

LUXURY AND LIFESTYLE TRAVEL MAGAZINE

travel

SPAN

Volume 26 | Issue 09 | October 2026 | ₹750 / \$15 US

A Profiles Media Network Publication

www.travelspan.in

Spain

10 Must-See
Attractions

Western Australia

Tourism Spend Hits
\$19.2 Billion

Nepal

Centara Unveils
Himalayan Hideaway
in Pokhara

TAAI Marks 75 Years

of Travel Leadership
and Excellence

Malta

Mediterranean
Magic



SUBSCRIBE travel SPAN



TRAVELSPAN.IN

Inspiring the most affluent and discerning travellers.

Engage with the website and its social media platforms through: Display ads, carousels, videos, photos and more.



@travelspanindia



travelspan1



travel span



@travelspan1

For advertising queries please contact
91-124-411 1182

Why Subscribe?

- 33% off on annual subscription
- delivery monthly to your doorstep
- 42% off on digital subscription and read Travel Span on any device

Subscription	Cover Price	You save	You pay
Print	₹ 250 x 12 = ₹ 3000	₹ 890	₹ 2110
Digital	₹ 250 x 12 = ₹ 3000	₹ 1440	₹ 1560

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

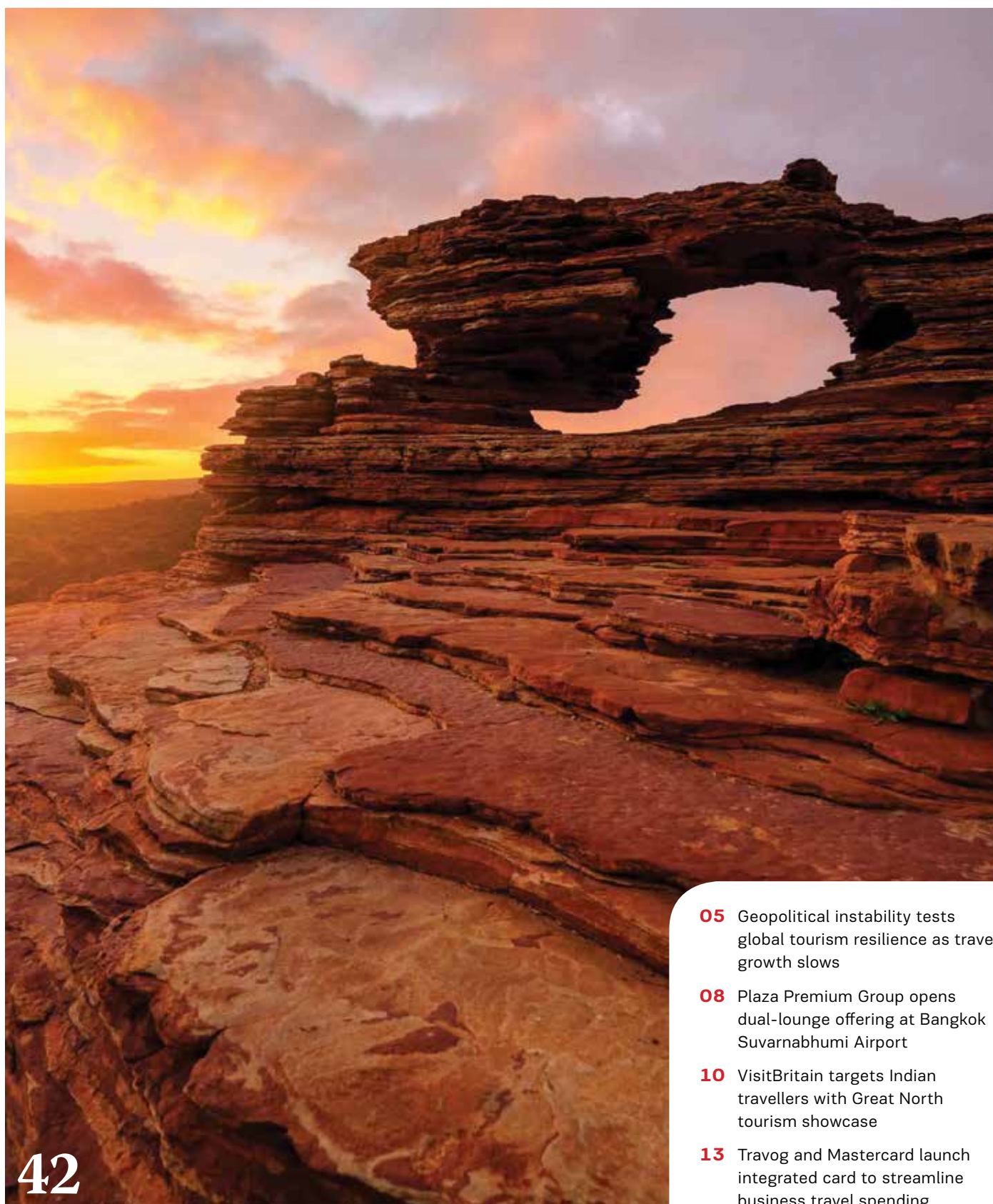
online: www.travelspan.in / call: +91 124 411 1182

All Payments in favour of Profiles Media Network Pvt Ltd.

Contact: **Studio 9 Productions** - C-59, Defence Colony, Chetna Marg, New Delhi 110024, India

Contents

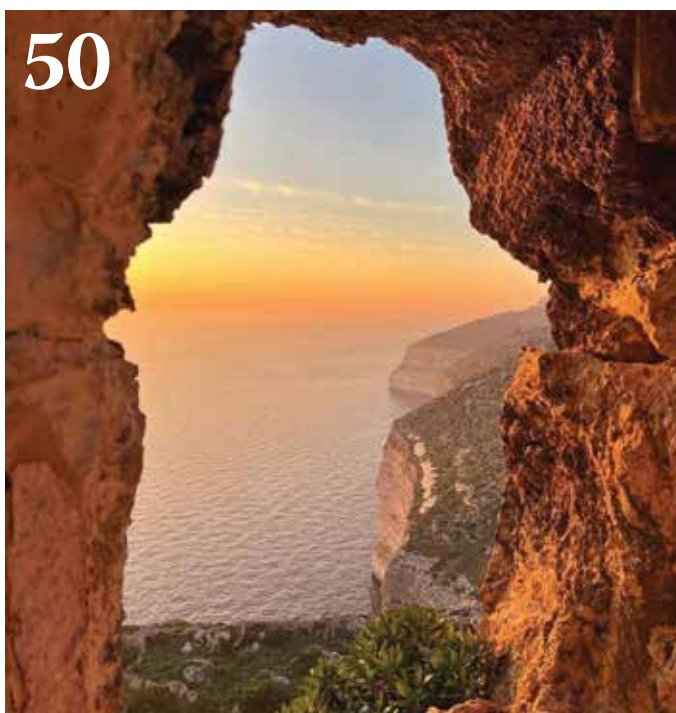
Volume 26 | Issue 09 | October 2026



- 05** Geopolitical instability tests global tourism resilience as travel growth slows
- 08** Plaza Premium Group opens dual-lounge offering at Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport
- 10** VisitBritain targets Indian travellers with Great North tourism showcase
- 13** Travog and Mastercard launch integrated card to streamline business travel spending

42

Contents



- 14** Western Australia Seeks Direct India–Perth Flights to Strengthen Tourism and Trade Links
- 18** Etihad Rail Launches Dubai–Abu Dhabi Passenger Service in 64 Minutes
- 20** WION ICONIC Tourism Summit 2026 brings tourism leaders together in New Delhi

- 23** New Zealand International Tourism Spend Rises 2.9% in August
- 26** TAAI Celebrates 75 Years of Leadership and Excellence in Travel
- 28** Atout France targets Indian MICE market with first Mumbai conclave
- 30** Indonesia records 10.58 million foreign tourist visits in January–August 2026
- 32** India to host WTTC Global Summit 2027
- 36** Crystal unveils 2028–2029 cruise itineraries across Asia-Pacific, the Caribbean and South America
- 38** Marriott International takes Maldives portfolio to Indian travel trade
- 40** ASSOCHAM Tourism Conclave 2026 highlights investment and destination development priorities
- 42** Western Australia Records \$19.2 Billion in Visitor Spend as Overnight Tourism Reaches 11 Million
- 48** Fiji Records Highest-Ever August Visitor Arrivals with 99,963 Tourists
- 50** Malta A Mediterranean Escape Where History, Cuisine and Coastal Beauty Meet
- 62** Centara expands into Nepal with Himalayan Hideaway Resort Pokhara
- 64** Spain welcomes 70.36 million international tourists in first eight months of 2026

EDITOR'S LETTER

Geopolitical instability tests global tourism resilience as travel growth slows

Conflict, aviation disruption and rising travel costs are reshaping international tourism, prompting destinations and travel businesses to strengthen contingency planning, diversify markets and build more resilient operations.

The global tourism economy is facing a more uncertain operating environment as geopolitical tensions disrupt travel connections, weigh on consumer confidence and increase costs across the aviation and hospitality sectors.

The effects extend well beyond destinations directly affected by conflict. Disruptions to major aviation hubs can complicate connecting journeys between continents, while airspace restrictions, longer flight

routes and higher fuel costs can push up fares and make travel less predictable. Hotels, tour operators, destination management organisations and other tourism businesses must also contend with changing booking patterns and travellers' growing sensitivity to price and safety concerns.

The scale of the challenge is reflected in recent assessments from international tourism organisations. The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) estimated in March 2026 that

the conflict involving Iran was affecting international visitor spending across the Middle East by at least US\$600 million a day. The estimate reflects the impact of disrupted air travel, weaker traveller confidence and reduced regional connectivity, rather than a confirmed daily loss across the entire global tourism economy.

Meanwhile, UN Tourism reported that international tourist arrivals increased by just 0.4% in the first half of 2026, with an estimated 690 million

DEVENDER GROOVER Editor in Chief & Publisher

GAURA G BAHL Group Editor
ANURADHA M Associate Editor
JYOTSNA MALIK International Sales Director

RASIKA MATHUR Events Coordinator
RAJESH MAURYA Head of Finance
JITESH GANDHI Creative Director

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

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY

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

PRINTED BY

STUDIO 9 PRODUCTIONS, C-59, Defence Colony, Chetna Marg, New Delhi 110024, India
Volume 26, Issue 09, October 2026

Content June not be reproduced in any format without written permission from **Profiles Media Network Pvt Ltd.**

RNI No. DEL/ENG/2000/03308 Travel Span is Printed Published Edited and Owned by **Devender Groover**. Printed at G S Graphic Arts. A-18, Naraina Industrial Area, New Delhi - 110028

Editor: Devender Grover. All Rights Reserved. Reproduction in whole or part without written permission is strictly prohibited. All information is correct at the time of going to press but subject to change. Editorial material, views and opinions expressed in Travel Span are those of authors. Editor(s) assume no responsibility of any errors or omissions. Neither is any liability assumed resulting from the use of this information. The Publisher will not be responsible for any damage or loss caused by the late Publication, errors or failures of advertisements to appear. Products and services mentioned are subject to change without prior notice.



international trips recorded between January and June. The organisation lowered its full-year growth forecast to between 1% and 2%, down from its January projection of 3% to 4%, citing geopolitical volatility, elevated oil prices and broader inflationary pressures.

These figures point to a tourism sector that continues to generate substantial demand but faces greater uncertainty over where, when and how people travel.

Aviation connectivity at the centre of the disruption

International aviation is a critical link in the global tourism economy, connecting source markets with destinations and enabling multi-country itineraries. When conflict affects airspace or airport operations, the consequences can spread rapidly through airline networks.

Major transit hubs in the Gulf play an important role in connecting Europe, Asia, Africa and other regions. Operational restrictions or schedule changes can affect connecting

passengers, increase journey times and force airlines to revise routes. For travellers, the result may be missed connections, longer journeys, higher fares or the need to change travel plans.

Airlines must balance safety requirements with network continuity, aircraft availability and operating costs. Rerouting can increase fuel consumption and crew requirements, while cancellations and schedule adjustments create additional work for airports, travel agents and customer service teams.

Higher energy prices can add another layer of pressure. When fuel and operating costs rise, airlines may adjust fares or capacity, making some journeys less affordable. These pressures can influence demand for long-haul holidays, multi-destination itineraries and discretionary travel, particularly among price-sensitive consumers.

For destinations dependent on international visitors, reliable air access is therefore not simply a transport issue. It is a key factor in tourism

competitiveness, visitor spending and employment.

Regional impacts and changing travel patterns

The impact of geopolitical instability varies considerably by destination. Markets close to affected areas may experience reduced visitor numbers, changes to airline schedules and weaker demand for leisure travel. Destinations farther away can also feel the effects when disrupted connections or rising transport costs influence travellers' decisions.

UN Tourism's first-half 2026 figures illustrate these regional differences. International arrivals in the Middle East fell by 22% compared with the same period in 2025, while Europe recorded 3% growth and Africa 4%. The Americas registered a 2% increase, and Asia and the Pacific recorded growth of 1%.

The data suggests that global tourism is not moving in a single direction. Some destinations continue to attract more visitors, while others face substantial pressure from conflict,

connectivity constraints and changing consumer sentiment.

Travellers may respond by choosing destinations closer to home, shortening their trips, postponing holidays or prioritising value for money. Others may change destinations altogether, depending on travel advisories, flight availability, insurance conditions and their own assessment of risk.

Such shifts can create opportunities for alternative destinations, but sudden changes in visitor demand also present challenges. A rapid increase in arrivals can put pressure on accommodation, local transport, attractions and public services, particularly in destinations with limited capacity. Effective destination management is therefore important both for visitor experience and for the wellbeing of local communities.

Building resilience into tourism operations

As disruption becomes a central consideration for the industry, tourism businesses and destination authorities are placing greater emphasis on preparedness rather than relying solely on recovery measures after a crisis.

Diversifying travel markets can reduce reliance on a single source region or visitor segment. Destinations may strengthen domestic and regional tourism while continuing to develop longer-haul markets, allowing them to respond more flexibly when demand changes.

Improving transport alternatives and coordination is another priority. Cooperation among airlines, airports, tour operators and destination authorities can help businesses respond to schedule changes, communicate travel options and support visitors affected by disruption. Where practical, a broader mix of routes and transport connections can reduce dependence on individual gateways.

Flexible commercial planning can help hotels, tour operators and travel businesses adjust to changing

demand. Scenario planning, adaptable staffing and inventory strategies, cash-flow management and clear cancellation policies can provide greater operational flexibility during uncertain periods.

Transparent communication remains equally important. Travellers need timely information about flight changes, safety guidance, entry requirements and booking conditions. Clear communication from governments, airlines and tourism providers can help reduce confusion and support informed decisions.

Technology can strengthen these efforts through improved demand forecasting, real-time travel updates, customer communication and coordination across the tourism supply chain. However, digital systems work best when supported by reliable information, trained personnel and clear crisis-management responsibilities.

Sustainability and long-term competitiveness

Geopolitical uncertainty is unfolding alongside other structural pressures, including climate change, rising operating costs and the need to manage tourism's impact on destinations. Resilience therefore involves more than restoring visitor numbers after a disruption. It also requires businesses and governments to consider the long-term economic, environmental and social foundations of tourism.

Destination planning that balances visitor growth with infrastructure capacity can help limit pressure on communities and natural resources. Investment in public transport, workforce development, local businesses and year-round tourism products can also support a more balanced distribution of economic benefits.

The sector's response will depend on cooperation among governments, destination management organisations, airlines, hospitality providers, travel intermediaries and local communities. No single

business or destination can eliminate geopolitical risk, but coordinated planning can improve the ability to absorb shocks and recover when conditions stabilise.

A global tourism economy adapting to uncertainty

The outlook for international tourism remains sensitive to the duration and geographical reach of geopolitical tensions, as well as their impact on fuel prices, inflation, air connectivity and consumer confidence. Forecasts will continue to evolve as new data becomes available.

The 12th Global Tourism Economy Forum in Macao, provides a timely setting for discussion of these challenges. Its official theme, "Crisis · Resilience · Evolution – Building a Tourism Economy for a Shared Future", reflects a broader industry focus on resilience, innovation, sustainable growth and international cooperation.

For destinations and travel businesses, the immediate task is to protect travellers, communicate clearly and maintain reliable services wherever possible. Over the longer term, diversified markets, flexible operations and stronger partnerships can help the tourism economy navigate uncertainty while preserving the connections, livelihoods and cultural exchanges that make travel valuable.



DEVENDER GROOVER

We are on



travel
SPAN





Plaza Premium Group

opens dual-lounge offering at Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport

Plaza Premium Group has expanded into Thailand with the opening of **Plaza Premium First** and **Plaza Premium Lounge** at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport, creating a combined 790-square-metre lounge offering in the airport's Concourse G.

The dual-lounge concept is located airside on the third floor near Gate G1



and is designed to serve international departing and transfer passengers. Both lounges are open to travellers regardless of airline or class of travel, with walk-in access available alongside advance booking.

The opening marks Plaza Premium Group's entry into Thailand and adds Bangkok to its international network of independent airport hospitality facilities.

Two lounge concepts, one airport location

Plaza Premium First occupies 212 square metres and accommodates up to 51 guests. The more personalised concept features private lounge bays, shower suites and dedicated concierge assistance.

Its dining offer centres on Primo Dining, with an à la carte menu featuring Thai specialities including Aep Pla, Tom Kha Gai and Northern-style Khao Soi. The lounge's Aero Bar serves spirits, wine and cocktails, including the Tom Yum-inspired Siamese Martini.

The larger **Plaza Premium Lounge** covers 578 square metres and can accommodate up to 98 guests. Its facilities include a live kitchen and buffet, with Thai dishes such as Som Tam and Gai Ping skewers, as well as Luk Chup sweets.

Travellers also have access to high-speed Wi-Fi, charging stations, shower facilities, a multi-faith room and family facilities.

Thai culture incorporated into lounge design

Local culture is a central feature of the new Bangkok facilities, with both lounges incorporating works by contemporary Thai artists.

The design programme uses Thai cultural motifs across a range of materials and techniques, including silk embroidery, glass mosaics, plant-dyed textiles and denim-crafted cityscapes.

According to Plaza Premium Group, the approach is intended to give

travellers a stronger sense of place while connecting the airport experience with Thailand's food, art and cultural heritage.

"Thailand remains one of Southeast Asia's primary aviation and tourism gateways, making Suvarnabhumi Airport a natural home for our flagship dual-lounge launch," said Song Hoi-See, Founder and CEO of Plaza Premium Group.

He said the Bangkok operation would allow the company to combine Thai flavours and art with a choice of lounge experiences for international travellers.

Supporting Bangkok's growing international traffic

The opening comes as Suvarnabhumi continues to play a central role in Thailand's international aviation network. Plaza Premium Group said the airport handled **62.9 million passengers in 2025**, with international passengers accounting for more than 80% of total traffic.

Airports of Thailand is also pursuing infrastructure expansion intended to increase the airport's annual

capacity from 65 million to 80 million passengers by 2030.

Kittipong Kittikachorn, General Manager of Suvarnabhumi Airport, said the partnership with Plaza Premium Group would add new facilities for passengers travelling through the airport and support its position as an international gateway.

Access for international and transit passengers

Both lounges are located at **Unit G3-O10, third floor, Concourse G**, in the airside international departures area.

Plaza Premium Group states that access is available to international departing and transferring passengers irrespective of airline or travel class. Guests can enter without making an advance reservation, while bookings can also be made through the company's official website.

The official Plaza Premium booking pages currently list the two facilities as operating **24 hours a day**. Plaza Premium First is listed from THB 2,400, while Plaza Premium Lounge is listed from THB 1,750; prices are subject to the selected package and booking conditions.

With the Bangkok launch, Plaza Premium Group is extending its independent airport-lounge model into Thailand while giving passengers at one of Southeast Asia's major aviation hubs a choice between a more personalised premium experience and a larger lounge focused on comfort, local cuisine and practical amenities.

The dual-lounge concept is located airside on the third floor near Gate G1 and is designed to serve international departing and transfer passengers.

VisitBritain targets Indian travellers with Great North tourism showcase

The initiative brings Northern England's destinations, sporting attractions, heritage properties and countryside experiences to Indian travel companies, aiming to encourage visitors to explore beyond London.



VisitBritain is stepping up efforts to promote Northern England to India's outbound travel market through the Great North Destination Showcase 2026, a trade initiative designed to connect regional tourism businesses with Indian tour operators and travel industry representatives.

Organised in collaboration with Marketing Manchester and regional tourism partners, the showcase took place in New Delhi on 13–14 October 2026, with a Mumbai programme scheduled for 14–15 October. The delegation was led by **Patricia Yates, chief executive of VisitBritain, and**

Gary Robson, the organisation's deputy director for Europe, the Middle East and India.

The initiative comes as VisitBritain projects that visitors from India could generate £1.5 billion in annual spending in the UK by 2030. The organisation also forecasts approximately one million visits from India by that year, presenting an opportunity for destinations across Britain to attract a larger share of international visitors.

The showcase brought together tourism organisations, attractions and experience providers from across Northern England, including Marketing Manchester, Visit Liverpool, Visit Lake District, Experience North East England, Explore West Yorkshire, Harewood House Trust, Muncaster Castle, Lancashire County Cricket Club and Manchester City Football Club.

Through business meetings and destination presentations, participating organisations sought to develop partnerships with Indian travel companies and encourage the inclusion of northern destinations in leisure, luxury, sporting and special-interest itineraries. **Patricia Yates, Chief Executive Officer, VisitBritain**, said, *"Working with Marketing Manchester and our partners across the Great North, we're proud to be supporting this landmark mission, bringing together the region's outstanding tourism offer to leading travel buyers and the media. Events like this are so important because they build partnerships between the very people who inspire travel and the people who create and sell tourism experiences. India is one of our most valuable and fastest-growing visitor markets. We are forecasting that visitors from India will spend £1.5 billion annually by 2030, underlining the huge opportunity to sell Britain here. As this market continues to grow, we want to ensure that visitors explore more and discover the breadth of experiences across the Great North."*

Northern England looks beyond established UK itineraries

While London remains a major draw for international visitors, Northern



England offers a different combination of urban culture, historic architecture, countryside, sporting heritage and culinary experiences. VisitBritain sees an opportunity to raise awareness of these attractions among Indian travellers who may already be familiar with Britain's principal tourist landmarks.

According to figures shared by **Gary Robson** during the showcase, Northern England receives approximately 66,000 visits from India annually, accounting for around 12% of Indian visits to the UK. These visitors are estimated to spend about £80 million in the region each year.

Robson identified destination awareness as a key challenge, suggesting that the region has a broad range of products that can be

adapted to Indian travellers' interests. Cricket and football, food, heritage and opportunities to experience local communities provide potential points of connection.

Transport connectivity is another consideration. Manchester serves as a key gateway to Northern England, with road and rail connections to destinations across the region. Travel companies can also incorporate northern stops into wider UK itineraries using other major arrival points, depending on flight schedules and the route selected.

Manchester strengthens its position as a regional gateway

Manchester is central to the campaign, promoted both as a destination in its own right and as a

starting point for exploring the wider North.

Marketing Manchester managing director Victoria Braddock said the city currently attracts approximately 21,000 visitors from India annually. Greater Manchester has set a target of generating £15 billion in economic benefit from its visitor economy by 2030, with international markets expected to contribute to that ambition.

The city offers a mix of music, shopping, food, culture and sport. Its football heritage is a particular attraction for Indian visitors, with Manchester City and Manchester United providing stadium tours and behind-the-scenes experiences. Lancashire Cricket also offers opportunities to explore one of the region's established sporting institutions.

Manchester's live entertainment venues and cultural attractions may also appeal to younger travellers seeking experiences they can share with friends and through social media. Marketing Manchester is additionally engaging with Indian meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) planners to attract business events and incentive groups.

For travellers planning a week-long or 10-day UK holiday, Manchester can serve as a base for excursions to Liverpool, Leeds, York and the Lake District, while wider itineraries can include North Wales or southern Scotland.

Sport, wellness and heritage broaden the offer

The showcase highlighted the range of experiences available beyond conventional sightseeing. Manchester City Football Club is promoting its stadium tour, which includes access to selected behind-the-scenes areas and interactive features. Such attractions offer travel companies an opportunity to build football-focused holidays for supporters and families.

Lancashire County Cricket Club is also positioning its ground at Emirates Old Trafford as both a sporting attraction and a venue for corporate

events. Its facilities include event spaces, stadium tours and an on-site hotel, creating options for sporting itineraries and MICE programmes.

Wellness tourism is another developing part of Manchester's offer. Therme Manchester is a planned urban wellbeing resort intended to combine family recreation, water attractions, spa facilities and relaxation spaces. The project has been promoted with a target opening in 2029; its development schedule and final facilities should be confirmed closer to launch.

Further afield, historic properties and countryside destinations provide opportunities for premium travel. Muncaster Castle in the Lake District is exploring the Indian market for private celebrations, family gatherings and destination weddings. Its heritage setting and exclusive-use potential could appeal to travellers seeking distinctive venues, subject to event arrangements and accommodation availability.

West Yorkshire and the North East seek greater visibility

West Yorkshire is promoting its cultural and industrial heritage to encourage Indian visitors to look beyond the UK's best-known destinations. Leeds, the wider region's historic towns and countryside attractions offer opportunities to combine architecture, museums, literary heritage and outdoor experiences.

Attractions such as Yorkshire Sculpture Park, alongside the area's textile history and connections with the Brontë family, can support themed itineraries for travellers with particular cultural interests. The region's position between London and Edinburgh also makes it a possible stop on longer UK journeys, although routing and travel times will depend on the itinerary.

In the North East, destination management company Northern Secrets is seeking to build relationships with Indian travel advisers and tour operators. The region offers coastal scenery, historic attractions,

transformed urban centres and opportunities to engage with local communities. Bespoke programmes for independent travellers and small groups could help introduce these experiences to visitors who have already explored Britain's main tourism hubs.

Screen tourism adds another route to destination discovery

VisitBritain is also using film and television locations to inspire international travel through its Starring GREAT Britain campaign. Screen tourism can introduce visitors to places they may not otherwise have considered, linking familiar productions with regional landscapes, historic buildings and local experiences.

For Northern England, this approach provides another way to raise awareness beyond established city breaks and traditional sightseeing routes. Combined with trade partnerships and tailored itineraries, it could help regional tourism businesses reach travellers interested in culture, sport, food, heritage and countryside escapes.

Turning interest into bookings

The Great North Destination Showcase reflects a broader effort to distribute tourism benefits beyond Britain's most visited destinations. For Indian travel companies, the region offers the potential to create itineraries that combine major city experiences with heritage properties, sporting attractions, rural landscapes and local food.

Converting interest into bookings will depend on continued engagement with the travel trade, clear product information, accessible transport links and experiences that match travellers' budgets and preferences. Familiarity with regional destinations can also help advisers build confidence when recommending places that may be less established in the Indian market.

With Indian visitor spending projected to grow over the coming years, VisitBritain and its regional partners are seeking to ensure that more travellers discover Northern England as part of their British holiday.

Travog and Mastercard launch integrated card to streamline business travel spending



The new travel and expense payment solution aims to give small and medium-sized enterprises greater control over corporate travel costs by bringing payments, bookings, approvals and reporting into one platform.

Travog has partnered with Mastercard to launch the Travog travel and expense card, a payment solution designed to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) manage business travel spending more efficiently.

Integrated with Travog's travel and expense management platform, the card brings booking information, payment transactions, approval workflows and expense reporting into a single environment. The initiative aims to reduce the administrative burden of managing business travel across disconnected systems while improving visibility into expenditure.

For many organisations, corporate travel costs are spread across booking platforms, card statements, reimbursement claims and internal approval processes. This fragmentation can make it difficult for finance teams to monitor spending in real time,

enforce travel policies and reconcile expenses promptly.

The new card is designed to connect payment activity directly with travel bookings and expense workflows. Employees can use it for approved business travel expenses, while companies can establish spending limits, apply policy rules and manage approvals before and during trips.

"Business travel payments should be simple for employees and transparent for finance teams," said Gaurav Chiripal, CEO of Travog. He said the collaboration would bring payment, policy and travel data together, enabling organisations to manage expenditure as it occurs rather than waiting until trips are completed.

Omoke Adebajo, Mastercard's senior vice-president for Merchants and Commerce in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EEMEA), said businesses increasingly require greater

visibility, control and efficiency across transactions. Combining Mastercard's payment capabilities with Travog's integrated platform, she added, is intended to support a more seamless, secure and data-driven approach to expense management.

For corporate travel managers and finance departments, the integration is expected to simplify reconciliation by bringing card transactions, booking records and expense claims together. It could also help organisations identify policy exceptions earlier, reduce manual follow-ups and improve the accuracy of travel expenditure reporting.

The card extends Travog's existing offering, which includes self-service travel booking, expense management, approval workflows, policy compliance, reimbursements, dashboards and analytics. The platform is designed to support organisations across the Asia-Pacific region and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

By integrating payments into its broader travel management ecosystem, Travog aims to help businesses move away from fragmented expense processes towards a more connected approach to corporate travel spending.

Western Australia

Seeks Direct India–Perth Flights to Strengthen Tourism and Trade Links

Premier Roger Cook highlights aviation connectivity as a priority during India mission as visitor numbers from the market continue to grow



Western Australia is seeking stronger air connectivity with India as the state looks to expand tourism, trade, investment and education links with one of its key regional markets.

Western Australian Premier and Tourism, Trade and Investment Minister **Roger Cook** made direct flights between India and Perth a priority

during an investment and trade mission to India and Vietnam from September 17 to 25. The state government said meetings with major Indian airlines were planned as part of the mission, with the objective of securing a direct connection between Perth and India.

No direct India–Perth service has been announced as a result of the mission. The proposed connectivity

remains a government priority and forms part of Western Australia's broader effort to strengthen links with the Indian market.

India becomes an increasingly important tourism market

India has become an important source market for Western Australia. The state government reported that

50,000 Indian visitors travelled to Western Australia in 2025–26, reflecting continued growth in demand from the market.

Western Australia recorded strong overall tourism performance during the period, with **11 million overnight visitors and \$19.2 billion in visitor expenditure**. The state also reported a record international visitor total of about 1 million.

Improved international aviation access has been an important part of that growth. Perth is currently connected to **22 international destinations through nonstop services operated by 26 airlines**, according to the Western Australian Government.

For India, the state sees a direct Perth connection as an opportunity to reduce travel friction while creating stronger links for leisure, business, education and visiting friends and relatives.

Perth positioned as a gateway to Western Australia

Cook has described Perth's geographic position as an advantage in developing Western Australia's relationship with India and the broader Indian Ocean region.

During the India mission, the Premier argued that direct aviation links would support Perth's ambitions as a western gateway to Australia and strengthen connections between the two economies.

The Western Australian Government has specifically identified direct aviation and tourism links as priorities in its engagement with India and Vietnam, alongside energy, primary industries and workforce development.

The geographic proximity between Perth and India is also being used to support the state's broader positioning within the Indian Ocean region.

A relationship spanning three decades

The latest push for closer aviation links comes as Western Australia marks **30 years of maintaining a presence in Mumbai**.

The state's current engagement with India extends beyond tourism, covering resources, energy, education, technology, investment and trade. The government describes India as one of Western Australia's key regional partners and has been using its India mission to identify opportunities for further cooperation.

Tourism is therefore part of a wider economic relationship rather than a standalone initiative.

Education adds another connection

International education is another growing component of the Western Australia–India relationship.

During the September mission, Cook attended the opening of **The University of Western Australia's Mumbai campus**, which began operations in September 2026. UWA describes the Mumbai campus as its first international branch campus, with a second Indian campus planned in Chennai.

The Mumbai campus was officially opened on September 18, with UWA saying the university has committed approximately **AUD 80 million** to its Indian campuses. Chennai is scheduled to follow, expanding the university's presence in India.

The university's India expansion covers disciplines including computer science, cybersecurity, data science, artificial intelligence, business and information technology, creating additional links between Indian students and Western Australian institutions.

India is also Western Australia's largest international student market, with the state government reporting more than **15,000 enrolments in 2025**.

Tourism and aviation support wider economic ties

For the tourism industry, improved connectivity could have implications beyond leisure travel.

Direct flights can also facilitate business travel, university connections, visiting friends and relatives, events and investment activity. Western

Australia is seeking to use its geographic position and existing economic relationships with India to build a broader visitor and business ecosystem.

The state government's current tourism strategy is also focused on strengthening international markets while expanding visitor spending across Perth and regional Western Australia.

India's growing role is particularly relevant as Western Australia looks to diversify its international visitor base and develop markets across the Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific.

Sport and cultural connections expand

Sport is also being used to strengthen Australia–India engagement.

The Western Australian Government is promoting the **Perth Scorchers' Big Bash League match in Chennai**, which is scheduled to be the first BBL match played outside Australia. The event forms part of the state's broader international engagement programme in India.

Such initiatives provide additional platforms for tourism promotion and people-to-people connections while raising the visibility of Western Australia among Indian audiences.

Direct flights remain the next step

Western Australia's latest engagement with India demonstrates the increasingly broad relationship between the two markets, spanning tourism, aviation, education, trade, investment and sport.

For tourism, however, direct air connectivity remains a key outstanding objective. The Western Australian Government has made securing a direct India–Perth service a priority and held discussions with Indian airlines during the September mission.

With Indian visitor numbers already reaching 50,000 in 2025–26, the development of direct air links could become an important factor in determining how quickly the market expands further.

TBO's multi-city roadshow brings global hospitality, cruise and travel brands together with Indian travel professionals

Luxury Travel Suppliers and Indian Advisors Expand B2B Connections Through Luxe Connect



India's expanding luxury outbound travel market is drawing greater attention from international hospitality, cruise and travel companies, with business-to-business platforms increasingly being used to connect global suppliers with travel advisors across the country.

One such initiative is **Luxe Connect**, the luxury travel networking roadshow organised by TBO. The 2026 edition brought together **25 exhibitors and around 300 luxury travel advisors across Mumbai and New Delhi**, according to TBO. The company's own post-event communication confirms the participation of 25 exhibitors and 300 advisors across the two-city programme.

The event was held in Mumbai on September 21 and New Delhi on September 23, with pre-scheduled business meetings between suppliers and travel professionals.

International suppliers target India's luxury market

The roadshow provided a platform for luxury hotels, cruise companies, destination businesses and other travel suppliers from international markets to engage directly with Indian travel advisors.

For international brands that are still developing their presence in India, such events provide an opportunity to understand how the market operates, identify potential distribution partners and establish relationships with travel companies serving affluent outbound travellers.

TBO has positioned Luxe Connect

as part of its broader strategy around luxury travel. The company had previously announced plans to expand the event's international supplier participation and develop a more focused B2B ecosystem for premium travel sellers and suppliers.

Luxury travel demand broadens beyond traditional markets

Discussions at the event highlighted several changes taking place in India's outbound travel market.

Travel professionals cited continued demand for Europe, particularly France, Italy, Spain and the UK, while Japan, Australia and destinations across Asia are also attracting increasing interest.

The market is also becoming more diverse geographically. Travel businesses are reporting demand from travellers in India's Tier II cities, while personalised itineraries and experience-led holidays are becoming increasingly important within the luxury segment.

Rather than relying exclusively on conventional group tours, some high-end travellers are seeking individually designed journeys built around specific interests, experiences and service requirements.

Cruises gain visibility among Indian travellers

Cruise holidays are another segment attracting growing attention from the Indian travel trade.

Industry representatives participating in Luxe Connect said Indian travellers are increasingly considering cruises as part of their holiday choices. Group travel continues to play an important role, including special-interest groups and MICE movements, while individual leisure demand is also developing.

The growing presence of cruise companies at B2B travel events reflects the wider diversification of India's outbound tourism market, as travel advisors introduce customers to products and destinations beyond conventional land-based holidays.

Technology and distribution remain central

The growth of specialist B2B events comes as travel distribution platforms increasingly combine technology with relationship-driven sales.

TBO describes itself as a global travel distribution platform connecting travel buyers with suppliers across hotels, airlines, cruises, car rentals, transfers, rail and other travel products. Its current platform connects more than **159,000 travel buyers with more than one million hotels across more than 100 countries**, according to the company.

advisors can provide access to customers across India's established metropolitan markets as well as emerging outbound centres.

TBO's current business model reflects this wider distribution landscape, with the company serving travel agencies, independent advisors, tour operators, travel management companies and other enterprise buyers.

A growing B2B ecosystem for outbound travel

The second edition of Luxe Connect follows the launch of the platform in 2025. TBO's own event material said



The roadshow provided a platform for luxury hotels, cruise companies, destination businesses and other travel suppliers from international markets to engage directly with Indian travel advisors.



The company has also been expanding its use of artificial intelligence, automation and data-driven tools as part of its broader technology strategy.

For luxury travel, however, technology is being complemented by direct interaction between suppliers and travel advisors. Face-to-face meetings remain particularly relevant where itineraries involve multiple suppliers, high-value accommodation, cruises, experiences and customised services.

Indian travel advisors play a larger role

The developments also point to the changing role of Indian travel advisors. As luxury travellers seek greater personalisation, advisors are increasingly involved in designing complex itineraries rather than simply arranging individual flights or hotel bookings.

For international suppliers, establishing relationships with these

the initiative was created as a focused platform for premium travel sellers, hoteliers and other luxury suppliers, with the company planning a larger international network for the 2026 edition.

The latest event suggests that luxury outbound travel is becoming an increasingly important area of interaction between Indian travel businesses and international suppliers.

As Indian travellers explore more destinations, seek personalised experiences and increasingly consider products such as luxury cruises, international hotel groups and destination specialists are looking to strengthen their relationships with the country's travel trade.

For the wider tourism industry, the expansion of such B2B platforms highlights the importance of distribution networks in converting growing outbound travel interest into bookings and long-term commercial partnerships.



Etihad Rail Launches Dubai–Abu Dhabi Passenger Service in 64 Minutes

Etihad Rail has expanded its national passenger network to Dubai, opening a new rail connection to Abu Dhabi and Fujairah while linking the UAE's intercity railway with Dubai Metro.

The UAE's passenger rail network has entered a new phase with the opening of Etihad Rail's Dubai station on September 30, creating a new scheduled rail link between Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

The Dubai–Abu Dhabi journey takes approximately 64 minutes, connecting **Al Yalays Station in Jumeirah Golf Estates** with **Mohamed Bin Zayed City Station in Abu Dhabi**. The

new service gives residents, business travellers and tourists an alternative to road travel between the UAE's two largest cities.

The launch follows the introduction of passenger services between Abu Dhabi and Fujairah on June 30 and represents another major stage in the phased development of the UAE's national passenger railway.

Dubai to Abu Dhabi in about an hour

The Dubai–Abu Dhabi service operates with five trains in each direction, providing 10 daily services between the two cities. Published schedules include departures from Al Yalays in the morning and afternoon, with the journey taking approximately 64 minutes.

Fares start at **AED39 for Comfort**

Class and AED109 for Premium Class. Tickets can be purchased through Etihad Rail's official digital channels and station ticketing facilities.

The passenger trains are designed to travel at speeds of up to **200 km/h**, while the fleet consists of 13 trains, each capable of carrying up to 400 passengers.

Onboard facilities include Wi-Fi, charging facilities and dedicated luggage space, while Premium Class provides an upgraded passenger experience.

Direct connection with Dubai Metro

One of the most significant features of the Dubai launch is the connection between the national railway and the emirate's existing public transport network.

Al Yalaysi Station is linked to **Jumeirah Golf Estates Metro Station on the Dubai Metro Red Line by a dedicated pedestrian bridge**. The connection enables passengers arriving from Abu Dhabi and other parts of the national rail network to continue their journeys across Dubai using the Metro.

Integration also extends to Dubai's Nol system. According to the Dubai government, passengers can combine Etihad Rail and Dubai public transport services using a unified QR code, creating a more integrated journey across train, Metro, tram and bus services.

For international visitors, the connection could make rail a more practical option for combining intercity travel with journeys within Dubai, particularly for travellers whose final destinations are served by the Metro network.

Dubai–Fujairah connection added

The September 30 expansion also connects Dubai directly with Fujairah.

The new service links **Al Yalaysi Station with Madinat Al Hilal Station in Fujairah**, with the journey taking about 70 minutes. Published timetable information shows a late-morning departure from Fujairah and an

afternoon return service from Dubai.

The Dubai–Fujairah connection builds on the Abu Dhabi–Fujairah passenger service introduced in June, which takes approximately one hour and 45 minutes.

The expansion gives travellers a new way to reach Fujairah without relying exclusively on road transport and strengthens the rail connection between the UAE's western and eastern regions.

Al Dhaid joins the network

September 30 also marks the opening of **Al Dhaid Station in Sharjah**, extending passenger rail access into another part of the UAE.

Etihad Rail has said Al Dhaid will form part of the expanding national passenger network, with the station providing connections to other destinations as the phased rollout progresses. Fares from Al Dhaid start at AED19, according to current reporting on the new service.

The station is part of a wider network designed to connect cities, communities and major economic centres across the UAE.

Etihad Rail's passenger fleet and network have been designed to serve not only daily commuters but also leisure travellers, families, business passengers and visitors exploring destinations across the country. The company reported in August that more than 70,000 passenger tickets had already been sold during the initial operational phase, indicating early demand for intercity rail travel.

More destinations to follow

The September expansion is not the end of the rollout.

Madinat Zayed and Liwa are scheduled to join the passenger network on November 30, 2026, following a decision to bring forward their opening to coincide with the Al Dhafra region's events and festival season.

The **remaining Al Dhafra stations are scheduled to open on December 30**, followed by **Sharjah Station on March 30, 2027**. Etihad

Rail says the wider passenger network is being developed to connect 11 cities and key hubs across the UAE.

The network includes stations and planned connections serving locations such as Al Sila, Al Dhannah, Al Mirfa, Madinat Zayed, Liwa, Mezaira'a, Al Faya and Al Dhaid, alongside major stations in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah and Fujairah.

A new option for UAE tourism

For the tourism sector, the expansion of passenger rail adds another dimension to how visitors can move around the UAE.

Dubai and Abu Dhabi already have extensive road and air connections, but the new railway introduces a scheduled intercity service that can be combined with Dubai's urban public transport network. The future expansion into Al Dhafra, Sharjah and other destinations could further broaden the range of UAE locations accessible by rail.

The launch also forms part of a longer-term national strategy to establish an integrated passenger railway alongside the UAE's existing freight network.

Etihad Rail began freight operations on the national railway in 2023. Its passenger programme now adds a new dimension to the network, positioning rail as an option for everyday travel as well as tourism and leisure journeys.

The UAE is also pursuing a separate **high-speed rail project between Abu Dhabi and Dubai**, announced in 2025, which is planned to offer journey times of about 30 minutes and speeds of up to 350 km/h. That project is distinct from the passenger service launched on September 30 and should not be confused with the current 64-minute Etihad Rail connection.

With Dubai now connected to the national passenger railway, the September 30 launch marks an important step in the UAE's development of a more integrated intercity transport system — giving residents and visitors a new way to travel between the country's major cities and emerging tourism destinations.



WION ICONIC Tourism Summit 2026 brings tourism leaders together in New Delhi



The ninth edition of the **WION ICONIC Tourism Summit 2026** brought together senior government officials, diplomats and leaders from the tourism, aviation, hospitality and technology sectors in New Delhi, with discussions focused on how technology, artificial intelligence and sustainability are reshaping the travel industry.

Held on **23 September at ITC Maurya**, the summit was organised by Red Hat Communications, an initiative of Jyoti Mayal, in association with Zee Network and VFS Global. Union Minister for Culture and Tourism **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat** attended as Chief Guest, while Delhi Cabinet Minister **Kapil Mishra** was Guest of Honour.

The summit was held under the theme **“Reinventing Tourism: Where**



Technology, AI and Sustainability Are Shaping the Future of Travel.”

Sessions examined digital transformation, artificial intelligence, aviation growth, sustainable tourism, changing traveller expectations, destination development and workforce skills.

Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Minister of Culture & Tourism, addressed the summit, saying, *Tourism will play an increasingly important role in India's growth story, and our approach has always been rooted in the timeless values of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Atithi Devo Bhava. The growth of tourism goes far beyond architecture or amenities. It depends on a complete ecosystem where infrastructure, connectivity, hospitality, food and beverage, technology, local communities and travel enablers work together to create a meaningful experience for visitors.*

Tourism is becoming increasingly decentralised, which presents a tremendous opportunity for a diverse country like India. Technology and social media are opening up destinations that were earlier less visible, while AI, AR and VR can help travellers curate experiences and discover destinations in new ways. Yet technology can only enable the journey; it can never replace the human touch. Travel agents, tour operators and other travel enablers continue to play an important role in shaping the overall visitor experience.

Indian hospitality has always been one of our greatest strengths, and we must continue to raise the bar. In the age of social media, a visitor's experience can travel faster than anything else and a poor experience can influence the perception of an entire destination. This makes it essential for all stakeholders to work together on quality, safety, infrastructure and connectivity. India offers immense possibilities for unparalleled travel experiences because of its extraordinary diversity, and our collective responsibility is to build an ecosystem that allows these experiences to flourish.

Technology and AI take centre stage

The discussions reflected the growing role of technology across the travel journey, from destination discovery and trip planning to airport processes and passenger experiences.

WION's summit programming included discussions on digital transformation, visa facilitation and the use of technology to create more seamless travel experiences. A dedicated session on technology explored how AI and other digital tools are influencing the way travellers plan and experience journeys.

Speaking at the summit, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat highlighted the importance of an integrated tourism ecosystem encompassing infrastructure, connectivity, hospitality,

food and beverage, technology, local communities and travel intermediaries.

He also pointed to the growing role of AI, augmented reality, virtual reality and social media in helping travellers discover destinations that were previously less visible, while stressing that technology remains an enabler rather than a replacement for human interaction.

Delhi looks to strengthen its tourism proposition

Kapil Mishra used the event to highlight Delhi and the National Capital Region's potential as a tourism hub.

He said strengthening the capital's tourism proposition would require improvements in infrastructure, visitor experiences and tourism-related investment, alongside greater participation from the private sector. Independent coverage of his remarks similarly reported his call for industry input and partnerships to develop Delhi as an international tourism destination.

The discussions placed Delhi within the wider context of India's expanding tourism ecosystem, with connectivity, hospitality, infrastructure and new travel experiences emerging as key areas for collaboration between government and industry.

He said, *It is a privilege to be part of ICONIC Summit 2026 and to engage with stakeholders who share a common vision for the growth of tourism. We all have a role to play in taking tourism*

forward in the national capital as well as across India. Delhi and the NCR region have immense potential, and we are undertaking several measures to strengthen tourism infrastructure, architecture and visitor experiences across the capital and its surrounding areas. At the same time, making Delhi a leading tourism hub will require greater participation from the private sector, with investments and partnerships that can help strengthen infrastructure, develop new tourism experiences and create more opportunities for visitors.

Technology, artificial intelligence and social media are opening up new possibilities for tourism and can significantly expand the way destinations are discovered and experienced. At the same time, the impact we create will ultimately depend on how effectively all stakeholders come together and translate these opportunities into meaningful action. Stronger public-private partnerships can play an important role in bringing together government vision, industry expertise and private investment to build a more vibrant and competitive tourism ecosystem for Delhi. Government, industry, tourism professionals and citizens must work collectively to build an ecosystem that supports sustainable growth and creates a stronger tourism experience.

I invite stakeholders from across the industry and everyone working towards the larger interests of the nation to come forward, collaborate and contribute their ideas towards strengthening tourism in Delhi and across India. I also extend my appreciation to Hon'ble Union Minister of Tourism Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat ji for his continued efforts and passion towards taking Indian tourism forward. Together, we can build further on the vision of the Government and Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji and strengthen tourism as an important contributor to India's growth and prosperity.

Industry and diplomatic participation

The ninth edition brought together

industry leaders including **Tribhuvan Darbari, Chairman, BIMSTEC Business Council Secretariat, India; K.B. Kachru, Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia at Radisson Hotel Group; Ravi Nandan Sinha, Director, Strategic Investments & Economic Partnerships, MSME Business Forum India; Saurabh Tiwari, Vice President – Middle East, Maldives & Sri Lanka, IHCL (Taj Dubai); Vikram Lalvani, MD & CEO, Sterling Holiday Resorts; Manish Puri, Head of Global Sales, Air India Limited & Air India Express; Ahmed Hamed Sharbak, Regional Manager (APAC), Visit Qatar; Kamal Munasinghe, Senior VP, Colombo Hotels, Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts and General Manager, Cinnamon Life; Anil Parashar, Executive Director, ITQ Technologies Pvt. Ltd.; Vinay Malhotra, Head, Strategic Global Partnerships, VFS Global; Achin Sharma, Chief Digital Officer, WAISL (GMR Cargo); Abhilash Kalathil Ramesh, Executive Director, Kairali Ayurvedic Group; and Sharad Gowani, Head of Operations – India, VFS Global, among other industry stakeholders.**

The summit also included senior diplomatic representatives, including **H.E. Mariano Agustin Caucino, Ambassador of Argentina to India; H.E. Hanisha Jairam, Ambassador of Suriname to India; H.E. Lalatiana Accouche, High Commissioner of Seychelles to India; H.E. Anil Sooklal, High Commissioner of South Africa to India; H.E. Aliki Koutsomitopoulou, Ambassador of Greece to India; H.E. Kevin Kelly, Ambassador of Ireland to India; H.E. Nadeska Cuthbert, Ambassador of Nicaragua to India; H.E. Robert Maxian, Ambassador of Slovakia to India; H.E. Evagoras Vryonides, High Commissioner of Cyprus to India; H.E. Mahishini Colonné, High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to India; and Muktesh Pardeshi, Former Secretary and Former Ambassador to Türkiye & New Zealand.**

The participation of diplomatic representatives brought an international dimension to discussions around inbound tourism, outbound travel and cross-border cooperation.

Collaboration and skills remain key priorities

Speaking after the summit, **Jyoti Mayal**, who is behind the ICONIC platform and serves as Chairperson of the Tourism & Hospitality Skill Council, said: "Today, marking the 9th edition of ICONIC is a deeply meaningful milestone. Over the years, the platform has grown into a space where leaders across sectors can come together, exchange perspectives and collectively shape the future of travel and tourism. The industry has undergone tremendous transformation, with technology, AI, sustainability and evolving traveller expectations reshaping the way tourism is experienced. As we look ahead, the opportunity lies in building a more connected and inclusive tourism ecosystem—one that brings together government, industry, investors, technology partners and local communities. Collaboration, innovation and skilling will be central to ensuring that tourism growth creates stronger destinations, new opportunities and meaningful livelihoods. I am grateful to all the industry leaders, policymakers, diplomats and partners who have been part of the ICONIC journey and contributed to making it a meaningful platform for the industry."

Looking ahead

The ninth edition of the ICONIC Tourism Summit concluded with discussions around collaboration, innovation and the development of a more connected tourism ecosystem.

With government officials, diplomats and industry executives participating alongside technology and aviation specialists, the event provided a platform for examining the operational and technological changes affecting travel while highlighting the importance of infrastructure, skills, sustainability and human-led hospitality in India's tourism development.

New Zealand International Tourism Spend Rises 2.9% in August



Visitor expenditure reaches NZD 480.5 million, continuing a recovery from the mid-year low

International tourism expenditure in New Zealand increased 2.9% year on year in August 2026, reaching **NZD 480.5 million**, compared with NZD 467.2 million in August 2025, according to the latest tourism expenditure data.

The August figure was NZD 9.9 million higher than July and NZD 69.9 million above June, indicating a gradual recovery in international visitor spending after a pronounced decline during the first half of the year.

The figures cited in the original report are consistent with New Zealand's official tourism data framework, although the source article contains a significant currency-conversion error: **NZD 480.5 million is not equivalent to USD 27.46 billion**. The article also describes the figures as Stats NZ data, whereas the current monthly tourism expenditure estimates are published through the **Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment's (MBIE) Monthly Regional Tourism Estimates (MRTEs)**.

Tourism spending recovers from June low

International tourism expenditure was reported at **NZD 778.4 million in January 2026**, rising to NZD 784.8 million in February before easing to NZD 725.8 million in March.

The decline continued through April and May, when expenditure fell to NZD 542.9 million and NZD 462.7 million respectively. Spending reached **NZD**

410.6 million in June, the lowest monthly level cited for the year.

The trend then reversed, with expenditure increasing to **NZD 470.6 million in July** and NZD 480.5 million in August.

The latest MBIE MRTE release, published on September 25, incorporates updated Retail Trade Survey information and additional merchant data to improve the accuracy and consistency of the tourism expenditure series.

Monthly estimates provide a broader tourism measure

The MRTE system is designed to estimate monthly tourism expenditure and its contribution to New Zealand's national and regional economies. The estimates are produced using electronic card transaction data alongside official tourism statistics, including the Tourism Satellite Account.

The published series covers expenditure categories including accommodation, food and beverage services, retail spending, cultural and recreational services and other passenger transport. Some categories, including air passenger transport and education services, are currently excluded from the published MRTE totals.

This distinction is important when comparing monthly tourism-spending figures with New Zealand's International Visitor Survey. MBIE states that the IVS measures expenditure by international visitors aged 15 and over and excludes

international airfares, while the MRTE and related electronic-card datasets use different methodologies and coverage.

International tourism demand remains closely watched

The spending trend comes as New Zealand continues to rebuild international tourism volumes. MBIE's latest International Visitor Survey release said international visitor numbers for the year ended June 2026 had reached **3.67 million**, equivalent to 94% of the 2019 level, while overall visitor expenditure, adjusted for inflation, had recovered to 98% of its pre-pandemic level.

Australia and the United States were among the markets that had exceeded their 2019 visitor levels by the year ended June 2026, according to MBIE.

At the same time, travel costs have been rising. Stats NZ reported that international airfares increased **21.5% in the year to August 2026**, following a 4.3% monthly increase in August.

Gradual improvement heading into the peak season

The rise in August international tourism expenditure marks the second consecutive monthly increase following June's low point. While the monthly figure remained below the levels recorded at the beginning of 2026, the improvement provides a more positive indication for tourism activity as New Zealand moves toward its spring and summer travel period.

MBIE's latest MRTE release also notes that the August series incorporates routine methodological and data updates, meaning the estimates may be revised as additional information becomes available.

Mélange 2026

Concludes in Mumbai with Strong Travel Trade Engagement

Third edition records more than 80,000 exhibitor-buyer connections as industry gathers for two days of business, networking and awards



The third edition of **Mélange** concluded at the Jio World Convention Centre in Mumbai following two days of business meetings, networking and engagement among travel, tourism, aviation and hospitality professionals.

Held on **September 26 and 27**, the trade exhibition brought together travel brands and buyers from across

India and international markets. Organisers said the event recorded more than **80,000 exhibitor-buyer connections** through the Mélange platform, reflecting the emphasis on structured business interaction. Independent industry listings and exhibitor communications also confirm the September 26–27 dates and Mumbai venue.

Focus on meaningful business connections

The organisers said the event was designed around quality of engagement rather than simply maximising visitor numbers. Buyer participation and access were controlled, with the objective of giving exhibitors more time for substantive discussions with relevant travel professionals.

The exhibition floor remained active throughout both days, with meetings continuing across exhibitor areas and networking spaces. The format also attracted senior representatives and decision-makers from the travel, tourism, aviation and hospitality sectors.

The event's emphasis on business-to-business interaction reflects a broader trend within India's travel trade, where destination organisations, hotels, airlines, cruise companies, DMCs and technology providers increasingly use specialised platforms to establish direct relationships with travel advisors.

Mélange's organisers had earlier announced more than **400 travel brands** for the 2026 edition, with participation from India and overseas markets.

Awards mark World Tourism Day finale

The second day concluded with the **Mélange Awards 2026**, held on World Tourism Day, September 27.

The awards included categories decided by an industry jury as well as popular-choice categories voted on by the travel trade.

According to the official awards platform, the jury categories covered sustainable tourism, technology, lifetime achievement, female leadership and young achievement.

Jury Awards

The 2026 jury awards recognised:

- **Sustainable Tourism Initiative Award:** RARE India, founded by Shoba Rudra

- **Technology Upgrade for Trade Award:** Veena World

- **Lifetime Achievement Award:** Subhash Goyal, Founder and Chairman, STIC Travel Group

- **Female Achiever Award:** Ratna Chadha, Chief Executive, TIRUN Travel Marketing

- **Young Achiever Award:** Hari Ganapathy, CEO and Co-Founder, Pickyourtrail

The jury comprised senior industry professionals including **Dev Karvat, Dinesh Bhattar, Hemant Mediratta,**

Organisers said the event recorded more than 80,000 exhibitor-buyer connections through the Mélange platform, reflecting the emphasis on structured business interaction.

Nalini Gupta, Nishant Kashikar, Pranav Kapadia and Sunil Kumar Rumalla. The official awards platform confirms their participation in judging the jury categories.

Popular Choice Awards

The popular awards were determined through trade voting across eight categories. The 2026 winners listed by the organisers were:

- **Most Trade Friendly Airline – Domestic:** IndiGo

- **Most Trade Friendly Airline – International:** Emirates

- **Most Popular Hotel Chain – MICE:** Marriott International

- **Most Popular Hotel Chain – Leisure:** Taj Group

- **Most Trade Friendly Cruise Brand:** Royal Caribbean International

- **Most Popular Tour Operator:** Thomas Cook (SOTC)

- **Most Popular Destination – International:** Switzerland

- **Most Popular Destination – Domestic:** Kerala

The official awards platform confirms that these eight categories were presented as trade-voted awards, while the five jury categories were assessed separately by the appointed industry panel.

A platform for travel trade networking

Beyond the awards, Mélange 2026 provided a meeting point for companies across different segments of the travel ecosystem.

Exhibitor communications ahead of

the event showed participation from DMCs, technology companies and international tourism suppliers, with businesses using the exhibition to develop B2B relationships with Indian travel professionals.

The format also placed emphasis on verified buyers and targeted meetings. MTF Events, the organisation behind Mélange, has described the exhibition as a platform focused on connecting relevant exhibitors with buyers rather than pursuing visitor numbers alone.

Mélange 2027 announced

With the 2026 edition completed, organisers have already announced dates for the next edition.

Mélange 2027 is scheduled for **August 26 and 27, 2027**, at **Hall VI, NESCO, Mumbai.**

The organisers have also announced **Mélange Select**, a regional format designed to provide more focused interactions between travel brands and buyers.

The announced 2027 Mélange Select schedule is:

- **January 27, 2027 – Kolkata**
- **January 28, 2027 – Chennai**
- **January 29, 2027 – Ahmedabad**
- **January 30, 2027 – Chandigarh**

The regional programme is intended to take the B2B networking format beyond Mumbai and provide participating suppliers with access to travel professionals in key markets.

Travel trade looks ahead

The conclusion of Mélange 2026 comes as India's travel industry continues to expand its network of B2B platforms connecting domestic and international suppliers with travel advisors.

With tourism products becoming increasingly diverse across leisure, luxury, MICE, cruises, technology and destination services, industry exhibitions continue to provide opportunities for suppliers and buyers to develop commercial relationships and explore new markets.

For Mélange, the next stage will be the expansion of its regional format and preparations for the 2027 Mumbai edition.

TAAI Celebrates 75 Years of Leadership and Excellence in Travel



Sunil Kumar, President, TAAI



Lokesh Bettaiah, Vice President, TAAI

Kolkata to host the association's 69th Convention and Exhibition, bringing together travel, tourism, aviation and hospitality leaders under the theme 'Empowering Evolution'.

The Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), one of the country's established travel trade bodies, is marking its 75th anniversary in 2026, celebrating seven and a half decades of representing travel professionals and supporting the development of India's travel, tourism and hospitality sectors.

Founded in 1951, the association has played a role in bringing together travel agents, tour operators, airlines, hospitality businesses and tourism stakeholders. Over the years, its work has encompassed industry representation, professional development, business networking and engagement with domestic and international tourism partners.

The diamond jubilee year will be marked by the 69th TAAI Convention and Exhibition, also known as the Indian Travel Congress 2026, scheduled for October 25–27 at ITC Royal Bengal in Kolkata. The three-day gathering is expected to attract delegates and media representatives from across India, alongside stakeholders from the

wider travel and tourism industry.

The convention will combine professional discussions, business networking and anniversary celebrations, offering an opportunity to reflect on the association's legacy while examining the challenges and opportunities shaping the industry's future.

Empowering Evolution: Preparing for a changing industry

This year's convention theme, Empowering Evolution, reflects the need for travel businesses to adapt to changing customer expectations, emerging technologies and evolving market conditions.

Sunil Kumar, President of TAAI, describes the 75th anniversary as a significant milestone for the association and its members. He emphasises that remaining competitive requires businesses to reconsider established practices, embrace innovation and make effective use of technologies, including artificial intelligence.

The decision to hold the convention in India, rather than overseas, also reflects TAAI's stated commitment to strengthening domestic tourism and showcasing the country's tourism potential. According to the

association's official convention announcement, the decision was guided by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call to give greater emphasis to India as a destination.

Kolkata, with its distinctive cultural heritage, architectural landmarks, cuisine and artistic traditions, provides a fitting setting for a gathering that connects the business of travel with the broader experience of discovering India.

For delegates, the convention is intended to offer more than an anniversary celebration. It will provide opportunities to exchange ideas, strengthen professional relationships and explore new approaches to business development in an increasingly competitive travel market.

Technology, sustainability and industry collaboration

The convention programme is set to feature keynote presentations by international speakers and industry leaders, alongside practical masterclasses covering artificial intelligence in travel marketing, sustainable tourism and risk management.

These subjects reflect several of the key priorities facing travel businesses. Artificial intelligence is creating new possibilities for customer engagement, marketing and operational efficiency, while sustainability is becoming increasingly important in destination planning and tourism development. Risk management, meanwhile, remains essential in an industry exposed to geopolitical uncertainty, changing travel regulations and fluctuations in demand.

Lokesh Bettaiah, Vice President of TAAI, has highlighted the convention's focus on knowledge-sharing and business connections. The programme is expected to include business-to-business networking sessions, an India Travel and Tourism Expo,

evening functions and opportunities to connect with travel agency owners, tour operators, aviation professionals, hospitality representatives and tourism boards.

TAAI's convention information indicates an anticipated gathering of approximately 900 delegates and media representatives. The association expects participation from across the travel and tourism ecosystem, creating opportunities to develop partnerships, exchange market intelligence and identify new avenues for collaboration.

The exhibition and networking sessions are also expected to strengthen engagement between travel businesses and destination partners, including state tourism organisations and international tourism boards.

A 75-year legacy with a forward-looking agenda

For Shreeram Patel, Secretary General of TAAI, the anniversary is an opportunity to recognise the generations of travel professionals who have contributed to the association's development.

He notes that TAAI has evolved from an association representing travel agents into an influential industry platform, adapting to changes in the travel trade while advocating members' interests and building relationships with airlines, tourism boards and other stakeholders.

Looking ahead, the association's priorities include greater adoption of technology and artificial intelligence, stronger support for emerging travel professionals, improved competitiveness among members and continued advocacy for policies that enable sustainable industry growth.

The challenge, as Patel's remarks suggest, is to balance innovation with the professional values and relationships that have sustained the association over seven decades. For independent travel businesses and larger operators alike, access to knowledge, effective partnerships and the ability to respond to market changes will remain important to long-term resilience.

Supporting travel businesses through uncertainty

The anniversary also comes at a time when parts of the travel industry face considerable uncertainty. Vijay Mohan Raj, Chairman-Elect of TAAI's Hyderabad chapter for the 2027–2028 term, points to the difficulties confronting travel businesses amid the West Asia crisis and its implications for commercial stability and sustainability.

Having been associated with TAAI for more than two decades, he stresses the importance of greater unity among travel agents and stronger coordination across different segments of the tourism industry.

He advocates a more structured approach, supported by appropriate policies and regulatory mechanisms, to create conditions in which businesses of different sizes can remain viable and grow. His observations underline the importance of representation and collective action, particularly for smaller travel agencies that may have fewer resources to absorb market disruptions.

The issue is significant for an industry in which travel agents continue to serve a diverse range of customers, from individual holidaymakers to corporate travellers and group tour participants. Their ability to provide reliable advice, manage complex itineraries and respond to disruptions remains an important part of the travel ecosystem.

Championing domestic tourism and India's diversity

Mariyamma Jose, Chairperson of TAAI's Kerala chapter, views the anniversary as an occasion to honour the pioneers and senior members whose contributions helped establish the association's foundations.

She also emphasises the importance of domestic tourism, aligning the convention's broader purpose with the national vision of *Dekho Apna Desh*—encouraging people to discover the diversity of destinations within India.

From heritage cities and spiritual centres to coastlines, forests, mountains, regional cuisines and living

cultural traditions, India offers a wide range of experiences for domestic and international travellers. Promoting these destinations can help distribute tourism activity beyond established gateways, support local enterprises and create economic opportunities for communities.

For travel professionals, this presents an opportunity to develop new itineraries, encourage travel to lesser-known destinations and help visitors engage more meaningfully with local cultures and traditions.

The convention in Kolkata is expected to provide a platform for advancing these discussions while strengthening connections between travel businesses and destination representatives.

Looking towards the next chapter

As TAAI marks 75 years, its anniversary represents both a celebration of its institutional history and an opportunity to consider the future of India's travel trade.

Technology adoption, workforce development, sustainability, policy engagement and stronger industry collaboration are likely to remain central to the association's agenda. The ability to translate these priorities into practical support for members will be important as travel businesses navigate an increasingly complex operating environment.

The 69th Convention and Exhibition will bring these themes together through professional sessions, business interactions and anniversary events. More broadly, the gathering will provide an opportunity for the industry to recognise the contribution of generations of travel professionals while considering how the sector can respond to new demands and emerging opportunities.

For an association established in 1951, the milestone is a reminder that the future of travel depends not only on changing technology and market conditions, but also on professional knowledge, trusted relationships and a shared commitment to the development of tourism.

Atout France

targets Indian MICE market with first Mumbai conclave



The initiative brought together eight French tourism stakeholders and Indian travel industry representatives to develop opportunities in corporate events, incentive travel and destination weddings, with Paris Region reporting double-digit growth in Indian visitor spending and overnight stays in 2025.

Atout France, France's tourism development agency, has joined forces with Visit Paris Region and Linkeus – Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Convention Bureau to strengthen the country's position in India's meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) market.

The partners held their first MICE Conclave and Workshop in Mumbai on 24 and 25 September 2026, bringing together eight French tourism stakeholders

and Indian travel industry representatives to explore opportunities in corporate events, incentive programmes and destination weddings.

The event was designed to showcase France's business-events offering and connect French destinations and service providers with Indian corporate travel managers, event planners and travel companies. Discussions focused on destination selection, event requirements and the needs

of Indian planners organising programmes in France.

The first day centred on presenting the participating destinations and their MICE capabilities. The second day featured one-to-one meetings between the French delegation and Indian travel companies specialising in corporate travel and events, enabling participants to discuss tailored itineraries, venues and service requirements.

Sheetal Munshaw,
director of Atout

France India, said the timing was favourable as corporate events in France gained momentum. She highlighted Paris Region and the south of France as established choices for MICE programmes and destination weddings, adding that the meetings were intended to build on this demand. “*We are very pleased with the outcome of our very first MICE Conclave & Workshop co-organised with Visit Paris Region & Linkeus – Provence-Alpes-*

Côte d'Azur Convention Bureau. The timing is opportune, considering the uptake in corporate events taking place in France. Paris Region and the South of France remain top favourites for MICE activations and weddings. We are confident that these productive sessions will contribute to this momentum. Sincere thanks to our partners for their support and confidence in the market," says Sheetal Munshaw, Director, Atout France India."

Paris Region is also seeing stronger engagement from Indian visitors.

Baptiste Orlandini, CEO of Choose Paris Region,

said spending by Indian travellers in the region increased by 16% in 2025, while overnight stays rose by 17%. He described India as a strategic market and said the organisation's Mumbai office, opened two years earlier, reflected its commitment to strengthening relationships with Indian travel industry partners." "We are very happy to have organised this MICE workshop along with our partners, Atout France and Linkeus.

Paris Region is a beloved and iconic destination for Indian travellers and corporate events. It is also a destination that keeps reinventing itself and offering new experiences that take visitors beyond their expectations. India is a strategic market for us, with spending growing 16% and overnight stays 17% in 2025. This is why we opened an office in Mumbai two years ago, managed by Axel Guyon, and this MICE workshop is a direct result of our efforts to



Sheetal Munshaw

better understand and meet Indian stakeholders where they are. We look forward to more engagements with the Indian travel trade in this segment," says Baptiste Orlandini, CEO, Choose Paris Region."

The south of France is positioning itself as a complementary option for Indian event organisers seeking multi-destination programmes. **Fabrice Lavergne, president of**

Linkeus – Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur

Convention Bureau, said Indian planners prioritise large-scale capacity, tailored Indian food and beverage options, flexible timings and seamless logistics.

Beyond the Côte d'Azur, the region offers opportunities to combine destinations such as Marseille, Aix-en-Provence, Avignon and Arles within a single itinerary. Working with

Paris Region, Linkeus also aims to support programmes that combine the French capital with southern France for corporate groups and wedding parties.

Linkeus acts as a single point of contact for access to more than 250 event professionals, including venues and catering providers, according to Lavergne.

The Mumbai conclave reflects a coordinated effort by French tourism organisations to engage directly with India's corporate travel and events sector. By combining destination promotion with business-to-business meetings, the partners aim to help Indian planners identify suitable venues, services and multi-region itineraries for future events in France.

The partners held their first MICE Conclave and Workshop in Mumbai on 24 and 25 September 2026, bringing together eight French tourism stakeholders and Indian travel industry representatives to explore opportunities in corporate events, incentive programmes and destination weddings.

Indonesia records 10.58 million foreign tourist visits in January–August 2026

International visits increased 5.38% year-on-year, while domestic travel rose 4.29% to 842.15 million trips, highlighting the continued strength of Indonesia's tourism market.



Indonesia recorded 10.58 million foreign tourist visits between January and August 2026, an increase of 5.38% compared with the same period last year, according to the Ministry of Tourism. Domestic tourism also maintained its upward trajectory, with trips by Indonesian residents reaching 842.15 million, up 4.29% year-on-year.

The figures were presented by Tourism Minister Widiyanti Putri Wardhana during the ministry's monthly performance briefing in Jakarta on October 8. Officials said the growth reflected the resilience of the country's tourism sector amid continuing international uncertainties.

August arrivals show further growth

Indonesia received approximately 1.6 million foreign tourist visits in August, a 6.27% increase compared with August 2025. Domestic travel recorded stronger monthly growth, reaching 104.3 million trips, up 11.47% year-on-year.

The ministry said its efforts to diversify source markets were showing positive results. During the first eight months of 2026, visits from other Asian markets increased by 8.41%, while arrivals from Southeast Asia rose 7.75% and those from Oceania grew 7.36%. Visits from the Middle East also returned to growth, increasing 1.3% cumulatively.

Domestic travel remained a significant pillar of the market, supporting tourism activity across Indonesia's regions and helping sustain demand for accommodation, transport, attractions and local businesses.

Outbound travel declines as domestic demand strengthens

Trips by Indonesians travelling overseas fell 3.56% year-on-year to 5.91 million during January–August 2026, according to the ministry's report.

The difference between foreign tourist visits to Indonesia and outbound trips by Indonesian residents widened to 4.67 million, compared with 3.91 million in the same period of 2025.

The figures point to a stronger balance between inbound visits and outbound travel, although the two measures track different types of travel activity.

Indonesia improves its tourism development ranking

Indonesia also reported progress in the World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Development Index (TTDI) 2026, released in September. According to the ministry, the country's score increased to 4.56 from 4.46 in 2024, placing it 23rd globally, sixth in Asia-Pacific and second in Southeast Asia, behind Singapore.

The ministry highlighted Indonesia's performance in several index pillars, including first place globally for prioritisation of travel and tourism, fifth for price competitiveness, ninth for natural resources and 15th for cultural resources and socioeconomic impact.

The index assesses the conditions and policies that support the sustainable and resilient development of travel and tourism. Indonesia's improved score indicates progress in its overall assessment, while continued investment and destination development remain important to strengthening the sector.

Tourism investment rises

Tourism investment increased from IDR 47.14 trillion in 2024 to IDR 73.56 trillion in 2025, representing growth of 56.05%, the ministry reported.

Investment remained concentrated in Bali and Jakarta, with the government seeking to spread development more widely across 13 priority and regenerative tourism destinations and special economic zones. The approach aims to encourage regional economic activity and broaden the benefits of tourism beyond established centres.

Hotel occupancy edges higher

Indonesia's star-rated hotels recorded an average occupancy rate of 52.52% in August 2026, an increase of 2.01% year-on-year, according to the ministry's report. Average occupancy for January–August reached 49.56%,



up 2.30% compared with the same period a year earlier.

The figures provide an additional indicator of tourism demand, although occupancy levels can vary significantly by destination, season and hotel category.

Regional events support local economies

Through its Karisma Event Nusantara programme, the ministry supported 125 regional events across 38 provinces in 2026. By September 30, 89 events had been held in 34 provinces.

An assessment covering 78 events recorded 9.97 million visitors and IDR 888.52 billion in direct economic transactions, excluding multiplier effects. The events involved 19,866 micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and 120,642 arts workers, while generating employment for 58,077 workers.

The programme forms part of efforts to use festivals and regional events to attract visitors, support local enterprises and distribute tourism-related economic activity across the country.

Gastronomy tourism gains momentum

Indonesia is also promoting food-led travel through initiatives such as the second edition of *Wonderful Indonesia Gastronomy*, held in Solo and Yogyakarta. The event's three-day Artisan Market attracted more than 2,000 visitors, exceeding its target of 1,300, the ministry reported.

Culinary experiences are increasingly being used to showcase regional identities and encourage visitors to explore destinations beyond the country's best-known tourism hubs.

Tourism contributed 4.78% of Indonesia's gross domestic product in 2025, according to the ministry. Officials said the sector's wider economic role includes job creation, support for small businesses, investment, foreign-exchange earnings and regional development.

The ministry also reported providing IDR 817.5 million in assistance and work equipment on September 30 to support local businesses and traditional weaving activities following a fire in Sade Hamlet, West Nusa Tenggara.

India to host WTTC Global Summit 2027

New Delhi will welcome global tourism executives, government leaders and investors as India seeks to build on its fast-growing travel economy and attract greater international visitor spending.



The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) has announced that India will host the WTTC Global Summit in 2027, bringing the world's leading Travel & Tourism CEOs and government leaders to Delhi as the country's tourism sector enters a new era of growth and global opportunity,

supported by one of the world's largest and fastest-growing domestic travel markets.

As the sector's most important global event, the WTTC Global Summit attracts the highest level of public and private sector participation from across the world. India was selected following

a highly competitive process involving 22 destinations that expressed interest in hosting the event.

The 2027 Summit will provide a global platform to showcase India's extraordinary tourism offering, the strength of its domestic visitor economy, and its growing appeal to



Gloria Guevara

international travellers, while bringing together the public and private sectors to address the opportunities and challenges shaping the future of Travel & Tourism.

The announcement comes during the WTTC Global Summit in Malta, where H.E. Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Minister of Tourism and Culture, Government of India, participated in discussions on the future of the sector and has been recognised with a WTTC Global Champion Award for his leadership and contribution to Travel & Tourism.

India has emerged as one of the world's fastest-growing Travel & Tourism economies. According to WTTC's latest Economic Impact Research, the sector contributed US\$263.6 billion to India's economy in 2025, growing by 7.3% and supporting 46.2 million jobs – more than one in every ten jobs in the country.

The momentum is expected to continue. WTTC forecasts that Travel & Tourism's contribution to India's economy will grow by 8.5% in 2026, reaching US\$286.1 billion, while supporting 48.1 million jobs. Over the next decade, the sector is projected

to almost double in economic size, reaching US\$527 billion by 2036.

India's enormous domestic tourism market provides a powerful foundation for this growth. Domestic visitor spending reached US\$203 billion in 2025, accounting for 86% of total Travel & Tourism spending, while international visitor spending represents a significant opportunity for further expansion.

WTTC's research projects that India will move from being the world's 10th-largest Travel & Tourism economy to fourth by 2036, underlining the scale of the opportunity ahead. International visitor spending is also forecast to grow significantly over the coming decade, highlighting the potential for India to capture a greater share of global tourism demand.

The country's scale, diverse tourism offering and expanding infrastructure are creating opportunities across leisure, business travel, hospitality, aviation, technology, investment and destination development. The 2027 Summit will provide a unique opportunity for international businesses and investors to engage directly with India and explore partnerships

across its rapidly developing tourism ecosystem.

Manfredi Lefebvre d'Ovidio, Chairman, WTTC, said: "We are delighted to bring the world's most important Travel & Tourism event to India in 2027, chosen from among 22 destinations. Delhi will provide the perfect stage for global leaders to come together, drive collaboration, and continue shaping the future of the sector."

Gloria Guevara, President & CEO, WTTC, said: "India is a country with extraordinary tourism potential and a sector that is already delivering remarkable economic growth. Its scale, ambition and growing global connectivity make it a natural place to bring the world's Travel & Tourism leaders together.

This will be an opportunity to showcase the country to our global membership, strengthen public-private partnerships and look at how India can capture even more of the international demand that is driving the next chapter of global Travel & Tourism."

The decision to bring the Global Summit to India follows a period of significant expansion for the country's Travel & Tourism sector and reflects WTTC's commitment to bringing its flagship event to markets that are helping shape the future of the industry.

India has already demonstrated the strength of its domestic tourism market, while the next phase of growth will increasingly focus on expanding its international visitor economy. WTTC's research highlights the opportunity to build on India's strong domestic foundation and attract a greater share of international visitor spending.

The announcement also reinforces the importance of strong collaboration between governments and the private sector. WTTC's Global Summit brings together the leaders responsible for investment, infrastructure, connectivity, hospitality, aviation, technology and destination development, creating a unique environment for new partnerships and investment opportunities.

River cruising set for expansion as 21 new ships are planned for 2027

New vessels across European waterways and long-haul river destinations are set to broaden holiday choices, while cruise operators respond to demand for immersive experiences, flexible itineraries and more personalised travel.



The river cruise sector is preparing for a significant fleet expansion in 2027, with 21 new ships scheduled to enter service, according to Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA). The planned

additions span established European routes and destinations in Asia, South America and North America, giving travellers a wider choice of itineraries and onboard experiences.

The figures were highlighted by

Andy Harmer, managing director of CLIA UK and Ireland, at an industry river cruise event in October 2026. He said the investment reflected the breadth of choice available to travellers and created further opportunities for travel

advisers to match customers with suitable river cruise holidays.

The expansion includes new vessels from established river cruise operators, as well as Celebrity Cruises' planned entry into the river cruise market. Its ships, Celebrity Compass and Celebrity Seeker, are scheduled to operate European river itineraries, including journeys along the Danube and Rhine.

New ships across established and emerging destinations

Among the planned launches are three ships from AmaWaterways—AmaRudi, AmaFiora and AmaMaya—and two from Celebrity Cruises. Emerald Cruises is scheduled to introduce Emerald Lumi and Emerald Nova, while Uniworld Boutique River Cruises plans to add S.S. Audrey, S.S. Marlene and S.S. São Rafael.

Other vessels listed in CLIA's announcement include AMADEUS Mira from Amadeus River Cruises, RV Brazilian Dream from CroisiEurope, Century Diamond from Century Cruises, Riviera Reflection and Riviera Alba from Riviera Travel, Spirit of the Lorelei from Saga, Scenic Aria from Scenic, TUI Luzia from TUI River Cruises and VIVA UNIQUE from VIVA Cruises. American Cruise Lines is also planning new vessels.

The range of launches reflects the variety of river cruise experiences available to travellers. European itineraries continue to feature prominently, with the Rhine and Danube connecting historic cities, cultural landmarks, wine regions and smaller riverside communities. Other routes offer opportunities to explore destinations along the Douro, Seine and Mekong, as well as waterways in South America and North America.

For holidaymakers, river cruising

combines accommodation, transport and guided visits in a single itinerary, often allowing access to city centres and smaller destinations that may be less convenient to explore through conventional land-based travel.

Celebrity Cruises enters the river cruise market

Celebrity Cruises' move into river cruising is one of the notable developments in the 2027 pipeline. Celebrity Compass is scheduled to make its inaugural voyage in August 2027, followed by Celebrity Seeker in October.

The ships are designed for European river itineraries and will offer accommodation and onboard facilities tailored to a smaller-ship experience. Their planned itineraries include journeys linking destinations such as Budapest, Vienna and other Danube-region ports, alongside routes on the Rhine.

The entry of a major ocean cruise brand into the river market adds another option for travellers and could broaden awareness of river cruising among customers who have previously favoured ocean voyages. The longer-term impact will depend on how the new product performs, the itineraries offered and the value travellers perceive compared with established operators.

Travel advisers play a growing role

CLIA is also expanding its training and engagement initiatives for travel advisers as the river cruise market develops. Its *A Week on the Rivers* webinar series, scheduled for 12–16 October 2026, covers destinations and itineraries including Asia, the Douro, the Nile, Christmas markets, the Rhine and the Danube.

The association's RiverView

conference is scheduled for 5–8 March 2027. The programme is designed to give travel advisers a closer look at river cruise products and destinations through business sessions, supplier networking and onboard experiences.

For travel professionals, product knowledge is increasingly important as operators introduce new ships and differentiate their offerings through design, dining, excursions and destination-led experiences. Familiarity with vessel features, route characteristics and seasonal variations can help advisers identify the most suitable options for different types of traveller.

Evolving preferences shape river cruise holidays

The planned fleet expansion comes as river cruise operators respond to a range of traveller preferences. Demand for destination-focused experiences remains central to the product, with excursions, local food, cultural visits and time in historic towns forming an important part of many itineraries.

Shorter sailings can appeal to travellers seeking a compact holiday or an introduction to river cruising, while longer itineraries provide opportunities to explore multiple regions in one trip. Solo travellers are another segment receiving attention, with some operators offering dedicated departures, cabin options or pricing arrangements designed to make travelling alone more accessible.

As the sector expands, travellers will have more options to compare across destinations, ship styles, itinerary lengths and onboard experiences. Availability, pricing and launch schedules may vary by operator, and travellers should confirm current details before booking.

The addition of 21 planned ships in 2027 signals continued investment in river cruising. For destinations, operators and travel advisers, the challenge will be to turn that expanded choice into memorable, well-managed journeys that connect visitors with the character and culture of the places they explore.

Celebrity Cruises' move into river cruising is one of the notable developments in the 2027 pipeline. Celebrity Compass is scheduled to make its inaugural voyage in August 2027, followed by Celebrity Seeker in October.



Crystal

unveils 2028–2029 cruise itineraries across Asia-Pacific, the Caribbean and South America

New ports, seasonal highlights and Crystal Grace's first South American season feature in the luxury cruise line's latest programme, with bookings opening on 20 October 2026.

Luxury cruise operator Crystal has announced a new collection of voyages for the 2028–2029 season, with itineraries aboard Crystal Symphony, Crystal Serenity and Crystal Grace covering destinations across Asia-Pacific, Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean, South America and the Atlantic.

The voyages will run from October

2028 through May 2029, with bookings scheduled to open on 20 October 2026. Highlights include Japan's cherry blossom season, festive sailings in the Southern Hemisphere, scenic cruising through New Zealand's fjords and Crystal Grace's first South American season.

The programme also introduces new ports of call across the three

ships, giving travellers opportunities to explore lesser-visited destinations alongside established cruise gateways.

Mario Parodi, Crystal's vice-president of itinerary planning and port and fuel operations, said the itineraries were designed to offer new ways to experience familiar regions while reaching destinations that feature less frequently on cruise routes.

Crystal Symphony explores Japan, Southeast Asia and Australasia

Crystal Symphony begins its season on 3 October 2028, with voyages through Japan and South Korea before continuing into Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand.

New Japanese calls include Akita, Amami and Kumamoto, expanding the ship's coverage of the country's northern coastline and southern islands. The itinerary also includes a new visit to Surabaya in Indonesia and a stop at Rinca Island, known for its Komodo dragons.

In Australia, new destinations include Cooktown in Queensland, Port Arthur in Tasmania and Phillip Island in Victoria. The New Zealand programme features scenic cruising through Milford Sound, Doubtful Sound and Dusky Sound, offering views of the country's dramatic fjord landscapes.

The series concludes in Melbourne on 7 January 2029, where the ship is scheduled to begin its World Cruise.

Crystal Grace makes its South American debut

Crystal Grace begins its season on 20 November 2028 with Caribbean voyages departing from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, before heading south in February 2029 for its first South American season.

The itinerary follows Brazil's coastline, including an extended stay in Rio de Janeiro during Carnival season, before continuing to Uruguay

and Argentina and into Patagonia. The programme includes a first visit to Îles du Salut, an island group that includes the historic Devil's Island.

After sailing around Cape Horn, the ship is scheduled to explore Chile's fjords and call at destinations including Puerto Chacabuco, Castro, Puerto Montt and Valparaíso. Further north, the route includes ports in Peru, Ecuador and Panama, with a planned transit of the Panama Canal on 22 March 2029.

The return journey takes Crystal Grace through the Caribbean and Bermuda before crossing the Atlantic to the Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands and Morocco. The season concludes in Lisbon on 2 May 2029.

Crystal Serenity combines Central America, the Pacific and Japan

Crystal Serenity departs on 4 December 2028 from Fort Lauderdale for a season that links Central America and Mexico with Hawaii, French Polynesia, Australia, Southeast Asia and Japan.

New calls include Corinto in Nicaragua, Puerto Quetzal in Guatemala and Hilo on Hawaii's Big Island. The itinerary also includes Cooktown in Australia before continuing through Indonesia and other destinations across Southeast Asia.

In March and April 2029, the ship turns towards Japan, with sailings timed to coincide with the country's cherry blossom season. The programme

includes calls at Kumamoto, Kagoshima, Kochi, Nagoya, Shimizu and Osaka, alongside destinations on Japan's Sea of Japan coast and visits to South Korea.

The final leg heads north from Japan before crossing the Pacific to Alaska, with stops at Kodiak and Homer. The season ends in Seward on 28 May 2029.

Expanding destination choice for luxury cruise travellers

The new programme reflects the appeal of itineraries that combine familiar destinations with less frequently visited ports, seasonal events and scenic sailing. From Japan's spring landscapes and New Zealand's fjords to South America's dramatic southern coastline, the routes offer a range of cultural, culinary and nature-focused experiences.

For travellers considering a longer cruise holiday, the itineraries also provide opportunities to combine multiple regions within a single season. As with all cruise schedules, individual ports and timings may be subject to change, and travellers should confirm final details with Crystal or their travel adviser before booking.

With bookings opening in October 2026, Crystal's 2028–2029 programme gives prospective guests an early opportunity to plan voyages around major seasonal highlights and destinations across several continents.

LUXURY AND LIFESTYLE TRAVEL MAGAZINE TRAVELSPAN.IN

For advertising queries please contact: **91-124-411 1182**

 @travelspanindia

 travelspan1

 travel span

 @travelspan1

Marriott International takes Maldives portfolio to Indian travel trade



Marriott International has taken its Maldives resort portfolio to the Indian travel trade through a three-city roadshow covering **Mumbai, Ahmedabad and New Delhi**, highlighting the destination's importance to its India market strategy.

The roadshow brought together travel trade partners, media and tourism stakeholders for updates on Marriott's Maldives portfolio, its India-based destination sales structure, recent resort developments and planned additions to its island resort offering.

The programme forms part of Marriott International's efforts to strengthen engagement with

Indian travel professionals and build awareness of its Maldives resorts among the country's outbound travel trade.

Dedicated India sales team supports Maldives business

Peter Foreman, Senior Director, Sales & Distribution, Singapore and Maldives, Marriott International emphasised the collaboration and Marriott's long-term commitment to the Indian travel market.

"This is a milestone moment for us at Marriott International. It is the first time that all eight of our Maldivian resorts have come together to

collectively visit India," Foreman said.

He noted that India has consistently ranked among Marriott's leading source markets and said the roadshow across **New Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru** was designed to strengthen relationships with key travel trade partners.

"We want our travel trade community to not just know about our resorts individually, but to understand the diversity and depth of our Maldives portfolio as a whole," he said. "This initiative enables our partners to meet resort representatives face-to-face, receive updates directly from the source and build stronger synergies."

Reflecting on the Delhi leg of the programme, Foreman said the roadshow had begun positively, with a strong turnout from travel trade partners and media.

"We have had a fantastic start. We hosted a vibrant gathering of trade partners and media and shared exciting developments, such as the opening of our second JW Marriott property in the Maldives, JW Marriott Maldives Kaafu Atoll Island Resort, and the reopening of W Maldives following a full-scale renovation," he said.

Foreman also highlighted Marriott's upcoming luxury development, **Bulgari Resort Ranfushi**, which he said is scheduled to debut in the fourth quarter of 2026.

Describing the roadshow as a fast-paced programme of consecutive city engagements, Foreman said its value extended beyond product updates.

"The real highlight is that our partners get to discover resorts they may not have worked with before, all under the trusted Marriott umbrella," he said.

The team comprises **Vaishali Shah**, Market Director of Destination Sales – India, based in New Delhi; **Rahul Gupta**, Account Director, Destination Sales, based in Bengaluru; **Reena Sharma**, Account Director, Destination Sales, based in New Delhi; and **Karishma Kazi**, Account Director, Destination Sales, based in Mumbai.

The India-based structure is intended to strengthen relationships with travel advisers and other trade partners while supporting sales and destination awareness for Marriott's Maldives resorts.

India remains an important source market

Foreman said India continues to be an important source market for the Maldives as well as for Marriott's portfolio of resorts across the archipelago.

Marriott currently promotes a broad collection of Maldives properties spanning brands including **The St. Regis**, **The Ritz-Carlton**, **W Hotels**, **JW Marriott**, **Le Méridien**, **The**

Westin and Sheraton. Its official Maldives portfolio page highlights the range of resorts available across the destination.

For Indian travel advisers, the portfolio provides a range of luxury and lifestyle options across different resort brands, allowing the company to address varied traveller segments while maintaining a substantial presence in one of the Indian outbound market's established island destinations.

JW Marriott Kaafu strengthens the portfolio

The roadshow also highlighted Marriott's recent resort developments in the Maldives, including **JW Marriott Maldives Kaafu Atoll Island Resort**.



The roadshow brought together travel trade partners, media and tourism stakeholders for updates on Marriott's Maldives portfolio, its India-based destination sales structure, recent resort developments and planned additions to its island resort offering.



Located in Kaafu Atoll, the resort features **80 private pool villas** and is approximately a 15-minute speedboat journey from Velana International Airport. Marriott describes the property as a luxury island resort focused on relaxation, family experiences, wellness and marine activities.

Its facilities include multiple restaurants and bars, Spa by JW, a fitness centre, swimming pools and a dedicated kids' club. The resort also offers activities including snorkelling, scuba diving and other water-based experiences.

Marriott's current Maldives portfolio also includes **W Maldives**, **The St. Regis Maldives Vommuli Resort**, **The Ritz-Carlton Maldives**, **Fari Islands**, **JW Marriott Maldives Resort & Spa**, **Le Méridien Maldives Resort & Spa**,

The Westin Maldives Miriandhoo Resort and **Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa**, among other properties listed by the company.

W Maldives renovation and future expansion

The roadshow further highlighted the recent relaunch of **W Maldives** following a major renovation, alongside Marriott's future development pipeline.

According to the information presented during the India roadshow, **Bulgari Resort Ranfushi** is planned to join Marriott's Maldives portfolio in July 2027.

The planned resort would add another luxury brand to Marriott's presence in the destination and further

expand the company's Maldives offering for international leisure travellers.

Strengthening trade engagement

The three-city programme underscores the role of the Indian travel trade in Marriott International's Maldives strategy. By taking its Maldives portfolio directly to travel professionals in Mumbai, Ahmedabad and New Delhi, Marriott is seeking to deepen trade relationships, communicate product developments and provide agents with updated information on its growing collection of island resorts.

With established properties, recently introduced resorts and further development in the pipeline, the Maldives remains an important component of Marriott International's leisure portfolio in the Indian Ocean.

ASSOCHAM Tourism Conclave 2026 highlights investment and destination development priorities



Greater private-sector investment, new destination development and a stronger focus on destination management and visitor experience are emerging as key priorities for the next phase of India's tourism growth, according to discussions at the **ASSOCHAM National Tourism Conclave 2026** in New Delhi.

The conclave, held under the theme **"Tourism as an Economic Engine: Technology, Policy, Investment & Global Partnerships,"** brings together government representatives, tourism boards, hospitality companies, travel-tech firms, investors, destination marketers, academics and other industry stakeholders to examine the opportunities and challenges shaping India's tourism sector. ASSOCHAM lists the event for **30 September 2026 at Hotel Shangri-La Eros, New Delhi**, while CBRE India is participating as knowledge partner.

Discussions centre on connectivity and destination infrastructure, investment facilitation, ease of

travel, technology adoption, skills development, destination creation and closer coordination between government and industry.

Private investment seen as critical to tourism expansion

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Minister of Tourism and Culture, Government of India, emphasised the need for greater private-sector participation as India seeks to expand its tourism capacity and develop new destinations.

"Tourism is emerging as an important driver of economic growth and employment, with the potential to play a much larger role in India's journey towards Viksit Bharat 2047," Shekhawat said.

He noted that improving connectivity through highways, airports, railways and new transport corridors is expected to support further growth in travel demand. The next stage, he said, would require investment not only in established tourism centres but also

in new destinations, experiences, infrastructure, hospitality and human resources.

The minister also highlighted destination management and visitor experience as increasingly important elements of tourism development.

"Technology will also be central to improving the tourism experience, from destination discovery and parking to feedback and visitor services," he said, adding that partnerships between government, technology companies, airlines and other private-sector stakeholders would remain important.

Tourism demand broadens across multiple segments

The conclave also examined the changing composition of India's tourism demand, with opportunities extending beyond traditional leisure travel.

According to the material presented at the event, the **ASSOCHAM-CBRE report** identifies potential across spiritual tourism, MICE and destination events, wellness and medical tourism, cruise travel, rural tourism and wildlife experiences.

Improving connectivity—including expressways, rail networks, ropeways and river-based circuits—is also opening opportunities for destinations outside India's established tourism centres.

The broader investment opportunity extends beyond hotels, with demand expected across transportation, attractions, food and beverage, retail, local enterprises and other components of the visitor economy.

ASSOCHAM calls for a competitive and sustainable tourism ecosystem

Nirmal K. Minda, President, ASSOCHAM, said tourism was

increasingly moving beyond its traditional role as a leisure activity to become an important contributor to economic growth, employment, investment and regional development.

“India’s tourism sector is at a defining juncture, evolving beyond leisure into a powerful engine of economic growth, employment, investment and regional development,” Minda said.

He highlighted spiritual, MICE, wellness, cruise, rural and wildlife tourism as areas with potential for further investment, while pointing to the importance of connectivity and emerging destinations.

Minda also outlined ASSOCHAM’s focus on **Make in India, Ease of Doing Business, MSME growth, the Digital Economy and Sustainability**, saying continued government-industry dialogue would be important to translating tourism opportunities into investment and policy initiatives.

Technology and AI reshape destination discovery

Technology emerged as another central theme, particularly in relation to destination discovery, navigation, visitor services and destination management.

Dr Subi Chaturvedi, Former Member, MAG, United Nations Internet Governance Forum, said technology and artificial intelligence could help broaden the distribution of tourism demand by bringing lesser-known destinations, communities and local businesses to the attention of travellers.

She highlighted opportunities for local guides, artisans, women entrepreneurs, homestays and small businesses to participate more directly in the tourism economy.

“The real measure of smart tourism is not impressions or footfall alone,” Chaturvedi said. “It is whether every new journey creates shared value, supports local livelihoods and protects the heritage and character of the places people come to experience.”

Her comments underscored the growing focus on using digital tools not simply to attract visitors, but

to distribute tourism activity and economic benefits more widely.

Haryana highlights regional tourism potential

Dr Arvind Kumar Sharma, Cabinet Minister for Cooperation, Jails, Elections, Heritage and Tourism, Government of Haryana, highlighted the potential for tourism to support economic opportunities for farmers, workers, MSMEs, entrepreneurs and local communities.

He pointed to Haryana’s proximity to the National Capital Region and its heritage and cultural assets as potential drivers of tourism-led development.

Destinations including **Kurukshetra, Panipat and Surajkund**, along with opportunities in rural tourism, were highlighted as areas where further investment and public-private partnerships could support tourism development.

Sharma also called for greater industry participation and investment in tourism properties and destinations across the state.

Infrastructure and destination management remain priorities

Anshuman Magazine, Chairman & CEO, India, South East Asia, Middle East and Africa, CBRE, said India’s diverse tourism proposition—including heritage, spirituality, culture, wildlife, wellness, beaches and mountains—provides a broad base for future development.

He emphasised the importance of infrastructure, destination management, cleanliness and safety, alongside the use of technology and artificial intelligence to create more seamless visitor experiences.

Greater collaboration between government and private-sector stakeholders, he said, could support employment creation and regional economic development.

CBRE’s participation as knowledge partner reflects the growing intersection between tourism, hospitality and investment. The company’s broader 2026 research

has also identified infrastructure improvements and experience-led hospitality as important factors influencing tourism and hospitality development across emerging Indian destinations.

Travel trade and local businesses remain central

Ravi Gosain, President, IATO, highlighted the wider economic footprint of tourism, pointing to its links with transport, hospitality, local businesses, artisans, guides and communities.

He said India’s cultural heritage, nature, spirituality, wildlife and cuisine provide a strong foundation for developing distinctive tourism experiences, while technology and AI can help make travel planning more personalised and improve how tourism businesses reach prospective visitors.

He also stressed the need for continued investment in connectivity, digital infrastructure, skills and lesser-known destinations.

Investment opportunity extends beyond traditional tourism centres

The discussions at the conclave point to a tourism development model in which investment is increasingly distributed across the wider visitor economy.

Spiritual destinations, MICE hubs, wellness centres, cruise circuits, rural communities and wildlife destinations can create demand for hotels and accommodation, but also for transportation, attractions, food and beverage, retail, guides, digital services and local enterprises.

The emphasis on destination management also reflects a shift from measuring tourism primarily through visitor numbers towards improving the quality and sustainability of the visitor experience.

With government policy, private investment, technology and local participation increasingly interconnected, the conclave’s discussions placed collaboration between the public and private sectors at the centre of India’s tourism development agenda.



Western Australia

Records \$19.2
Billion in Visitor
Spend as
Overnight
Tourism Reaches
11 Million



Western Australia's tourism industry had an outstanding year, with \$19.2 billion in visitor spend, 11 million overnight visitors, and major events delivering a \$2.8 return on every \$1 invested by the Cook Labor Government.

Western Australia recorded **\$19.2 billion in visitor expenditure and 11 million overnight visitors**, highlighting continued growth in the state's visitor economy and strengthening international tourism performance.

The results, reported by the Western Australian Government and Tourism Western Australia, relate to **2025**, while Tourism WA's latest annual-report figures cover the 2025–26 financial

year. The government says the \$19.2 billion in visitor spending exceeded its annual target by \$800 million, while the 11 million overnight visitors were 300,000 above target.

International visitation reaches record level

International tourism was a major contributor to the performance. Western Australia recorded **1.1 million international visitors in 2025**, the highest number recorded for the state, with international visitors spending approximately **\$3.4 billion**.

Tourism WA said Western Australia achieved an **8.7% share of Australia's international visitor market**, above its 8% target. The state

was also the first Australian jurisdiction to recover international visitor volumes to pre-pandemic levels, according to the state government.

The United Kingdom remained Western Australia's largest international market by visitor numbers, with about **163,000 visitors spending \$414 million** in the state.

China was the leading international market by visitor expenditure, with around **70,000 visitors generating \$503 million in spending**, a 66% increase from 2024.

France and Japan also recorded strong growth. French visitor numbers increased 80%, while spending by Japanese visitors rose 85%, according to the Western Australian Government.



India remains a priority growth market

India continues to feature among Western Australia's priority international markets. The state government's latest announcement said approximately **50,000 Indian visitors** travelled to Western Australia.

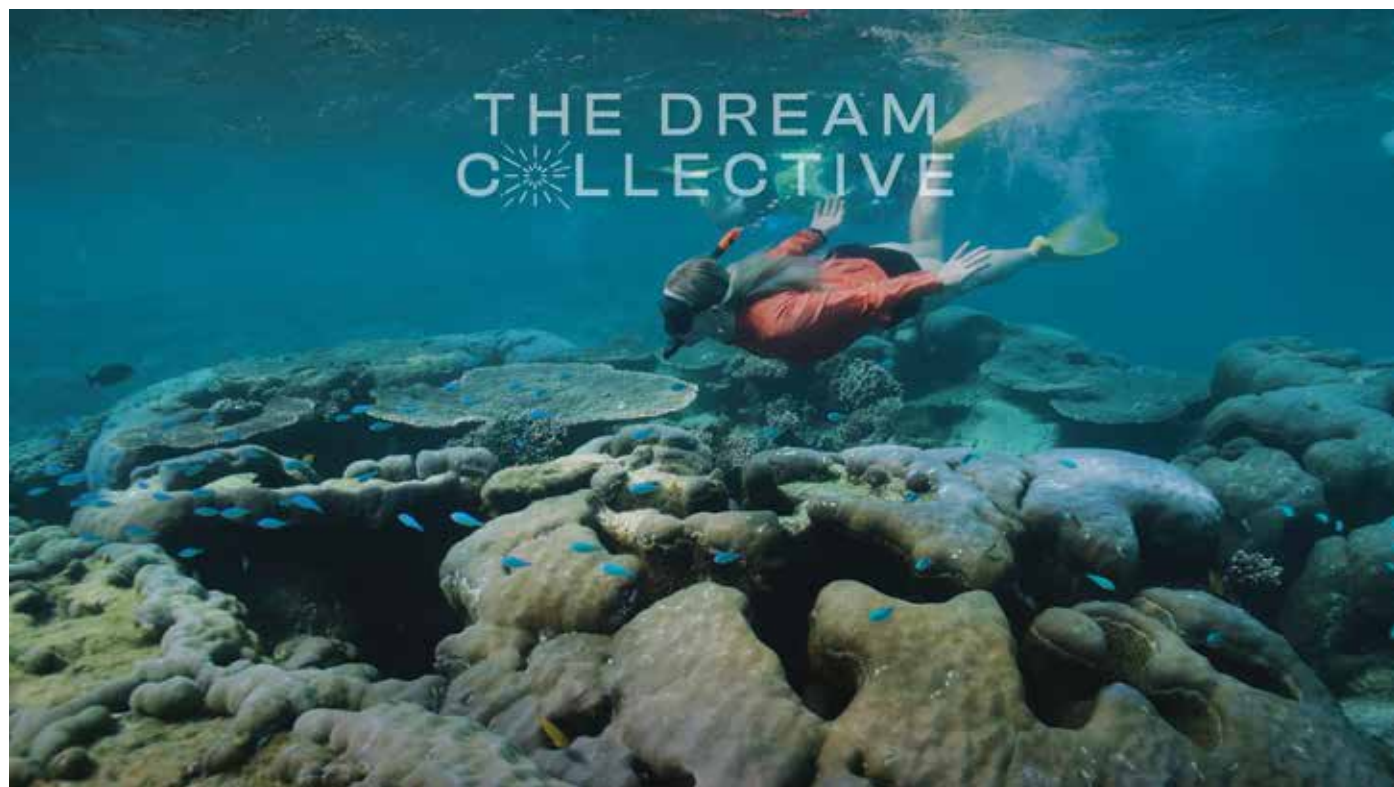
The government has identified India and Vietnam as emerging markets with further potential for visitor growth, aviation connectivity and investment.

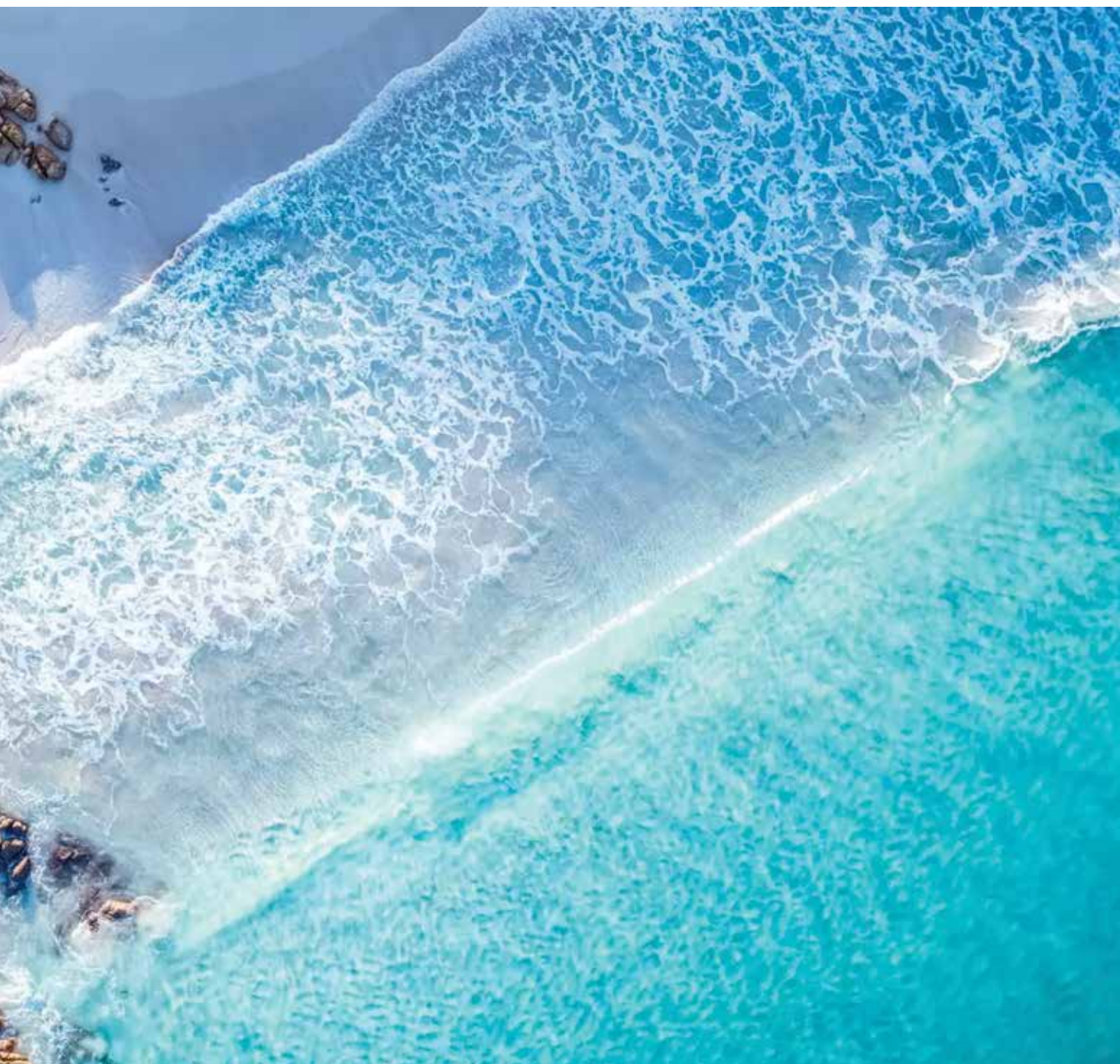
Tourism WA's international marketing strategy is being supported by its global **Walking On A Dream** campaign, which operates across 13 key international markets. Tourism WA said the campaign has played a role in the state's international tourism recovery.

Perth's international connectivity expands

Improved air connectivity has been another factor supporting Western Australia's international tourism growth.

The government said Perth is connected to **22 international**





destinations, with nonstop services operated by 26 airlines. Tourism WA's current visitor statistics page similarly lists 22 global cities with direct flights into Perth.

The expansion of aviation access has helped strengthen links with key source markets while supporting the state's wider tourism and economic-development strategy.

Regional Western Australia benefits

Tourism growth has also extended beyond Perth and the state's metropolitan areas.

Visitors spent approximately **\$6 billion in regional Western Australia during 2025**, according to the state government.

The latest annual visitor figures also

show that Western Australia received **1.2 million interstate overnight visitors** in 2025, while 8.7 million intrastate overnight visitors travelled within the state. Interstate visitors generated \$3.3 billion in expenditure, while intrastate overnight visitors spent \$7.9 billion.

Day trips added a further 29.1 million visits and \$4.6 billion in expenditure.





Major events generate tourism returns

Major and regional events remained an important component of Western Australia's visitor strategy.

According to Tourism WA's 2025–26 results, the state's events strategy generated **\$2.80 in direct economic return for every \$1 invested**, exceeding the target of \$2.40. Events cited by Tourism WA include the AFL Origin, Perth Sail Grand Prix, WWE Weekend Takeover and NRL matches.

The broader 2025 visitor results

also identified events such as WWE: Crown Jewel, the Bledisloe Cup and the Ashes West Test among the activities supporting tourism demand.

Tourism investment continues

The Western Australian Government has committed **\$46.7 million over the forward estimates for 2026–27** to support tourism initiatives, including destination marketing, investment attraction and infrastructure, business events and related sector development. A further **\$20 million** has been

committed to Aboriginal tourism initiatives.

Tourism WA's longer-term objective is to grow Western Australia's visitor economy to **\$25 billion in visitor expenditure by 2033**, under the WA Visitor Economy Strategy 2033.

The state's tourism statistics are continuing to evolve following Tourism Research Australia's introduction of the new Domestic Tourism Statistics system in 2025. Tourism WA notes that the methodology change has resulted in revisions to inter- and intrastate expenditure and backcast estimates, meaning comparisons with earlier datasets should be made carefully.

Strong platform for further international growth

Western Australia's latest results point to continued expansion in both domestic and international tourism, supported by increased air connectivity, major events, destination marketing and visitor spending across regional areas.

The state government said its next focus will include expanding opportunities in markets such as India and Vietnam while attracting additional aviation services and tourism investment.





Fiji

Records Highest-Ever August Visitor Arrivals with 99,963 Tourists

Fiji recorded its strongest-ever visitor arrivals for the month of August in 2026, with **99,963 visitors** entering the island nation, according to provisional figures from

the Fiji Bureau of Statistics (FBoS).

The August total was **0.2% higher than the 99,737 visitors recorded in August 2025**, and represented a new record for the month. However, arrivals

were 5.5% below July's record monthly total of 105,791. FBoS data also shows a continued upward trend in August arrivals over the past five years, from 70,110 in 2022 to 99,963 this year.



Air travel accounts for almost all arrivals

Of the 99,963 visitors recorded during August, **99,108 arrived by air**, while 855 entered Fiji by sea.

Sea arrivals included 539 seamen travelling on fishing vessels and 316 visitors arriving by yacht. The figures underline the importance of air connectivity to Fiji's international tourism market, with air travellers accounting for the overwhelming majority of monthly arrivals.

Holiday travel remained the dominant reason for visiting Fiji. **80,971 visitors**, equivalent to 81.0% of the August total, travelled for holidays.

Visiting friends and relatives accounted for 7,644 arrivals, or 7.6%, while 1,884 visitors, or 1.9%, travelled for business. A further 8,289 visitors, representing 8.3%, were recorded under other purposes.

Australia remains Fiji's largest source market

Australia continued to provide Fiji's largest visitor market in August, with **43,007 arrivals**, representing 43.0% of the total.

New Zealand was the second-largest market, contributing **25,163 visitors**, or 25.2%, followed by the United States with **11,906**, representing 11.9%.

Other significant markets included continental Europe with 4,508 visitors, China with 3,223, Canada with 2,393 and the United Kingdom with 1,280.

Together, the seven major source markets accounted for **91.5% of**

Fiji's total visitor arrivals during the month.

The detailed FBoS data also records 1,486 visitors from Japan, 153 from South Korea, 405 from India and 84 from Singapore during August.

Strong holiday-led tourism demand

The August figures indicate that leisure travel continues to underpin Fiji's inbound tourism performance.

The number of visitors travelling for holidays in August, at 80,971, was slightly below the 84,777 recorded in July, in line with the overall monthly decline in arrivals. Nevertheless, holiday travellers accounted for more than four-fifths of all visitors entering Fiji during August.

The continued dominance of holiday travel also reflects Fiji's position as a leisure destination for travellers from Australia, New Zealand and North America, its principal international source markets.

Mature travellers form the largest visitor group

Travellers aged **25 to 64 accounted for 64.3%** of all visitor arrivals in August, making the group the largest age category.

Children aged 14 and below represented 14.2% of arrivals, while visitors aged 65 and over accounted for 13.2%. Travellers aged 15 to 24 made up the remaining 8.2%.

The age profile provides an indication of the broad demographic base of Fiji's international visitor market, with working-age adults representing the majority of arrivals.

August follows a record July

Although August arrivals fell from July's record, the latest figures continue a strong run of monthly tourism performance.

Fiji recorded **98,522 visitors in June**, followed by a record **105,791 in July**, the first month in which monthly arrivals exceeded 100,000. August's 99,963 arrivals were therefore the second-highest monthly total recorded so far in 2026.

The latest statistics also show that

August visitor arrivals have increased substantially over the longer term:

August	Visitor arrivals
2022	70,110
2023	87,368
2024	94,787
2025	99,737
2026	99,963

FBoS describes the five-year pattern as an overall upward trend.

Tourism remains central to Fiji's visitor economy

The latest visitor figures come as Fiji continues to operate with visitor volumes close to historically high levels.

FBoS recorded **986,367 international visitor arrivals for the full year 2025**, compared with 982,938 in 2024 and 929,740 in 2023.

The August 2026 result adds to that trajectory, although the monthly data also demonstrates the normal seasonal movement in visitor numbers, with August arrivals below the unusually strong July result.

For Fiji's tourism industry, the continued concentration of arrivals from Australia and New Zealand remains significant, while the United States, Europe, China and Canada provide additional long-haul markets.

A strong platform for the peak travel period

With August delivering another near-100,000 monthly visitor total, Fiji enters the latter part of 2026 with international demand remaining substantial.

The latest figures are **provisional**, and final numbers may be revised. Nevertheless, the August result establishes a new monthly record for the month and maintains the upward five-year trend recorded by the national statistics agency.

For hotels, airlines, tour operators and other tourism businesses, the continued strength of holiday arrivals will remain an important indicator as Fiji moves through the remainder of the year.



From Valletta's honey-coloured streets and the quiet lanes of Mdina to prehistoric temples, picturesque fishing villages and crystal-clear waters, Malta offers travellers a rich blend of heritage, gastronomy and island life.

Malta

A Mediterranean Escape
Where History, Cuisine and
Coastal Beauty Meet

Set in the heart of the Mediterranean, Malta is a destination where centuries of history sit alongside a lively contemporary culture. Its compact size makes it possible to experience fortified cities, archaeological treasures, coastal landscapes and distinctive local cuisine within a single holiday, while the neighbouring islands of Gozo and Comino offer further opportunities to explore.

For visitors seeking more than a traditional beach break, the Maltese Islands combine cultural discovery with outdoor adventure, leisurely dining and a welcoming Mediterranean atmosphere.

Valletta: The capital of culture and history

A visit to Malta often begins in Valletta, the island's historic capital. Recognised for its architectural heritage, the city is characterised by narrow streets, limestone buildings, ornate churches and traditional enclosed wooden balconies. Its position above the Grand Harbour provides striking views across one of the Mediterranean's most historically significant waterfronts.

Valletta rewards exploration on foot. Visitors can wander through its streets, discover independent shops and cafés, and visit cultural landmarks that reflect the island's complex past. St John's

Co-Cathedral is a major highlight, particularly for its richly decorated Baroque interior and Caravaggio's celebrated painting *The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist*.

The city's museums, gardens and waterfront viewpoints provide a varied introduction to Malta's history, while its restaurants and contemporary cultural venues demonstrate how the capital continues to evolve.

Mdina and the Three Cities: Discovering Malta's past

Beyond Valletta, the medieval walled city of Mdina offers a quieter perspective on the island. Known as the Silent City, Mdina is distinguished





by its narrow lanes, historic palaces, imposing gateways and panoramic views across the countryside. Its atmosphere is particularly appealing in the late afternoon and evening, when the streets become quieter and the limestone architecture takes on warmer hues.

Nearby Rabat adds another dimension to a visit, with historic sites, churches and opportunities to sample Maltese food.

Across the Grand Harbour from Valletta lie the Three Cities—Birgu, Senglea and Cospicua. These historic harbour towns offer a glimpse into Malta's maritime heritage, with fortified walls, traditional streets, waterfront promenades and historic buildings. Birgu, also known as Vittoriosa, is home to the Inquisitor's Palace, a significant heritage attraction that explores an important chapter in the island's religious and social history.

Together, Valletta, Mdina and the Three Cities reveal how Malta's strategic Mediterranean location has shaped its architecture, identity and cultural traditions over many centuries.

Prehistoric temples and extraordinary heritage

Malta's history reaches far beyond its medieval streets and Baroque landmarks. The islands are home to prehistoric temple complexes that offer insight into societies that flourished thousands of years ago.

The archaeological sites of Ħaġar Qim and Mnajdra, on Malta's southern coast, are among the most notable. Their monumental stone structures, carefully arranged spaces and remarkable setting above the sea make them essential stops for travellers interested in archaeology and ancient civilisations.

The sites form part of Malta's internationally recognised heritage, alongside other important historic and cultural locations across the islands. Visitors can combine a temple visit with time exploring the surrounding countryside and coastline.

For those interested in art and architecture, Malta's churches,

palaces, museums and fortifications provide further opportunities to understand the influences that have shaped the destination—from ancient Mediterranean cultures to the legacy of the Knights of St John.

Blue Grotto and the beauty of the coastline

Malta's appeal extends well beyond its historic towns. The coastline features rocky inlets, swimming spots, dramatic cliffs, caves and clear blue waters that invite visitors to explore the islands from the sea as well as from land.

The Blue Grotto, near Wied iż-Żurrieq, is among the best-known coastal attractions. Its sea caves

and changing shades of blue create a memorable setting, with boat excursions offering a closer view when weather and sea conditions permit.

Elsewhere, visitors can choose from sandy beaches, rocky swimming areas and secluded coves. Boat trips, kayaking, swimming and coastal walks offer different ways to experience the Mediterranean landscape. Malta is also a popular destination for diving, with underwater caves, reefs and wrecks attracting divers of varying experience levels.

The smaller islands add to the appeal. Gozo offers a more rural atmosphere, with countryside, villages and coastal scenery, while Comino is known for its striking turquoise waters





and the Blue Lagoon. Visitors should check access arrangements and local conditions before travelling to popular swimming areas.

A destination for food lovers

Maltese cuisine is an essential part of the travel experience. Influenced by neighbouring Sicily and wider Mediterranean and North African traditions, the local food culture combines seasonal produce, seafood, bread, cheese, olive oil and recipes passed down through generations.

Traditional dishes provide an introduction to the islands' character. Pastizzi—savoury pastries commonly filled with ricotta or a pea mixture—are a popular snack, while Maltese bread, local cheeses and regional specialities

offer further opportunities to explore the culinary heritage.

Seafood is a natural feature of island dining. In Marsaxlokk, a traditional fishing village known for its colourful luzzu boats, visitors can enjoy a waterfront setting and restaurants serving fish and other Mediterranean dishes. The village is also a place to experience a more traditional side of coastal life.

Malta's dining scene extends from casual cafés and family-run establishments to contemporary restaurants and fine-dining venues recognised by the MICHELIN Guide. Local wines and vineyards add another dimension for visitors interested in food and drink, while seasonal ingredients and regional recipes provide a connection between the island's landscape and its cuisine.

Gozo and Comino: A different pace of island life

A trip to Malta can be complemented by time on Gozo, its neighbouring island known for its countryside, villages, heritage sites and rugged coastline. The island offers a slower pace, making it attractive to visitors seeking walking routes, rural experiences and a break from busier urban areas.

Victoria, Gozo's main town, is a useful base for exploring local markets and historic attractions, including the fortified Citadel. Across the island, small villages, churches, traditional farmhouses and coastal viewpoints provide a sense of place distinct from Malta's more urbanised areas.

Comino, by contrast, is best known for its coastal scenery and clear waters. It is a popular destination for day trips, swimming and boat excursions. As visitor numbers can be high at peak times, planning ahead and checking any access requirements can help make the experience more enjoyable.

Where heritage meets contemporary hospitality

Malta's accommodation options range

from historic boutique properties and converted townhouses to luxury hotels, coastal resorts and modern lifestyle stays. Travellers can choose a base according to their priorities, whether that means staying close to Valletta's cultural attractions, enjoying the nightlife and restaurants of St Julian's, or seeking a quieter coastal retreat.

The islands also offer a calendar of cultural events, village festas, concerts and festivals throughout the year. These celebrations provide opportunities to experience local traditions, music, food and community life beyond the main sightseeing attractions.

While summer attracts visitors looking for beaches and warm-weather activities, Malta's combination of heritage, gastronomy and outdoor experiences makes it appealing for cultural breaks and short escapes at other times of year too. Travellers should consider seasonal temperatures, opening hours and event schedules when planning their visit.

Planning a memorable Maltese holiday

Malta's compact geography allows

visitors to combine several experiences in one trip, but a little planning helps make the most of the islands. Valletta and the Three Cities can be explored together, while Mdina and Rabat make a natural pairing. The southern coast combines the Blue Grotto with the prehistoric temples, and separate time can be set aside for Gozo or Comino.

Comfortable walking shoes are useful for historic streets, archaeological sites and uneven coastal paths. Boat excursions depend on weather and sea conditions, and popular restaurants or guided heritage experiences may require advance reservations.

Above all, Malta is a destination best enjoyed by balancing its headline attractions with time to explore at a slower pace: lingering over a local meal, walking through a quiet historic lane, visiting a village market or watching the light change across the harbour.

With its layers of history, distinctive cuisine, dramatic coastline and varied island experiences, Malta offers a compelling Mediterranean holiday for culture seekers, food enthusiasts, outdoor travellers and those simply looking to unwind by the sea.





10 Spain's

standout attractions:

From sunny coastlines to rich cultural traditions

From year-round sunshine and celebrated cuisine to vibrant festivals, historic landmarks and diverse landscapes, Spain offers travellers a wide range of experiences across its regions.



Spain's appeal lies in its diversity. Whether visitors are seeking a beach escape, a cultural city break, an active outdoor holiday or a restorative wellness retreat, the country offers experiences to suit a broad range of interests, travel styles and budgets.

Spain's official tourism website

highlights 10 defining features that help make the destination attractive to international visitors.

1. A climate made for outdoor exploration

With close to 3,000 hours of sunshine a year in some areas, Spain offers plenty of opportunities to enjoy

the outdoors. The Mediterranean climate shapes much of the country, while the Canary Islands enjoy mild conditions throughout the year. The Costa del Sol in Málaga and Las Palmas de Gran Canaria are highlighted for their average annual temperatures of around 20.7°C.





From coastal walks and alfresco dining to sightseeing and outdoor sports, the weather is a major part of Spain's appeal.

2. A celebrated food and wine culture

Spanish gastronomy is a central part of the travel experience. Tapas, Iberian cured ham, paella, traditional stews and regional wines offer visitors an introduction to the country's culinary heritage.

The experience changes from region to region: travellers can explore the lively food streets of Logroño, enjoy seafood in Galicia's Rías Baixas or sample seasonal calçots in Catalonia. Across Spain, local markets, restaurants and beachside eateries provide opportunities to discover regional ingredients and traditions.

3. Festivals that bring cities to life

Spain's calendar is filled with festivals that showcase its music,

customs and community spirit. Among the best-known celebrations are Carnival in Tenerife, Holy Week in Seville, Las Fallas in Valencia and the San Fermín festival in Pamplona.

These events offer visitors a way to experience local traditions and public celebrations first-hand. As dates and programmes vary, travellers should check official tourism and event websites when planning a trip around a particular festival.

4. A rich cultural and historical legacy

Spain's history reflects the influence of numerous civilisations, including the Phoenicians, Romans, Celts and Moors. Their legacies can be found in architecture, archaeological sites, museums and living cultural traditions throughout the country.

Highlights include the prehistoric cave art of Altamira in Cantabria, the Alhambra in Granada and Valencia's City of Arts and Sciences. Visitors can

also explore Spain's artistic heritage through flamenco and destinations associated with artists such as Pablo Picasso.

5. Landscapes ranging from deserts to dramatic coastlines

Spain's varied geography offers striking contrasts, from mountain ranges and rugged coastlines to unusual rock formations and semi-arid landscapes. Travellers can explore the desert scenery of Almería, admire the geological formations of Las Médulas in León or visit the dramatic cliffs and beach at As Catedrais, near Ribadeo in Galicia.

These landscapes create opportunities for photography, walking, nature-based travel and quieter escapes beyond the country's major cities.

6. A welcoming approach to visitors

Hospitality is an important part





of Spain's tourism identity. Visitors can experience it through local food traditions, neighbourhood cafés, family-run businesses and community celebrations.

For many travellers, these everyday encounters help make a destination

memorable, offering opportunities to connect with local life as well as its major attractions.

7. Shopping across styles and budgets

Madrid and Barcelona are leading destinations for shopping, combining

international brands and contemporary fashion with independent designers, vintage stores, boutiques and traditional markets.

Whether looking for luxury labels, locally made products or distinctive souvenirs, visitors can find a wide range of retail experiences. Travellers planning dedicated shopping trips can also explore the cities' different commercial districts and markets.

8. Active holidays and adventure sports

Spain offers extensive opportunities for active travel, including hiking, cycling, horse riding and adventure sports. Its varied terrain allows visitors to choose between coastal routes, mountain trails and countryside itineraries.

The country also hosts sporting events throughout the year, including marathons. Weather and trail conditions vary by region and season, so visitors should select activities and routes appropriate to their experience and the time of year.

9. Wellness and relaxation

Wellness tourism provides another way to experience Spain. Visitors can choose from spa facilities, thermal bathing, health and beauty treatments, and wellness experiences in coastal and urban destinations.

The official tourism website points to more than 60 spas across the country, giving travellers options for combining relaxation with cultural sightseeing, nature or a longer restorative stay.

10. A destination defined by contrasts

Spain's diversity is one of its strongest tourism assets. Visitors can combine beaches with historic cities, outdoor activities with gastronomy, or lively festivals with time in quieter rural areas.

With experiences spanning different regions, interests and price points, Spain lends itself to a range of itineraries—from short city breaks to extended journeys that reveal the country's varied landscapes, cultures and traditions.



India to host Routes Asia 2027 in New Delhi

India is set to host Routes Asia 2027 in New Delhi from March 16 to 18, with the three-day aviation event scheduled to take place at Bharat Mandapam. The Airports Authority of India (AAI) will host the 24th edition of the regional route development forum.

The curtain raiser for Routes Asia 2027 was unveiled in New Delhi on September 29, bringing together representatives from 28 embassies and aviation industry stakeholders. The event highlighted the opportunities for airlines, airports, tourism authorities and destinations to strengthen connectivity and develop new air routes across Asia and beyond.

The event is expected to



attract more than 115 airlines and representatives from more than 55 countries, alongside airports, tourism authorities and other aviation stakeholders. More than 2,000 delegates are expected to attend, including senior decision-makers from across the aviation and tourism sectors.

Unveiling the curtain-raiser plaque, Union Minister for Civil Aviation Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu presented India's vision for the event under the theme **"Bharat Aviation Rising: Inclusive Growth – Connecting Asia & Beyond."** He highlighted the need for additional airline capacity, new routes and stronger connectivity as India continues to expand its aviation infrastructure.

"Routes Asia 2027 is coming to the right place, at the right time, with the right opportunity! There is room for

more capacity, more airlines and more routes," Naidu said.

The Minister said India is working towards becoming the world's third-largest aviation market and noted the country's expanding airport network. According to the government, India currently has more than 166 airports and plans to develop another 100 over the next decade. Naidu also highlighted the potential of hub-and-spoke connectivity to link more Indian cities with domestic and international markets.

He further pointed to opportunities arising from India's growing aviation engagement with Southeast Asia and stressed the importance of improving connectivity to Tier-II cities, strengthening international hubs and developing new routes.

Samir Kumar Sinha, Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, underlined aviation's wider role in connecting people and markets, facilitating trade and supporting economic activity. He also highlighted the importance of making international travel more accessible while strengthening partnerships across India's aviation ecosystem.

Routes Asia 2027 will provide a platform for airlines, airports and destinations to hold face-to-face meetings, explore new route opportunities and develop network strategies. The official Routes programme includes conference sessions, airline meetings and dedicated networking opportunities focused on the future of air service development in the Asia-Pacific region.

India formally assumed hosting responsibilities for Routes Asia 2027 from China West Airport Group at the conclusion of Routes Asia 2026 in Xi'an, with AAI receiving the hosting baton in April 2026.

With New Delhi serving as the host city, Routes Asia 2027 is expected to bring together aviation and tourism stakeholders to discuss route development, network expansion and opportunities to strengthen connectivity between India, the wider Asia-Pacific region and international markets.

Centara

expands into Nepal with

Himalayan Hideaway Resort

Pokhara

Centara Hotels & Resorts has expanded its presence in South Asia with the opening of **Himalayan Hideaway Resort Pokhara, The Centara Collection**, its first property in Nepal.

Set in the hills of **Kaskikot**, approximately 35 minutes from Pokhara, the 42-room resort combines mountain views, Nepali cultural experiences and Thai-inspired hospitality. The property overlooks the Annapurna range and





Machhapuchhre, also known as Fishtail Mountain, and is positioned as a base for wellness, outdoor activities and cultural discovery.

The resort officially opened in January 2026, marking Centara's entry into Nepal. Its grand opening was attended by tourism and hospitality representatives, including senior representatives of the Nepal Tourism Board, Gandaki Province and Centara Hotels & Resorts.

Mountain setting and locally inspired accommodation

Himalayan Hideaway Resort Pokhara features **42 rooms, suites and villas**, ranging from 75 to 128 square metres. Accommodation categories include Deluxe Garden Terrace rooms, Skylight Suites, One Bedroom Villas and One Bedroom Pool Villas.

The interiors combine contemporary amenities with warm

timber finishes and Nepali design influences. Depending on the category, guests have access to private gardens, balconies or private pools, while suites and villas feature separate living areas.

The resort's hillside setting provides views across the surrounding Himalayan landscape, while its location also offers access to the Sarangkot Loop Trail and village experiences in Kaskikot.



Wellness and Himalayan experiences

Wellness is a central element of the resort's offering. Facilities include **Cense by SPA Cenvaree**, yoga sessions, sound healing, signature Thai massage treatments, an infrared sauna, a gym and an outdoor swimming pool.

Guests can also join guided village walks and cultural activities designed to introduce visitors to local traditions and the heritage of Kaskikot. Adventure options in the wider Pokhara area include trekking, paragliding and flights offering aerial views of the Annapurna region.

The resort's approach reflects Centara's positioning of the property as more than a conventional mountain hotel, with accommodation, wellness and cultural experiences designed around the destination.

Dining draws on Nepal and Asia

The resort's culinary offering spans

local Nepali cuisine, Indian and wider Asian flavours.

The all-day dining restaurant, **The Bistro**, serves Nepali and international dishes, while **Thai Kitchen** focuses on Indian, Chinese and Thai cuisine. The Summit Bar & Lounge provides cocktails and light dishes, while the Tea House offers locally sourced Nepali teas and snacks.

Guests can also take part in cooking classes covering traditional Nepali dishes such as momo, sel roti and yomari, alongside Thai specialties including tom yum, green curry and pad Thai.

Wellness retreat available through December 2027

Centara is currently promoting a **Holistic Wellness Retreat** at the property for stays through **22 December 2027**.

The package includes daily holistic breakfast, spa massage, infrared sauna and guided yoga, along with a

sunrise hike to Kaskikot, a personalised wellness dinner, afternoon tea, wellness amenities, Wi-Fi and round-trip airport transfers.

The offer reinforces the resort's focus on slower-paced Himalayan travel, combining wellness activities with opportunities to explore the surrounding landscape and local culture.

A new hospitality option in Pokhara

The opening gives international travellers another accommodation option in Pokhara, a gateway to the Annapurna region, while extending Centara's portfolio into Nepal for the first time.

By combining mountain views, locally influenced design, wellness programmes, outdoor experiences and destination-focused dining, Himalayan Hideaway Resort Pokhara is positioned around a more immersive stay in the Himalayan foothills.

Spain welcomes 70.36 million international tourists in first eight months of 2026

International arrivals rose 9.2% in August to 12.26 million, with the United States, Italy and Switzerland among the markets recording strong growth. Andalucía led gains among Spain's major destinations.

Spain welcomed 70.36 million international tourists between January and August 2026, an increase of 5.4% year on year, as visitor arrivals accelerated in August, according to figures attributed to the country's National Statistics Institute (INE).

International arrivals reached 12.26 million in August, up 9.2% compared with the same month in 2025. The increase exceeded the 2.9% annual growth reported for August last year, pointing to stronger summer demand across several source markets.

The United Kingdom remained Spain's largest source market in August, contributing 2.41 million visitors, up 9.3% year on year. France ranked second with 2.06 million arrivals, an increase of 2.1%, while Germany accounted for approximately 1.36 million visitors, up 4.5%.

Other European markets also delivered growth. Arrivals from Italy increased 10.6% to 893,562, while Portugal contributed 676,376 visitors, up 3.7%. Switzerland recorded particularly strong growth, with arrivals rising 29.3% to 249,032.

Demand from outside Europe strengthened further. Visitors from the United States increased 31.9% to 481,911, while arrivals from the rest of the Americas rose 14.1% to 550,334. Visitors grouped under the rest-of-world category increased 16% to 701,361.

Accommodation and travel patterns

Commercial accommodation, including hotels and rented properties, accounted for 10.19 million international tourists in August, up 7.8% year on year. Hotels received 8.04 million visitors, an increase of 6.6%, while rental housing recorded 1.5 million, up 13.7%.

Non-market accommodation, including stays in private holiday homes and with friends or relatives, accounted for 2.05 million visitors, an increase of 16.3%. Stays in visitors' own holiday homes rose 15.6%, while visits involving accommodation with family or friends increased 13%.

Independent travel remained the more common option. Nearly 9.2 million tourists travelled without a package tour in August, up 9.3%, while approximately 3.1 million travelled on package holidays, an increase of 8.8%. Stays of four to seven nights remained the most common duration, accounting for more than 5.8 million visitors.



Balearic Islands lead August arrivals

The Balearic Islands remained Spain's leading destination in August, attracting 2.5 million international tourists, equivalent to 21.2% of the national total. Cataluña followed with 2.3 million visitors, or 19.4%, while Andalucía received 2 million, accounting for 16.8%.

Andalucía recorded the strongest growth among these three destinations, with arrivals increasing 21.3% year on year. Cataluña rose 9.1%, while the Balearic Islands registered more moderate growth of 2.6%.

The Valencian Community welcomed 1.6 million international tourists, up 9.4%, while the Canary Islands recorded 1.2 million, a marginal increase of 0.3%. Madrid received 776,867 visitors, up 13.2%.

Cataluña leads year-to-date arrivals

For the January–August period, Cataluña remained Spain's most visited autonomous community, welcoming 14.3 million international tourists, up 3.9% year on year. The Balearic Islands followed with 11.7 million arrivals, an increase of 2%, while Andalucía recorded 11.08 million, up 10.4%.

The Valencian Community received 9.3 million visitors, an increase of 9%, and the Canary Islands welcomed 10.2 million, down 0.5%. Madrid recorded 6.5 million international tourists, up 10%. The figures indicate that Spain's tourism growth is being supported by a broad mix of European and long-haul markets, alongside stronger performance in several mainland destinations. August's increase in arrivals, particularly from the United States and selected European markets, reinforced the country's positive year-to-date trend.

Israel Tourism targets Indian travellers with three-city trade roadshow

The Delhi event brought together more than 80 travel industry participants as Israel Tourism seeks to rebuild visitor numbers, strengthen trade partnerships and broaden the destination's appeal beyond religious travel.

Israel Tourism has launched a three-city roadshow in India, beginning in New Delhi on 12 October 2026, to strengthen ties with the country's outbound travel trade and promote a wider range of tourism experiences.

The Delhi event attracted more than 80 participants, including representatives from destination management companies Amaris Tours and Events and Satguru Travel. The programme provided a platform for Israeli tourism representatives and Indian travel professionals to discuss destination offerings, itinerary development and opportunities for future collaboration.

Galit Hoffman, Consul for Tourism Affairs in India, presented Israel's tourism proposition, highlighting its cultural, coastal, urban and natural attractions alongside its established religious tourism offering.

Air connectivity featured prominently in discussions. Hoffman welcomed the reported resumption of five weekly Air India flights between Delhi and Tel Aviv, describing the development as positive for travel trade engagement. She also referred to the return of services by international carriers, including United Airlines and Delta Air Lines, as signs of improving connectivity.

However, airline schedules remain subject to operational changes, and travellers and agents should confirm current services before making bookings.

Rebuilding India's visitor market

Israel Tourism is aiming to restore Indian arrivals to pre-pandemic levels and grow the market further. Hoffman



said the destination had welcomed approximately 70,000 Indian visitors annually before the pandemic, a figure the tourism office hopes to regain. The longer-term ambition is to attract 100,000 Indian visitors a year.

The recovery remains dependent on wider travel conditions. Nitin Patni, destination management company manager at Satguru Travel, said Indian visitor numbers had declined since the war began but had shown signs of improvement in recent months. He estimated that growth of around 5–10% could be possible, depending on how the situation develops.

Satguru Travel has continued promoting Israel through travel exhibitions and other industry platforms, Patni said, while looking for further improvement as conditions allow.

Trade engagement and destination training

The Delhi roadshow is the first of three planned events, with Mumbai

and Bengaluru next on the schedule. Israel Tourism also plans to conduct a webinar in December for travel agents unable to attend the in-person sessions.

Additional trade development initiatives include an online learning programme and familiarisation trips intended to give agents first-hand experience of the destination. Hoffman said two familiarisation trips were planned for November 2026, with a further five anticipated in 2027.

India is among Israel's 10 leading source markets and is its largest market in Asia, according to Hoffman. The United States remains the destination's largest source market, followed by several European countries.

Promoting Israel beyond religious tourism

While Israel remains closely associated with religious and pilgrimage travel, the tourism office is seeking to broaden its appeal among Indian visitors.

Hoffman highlighted Tel Aviv's beaches, nightlife, art galleries, cultural attractions and innovation sector, alongside Jerusalem, the Dead Sea, northern Israel's mountains and the desert. She recommended that travellers spend at least two days in Tel Aviv as part of a wider itinerary.

By combining destination promotion with direct trade meetings, training and familiarisation programmes, Israel Tourism aims to equip Indian travel professionals with a broader understanding of the country's tourism offering and support the gradual recovery of visitor demand.

EXPERIENCE

THE BEST OF TRAVEL AT

YOUR FINGERTIPS

SUBSCRIBE TO THE DIGITAL ISSUE



Scan this QR code to
get the latest issue of
TravelSpan Magazine
on your tablet or
mobile device!

AVAILABLE ON



@travelspanindia



travel span



travelspan1



@travelspan1

Car Insured 

Health Insured 

BUSINESS INSURED



ASEGŌ



ACT NOW!

Scan to request a callback.

Note: Asego Global Assistance Limited ("Asego") provides travel assistance and facilitates business protection solutions, including liability cover and cyber insurance. Insurance products are underwritten by IRDAI-authorized insurers and are subject to solicitation. This material is for general information only and does not create any binding obligation unless confirmed by an authorized representative of Asego. All insurance policies are distributed under the Corporate Agency of Asego Insurance LLP (IRDAI Reg. No. CA0776) and are governed solely by the terms, conditions, and exclusions of the respective insurers. Asego shall not be liable for denial of claims, delays, or deficiencies in services provided by third parties.