharth Kalra
Founder, Arts & Life
Agra, India

Siddharth Kalra is the founder of Arts & Life, a platform dedicated to preserving and bringing Agra's traditional Parchin-Kari marble inlay into contemporary design. For him, marble inlay is less a business proposition than a part of the landscape in which he grew up. Raised in Agra, he became familiar with the city's craftsmen and workshops and watched generations of artisans turn marble and semi-precious stones into intricate works of art. That familiarity eventually led him to establish Arts & Life, with a question at its heart: how can a centuries-old craft remain relevant in a rapidly changing world? Kalra's answer has been to take Parchin-Kari beyond its traditional associations with monuments and ornate interiors and introduce it to contemporary homes, hospitality projects and design spaces. Working alongside skilled artisan families, he is encouraging new patterns, forms and applications while retaining the painstaking hand techniques that define the craft. For Kalra, the appeal of marble inlay lies precisely in what modern mass production cannot easily reproduce—the time, judgement and individuality embedded in a handmade object. His larger ambition is to see Agra's stone artistry recognised not simply as a heritage craft or souvenir, but as a distinctive contemporary design tradition, connecting the city's artisans with collectors, architects and design audiences in India and around the world.



Arts & Life is giving Agra's traditional Parchin-Kari marble inlay a contemporary identity, connecting generations of artisans with architects, collectors, travellers and design enthusiasts around the world.

In Agra, marble carries a history that extends far beyond architecture. It is inseparable from the city's identity, its Mughal legacy and, above all, the Taj Mahal. But behind the celebrated monument is another, less visible story—the story of generations of craftsmen who transformed stone and semi-precious materials into intricate works of art.

That tradition, known as **Parchin-Kari**, or Pietra Dura, is finding new relevance in contemporary design.

At the centre of this revival is Arts & Life, founded by Agra-born entrepreneur Siddharth Kalra. The brand is working with traditional artisan families to take the centuries-old marble inlay technique beyond monuments and conventional souvenirs and into contemporary homes, luxury interiors, hospitality spaces and bespoke design projects.

Its proposition is relatively simple, but culturally significant: preserve the craft by allowing it to evolve.

Rather than reproducing historical designs alone, Arts & Life applies traditional handcrafting methods to contemporary forms, creating



statement tabletops, wall panels, decorative objects, architectural installations and customized pieces. The intention is to make an ancient Indian craft relevant to the way people live and design today, while retaining the human skill that gives it its character.

"Our aim is to keep the legacy of Parchin-Kari alive by adapting it to the way people live and design today," Kalra says. "We are bringing traditional Indian craftsmanship into modern spaces while ensuring the authenticity and artistry remain untouched."

A Craft Written in Stone

The relationship between Agra and marble is most famously represented by the Taj Mahal. The monument's decorative vocabulary includes delicate floral designs created through the painstaking insertion of semi-precious stones into marble.

Parchin-Kari is a craft of precision and patience. A design is first developed before marble is carefully prepared and individual pieces of stone are selected, cut, shaped and fitted into precisely formed spaces. The process requires an artisan to work with both the material and the composition,



making decisions that cannot easily be standardized or automated.

Every piece of stone has its own colour, texture and natural character. Selecting the right material and positioning it within a larger design requires an experienced eye.

For Arts & Life, preserving this process is as important as updating the designs.

The company's contemporary approach allows marble inlay to move into spaces where traditional Mughal motifs may not necessarily fit. A sculptural tabletop can become the focal point of a modern residence. A geometric wall installation can complement contemporary architecture. Smaller decorative pieces can introduce Indian craftsmanship without turning an interior into a reconstruction of the past.

The design may change, but the essential relationship between artisan, stone and hand remains.

From Agra's Workshops to Modern Homes

For Kalra, the idea of bringing Parchin-Kari into modern interiors grew from personal experience.

Raised in Agra, he grew up around the city's craftsmen and recalls watching master artisans transform raw marble and semi-precious stones into intricate pieces. That familiarity eventually developed into a broader concern: what happens to a traditional craft when the world around it changes?

According to Kalra, some artisan families associated with the tradition have carried their knowledge through as many as seventeen generations. Such continuity represents more than a commercial skill. It embodies accumulated knowledge about materials, design, tools and technique—knowledge transferred through observation and practice rather than manuals.

For Kalra, preservation therefore cannot mean keeping the craft frozen in time.

"When I recognised that for the craft to survive, it had to evolve, Arts & Life became that platform," he says.

That philosophy has required a dialogue between generations. Traditional artisans, accustomed to established floral patterns and Mughal-inspired imagery, are being encouraged to explore contemporary forms while retaining the techniques they have inherited.

"Rather than viewing innovation as a challenge, we made it a continuous learning process," Kalra explains. "These artisans possess an extraordinary artistic instinct. Once they understand the vision, they embrace new ideas with remarkable enthusiasm."

The result is a distinctive proposition: modern design executed through an ancient technique.



When Craft Becomes Luxury

Arts & Life's interpretation of luxury is closely linked to the idea of permanence.

In an age of mass production and rapidly changing consumer tastes, handcrafted objects occupy a different category. Their value is not determined solely by function or appearance but also by the time, skill, material and human attention invested in making them.

That philosophy has a clear historical precedent in the Mughal tradition, where marble and semi-precious stones were used to create decorative elements intended to endure.

Arts & Life applies the same principle to contemporary pieces.

Each creation is individually curated, with semi-precious stones selected for their natural characteristics before being matched to the artwork. Differences in colour and texture become part of the identity of the

finished object rather than something to be eliminated.

"True luxury is something created specifically for you," Kalra says. "It cannot be mass-produced, copied, or replaced. It carries a story and reflects the personality of its owner."

The concept is particularly relevant to a new generation of consumers who increasingly look for provenance and individuality in the objects they buy.

A handmade marble table, for example, can function as furniture while also becoming an heirloom. A bespoke installation can carry the story of the place where it was made and the people who made it. In this context, craftsmanship becomes part of the value proposition.

The Global Journey of an Agra Tradition

Although the craft remains firmly rooted in Agra, Arts & Life is building an international audience.

The brand ships worldwide, bringing handcrafted marble inlay to collectors and design professionals beyond India. Its work is increasingly positioned for architects and interior designers looking for materials and objects with cultural depth, individuality and a strong sense of provenance.

The application extends across luxury residences, hospitality projects and curated commercial interiors.

For contemporary architects, marble inlay can offer a way to incorporate Indian craftsmanship without creating a traditionally Indian interior. A single wall panel, table or architectural detail can become a visual focal point within an otherwise minimalist space.

Customization is another part of the appeal. Rather than selecting an off-the-shelf decorative item, designers and clients can develop pieces around specific dimensions, concepts or interiors.

This flexibility places Parchin-Kari in an interesting space between art, architecture and design.

It also reflects a broader shift in the way travellers and international consumers engage with cultural heritage. Increasingly, the experience of a destination is not limited to monuments and sightseeing. Visitors are interested in local food, craft, design and the people who maintain traditional skills.

For Agra, marble inlay provides an opportunity to tell a more complete cultural story.

Seeing the Craft Being Made

Arts & Life's showroom on Fatehabad Road, near the Taj Mahal, provides visitors with an opportunity to encounter that story firsthand.

The space offers live demonstrations of marble inlay, allowing guests to see the process behind the finished objects. For travellers, this can add another dimension to a visit to Agra, particularly for those interested in craft, architecture and design.

A finished piece can conceal the complexity of its making. Watching the process makes that labour visible.

The cutting, shaping, fitting and polishing of individual pieces of stone require concentration and consistency. What appears to be a simple floral or geometric pattern when completed may have involved dozens or even hundreds of individual decisions.

For tourists, such an experience changes the nature of a purchase. Instead of taking home an anonymous souvenir, visitors can acquire an object connected to a particular place, technique and artisan tradition.

It is also a reminder that Agra's cultural heritage does not end at the gates of the Taj Mahal. The city's living traditions—the workshops, craftsmen and techniques that continue to operate today—are part of the same cultural landscape.

The Challenge of Authenticity

The growing international appetite for handcrafted luxury also presents a challenge: distinguishing genuine

craftsmanship from mass-produced imitation. Traditional designs can be reproduced mechanically, often at a fraction of the cost of a handmade piece. For consumers unfamiliar with the techniques involved, the difference may not always be immediately apparent. Arts & Life views consumer education as part of the preservation process. Understanding how Parchin-Kari is made helps explain why an authentic handmade piece carries a different value. It also makes visible the labour and expertise that are otherwise easily overlooked.

"Luxury is ultimately about value, not simply price," Kalra says.

The distinction is particularly important for heritage crafts. If consumers value only the appearance of an object while ignoring the method of production, traditional skills can gradually lose their economic viability.

For artisans, preservation must therefore involve livelihoods as well as cultural recognition.

Keeping the Next Generation Interested

The future of Parchin-Kari ultimately depends on whether younger generations choose to learn it. Arts & Life says it is working to support this transition through fair practices and training initiatives. The company's approach has been influenced by Kalra's mentor, Haji Iqbal Ahmed, a five-time National Award recipient. The emphasis is not simply on teaching technique but on creating an environment in which artisans feel respected and see craftsmanship as a meaningful profession.

Arts & Life is also investing in evening training programmes designed to introduce younger people to marble inlay.

The challenge is familiar across traditional crafts worldwide. Younger generations have more career choices than their predecessors, while traditional skills can require years of practice before they become economically rewarding. Making craftsmanship relevant to contemporary luxury markets can provide one pathway to keeping those skills

alive. "When artisans feel valued, fairly compensated, and inspired by meaningful work," Kalra says, "they naturally produce extraordinary results."

A New Chapter for an Old Tradition

For Arts & Life, the objective extends beyond selling marble furniture and décor. The larger ambition is to reposition handcrafted Indian artistry within the global luxury landscape—to demonstrate that authenticity, human skill and cultural provenance can themselves define luxury. The company seeks to build an international reputation for Agra's marble inlay while creating sustainable opportunities for the artisan communities responsible for preserving it.

For the city, the significance is broader still. The Taj Mahal has made Agra one of India's most recognizable destinations, but its legacy was created by countless artisans whose individual names have largely disappeared from the historical record. Their work, however, remains visible in stone.

"Their names may not appear in history books," Kalra reflects, "but their work has outlived empires." That observation offers a useful way to understand the importance of living craft traditions. Monuments can preserve the physical evidence of history, but techniques survive only when people continue to practise them.

The future of Parchin-Kari, therefore, may depend not on reproducing the past exactly, but on finding ways for the tradition to remain meaningful in the present. That is the space Arts & Life is attempting to occupy: between heritage and contemporary design, between Agra and the global marketplace, and between an ancient technique and a new generation of consumers.

For travellers arriving in Agra, the Taj Mahal will remain the essential landmark. But beyond its marble walls is another story worth discovering—the story of the hands that continue to shape stone. And perhaps that is the most enduring legacy of Parchin-Kari: not simply that it decorated monuments centuries ago, but that it continues to evolve, one carefully cut piece of stone at a time.



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