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# Editor's Letter

In childhood, how often did our parents warn us about strangers? "Don't talk to them, stay away!" they'd say. And yet, here we are, years later, actively seeking out strangers- meeting them, learning from them, and sometimes even finding the best pieces of ourselves through them. Isn't that the very essence of what we do in the travel industry?

Every day, whether at trade shows, networking events, or simply during our journeys, we cross paths with strangers who unknowingly leave us with new perspectives. A passing conversation can spark inspiration; a fleeting connection can shift our understanding. And when these interactions come from far-off horizons, they become even more profound.

For me, some of the most enriching conversations happen while traveling. When I sit with people from around the world and hear their vision for India as a global tourism powerhouse, my heart swells with pride. "We're just getting started, I often say, especially in the luxury space. And every time, they nod in agreement. After all, India's story is one of resilience and reinvention-its skilled hospitality workforce is already setting new global standards, and the best is yet to come.

As we edge closer to 2025, let's pause to reflect. Think of how far you've come this year, the milestones you've reached, the barriers you've broken. And if something still feels incomplete, remember, we still have two months. Time enough to tie up loose ends or begin something new.

India, too, has been on a transformative journey. This year saw some of the world's most illustrious hospitality brands debuting in our country, and 2025 promises even more. My October was quieter on the travel front as I soaked in the festive spirit of Delhi, but my team? Oh, they were unstoppable bringing you grandeur from Georgia to Greece and curating the finest luxury stays around the world.

Our November issue, the much-anticipated WTM special, celebrates the diversity of India's states and their incredible offerings. From traditions to innovations, it's a tapestry of everything that makes India a jewel in the world's travel crown.

We hope you enjoy reading this edition as much as we've loved creating it. Your feedback means the world to us, so don't hesitate to drop a line at [Bharti@travelturtle.world](mailto:Bharti@travelturtle.world).

As travel teaches us every day, "A journey is best measured in friends, not miles" (Tim Cahill). Here's to many more journeys, friends, and memories to come.

Happy reading!

*Bharti Sharma*

**Bharti Sharma**  
Editor

   : [travelturlemag](https://www.instagram.com/travelturlemag)







# Travel Turtle Team

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Editor: **Bharti Sharma**

Executive Director: **Sudipta Saha**

Bureau Chief (West): **Naina Nath**

Sub-Editor: **Tripti Jain**

Contributing Editors:

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**Ameet Kaur**

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Photographer: **Khurshed Ahmed**

Circulation: **Pradeep Kumar**

Accounts: **Dinesh Kumar**



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**Saudia promotes global connectivity at Spectacular Saudi event**

Saudia, the national flag carrier of Saudi Arabia, announces its participation in the Spectacular Saudi event, organised by the Saudi Travel Authority. This 9-day exhibition took place in Mumbai, India, and featured various cultural and promotional activities designed to bring a piece of Saudi Arabia to India, offering a unique cultural experience. The event was open to the public from September 25th to October 2nd.



**Fly24hrs all set for expansion, opening new offices across India in 2024**

Fly24hrs is poised for major growth in the coming year with the opening of new offices nationwide. This strategic expansion reflects the company's commitment to delivering unparalleled customer service and tailored travel experiences to a wider audience across India. Mr Vaseem Parvez, COO, Fly24hrs Holiday Pvt. Ltd. has announced the company's 4th Anniversary Sale from 1st to 31st Oct 2024. 400 Free air tickets with upto 100 per cent Cashback on every flight ticket booking on Fly24hrs's online B2B portal.



**GRNconnect signs MoU with ASITA Indonesia as technology partner**

GRNconnect, a global B2B travel service provider, announces the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with ASITA (Association of the Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies) Indonesia. This strategic partnership marks a significant milestone for both organisations, as GRNconnect will serve as the official technology partner for ASITA's vast network of members.

**Millennials in India spend 34 per cent on travel, leading Gen Z, Gen X, and boomers**

According to the 2024 travel benefits and Customer Engagement Report by Collinson International, Millennials in India are spending more on travel than any other generation. On average, Millennials are spending \$6,031 annually on travel. This is much higher compared to Gen Z, Gen X, and Baby Boomers, who spend \$2,622, \$3,059, and \$2,600, respectively, each year.





**Building cultural connection between Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh**

Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board's participates in India Travel Mart, Varanasi with a focus on Kashi-Ujjain Connectivity and New Tourism Circuits. The Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board will be actively participating in the India Travel Mart (ITM), held at Deendayal Hastkala Sankul, Varanasi, from October 17 to 19. Five key stakeholders from Madhya Pradesh's tourism sector took part in this mart. This event served as a significant platform for promoting tourism between Madhya Pradesh and other states.



**Taiwan Tourism Administration hosts Leisure FAM Trip and Roadshow**

In a major stride to reinforce its foothold in the Indian travel market, the Taiwan Tourism Administration successfully hosted an influential familiarization (FAM) trip for leading leisure travel agents from key Indian cities. This immersive six-day FAM tour, held from 23rd to 28th September 2024, was accompanied by a highly successful roadshow in Mumbai, reaffirming Taiwan's appeal as a premier leisure and incentive destination for the discerning Indian traveller.



**Balitrip Wisata expands presence with New Branch Office in Mumbai**

The new office, staffed by a dedicated local team, will manage all operations and quotations, offering seamless support to partners in Mumbai. The branch is set to oversee daily functions, with sales processes continuing to be handled at this location. This move underlines Balitrip Wisata's commitment to strengthening its presence in the Indian market and catering to the growing demand for personalised travel experiences.

**The Maldives is nominated for WTA's**



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**MMPRC as the World's Leading Tourist Board**

**Maldives nominated for six titles including World's Leading Destination 2024**

The Maldives has been nominated for six awards in the prestigious World Travel Awards (WTA) World's Leading Category, including the coveted title of 'World's Leading Destination 2024.' In addition to five nominations for the Maldives as a destination, Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC/Visit Maldives) is once again nominated for the title of 'World's Leading Tourist Board 2024.'





**VFS Global appoints to offer new Indonesia e-Visa on Arrival service to Indians**

The Directorate General of Immigration under the Ministry of Law and Human Rights, Indonesia has appointed VFS Global, the world's largest outsourcing and technology services specialist for governments and diplomatic missions, as the exclusive private service provider for Electronic Visa on Arrival (e-VoA) to make the process seamless, promote inbound tourism, increase investments into Indonesia, and enhance overall traveller experience.



**Sentosa Development Corporation and STIC Travel Group Partner to launch immersive educational programmes**

Sentosa Development Corporation (SDC) and STIC Travel Group (STIC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance Sentosa's standing as a sustainable destination in the Indian market. This one-year partnership will seek to create innovative educational experiences targeted at students in India, highlighting Sentosa's sustainable practices and diverse ecosystems.

**NCL unveils more to do abroad Norwegian Aqua and Norwegian Luna**

The soon-to-debut ships will feature the Company's first-ever Aqua and Luna Game Zone, an all-new gaming experience and evolution of NCL's popular Galaxy Pavilion and arcade venues. The sister vessels will boast even more expanded and redesigned spaces, including Bull's Eye Bar, a now complimentary experience with interactive dart games and a new full-service bar; and Tee Time, a supercharged version of mini golf where guests can play 12 interactive holes across two decks.



**Club Med's bold expansion plans as it approaches its 75th Anniversary**

As Club Med gears up for its 75th anniversary in 2025, the world's most desirable holiday lifestyle brand is on an exciting expansion journey. With plans to open nine new resorts between 2024 and 2026, travellers can look forward to exploring extraordinary destinations and experiencing Club Med's premium all-inclusive luxury like never before.





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Indore: +91 73 1491 1374

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LIVE WIRE

# THERAPY TOURISM

The Healing Journey Beyond Wellness



In a world that moves at breakneck speed, where deadlines loom, notifications never cease, and self-care often takes a backseat, a new form of travel is rising ie Therapy Tourism. While wellness tourism has been the go-to buzzword, therapy tourism dives deeper, addressing the growing need for emotional, physical, and mental healing. It's not just about spa days or yoga retreats; it's about hitting the reset button and unlocking the door to a more harmonious way of living. So let's explore why therapy tourism is becoming a necessity, the types of therapies offered by resorts, and the growing trends that are reshaping this emerging industry.

-Bharti Sharma





## Beyond Pampering

We live in a time where stress has become a normalised part of daily existence. The World Health Organization (WHO) has dubbed stress as the 'health epidemic of the 21st century'. This stress manifests in myriad ways, whether it be anxiety, burnout, or chronic physical ailments. Enter therapy tourism, a natural extension of wellness travel, but with a more focused, therapeutic approach.

For many, the standard vacation of sightseeing, sunbathing, and indulging in local cuisine no longer suffices. People crave deeper experiences, seeking not just to unwind but to truly heal. Therapy tourism allows individuals to take a conscious break from their chaotic lives, creating the space to confront emotional, psychological, and physical challenges with the help of professional guidance. Whether it's a week-long detox program or an intensive therapy retreat, travellers are turning their vacations into transformative experiences that offer long-term benefits.

## A Boom in Wellness Travel

The rise in therapy tourism is intrinsically linked to the surge in wellness travel. According to the Global Wellness Institute (GWI), wellness tourism is expected to grow by 21 per cent annually through 2025, with a projected value of over \$1.2 trillion globally. This growth is not just driven by traditional wellness seekers but also by a new wave of travellers who are recognizing the power of therapy-based vacations.

The demand for mental health services has skyrocketed in recent years. According to a report by the American Psychological Association, the need for mental health services saw a 30 per cent increase in 2022 alone. This has prompted many resorts and destinations to cater specifically to these needs by offering therapeutic services ranging from clinical treatments to holistic healing methods.

What's driving this trend? The modern traveller is increasingly prioritizing mental and emotional well-being. Whether it's millennials searching for meaning beyond materialism or baby boomers seeking to ease the aches and pains of aging, therapy tourism offers a diverse range of solutions. In Europe, for instance, countries like Germany and Austria are seeing a spike in travellers booking 'Kur' retreats, traditional spa treatments combined with medical care. On the other hand, in the U.S., luxury retreats like Canyon Ranch and Miraval have seamlessly integrated therapy services into their wellness offerings.







## Healing Beyond the Surface

One of the fascinating aspects of therapy tourism is its diversity. Resorts and retreat centers worldwide are expanding their menus, offering an array of therapies that cater to individual needs. Here are some of the most popular therapies you'll find:

**Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** With the increase in anxiety and depression rates, CBT-based retreats have gained popularity. These retreats often include one-on-one sessions with trained psychologists, coupled with mindfulness and meditation exercises to help individuals reframe negative thought patterns.

**Ayurvedic Therapies:** Rooted in ancient Indian healing practices, Ayurveda focuses on balancing the body's energy systems. Many luxury resorts in India and Sri Lanka, such as Ananda in the Himalayas, offer tailored Ayurvedic treatments designed to detoxify the body and rejuvenate the mind.

**Somatic Therapy:** Focusing on the connection between the mind and body, somatic therapy helps release trauma stored in the body. It involves physical exercises, breathwork, and touch-based therapies. Resorts like Esalen in California have integrated

somatic work with their wellness programs, helping guests overcome deep-seated emotional blocks.

**Digital Detox Programs:** In today's hyper-connected world, digital addiction is a real issue. Many therapy retreats now offer digital detox packages where guests hand over their devices and immerse themselves in nature, mindfulness, and therapeutic activities to regain mental clarity.

**Trauma-Informed Therapy:** With increasing awareness around mental health, trauma-informed therapies are gaining traction. These retreats, led by experienced therapists, offer a safe space for individuals to process past trauma and embark on a journey of healing.

## Learning from the best

One shining example of therapy tourism in action is the Chiva-Som Wellness Resort in Thailand. Known globally for its award-winning programs, the resort has blended traditional wellness practices with cutting-edge therapy offerings. Guests can embark on personalized journeys that address physical, mental, and emotional health, incorporating everything from craniosacral therapy to mental health consultations. Their approach has yielded significant results, with many guests reporting

a complete overhaul in their mental health after attending their programs.

The success of Chiva-Som is indicative of a broader trend in which destinations are shifting focus from traditional pampering services to more profound therapeutic experiences. By creating individualized programs, such resorts offer long-lasting benefits that go far beyond the typical vacation.

## The Future of Therapy Tourism

As more travellers seek experiences that nurture their mental, emotional, and physical well-being, therapy tourism is poised to evolve into a multi-faceted industry. Destinations worldwide are taking note, integrating clinical mental health services, holistic therapies, and wellness-focused activities into their offerings.

Beyond individual travellers, corporations are beginning to recognize the value of therapy

tourism for their employees. Corporate wellness retreats are becoming popular, with companies sending employees on therapy-based vacations to prevent burnout and improve overall productivity. This shift is not just limited to high-stress industries; even tech giants like Google and Facebook have been known to offer wellness retreats as part of their employee benefits packages.

## Necessity or Luxury?

In an era where stress and mental health challenges have become part and parcel of everyday life, therapy tourism emerges as more than just a luxury, it's a necessity. With its combination of mental health therapies, holistic healing, and deep relaxation, therapy tourism provides travellers with the tools to not only recharge but also to realign with their purpose and well-being.

As we move forward, the line between wellness and therapy will continue to blur, creating opportunities for deeper, more transformative travel experiences. Whether you're seeking to heal from past trauma, disconnect from digital overload, or simply find balance in a fast-paced world, therapy tourism offers a path to wellness that transcends the ordinary vacation.

So, as you pack your bags for your next holiday, ask yourself: are you ready to transform, or are you just escaping? In a world that often leaves us drained, therapy tourism could be the key to unlocking a healthier, happier you.





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# Hungary

A land of heritage, wellness, and luxury



Ivan Ljubinkovic

In recent years, Hungary has become an increasingly appealing destination for Indian travellers, thanks to a combination of its rich history, luxurious experiences, wellness offerings, and cultural connections. Ivan Ljubinkovic, Regional Head of Business Development for India, Visit Hungary shares the pulse of travellers visiting Hungary.

- *Tripti Jain*





With Indian tourists showing more interest in destinations that offer immersive and unique experiences, Hungary's tourism board, Visit Hungary, has taken active steps to strengthen its presence in India. India is a high-potential and growing market for Hungary. The demand from Indian travellers is unique, covering everything from weddings to wellness, and luxury to leisure.

### Rising demand, new connections

The significance of the Indian travel market has grown markedly in recent years, not only for Europe as a whole but especially for Hungary. According to Ivan, "Indian travellers are increasingly looking for experiential tourism, something beyond just sightseeing, and Hungary's diverse offerings resonate well with these interests." From luxurious spas and thermal baths in Budapest to the scenic vineyards of the Tokay region, Hungary offers a broad array of experiences.

To further establish ties with the Indian market, Visit Hungary organised an exclusive event at the Hungarian Embassy in New Delhi. This networking evening brought together 70 top Indian travel agents, tour operators, and media representatives to explore what Hungary has to offer. Representatives from Hungarian partners, such as Marriott International, Kempinski Hotels, Duna Cruises, and others, showcased the country's varied tourism experiences, reinforcing its potential as a premier destination for Indian tourists. Ivan adds, "Our goal is to strengthen relationships with the Indian travel trade. We're here to show how Hungary can cater to Indian tastes and preferences."

### A journey of discovery

For many Indian travellers, Hungary begins in Budapest, the iconic capital known for its historic architecture, thriving cultural scene, and stunning Danube River views. Ivan shares that, while Budapest is a significant draw,



there's much more to discover across the Hungarian countryside. "Budapest is a city of layers—ancient history, vibrant nightlife, and world-class wellness facilities. But Hungary's beauty goes far beyond the capital, with regions such as Lake Balaton and the Tokay wine district offering rich experiences," he adds.

Lake Balaton, for instance, the largest lake in Central Europe, is a perfect day-trip option from Budapest. The lake is not only a spot for boating and swimming but is also surrounded by charming villages and vineyards. It even offers therapeutic thermal baths that have drawn travellers for centuries. Indian tourists will likely be fascinated by another notable connection: Rabindranath Tagore, the renowned Indian poet and philosopher, visited the area to recover from health issues.

### Expanding opportunities in niche markets

Visit Hungary is tapping into niche travel segments with significant growth potential, including destination weddings, luxury travel, and wellness tourism. Ivan explains, "We're seeing tremendous interest from Indian families looking to host destination weddings in Hungary. From beautiful castles to scenic vineyard settings, we offer incredible backdrops that bring a fairy-tale experience to life."

Indian weddings are known for their grand scale and luxurious flair, and Hungary is prepared to meet these demands. With its historic castles, exquisite hotels, and diverse culinary options, the country provides a dreamlike setting for couples and their families. Hungary's spa culture also resonates with Indians, especially those interested in wellness tourism. He adds, "Our thermal baths and wellness retreats offer something quite special for visitors. Imagine soaking in a thermal bath surrounded by snow-covered rooftops—it's an experience that is both invigorating and deeply relaxing."





### Reaching and exploring

One challenge Hungary faces in drawing Indian tourists is the lack of direct flights between the two countries. Nevertheless, Ivan remains optimistic, and emphasises the available connecting flights through hubs such as Istanbul, Dubai, and key European cities. He shares, "The connectivity is there. With one-stop flights through major hubs, Indian travellers can easily reach Hungary."

To make the journey even more appealing, Visit Hungary has started collaborating with Indian tour operators and travel agents on co-promotional activities. These partnerships aim to enhance the visibility of Hungary's attractions and provide Indian travellers with tailored itineraries. Ivan shares, "We're working closely with tour operators to ensure Indian visitors experience the best of Hungary. Our joint campaigns will highlight how accessible and enjoyable Hungary is for the Indian market."

### A destination of safety and serenity

As solo travel and female travel groups become more popular in India, the importance of a safe and welcoming environment is paramount. Ivan shares, "Hungary is a safe destination, and Budapest is a city where travellers can truly relax. With its easy-going vibe, high levels of public safety, and efficient public transport, it's a destination where people can unwind and explore at their own pace."

For those seeking a unique experience, he recommends Hungary's famous outdoor baths during winter. He adds, "One of my best experiences in Budapest was relaxing in a thermal bath under the falling snow with views of the Danube. It's a magical experience that blends relaxation with adventure."

### Bollywood and cultural ties

Bollywood's influence on travel trends is significant, and Ivan acknowledges this by mentioning Hungary's popularity as a filming destination. He shares, "We've seen an increase in visitors from markets where Bollywood movies have featured Hungary." Hungary's



scenic locations and historical landmarks have attracted both Bollywood and Hollywood filmmakers, creating added allure for fans eager to experience these film sites firsthand.

### A promising future

As Hungary continues to enhance its offerings and build strong partnerships within the Indian market, the future looks promising. By focusing on experiential travel, wellness, niche segments, and maintaining a warm and welcoming atmosphere, Hungary is well-positioned to become a preferred European destination for Indian tourists.





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# Batumi

*Where the  
sea sings and  
the mountains  
whisper*

The allure of travel is often found in the unexpected, where cultures converge, landscapes enchant, and every moment tells a story. My recent journey to Batumi, the jewel of the Adjara region in Georgia, was a symphony of such moments—a perfect blend of adventure, relaxation, and discovery.

-Tripti Jain







The journey began like all great adventures do—with a sense of wonder, an open heart, and a hunger for discovery. As we left behind the chaotic symphony of New Delhi for the tranquil allure of Georgia, I had little idea how much this trip would transform my understanding of beauty, history, and the art of living.

***A whisper from the Black Sea***

Our late-night flight landed in Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, where the air felt like a refreshing pause—a stark contrast to Delhi’s urban chaos. A six-hour drive awaited us to reach Batumi, the glistening port city of Adjara. The journey began under a veil of rain and darkness, but I didn’t mind. There was something poetic about traveling through the unseen, letting the sounds of the rain and the occasional curves of the road guide your imagination.

By the time we arrived in Batumi, dawn had just begun to kiss the Black Sea. The first glimpse of the waves crashing against the shore from my hotel balcony was pure magic. The sea seemed alive, its melody carried by the cool Georgian wind that filled the room. Rain continued to dance on the glass, but instead of dampening the mood, it added a dreamlike texture to everything. Batumi had made its quiet introduction, and I was already entranced.

***The art of Khachapuri and the stories of Adjara***

After a much-needed nap and an energising cup of coffee, we headed out to our first adventure: an Ajarian khachapuri cooking class at Alaverdi Restaurant. Here, the charismatic Chef Gia Agirba welcomed us with a warm smile and a story about how

he patented his unique technique for crafting the iconic Georgian dish. Making khachapuri is more than just cooking—it’s a dance. Rolling the dough, filling it with cheese, shaping it like a boat, and finally sliding it into the wood-fired oven felt like participating in a ritual passed down through generations. The best part, of course, was breaking into the golden crust to let the molten cheese and butter swirl together. Every bite was a reminder that simplicity, when done with love, can be profound.

The culinary journey was followed by a visit to the Khariton Akhvlediani Museum, a quiet treasure trove of history. As we walked through its halls, artefacts spoke of Adjara’s layered past, from ancient trade routes to Soviet-era relics. The juxtaposition of these stories against the rhythmic sound of rain outside

gave the experience a melancholic yet enchanting vibe.

Dinner that evening was a poetic affair at an Ajarian-style restaurant. Candlelight flickered as a live piano performance wove its notes into the gentle murmur of conversations. The rain outside had turned colder, but inside, the warmth of Georgian hospitality wrapped around us like a cozy blanket.

***Of snowflakes and song in the mountains***

The next morning greeted us with a familiar companion—rain. But far from being an inconvenience, it seemed to set the stage for what would be one of the most magical days of the trip. Our first stop was the Borjgalo Ethnographic Museum, the masterpiece of Kemal Turmanidze. This museum wasn’t just a collection of artefacts; it was a living storybook.



## TRAVEL THERAPY

Miniature dioramas of Georgian life, crafted with meticulous detail, depicted everything from village weddings to wine-making traditions. Turmanidze himself was there, a humble genius who spoke about his creations as if they were his children. He said, "This is more than art. It's life, frozen in time." From there, we journeyed to Chateau Iveri in Varjanisi. The road twisted and turned through lush landscapes, and as we climbed higher, the rain transformed into something extraordinary. First came the hail, sharp and fleeting. Then, as if nature had decided to surprise us, snowflakes began to fall. Watching the rain give way to snow was like witnessing a painter change their palette mid-creation. The world around us turned white, soft, and silent—a winter wonderland in the middle of autumn. By the time we reached

the chateau, the snow had transformed the vineyard into a scene straight out of a fairy tale. Inside, warmth awaited in the form of wine, song, and stories. Folk singers dressed in traditional Ajarian attire performed polyphonic melodies that seemed to echo off the chateau walls. The wine tasting that followed was equally lyrical, with each pour accompanied by tales of the vineyard's heritage. A hearty Georgian lunch capped off the experience, leaving us full—both in body and spirit.

### *The waterfalls and the fairy-tale bridge*

The journey back to Batumi was anything but ordinary. We stopped at the Mirveti Waterfall, a hidden gem tucked away in a lush forest. The sound of cascading water mixed with the scent of wet



earth, creating an ambiance that felt otherworldly. Nearby, an ancient stone arch bridge stood like a guardian from another time. Covered in moss and framed by vines, it looked like it had been plucked straight from the pages of a fantasy novel. Crossing it felt like stepping into another dimension, where the lines between history and myth blurred. The rain followed us, persistent and poetic, as if reminding us that it too was part of the story. By the time we reached Batumi, twilight had painted the city in hues of gold and grey.

### *A city of infinite stories*

Batumi is a city that refuses to be defined by a single narrative. It's modern yet steeped in tradition, vibrant yet serene. The Black Sea

whispers its secrets; the mountains hum their ancient songs, and the streets come alive with a rhythm of their own. As I sat in the balcony of my hotel room that night, watching the rain and listening to the waves of the Black Sea, I realised that Batumi isn't a destination—it's a feeling. And I'd only just begun to understand it.

The journey is far from over, and there's so much more to uncover. The adventures waiting in Batumi's bustling bazaars, serene botanical gardens, and vibrant nightlife promise to be just as enchanting as those we've already experienced.

For now, I'll leave you with this: Batumi is a place where dreams and reality merge, where every drop of rain carries a story, and where the next chapter is always waiting to unfold. Stay tuned for part two of this journey, where the magic of Adjara continues to reveal itself, one moment at a time. Gaumachos!







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Chitra Stern

# Redefining luxury family travel

Creating a niche in the hospitality industry often requires a keen understanding of unmet needs. Chitra Stern, Founder & CEO, Martinhal Family Hotels & Resorts, shares how her journey began with a desire to transform luxury travel for families.

- Naina Nath





## HOTELLIGENCE

### The inspiration behind Martinhal

The vision for Martinhal Family Hotels & Resorts was to redefine what luxury family travel could be. Chitra explains, "We aimed to create spaces where both parents and children would feel equally welcomed, allowing families to make wonderful memories together without compromising comfort, style, or quality."

Her inspiration to create Martinhal stemmed from her personal experiences as a parent. "When we started having children, we realised there was an untapped niche in the luxury travel market," she says. This revelation fueled her passion for crafting a brand focused on the unique needs of families, ensuring every detail is considered. That was—and still is—the driving force behind the brand.

### Unique locations, consistent quality

With properties spread across Portugal, each Martinhal location features its unique character, all while adhering to a core philosophy of family-centric luxury. Chitra shares, "Martinhal Sagres, for instance, is a beach resort that's deeply connected to

nature. It's perfect for families seeking outdoor adventures." In contrast, Martinhal Chiado in Lisbon offers a vibrant urban atmosphere. Furthermore she adds, "We bring a family-friendly concept to the historic heart of Lisbon, allowing families to enjoy the city's charm without sacrificing comfort. What ties all of these locations together is our unwavering commitment to quality and attention to detail."

### Luxury branded residences

The recent introduction of Martinhal Residences represents a significant shift in the brand's offerings. Chitra explains, "The move was driven by the increasing demand from families and expats relocating to Portugal. We saw a need for high-quality, family-friendly living spaces, which is where Martinhal Residences fits in perfectly." These residences complement the hotel experience by offering a home-like atmosphere with hotel-style services. "We're providing a seamless lifestyle for families, expats, and corporate travellers," she says, noting that this expansion aligns with modern living needs.





### Trends shaping luxury family travel

As the luxury travel landscape evolves, Chitra identifies several key trends. She shares, "Multi-generational travel is on the rise. Families are increasingly using vacations as opportunities to celebrate special occasions together. They seek destinations that cater to all ages, from grandparents to young children. Health and wellness are also gaining prominence in family travel. Families want holistic experiences—spas, fitness programs, and nutritious dining options." Beyond relaxation, these experiences promote health and rejuvenation for everyone. Personalised experiences for children are becoming essential as well. "Parents are looking for enriching activities that engage their kids while also meeting their own needs," Chitra explains. This focus on crafting meaningful moments will shape the future of luxury family travel.

### Continuously innovating

At Martinhal, innovation remains at the forefront. "We're always listening to our guests and adapting to the changing needs of modern families." This includes offering personalised services and creating bespoke experiences for guests. "From kids' clubs that engage children in educational activities to our baby concierge service, we ensure families can find balance during their stay," she shares. "We're designing environments where both parents and children can thrive." Technological developments are set to further enhance the guest experience. "We utilise technology to streamline services while maintaining that personal touch," she explains. This blend of innovation and care ensures families feel both welcomed and inspired.

### The way forward

As Martinhal looks toward international markets, Chitra notes significant opportunities in India. "Indian families place a strong emphasis on togetherness, celebrations, and shared experiences. This aligns perfectly with our brand ethos." With spacious accommodations



designed for larger families and a menu that includes a variety of vegetarian and Indian dishes, Martinhal is ready to welcome Indian travellers. "The historical connection between Portugal and India also sparks curiosity among Indian travellers," she adds, making Portugal an appealing destination.

Chitra concludes and shares, "As someone with Indian roots, I take pride in connecting our rich culture with the hospitality that Martinhal represents. I'm thrilled about welcoming Indian families to Martinhal, where they can create lasting memories in a luxurious, family-friendly environment."





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# Lights, Thrills Action

## *A Dazzling Journey Through Yas Island's Magic and Marvels*

Yas Island isn't just a place that delivers on excitement, it's a destination that leaves you with stories to tell and memories that linger long after you've left. It's the kind of place that doesn't just fulfill expectations, but constantly exceeds them, making it the ultimate canvas for creating unforgettable moments, whether for business or pure pleasure.

-Bharti Sharma





## TRAVEL THERAPY



Yas Island in Abu Dhabi had always been on my radar, but the opportunity to attend the IIFA Awards gave it a certain sparkle – the kind only the presence of Bollywood icons can bring. From the moment I set foot on Yas, I knew this wasn't just another travel experience. The island was buzzing with excitement for the grand event, and there was a palpable energy in the air, like the anticipation before a cinematic climax. Not only did I witness the magic of IIFA and its galaxy of stars, but I also explored Yas Island's famed theme parks: SeaWorld, Warner Bros. World, and Ferrari World. Each park had its own world of adventure, and together, they painted a picture of Yas as a playground for the starry-eyed and thrill-seekers alike.

### ***Walking the Green Carpet at the Iconic Etihad Arena***

The IIFA Awards were not just an event, they were a magical whirlwind of glamour, fandom, and pure Bollywood sparkle. As I watched the legends of the industry walk the iconic green carpet, I couldn't help but feel the electric energy of a thousand flashbulbs capturing moments destined to become memories. The crowd's anticipation was almost tangible, the hum of excitement rising with every step closer to the Etihad Arena. And then, the moment that made my heart skip several beats- Shah Rukh Khan. Yes, the Shah Rukh Khan, standing just a few meters away, commanding the stage like the king

he is. As a lifelong SRK fan, this was my ultimate fangirl moment. But it wasn't just me, the entire arena was in awe. Thousands of us, from all corners of the world, were united by one feeling: admiration for this man who has a unique ability to make every person feel seen. His witty banter, effortless charm, and ability to light up the room had the crowd hanging on to his every word, erupting in cheers and laughter at every perfectly timed joke.

And if that wasn't enough, the performances that followed turned the night into a spectacle of dreams. Ranveer Singh's electrifying dance moves could've powered an entire city, while Kriti Sanon's grace left the audience mesmerized. Each act was a visual masterpiece, backed by sweeping lights and heart-thumping music. Sitting there, amidst the cheers and the dazzling visuals, I couldn't help but think how surreal it all felt. Watching these moments on screen is magical, but being there, feeling the energy of the crowd and the performers in real-time, was an entirely different level of enchantment.

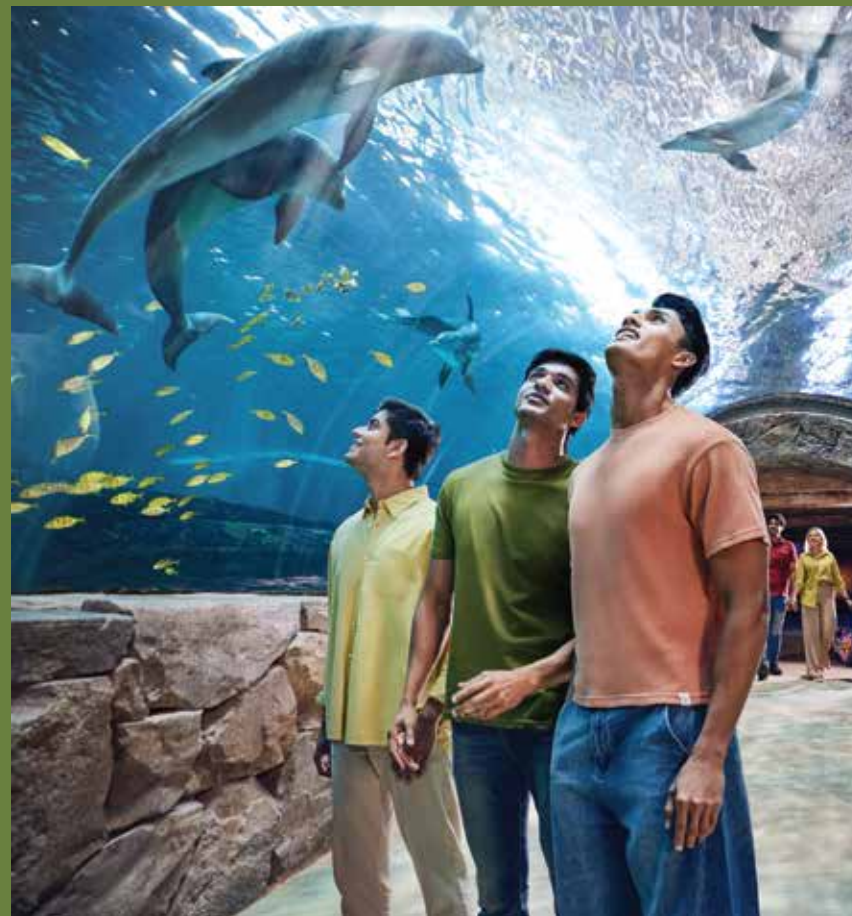
That night, the Etihad Arena wasn't just a venue- it was a temple for Bollywood worshippers like me. It was a night of glitz, glamour, and the kind of joy only Shah Rukh Khan and the magic of cinema can deliver.

### ***An Aquatic Adventure Like No Other: SeaWorld Abu Dhabi***

After basking in the stardust of the IIFA Awards, Yas Island still had more magic waiting for me. My first stop was SeaWorld Abu Dhabi, and stepping into this marine

wonderland felt like entering a vivid aquatic dream. The moment I laid eyes on the massive central aquarium, its vibrant hues and elegant sea creatures moving in perfect harmony, I was transported to a serene underwater world, far removed from the bustle of daily life. The 'One Ocean' show was a

highlight that left me spellbound. Watching dolphins leap gracefully through the air and sea lions performing with joyful precision, all set to a backdrop of music and storytelling, was nothing short of poetic. It wasn't just a performance, it felt like an ode to the ocean, a reminder of its endless wonders and mysteries. I found myself grinning





like a child, marvelling at the synchronisation between these incredible creatures and their trainers.

SeaWorld Abu Dhabi also revealed its potential as a premium MICE venue. Imagine hosting an exclusive event with the breathtaking aquarium as your backdrop, a setting that redefines sophistication and creates unforgettable memories. It's the kind of venue where the beauty of nature meets unparalleled luxury, making it ideal for the most extraordinary gatherings.

By the time I left, I carried more than just memories of awe-inspiring exhibits and playful sea creatures, I had a newfound respect for the delicate balance of marine ecosystems and the urgent need to protect them. SeaWorld Abu Dhabi wasn't just an attraction; it was a profound reminder of the oceans' beauty and our responsibility toward preserving it.

### **Warner Bros. World: From Gotham to Bedrock**

After my marine escapade at SeaWorld Abu Dhabi, I found myself stepping into a universe that felt like flipping through the most cherished chapters of my childhood. Warner Bros. World was more than just a theme park, it was a time machine that whisked me back to carefree days when the hardest choice I faced was deciding which cartoon to watch.

As someone who grew up bunking study sessions to catch episodes of Scooby-Doo, giggling at Baby Looney Tunes, and secretly wishing I could ride the Batmobile alongside Batman, walking into this park was like living my childhood dreams in 3D. The larger-than-life replicas of Gotham City, Bedrock, and Cartoon Junction were enough to give me goosebumps. Every corner sparked nostalgia, a symphony of the familiar theme tunes I hummed as a kid now playing against the backdrop of meticulously recreated cartoon worlds.

And then, there were the rides. The 'Batman: Knight Flight' wasn't just a rollercoaster, it was an invitation to Gotham City's shadowy skies. As the ride swooped and twisted through the dark alleys of Gotham, I could almost hear my inner child cheering, "I'm Robin for the day!"

What struck me most, though, was the park's meticulous attention to detail. The cobblestone streets of Cartoon Junction, the gloomy noir vibes of Gotham, and even the prehistoric humor of Bedrock felt like stepping straight into the TV screen. The dining areas were equally enchanting, with menus and decor tailored to match the worlds they belonged to - imagine munching on a Scooby Snack in a





## TRAVEL THERAPY

diner straight out of the Mystery Machine's pit stops!

Leaving the park, I couldn't help but smile at the thought of how these timeless animations continue to unite generations, reminding us that some of life's greatest joys come wrapped in laughter, imagination, and a dash of nostalgia.

### *Ferrari World: Living Life in the Fast Lane*

The final adventure on Yas Island was nothing short of exhilarating. At Ferrari World, I didn't just step into a theme park—I entered a realm where speed, luxury, and adrenaline combined to create pure magic. As a lifelong fan of fast cars and high-octane thrills, this was a dream come true.

But Ferrari World wasn't just about speed; it was a tribute to a legacy. Walking through displays of vintage Ferrari models felt like stepping into a museum of automotive art, each car telling its own story of design and dominance. The interactive simulators gave me a taste of what it's like to handle a Ferrari, making me feel like I'd just joined the Scuderia Ferrari team for a day. Even the Italian-inspired dining options added a touch of Ferrari's homeland charm, creating an experience that

went beyond thrills to celebrate the art of performance. Ferrari World wasn't just an attraction; it was a roaring symphony of speed and sophistication, the perfect high-octane finale to my unforgettable Yas Island adventure.

### *Big 'Yes' to the 'Yas' Hospitality*

While Yas Island is packed with thrilling attractions, the comfort of a well-appointed hotel makes the experience truly complete. Our base was the Dusit Thani Abu Dhabi, an excellent host with its blend of Thai-inspired elegance and attentive service that made for an indulgent stay. But Yas Island boasts a diverse array of accommodations, each offering a unique experience for travellers. The Warner Bros. Hotel brought movie magic to life right at the doorstep, with themed rooms that were a hit among families and fans alike. The iconic W Hotel, with its bold design overlooking the Formula 1 racetrack, offered a chic vibe and nightlife scene. Hilton Yas Island delivered a classic luxury experience with modern amenities and panoramic views, while Yas

Plaza Hotel combined comfort and accessibility at the island's bustling hub. Together, these properties not only offer relaxation but seamlessly extend the spirit of Yas Island, ensuring that guests feel immersed in a world of excitement, luxury, and top-tier hospitality from check-in to check-out.

### *The Pinnacle of MICE Experiences*

The beauty of the island is that it offers more than just thrills—it offers moments of reflection and connection. What struck me most was how seamlessly Yas Island can cater to both leisure and business. The island is not just a playground for tourists but an ideal venue for exclusive MICE events. With world-class facilities like Etihad Arena, the W Hotel, and Yas Plaza, it's clear that Yas is a place that knows how to host the finest corporate gatherings while making every participant feel like a VIP. Picture a luxury event surrounded by the

stunning backdrop of Ferrari World, or a high-profile meeting after a thrilling day at SeaWorld. Yas Island is where business meets adventure in the most extraordinary way. Yas Island also provides fantastic incentives for the travel trade. Through initiatives like the Abu Dhabi Advantage program, managed by the Abu Dhabi Convention and Exhibition Bureau, travel professionals can benefit from great subsidies, including a 7.5 per cent rebate on hotel bookings. Additionally, the MICE JV Fund offers further support, making Yas Island not just a dream destination for corporate events, but also an affordable one. With these exceptional programs, Yas Island stands as an unmatched leader in the MICE industry, blending luxury, efficiency, and exciting experiences seamlessly.





# Orchha



Sheo Shekhar Shukla

*A medieval town in the heart of India*

Discover the rich architecture, spiritual heritage, and cultural stories of Orchha. Orchha is a town that brings history, spirituality, and culture together in one place.





## INDIAN SAGA

Located along the Betwa River in Madhya Pradesh, Orchha is known for its impressive mix of Rajput and Mughal architecture, significant temples, and deep-rooted folklore. Whether you're exploring its historic palaces or visiting its spiritual sites, Orchha offers a unique look into India's history and culture.

"Orchha stands as a timeless testament to the grandeur of Madhya Pradesh, blending history, spirituality, and architecture in ways that captivate and inspire. Nestled along the sacred Betwa, it is a town where royal legacies come alive through majestic palaces and temples, and where every corner whispers tales of devotion and valour. Through our commitment to preserving Orchha's heritage, we invite travellers from across the globe to experience the soul of India, as it flourishes in the peaceful embrace of this remarkable town," shares Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary Tourism, Madhya Pradesh.

### *Architectural landmarks*

Orchha is filled with beautiful buildings that showcase both Rajput and Mughal designs. The town's palaces, forts, and cenotaphs (called Chhatris) are lined up along the Betwa River, offering visitors a glimpse into its royal past.

• **Jahangir Mahal:** Built to honour Emperor Jahangir's visit, this palace is famous for its carvings, wide courtyards, and balconies.

• **Raja Mahal:** Known for its detailed paintings and designs, this palace gives insight into the lives of Orchha's rulers.

### *Raja Ram Mandir: Worship fit for a King*

The Raja Ram Mandir is one of the most important spiritual spots in Orchha. Unlike other temples, Lord Ram is worshiped here as a king. The temple follows royal customs, with ceremonies that reflect this unique status. It draws many devotees who come to experience the spiritual and cultural significance of this site.

### *UNESCO recognition*

Orchha has been added to UNESCO's tentative list of World Heritage Sites, thanks to its historic palaces, temples, and royal cenotaphs. The nomination, planned for 2027-28, highlights the town's importance on a global scale. Efforts by the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board are underway to bring further recognition to Orchha's cultural value.

### *Folklore and Stories*

Orchha's rich history is filled with legends and stories that continue to shape its cultural identity. One of the town's most well-known tales involves the

Bundela King Madhukar Shah's wife; Queen Ganesh brought 'Ramlala' – Lord Rama from Ayodhya to Orchha after a divine encounter. The town also has a strong tradition of folk performances, with local stories of valour and devotion keeping its oral history alive.

### *Spiritual peace*

Orchha is a peaceful destination for those looking for spiritual experiences. Its riverside setting and ancient temples create a calming atmosphere. The Chaturbhuj Temple, known for its large structure and design, is one of the standout spiritual sites. Originally built to house the idol of Lord Vishnu, the temple now attracts visitors for its unique architecture and serene environment.

### *A popular wedding destination*

In recent years, Orchha has become a popular choice for couples looking for a heritage wedding venue. Its historic palaces and scenic riverside locations offer a unique setting for weddings. The Orchha Palace and other venues provide a traditional backdrop for couples seeking an experience steeped in history and culture.

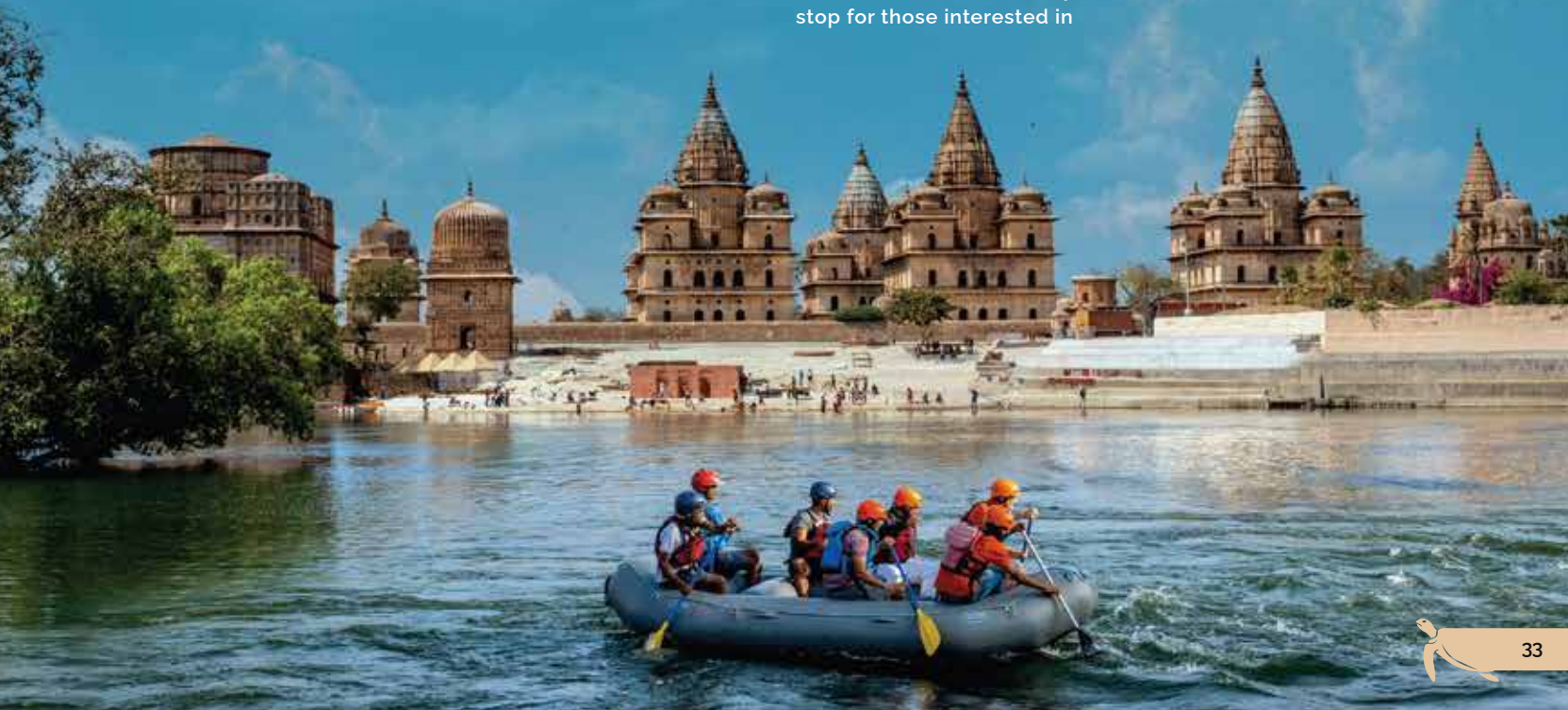
### *Exploring heritage tourism*

Orchha's well-preserved buildings, temples, and landmarks make it an important stop for those interested in

heritage tourism. Visitors can take guided tours to learn about the town's royal history and its architectural achievements. Whether walking through the palaces or visiting the temples, Orchha directly connects to India's past, making it an ideal spot for history lovers.

### *A taste of Orchha's local flavours*

While Orchha is best known for its stunning architecture and spiritual significance, its culinary offerings present an underexplored aspect of the town's cultural experience. The local cuisine reflects traditional flavours of Madhya Pradesh, with dishes like dal bafla and bhutte ka kees offering a taste of the region. Street vendors serve popular snacks such as kachoris and jalebis, adding to the vibrant food scene. Though not widely recognised for its cuisine, Orchha still offers food enthusiasts a flavourful journey through the region's heritage, making it a destination that appeals not only to history lovers but to food lovers as well. With its impressive architecture, sacred temples, and vibrant stories, it offers something for everyone. Whether exploring historic sites or attending a special event, Orchha is a destination that remains both interesting and deeply rooted in India's traditions.







# Camme

## The Brightest Star

It is a town that was destined for fame and fortune, simply because all the essential ingredients needed were in place. That's the story, and no one's ever doubted it.

- Inder Raj Ahluwalia



## TRAVEL THERAPY

The Carlton's revolving door turns and turns, cutting the opulent air into four equal parts - Folly, Mystery, Wonder, Fascination...!

Quite a handful! But there's a history to it all, and thereby hang several grand, romantic tales, as I found much to my delight.

Landing at Nice Airport, deposited smack between the bluest of seas and a maze of gleaming white villas, I didn't have an inkling of what was to come. Thirty minutes drive past low hills, still more luxury villas with red tiled roofs and the proverbial swimming pools, and stretches of deep blue sea, and I'd arrived at my haloed destination.

It didn't take me long to see that Cannes is one smart town. Though smaller, it bears an uncanny resemblance to Nice, sporting a similar classy image. Showing off their tall masts, hundreds of sailboats dotted the harbour.

My arrival...! What can I say...! Courteously met and ushered in by a concierge with an immaculately pressed white suit, for a deluxe check-in at the fabulous Hotel Martinez, seemed quite the appropriate thing. The fact is that the hotel is as famous as the town itself, which is rightly dubbed the 'world's glamour center.'

It's worth lending an ear to the town's history, and I did. In 1834, one Lord Brougham, prevented from continuing his journey into Italy, stumbled onto what was then a sleepy little Roman outpost. His brief halt started a lifelong devotion to the lovely little coastal town, becoming the first chapter in a spellbinding chronicle of glamour, glitz and fame.

Curiosity among local townsfolk going about their business, greeted Cannes' first visiting sophisticates. Yet within a few years the little town overlooking the marshlands thick with Cannae reeds (hence its name) was to become the world's most photographed, liveliest and brightest star.

Once the monopoly of the British gentry, local secret delights embraced the world! A glittering parade of trans-European kings, princes, archdukes, and consorts converted the town into an

enchanted domain studded with fabulous, luxurious, exotic villas and palaces.

There was a 'larger-than-life' quality to Cannes in those heady days. Legends were born. Princely palaces sprang up all over town under the magical wand of architect Laurent Vianney, the undisputed master builder of the day. In the Villa Escarras, Dutch aristocrat Baron Lycklama, had his residence transformed into an Oriental palace for a single night's musical entertainment.





## TRAVEL THERAPY

The decades flew by as in a dream. The royal yacht 'Britania' often anchored in the bay. The summer casino was built. In his atelier in the Villa Fiesole, Jean-Gabriel Domerque painted Josephine Baker. And Rolls and Bugattis slid through the dusk to the famous night playgrounds.

Fortune smiled on many: Aime Maeght met Pierre Bonnard at a gala hosted by Maurice Chevalier. There were tragic times, like Isadora Duncan, dancer of the veils, tragically strangled to death by her own billowing scarf. There were breathless times. Like Rita Hayworth leaving Orson Welles and marrying Ali Khan because she 'couldn't live with a genius'. And there were glittering times. Like Grace Kelly and Cary Grant on location with Alfred Hitchcock to shoot, 'To Catch a Thief'. And Sophia Loren and

Gina Lollobrigida who had only to appear on a balcony to start a riot. On a quieter note, a young amateur painter called Winston Churchill could often be spotted on the Quai Saint-Pierre.

Though I didn't know it then, just stepping into and out of the Martinez makes you a minor celebrity, for there is only one Martinez. And only one La Croisette, among the world's most famous promenades, and the domain of the rich and famous. And of course, there's only one Cannes, the world's undisputed glamour citadel.

Doing my tourist bit, I took several customary walks along the famous promenade. For ceremony's sake I poked my head into some half a dozen chic little boutiques, and duly stopped by at the Carlton, before settling down

at a corner café whose tables spilled out onto the pavement, sipping a glass of white wine that 'became the weather and me' according to attending waiter.

The legendary blue Mediterranean has made sailing one of the Cote d'Azur's great pleasures. If you can manage it, hop on to a private yacht. I did, and my foray afforded several delights as we bobbed amidst a maze of colourful sailboats and friendly tourists who seemed to do nothing but wave and drink.

I museum-hopped, starting off at Musee de la Castre that takes you on a fantastic world tour, from the archaeology of the Mediterranean basin, to ethnology and primitive art in all five continents. I then stopped by at Musee de la Mer, which unfolds the world of underwater

archaeology and also shows the 'Man in the Iron Mask's' famous cell.

The town's considerable fame got a further, huge boost through the highly-rated, top of the cinematic-ladder, annual film festival, The festival brings in international and Hollywood stars, and they bring in hordes of upscale tourists.

Riding on its glamorous legacy, Cannes grew and glittered, and the legacy lives on. Today as yesterday, the chronicle rolls on in an endless whirl that still spells pure magic. The old quarter of Le Suguet still watches over the sun and star-struck city. La Croisette is still one of the world's most famous promenades.

It's a story without an end. But I haven't heard anyone complain.

### Fact File

- Cannes is a short drive from Nice, which is connected by air with Paris and other European hubs.
- From deluxe Palais Hotels, down to standard establishments, there's a wealth of accommodation.
- Eat your heart out in an assortment of deluxe restaurants, bistros and smaller cafes.
- Though the high season is April through October, this is a year-round destination.



### About the author

Inder Raj Ahluwalia is a world-renowned international travel journalist & author. His professional profile features awards from several European and Asian countries, among others.





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HEADS IN BEDS

# Alila Kothaifaru Maldives

A spellbinding  
Maldivian escape

At Alila Kothaifaru Maldives, pristine waters embrace soul-stirring luxury and unforgettable moments

- Misbaah Mansuri





## HEADS IN BEDS

From the moment I stepped onto the shores of Alila Kothaifaru Maldives, I knew this was more than just a postcard-perfect island getaway. Tucked away in the quiet reaches of the Raa Atoll, this sanctuary offered something deeper—an unpretentious luxury that felt effortless. There was no over-the-top grandeur, just the right blend of nature's beauty and thoughtful design, where every corner seemed to invite you to pause and take in the serenity. Greeted by Shifa, my warm and ever-smiling host, I felt instantly at home. Her genuine care and insider knowledge of the island's hidden gems made me feel like I was about to experience something truly special. And I did. From the little surprises waiting in my villa to the unparalleled views of the endless turquoise waters, every moment at Alila Kothaifaru felt like a chapter in a story I never wanted to end.

### *Indulgence meets serenity*

From the moment I set foot in my Sunset Water villa, it was evident that this stay would be unlike any other. The villa stood as a sanctuary on its own—a contemporary, minimalist retreat where nature played its part perfectly. The glass doors opened directly onto an azure sea, and my private plunge pool was an oasis of calm. Yet, it was the finer details that captured my heart—meticulously arranged

flowers, the subtle scent of coconut oil, and even the sound of gentle waves lapping against the shore, creating a melody of pure, unbridled tranquillity. I loved the in-house amenities at Alila Kothaifaru that reflected the brand's commitment to sustainability without compromising luxury. From the subtly scented shower gel to the deeply hydrating body lotion, each product was eco-friendly and crafted with natural ingredients, leaving both a refreshing feeling and a clear conscience.

I floated through days filled with indulgence: starting with breakfast at Seasalt, where local produce was turned into culinary art, to watching the horizon blaze with colours during sunset cocktails, lunches experimenting with Yakitori's offerings, and afternoons either in the spa or gazing at the beauty of the island. The resort's signature experiences, like the sunset yoga and coconut painting, added both mindfulness and whimsy to our time there. And as the sky darkened, the Maldivian night learning event further deepened my understanding of the rich culture and history that envelops these islands.

I often found myself returning to the villa to relax in the plunge pool, where my husband and I would reminisce about the magic that had unfolded over the days. The sunset yoga session on Seasalt beach allowed us both to unwind

in the most serene of settings. But it was the little moments—the kind smiles of the staff, the thoughtful surprises like the flower arrangements and handwritten notes—that truly made the stay feel personal, like the island had wrapped us in a warm embrace.

### *Unscripted magic*

One of the most enchanting experiences during my stay was the sandbank adventure that property had arranged for us. We set out early, and as our boat gently skimmed over the translucent waters, we arrived at a secluded sandbank—a pristine stretch of powder-white sand surrounded by nothing but the endless blue of the Indian Ocean. The serenity of this untouched paradise was overwhelming. As we settled in, the team at Alila had set up a beautiful champagne sundowner at the Shack. The soft pop of the champagne bottle, the clink of our glasses, and the golden hues of the setting sun created a magical atmosphere. The fading light painted the sky in shades of pink and orange, reflecting off the water as dolphins danced in the distance, making the moment even more surreal. It was a perfect blend of nature and luxury, where time seemed to stand still.

Earlier that day, we embarked on a dolphin cruise that took us deeper into the turquoise expanse. The playful dolphins appeared as if on

cue, leaping gracefully out of the water, their sleek bodies glistening in the sunlight. It was one of those rare, spontaneous experiences that remind you of nature's brilliance. Watching them felt like witnessing a private performance, with the ocean as the stage.

Back at the resort, the day flowed into pure indulgence. The Alila Spa awaited us, and as we entered, the scene was nothing short of breathtaking. Hibiscus flowers had been meticulously arranged, spelling out a birthday message for my husband, creating an intimate atmosphere filled with warmth and care. The soft scent of essential oils filled the air, while the décor reflected a harmony between Maldivian nature and luxurious comfort.

Our therapists began with a deep-tissue massage, each stroke designed to melt away tension, their hands expertly tracing the contours of our tired muscles. Their knowledge of traditional techniques, combined with modern wellness practices, created an experience that felt both spiritual and rejuvenating. As they moved with fluid grace, I felt the stress of daily life dissolve. The treatment culminated in a beautifully arranged bath setup, adorned with petals, inviting us into a moment of pure tranquility. Soaking in the warm waters, surrounded by flowers, I felt the world drift away, leaving only peace in its place.





## HEADS IN BEDS

### *Culinary magic*

Another highlight was the leisurely lunch at Alila Spice Garden. My room, nestled opposite this lush garden, gave me glimpses of it every morning on my walks. The garden itself is a treasure trove of fresh produce used in the resort's kitchen—everything from pumpkin flowers to aromatic curry leaves. Chef Mohammed, with his warm smile and clear passion for the garden, crafted an exquisite meal for us under the swaying palms. The burrata was soft and fresh, paired with pesto pasta that was as fragrant as it was delicious. The entire meal was infused with the earthy freshness of ingredients picked straight from the garden just a few steps away. The simplicity of the setting—sun filtering through the palm fronds, the gentle rustle of leaves—combined with the vibrant flavours on our plates, created a culinary experience that was as soulful as it was delicious.

From the moment I sat down for my first meal at Yakitori, I knew I was in for a gastronomic journey that would leave an indelible mark. At Yakitori, the skewers were a true masterpiece. Grilled to perfection, the delicate char on the meat and vegetables delivered that quintessential umami punch.

Breakfast at Alila Kothaifaru was no less impressive. Each morning began with a mimosa in hand, the first sip signaling the start of a new culinary adventure. The sheer diversity of dishes at breakfast was striking. One morning, I indulged in a Pav Bhaji that was surprisingly authentic for being served in the Maldives, its spiced, buttery flavors transporting me momentarily to the streets of Mumbai. On another, I opted for a Mexican omelette, bursting with fresh peppers, cheese, and the right amount of heat to wake up the palate. The breakfast menu was meticulously curated, allowing for a different experience each morning, all while enjoying the stunning views of the ocean.

Another highlight was the dinner at Umami. When the black cod miso arrived, it was like an ode to perfection. The fish flaked apart at the slightest touch of my fork, its buttery texture giving way to a delicate sweetness from the miso glaze. Each bite was a medley of flavors—silky, sweet, and slightly smoky, with just enough umami to round it off. Paired with a crisp white wine, the dish felt like a culmination of everything Umami stood for—elegance, balance, and sheer culinary brilliance. Every meal here was a true masterclass in gastronomy.





## HEADS IN BEDS

### *Celestial surprises*

The property took things to a whole different level by crafting a surprise birthday dinner for my husband that left me speechless. The team had orchestrated the entire experience with incredible care, and the setup was nothing short of magical. The soft glow of lights illuminating the white sand, casting warm reflections around the intimate dining table set just for, the night sky stretched endlessly above, while performers serenaded us with traditional Maldivian songs, turning the birthday celebration into a symphony of joy.

The flickering candles, soft sand beneath our feet, and the heartfelt melody sung by the performers as they wished Aadil a happy birthday filled the air with something indescribable—something you don't find in brochures or itineraries. The performers, clad in their vibrant cultural attire, added an authentic Maldivian flair, making the evening even more unforgettable. Their voices rose in perfect harmony with the whispering sea breeze, creating a moment so precious that it felt like time itself had slowed down just for us.

The dinner itself was a masterpiece, every course a fusion of local flavours and international flair. The seafood platter was an ode to the ocean, each element as fresh as the day's catch. The lobster was perfectly grilled, tender and succulent with a smoky finish, while the prawns were plump and juicy, each bite bursting with the briny taste of the sea. The seared scallops were cooked to perfection—soft, buttery, and slightly caramelized on the outside, balanced with the tang of citrus dressing that brought out their natural sweetness.

Then came the lamb—rich, tender, and slow-cooked to perfection. The meat practically melted off the bone, with flavors that were deep and robust. It had been marinated in a medley of herbs and spices, and each bite was an explosion of warmth and comfort, the kind of dish that wraps you in a sense of indulgence. Paired with roasted vegetables and a smooth red wine reduction, it was the perfect counterbalance to the lightness of the seafood.

As I watched my husband's face light up with each surprise, I knew that this moment, crafted so intimately by the team at Alila, would be etched in our memories forever. The property is a place where nature and indulgence exist in perfect harmony, where each day is a new chapter in a story filled with awe and wonder. And thanks to the impeccable team led by GM Thomas Weber who is an institution in himself and its gracious staff, Alila Kothaifaru Maldives is a story, one that we will revisit in our minds for years to come. If I had to sum up the experience in one word, it would be magical. But even that doesn't quite capture the sheer beauty of it all. There is an incredible natural high that comes from being surrounded by the great spirit of this place. It is being polished, primed and opened up with reverence; so too are you. There are few better places on earth to be rocked into your whole and most exuberant self.





LOUISIANA  
Your Soul.

# Louisiana

**A journey of  
stories, culture,  
and adventure**

Louisiana's first-ever tourism mission in India lit up Mumbai and New Delhi, introducing a state known for its unique culture and down-to-earth charm. Doug Bourgeois, Assistant Secretary of Tourism, Louisiana Office of Tourism takes us through the nooks and corners of Louisiana with his words.

**-Tripti Jain**

Doug Bourgeois



## OFFSHORE BINOCULARS

When you think of Louisiana, what comes to mind? Perhaps the vibrant streets of New Orleans, the soulful strains of jazz, or the tantalising aroma of Creole and Cajun cuisine. But there's so much more to discover in this south-eastern state—a tapestry of adventures waiting to be unravelled.

Doug invites us on a journey through Louisiana, painting vivid scenes that highlight its charm. He begins, "Louisiana isn't just a destination; it's an experience. Every corner of our state tells a story, from its bustling cities to its serene bayous."

### The rhythms of life

Walking through Louisiana feels like stepping into a living symphony. New Orleans, the birthplace of jazz, sets the tempo with its vibrant music scene. Bourbon Street pulses with rhythm, where brass bands serenade visitors, and impromptu performances spill onto the sidewalks. Yet, this is only the beginning.

Doug shares, "Music is the soul of Louisiana. From the joyful energy of Cajun dance halls to the sultry, evocative sounds of Zydeco, our heritage resonates in every note." He describes sitting in a dimly lit club, the air thick with history and the unmistakable sounds of a saxophone filling the room. For visitors, it's not just a concert—it's an immersion into the essence of the state.

Beyond music, the state's culture is

a rich blend of French, Spanish, African, and Native American influences. It comes alive in festivals such as Mardi Gras, with its kaleidoscope of colours and traditions, or in the quieter corners of Acadiana, where locals preserve their language and customs.

### A feast for the senses

Food in Louisiana isn't merely a necessity; it's a celebration. Doug says, "Every meal here tells a story. Whether it's a bowl of gumbo that's been simmering for hours or a plate of beignets dusted with powdered sugar, our cuisine connects us to our roots."

Picture this: sitting in a bustling seafood shack along the Gulf Coast, cracking open freshly caught blue crabs while the salty sea breeze whispers through the air. Or savouring a plate of jambalaya in a cozy eatery, the spices singing on your palate. Louisiana's culinary experiences are as diverse as its landscapes.

Doug adds, "Indian travellers, with their love for bold and complex flavours, will feel right at home here. There's something magical about sharing a meal that transcends borders—it's where connections happen."

### The great outdoors

For those who crave adventure, Louisiana delivers with its untamed beauty. Doug paints a picture of the Atchafalaya Basin, one of the most

expansive river swamps in the United States. He says, "It's like stepping into another world. You paddle through quiet bayous, the cypress trees draped in Spanish moss, and suddenly, a heron takes flight. It's breath-taking."

The state's outdoor offerings range from deep-sea fishing along the Gulf of Mexico to bird watching during migration season. Bourgeois excitedly describes the Rosy Spoonbill, a bird so stunning it seems plucked from a dream. "Imagine seeing fifty of them perched in a single tree, their vibrant pink feathers glowing in the sunlight. It's a sight you'll never forget."

For those who prefer softer adventures, Louisiana's state parks offer serene bike trails and scenic hiking routes, while the Audubon Golf Trail provides world-class courses set amidst stunning natural backdrops.

### The stories that linger

Louisiana isn't just about the sights and sounds; it's about the people who bring them to life. Doug shares, "There's warmth here that you can't describe—you have to feel it." He recounts visiting a small town where locals welcomed him with open arms, sharing tales of their ancestors over cups of chicory coffee.

Even the architecture has stories to tell. In the heart of New Orleans' French Quarter lies Jackson

Square, surrounded by historic buildings that whisper of bygone eras. Doug shares highlights about the Pontalba Apartments, the oldest apartment building in the U.S., built by the visionary Baroness Micaela Almonester de Pontalba. He adds, "She was ahead of her time. Her legacy is a testament to the resilience and creativity that define Louisiana."

### A connection across cultures

As Louisiana opens its doors to Indian travellers, Bourgeois sees parallels between the two cultures. Doug shares, "India and Louisiana share a love for storytelling, for celebrating life. Whether it's a festival in Kolkata or Mardi Gras in New Orleans, there's this shared energy—a joy that brings people together."

This connection is perhaps why Louisiana feels so welcoming to those from afar. It's different enough to be intriguing, yet familiar enough to feel like home. He ends the journey with an invitation and says, "Come see for yourself. Let Louisiana surprise you. Let it move you."

Louisiana isn't just a place—it's a story waiting to be told, a melody waiting to be heard, a flavour waiting to be savoured. And for those willing to explore, it promises an experience that will linger long after the journey ends.





# The Cocoon Collection

A home away from home!



Ahmed Jihad

The Maldives, with its pristine beaches, turquoise waters, and rich marine life, has been a dream destination for travellers worldwide. Ahmed Jihad, Chief Operating Officer, The Cocoon Collection shares about India being their closest partners.

- Tripti Jain





## HOTELLIGENCE

Among its array of luxurious retreats, The Cocoon Collection stands out for creating spaces that resonate particularly well with Indian tourists. Ahmed shares, "India is not just a market; it's our closest partner and neighbour. With India's growing travel demand and close geographic proximity." The Cocoon Collection has strategically aligned its properties and services to cater specifically to Indian tastes. With each property offering unique experiences, The Cocoon Collection is quickly becoming a top choice for Indian tourists seeking both luxury and a familiar touch in the Maldives.

### *India is the key for success*

India has become a vital source market for Maldivian tourism, and The Cocoon Collection has been quick to tap into this opportunity. Ahmed explains, "We've seen tremendous growth from the Indian market over the last two years, and it's one of our biggest priorities. With easy flights from major cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru, the Maldives has become an increasingly popular short-haul getaway for Indian travellers." To meet the needs of this growing customer base, The Cocoon

Collection has tailored its offerings with Indian tastes in mind. From culinary selections to staff that can connect with Indian guests in their language, each detail has been carefully considered. He adds, "We've developed services tailored to the Indian market, especially when it comes to food and hospitality. This customisation has helped us build strong connections with Indian travellers, creating a space where they feel understood and welcomed."

### *Joy Island: A dream destination*

Among The Cocoon Collection's properties, Joy Island has quickly become a favourite among Indian visitors. Known for its lively atmosphere, scenic beauty, and wide range of activities, Joy Island attracts about 30-40 Indian guests every day. "Joy Island is more than just a resort; it's a destination full of energy and excitement. This vibrant setting has made it a top pick for Indian families, couples, and groups looking for a luxurious and immersive vacation," shares Ahmed. Joy Island offers a variety of accommodation options, from beachside villas to exclusive overwater suites, catering to guests with different preferences. The resort also features numerous

activities, from snorkelling excursions to cultural performances, allowing guests to experience the best of Maldivian nature and culture. He adds, "We want Joy Island to be a complete experience, not just a place to stay. This approach has resonated strongly with Indian guests, who appreciate the mix of adventure and relaxation that Joy Island provides."

### *You & Me Maldives: A romantic haven for couples*

Another standout in The Cocoon Collection is You & Me Maldives, an adults-only resort that has become a popular choice for Indian honeymooners and couples. Ahmed explains, "You & Me Maldives is a secluded paradise designed for

romance and relaxation. With overwater villas, intimate dining options, and breath-taking views, the resort offers couples an ideal escape where they can truly connect and unwind."

One of the highlights of You & Me Maldives is the H2O underwater restaurant, where guests can dine surrounded by the vibrant marine life of the Maldives. He adds, "We wanted to create an experience that would be unforgettable. This unique dining option has become a favourite among Indian couples, who enjoy the novelty and exclusivity of dining under the sea. The resort's focus on privacy and romance has made it a perfect choice for Indian couples seeking a unique, intimate getaway."





*Cocoon Maldives: Enhanced luxury for families*

Cocoon Maldives, the flagship property of The Cocoon Collection, recently underwent a renovation to further elevate its offerings. With new pools, slides, and family-friendly facilities, it's an ideal choice for families and groups traveling from India. Ahmed explains, "We wanted to ensure that every guest has a fantastic experience, regardless of their age or preferences. This refreshed approach has made Cocoon Maldives especially appealing to Indian families, who appreciate the balance of luxury and playfulness."

The property offers a variety of amenities that cater to guests of all ages. While parents enjoy private beachside relaxation, children can engage in supervised activities designed specifically for young travellers. Ahmed says, "It's important to us that families can create memories together, where everyone feels taken care of. The enhancements have been well-received by Indian families, who find Cocoon Maldives a perfect blend of relaxation and family-friendly entertainment."

*New destinations on the horizon*

With the success of its existing properties, The Cocoon Collection is gearing up for expansion, both within the Maldives and beyond. Ahmed reveals, "We're launching two new ultra-luxury projects in the Maldives next month, which will bring fresh experiences to our guests. These properties, accessible within a 45-minute speedboat ride from Malé, are set to offer guests unparalleled luxury and convenience, especially appealing to Indian travellers who appreciate short travel times."

The Cocoon Collection is also expanding to Zanzibar, with plans for two luxury properties on the East African coast. He shares, "Zanzibar offers an exotic experience, and we see it as a



natural extension of what we offer in the Maldives. The new resorts in Zanzibar will combine the brand's high standards with the unique cultural and natural beauty of the African coastline. Future plans also include developments in Sri Lanka and Italy, which promise to bring The Cocoon Collection's signature warmth and luxury to new destinations."

*Cocoon's Philosophy*

Central to The Cocoon Collection's success is its philosophy of making guests feels at home. The brand's name, inspired by the Hollywood movie Cocoon, represents a safe, nurturing environment where travellers feel comfortable and cared for. "We're not just offering luxury; we're offering a home away from home. This philosophy resonates strongly with Indian travellers, who find warmth, friendliness, and familiarity in The Cocoon Collection's properties." From the friendly interactions with staff to the Indian-inspired culinary offerings, every detail is designed to make Indian guests feel at ease. He explains, "Our goal is to create a welcoming environment where guests are more than just visitors; they're part of our family. This commitment to hospitality has built a strong bond between The Cocoon Collection and its Indian clientele, who return year after year to experience the brand's unique blend of warmth and luxury."

*Capturing hearts of Indian traveller*

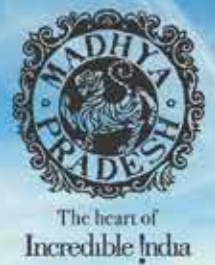
The Cocoon Collection has successfully captured the hearts of Indian travellers by blending luxury with cultural understanding. With properties that cater to different travel styles—be it family-oriented fun, romantic getaways, or adventurous escapes—The Cocoon Collection offers something for everyone. "Our relationship with India is incredibly important, and we're excited to continue building on it," says Ahmed.





# Madhya Pradesh

An Adventure Destination in Incredible India



Unlock Your Spirit of Adventure with Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board



Are you ready to break free from the ordinary? Step into the extraordinary with Madhya Pradesh's exciting array of adventure activities. As a premier offbeat destination, Madhya Pradesh is a treasure trove for adventure enthusiasts, offering everything from serene river rafting to thrilling tiger safaris. Discover ancient temples, trek through lush forests, and conquer majestic peaks!

## MOWGLILAND CYCLE TOUR

Embark on a four-day journey through the enchanting wilderness of Pench, following in the footsteps of Mowgli. Experience the untamed beauty and diverse wildlife of this iconic Indian landscape on your bicycle adventure!



## Embark on Unforgettable Adventures

### ROCK CLIMBING FESTIVAL

Push your limits at the Jatashankar Hill in Pachmarhi! Join the inaugural 10-day Climbing Challenge this November, hosted by the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, and embrace winter in this picturesque offbeat destination.



### PENCH MOWGLI TREK

Immerse yourself in the wildlife of Pench National Park, one of India's premier tiger reserves. This seven-day guided trek in September takes you through the lush buffer zone, rich in flora and fauna. Experience the thrill of exploring a protected tiger reserve on foot in collaboration with the forest department.

### MOWGLILAND HALF MARATHON

Feel the adrenaline as you run through the heart of the jungle in this unique half marathon held in September. This special event hosted by the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board offers adventure enthusiasts an unforgettable running experience in the backdrop of stunning sights and resonating sounds of nature.

### RIDERS IN THE WILD BIKING TOUR

Explore pristine tiger reserves and iconic destinations with Madhya Pradesh Tourism's unique biking event, which takes you through not one, but four tiger reserves. Discover popular tourist spots such as Khajuraho, Amarkantak, Panarpani, and Bhopal along the way!

### QUEENS ON THE WHEEL WOMEN'S BIKING TOUR

Discover the rich heritage and beauty of the Heart of Incredible India on a seven-day, women-only biking adventure—"Queens on the Wheel"—along a historic trail this March.

### KHAJURAHO MARATHON

Run through the historic Khajuraho Group of Temples in February, just before the mesmerizing Khajuraho Dance Festival.

### MP SKYDIVING FESTIVAL

Unleash your inner daredevil at the Skydiving Festival! Experience the unparalleled thrill of free-falling over stunning landscapes like Mahakal Lok, Ujjain. An electrifying adventure awaits!

Madhya Pradesh offers a wealth of exciting adventures, from jungle safaris, camping experiences, trekking trails, off-road 4\*4 TSD Car Rallies, Marathons, Water Sports, heritage walks, and more. Whether you're a seasoned explorer or a curious newcomer, this state has something for everyone!



# Greece

## *The Graceful Wonderland*

It's no secret that Greece is more than just a country; it's a phenomenon. Ancient temples, philosophers, mythical gods, breath-taking views of Mediterranean sea, and a whole lot of mouth-watering delicacies await every traveller with open arms.

**-Harish Chandra**





When I heard about the chance to join a familiarization trip to Greece, with a special focus on Athens and Rhodes, I had already started packing my bags. On my Schengen checklist, Greece was one of the very few countries where I never been to. This opportunity came as a pleasant surprise for which I was much excited to tick 'Greece' on my checklist.

Our adventure began with a flight from Delhi to Athens via Sharjah, and thanks to Arab Arabia's hospitality, we arrived relaxed and eager. The journey was comfortable, but nothing could compare to what lay ahead as we reached Athens International Airport. Our home base was the Roc Club, a hotel that felt like an elegant friend, while Cape Sounio - our other retreat in Athens - gave us a taste of luxury at its finest, with villas overlooking the Aegean Sea. The Greek culinary delicacies offered at both places were a welcome indulgence, setting the tone for an unforgettable trip.

### *The cradle of western civilization*

Athens felt like a time capsule set amidst a cosmopolitan canvas. Not just any European city, Athens lives and breathes history, with houses rarely going beyond five stories, allowing its ancient wonders to command attention. Our first stop, of course, was the iconic Acropolis, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This ancient hilltop citadel is home to the Parthenon, a monument of the classical spirit and an impressive feat of Greek architecture. It's hard not to be awe-struck when standing beneath its columns, marvelling at structures crafted in the 5th century BC.

But as much as Athens is about ancient ruins, it's also about lively modern experiences. After a day filled with historical sights, we dined at The Dolli which was just a stone's throw away from the Acropolis, where I discovered a newfound love for variety of Greek delicacies. But the highlight was the view. From The Dolli, it almost felt like you can reach out and touch the Acropolis itself. In that moment, I wasn't just a traveller; I was a part of something timeless.

A hop-on cruise along the Saronic Islands was next on our list, a 'must-do' for those craving authentic Greek experiences. We visited Hydra, Poros, and Aegina - each with its own unique personality. Hydra enchanted us with its charming harbour and traffic-free cobbled streets, while Aegina tempted us with freshly harvested pistachios and quaint shops. The clean,





## TRAVEL THERAPY



crystal-clear waters here were like nothing I'd ever seen. Swimming in these seas felt like plunging into the heart of Greek mythology itself.

### *Island of the sun*

After Athens, we took a short flight to Rhodes, a gem in the Dodecanese islands. Known for its medieval charm, Rhodes exudes a mysterious allure that combines the best of historical intrigue and natural beauty. We checked into Grecotel Dama Dama - a resort of luxury and Greek hospitality wrapped into one. The beach views alone could keep you entertained for days, but we had a medieval city to explore. The old city of Rhodes felt like straight out of a historical epic. We walked down the Street of the Knights, marvelling at the fortress-like structures built by the Knights of St. John during the Crusades. The Palace of the Grand Masters, a striking castle-turned-museum, holds centuries of stories and is an unmissable spot for any history lover. Every cobblestone seemed to echo with tales of past crusaders, and I half expected a knight to appear around each corner.

Rhodes got em' all!

Rhodes also offered a treasure trove of local cuisine and shopping. Strolling through the local market, I found vibrant olives, honey, spices, and hand-crafted souvenirs. Greek food here was another revelation - Greek Salad, Tzatziki, Souvlaki, and Baklava became our daily indulgences. The Roc Club, where we stayed in Rhodes, gave us an authentic taste of Greek hospitality that only added to the warmth of our experience.

And for those with a spirit for adventure (or those who can't resist an ocean view), the day trip to Simi Island is well worth it. Sailing on the Aegean for about an hour and a half, we reached Panormitis and the Monastery of Archontas Michail Panormitis, a revered site dedicated to the Archangel Michael. Legend has it that sailors who lost their way at sea would be guided back by the Archangel - a rather fitting story for an island that feels like a mythological haven.





## *City of stars*

Rhodes by night, as I soon discovered, has a different charm. The Casino Rodos, nestled in the heart of the city, offers not only gaming thrills but also the elegance of old-world luxury, making you feel like a character in a James Bond film. Beyond the casino, the nightlife in Rhodes is a mix of traditional tavernas and modern lounges, allowing visitors to taste both Greek culture and a bit of indulgence.

Though the Colossus of Rhodes - a statue of the Greek Sun-God Helios and one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World - is long gone, its spirit still looms large over the island. We also had a unique experience of watching 'Throne of Helios' - The History of Rhodes in 9D animation so beautifully presented that it not only entertains the kids but also amuses the adults.

One thing that I can assure to all the prospective travellers to

Greece that it is not just about Athens and Santorni Island - which are the first thing that come to mind while planning a visit to Greece, but there is a lot to explore in Rhodes along with Athens, which can broaden the experience of travel to Greece and can add to the memorable take-aways.

By the end of our trip, Greece had lived up to every expectation and surpassed many. I came for the history and the monuments, but I left with memories of flavours, sights, and laughter. Greece, with its scenic islands, legendary ruins, and genuine hospitality, is more than just a travel destination - it's an experience that lingers.

As Alexander Basile Coliadis, the Mayor of Rhodes has mentions in one of the brochures we recieved, "We are working diligently to ensure that our island claims an ever-higher place on the list of world-wide preferences."

Our company is specialised in the Indian market, especially for Greece. In terms of numbers, we are the first. Our main target is to make our country better known to the Indian audience this is why we do several of marketing actions all year round. Our passion and love for Greece is the reason we try to introduce New Greek destinations to the Indian travelers. With Greek tourism authorities or local tourism boards, we collaborate due to our deep understanding of the Indian travel mentality and needs. Rhodes, is a new Greek destination for the Indian market but very soon, will become one of the most favourite ones.

*Nikolaos Kavalieros*

Managing Director  
WOTFGroup





ADVERT

# Swosti Premium Beach Resorts, Puri

Elegance  
by the sea

Swosti Group unveils its latest marvel, setting new benchmarks in luxury and redefining Puri as the ultimate destination for leisure and business.



## ADVERT

Swosti Group proudly announces the grand opening of Swosti Premium Beach Resorts in Puri, a landmark addition to Odisha's luxury hospitality sector. This grand opening marks a significant step in establishing Odisha as a premier destination for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE), blending the state's rich cultural heritage with world-class amenities.

### Odisha's jewel of hospitality shines bright

The resort was officially inaugurated by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Odisha, Sri Mohan Charan Majhi, in a ceremony graced by the presence of Sri Dharmendra Pradhan, Hon'ble Minister of Education, Government of India, along with other prominent dignitaries. Their presence underscored the importance of this development for the state, which promises to elevate Puri's status as a top destination for both leisure and business travellers.

### Cultural roots, luxurious wings

Swosti Premium Beach Resorts, Puri, is the latest addition to Swosti Group's portfolio of luxury properties, now open for bookings. Situated in the sacred city of Sri

Jagannath Dham, this resort is designed to offer an unparalleled luxury experience, combining the spiritual and cultural richness of Puri with modern comforts and conveniences.

The Resort is now open for bookings, inviting guests to experience the perfect blend of Odisha's cultural richness and world-class luxury.

### MICE made magnificent

The resort is strategically designed to serve as a premier MICE destination, featuring state-of-the-art facilities that cater to large-scale conferences, corporate events, and elaborate wedding ceremonies. With expansive open-air landscaped lawns and a modern convention hall spanning 6,000 square feet, the resort offers versatile spaces to accommodate diverse events and gatherings.

### Stay in style, sleep in splendour

The design and architecture of Swosti Premium Beach Resorts are deeply rooted in Odisha's rich cultural heritage. The interiors draw inspiration from the elegant swipes and shapes of Odissi and Mahari dance forms, beautifully reflected in the resort's chandeliers. The ceilings, inspired

by the ancient Boita boats of Kalinga, feature graceful curved designs that evoke the region's maritime legacy. Even the staff uniforms are crafted with a nod to Odisha's traditional weaving culture, incorporating the intricate patterns of Sambalpuri and Ikat fabrics. This seamless blend of cultural inspiration and modern luxury creates an ambiance that is both sophisticated and authentic. Guests can choose from 125 elegantly designed luxury rooms, including suites that boast sophisticated decor, state-of-the-art technology, and stunning views of Puri's Golden Beach. Each room is meticulously designed to provide a perfect balance of comfort and luxury, ensuring a memorable stay for every guest.

### Taste the World, Savour the Ocean

Swosti Premium Beach Resorts offers an exceptional culinary experience, with menus curated by expert chefs. Guests can indulge in a wide range of multi-cuisine dishes and buffets at the Beach Hut, a restaurant that offers breath-taking panoramic views of the ocean. The resort also emphasises wellness, featuring a state-of-the-art fitness centre and the luxurious Ekayaa Spa, where guests can enjoy

rejuvenating treatments in a serene setting. Additional leisure amenities include a swimming pool, games room, and a dedicated kids' zone, ensuring entertainment for all ages.

### Sustainability meets sophistication

The Resort is committed to sustainability, incorporating eco-friendly practices such as energy-efficient systems, water conservation initiatives, and the use of locally sourced materials. These efforts reflect the Group's dedication to minimising its ecological footprint while delivering a luxurious experience.

### Swosti Group: A heritage of excellence

Since its inception in 1984, Swosti Group has been a pioneer in the hospitality industry, renowned for its commitment to excellence. The Group's portfolio includes Swosti Grand and Swosti Premium in Bhubaneswar, Gopalpur Palm Resort at Gopalpur-on-Sea, and Swosti Chilika Resort. The Group's success is further supported by Swosti Travels, Odisha's largest inbound tour operator, and the Swosti Institute of Management & Social Studies (SIMSS), which plays a vital role in training the next generation of hospitality professionals.





# Mahakumbh 2025: Where Spirituality Meets Tradition and Adventure



Uttar Pradesh

UTTAR PRADESH TOURISM



Since ancient times, saints across India have engaged in deep spiritual practices, or sadhana, striving to connect with the divine and praying for world peace. The tradition of collective prayer and unity runs deep in Indian heritage and continues today through vibrant festivals and spiritual gatherings. Of these, the Mahakumbh stands out as the pinnacle, a sacred event occurring every 12 years that is among the world's largest spiritual gatherings.

Millions of pilgrims from around the world gather at Prayagraj, the sacred confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers, known as the Triveni Sangam. This revered gathering is steeped in the symbolism of ancient Indian texts, which recount the cosmic battle between gods and demons for the elixir of immortality. Bathing in the waters of this confluence during Mahakumbh is believed to purify the soul, bringing devotees closer to salvation and liberation.

Mahakumbh is hosted in rotation between Haridwar, Ujjain, Nashik, and Prayagraj every 12 years, creating a powerful blend of spirituality and cultural diversity. This monumental event serves as a unique bridge to inner transformation and offers visitors a deep look into India's living traditions, making it a pilgrimage unlike any other.

In January 2025, Prayagraj will once again welcome the Mahakumbh, with extensive preparations already underway. The Uttar Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation (UPSTDC) is establishing a "tent city" at key areas like Arail Ghat, Parade Ground, and Jhunsi, offering around 2,000 tents in categories from basic to luxurious, and ensuring that pilgrims can enjoy both comfort and spiritual retreat. Moreover, special accommodations are being made for the Akhadas representing different monastic orders; these spiritual organizations bring an added dimension to the Mahakumbh's sacred atmosphere.

One of the key rituals of Mahakumbh is the series of seven important snans, or ritual baths, each with its own deep significance. The first snan is scheduled for January 13th, known as Paush Purnima, a full-moon bath associated with the pursuit of moksha (liberation from rebirth). On January 14, the Makar Sankranti snan—the first Shahi snan, or royal bath—will occur, where spiritual leaders symbolically lead devotees in taking the holy dip to mark the sun's northward shift. Other major snans include Mauni Amavasya (January 29), Basant Panchami (February 3), Magh Purnima (February 12), and the grand finale on Mahashivratri (February 26), each representing unique blessings and significance on the journey to spiritual awakening.

In addition to these ritual baths, Mahakumbh offers visitors a rich cultural experience. A wide array of indigenous and local cuisines will be available, giving visitors the chance to savor the authentic flavours of the region. Complementing this is a series of yoga sessions, offering pilgrims a rejuvenating opportunity to align their physical, mental, and spiritual selves. Yoga, renowned as an integral part of Indian culture, will play a significant role in providing inner peace to all who attend the Mahakumbh.

Another beautiful cultural component of Mahakumbh will be the bhajan sandhyas, or evening devotional music performances, where the uplifting sounds of traditional music fill the air with tranquility. For those seeking adventure, Mahakumbh 2025 will have something special to offer: helicopter joy rides will give visitors an exhilarating aerial view of the grand Kumbh Mela grounds and the holy Sangam, providing a unique perspective on the enormity of this sacred congregation and the captivating landscape of Prayagraj.

Adventure lovers can also engage in water sports along the banks of the rivers. The area surrounding Prayagraj boasts a number of revered temples, including the famous Hanuman Temple and Mankameswar Temple, each adding to the city's spiritual depth. These sacred sites allow visitors to explore Prayagraj's rich cultural history and enhance their journey with moments of deep spiritual connection.

Together, these cultural and recreational elements transform the Mahakumbh from a traditional pilgrimage into a multifaceted celebration of India's cultural heritage. With activities and experiences for every type of visitor, Mahakumbh 2025 promises to be an enriching event that resonates with both domestic and international travellers, all converging on Prayagraj for a glimpse of India's unique spiritual heartbeat.





LA LA LAND

# Indian Festivals

Where emotions, traditions  
and cultures unite!

India, a land of diverse cultures, languages, and traditions, is known for its ability to weave countless beliefs into one unified narrative.

- *Khurshed Ahmed*



The festivals of India are a testament to this beautiful diversity. From the riot of colours during Holi to the tranquil lights of Diwali, Indian festivals encapsulate the spirit of joy, togetherness, and deep-rooted tradition. For travellers, these celebrations are more than mere events—they are immersive experiences that provide a glimpse into the heart and soul of the country.

**The essence of Indian festivals**

Indian festivals are an embodiment of the country's rich cultural heritage, where ancient traditions blend seamlessly with modern expressions. These festivals often linked to religious practices, seasonal changes, or historical events, offer travellers an opportunity to experience the unique way India celebrates life. What makes these celebrations truly special is not just the grandiosity but the warmth with which locals invite visitors to be part of their customs.

Traveling to India during a festival can feel like stepping into another world, where the air is charged with excitement, streets are adorned with decorations and food stalls beckon with enticing aromas. Travellers from across the globe find themselves lost in the rhythms of India's festivals, discovering a shared sense of community and joy.

**The Festival of Colours**

One of the most popular Indian festivals among international travellers is Holi, the festival of colours. Celebrated in March to mark the arrival of spring, Holi is an exuberant occasion where social barriers dissolve, and people come together to splash vibrant colours on each other. For travellers, participating in Holi is a sensory delight—a celebration where laughter echoes in the streets and strangers become friends.

As a traveller, there is no better way to experience Holi than by heading to the bustling cities of Mathura and Vrindavan, believed to be the birthplace of Lord Krishna, who is closely associated with the festival. Here, the



celebration is a grand spectacle of dance, music, and colour, stretching over several days. Participating in Holi in these cities allows visitors to witness the sheer scale of the event while also enjoying the intimate gatherings of locals in smaller towns and villages.

The beauty of Holi is not just in the splashes of colour but in the joy it brings. Tourists from around the world share in the revelry, making it a festival that transcends boundaries. It's a celebration that reminds us all of the simple pleasures of life—of laughter, of human connection, and of the vibrancy that surrounds us.



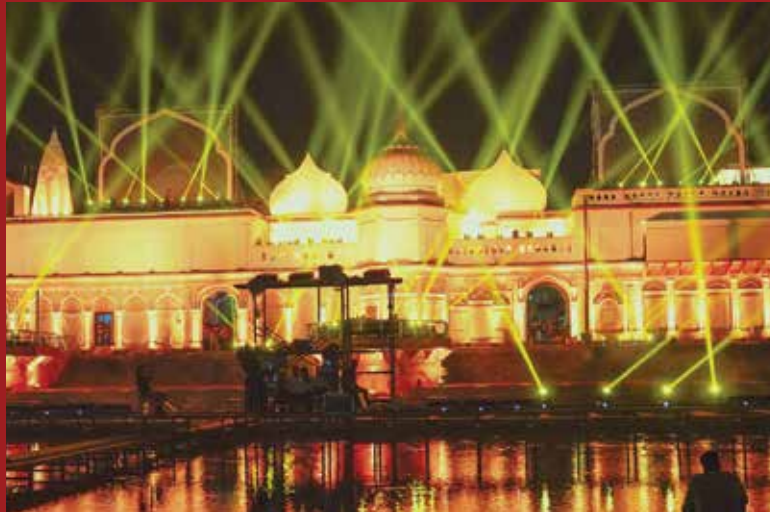


**The Festival of Lights**

If Holi is a riot of colours, Diwali is the celebration of light. Often referred to as the Indian equivalent of Christmas, Diwali is a festival that symbolizes the victory of good over evil, light over darkness. Celebrated with much fervour in November, it is a time when every home, street, and city glows with countless lamps, candles, and fireworks.

For travellers, Diwali is a magical experience. Imagine walking through the ancient streets of Jaipur or Varanasi, where the entire cityscape is illuminated by the soft glow of earthen lamps and the sky above is filled with the sparkle of firecrackers. Families invite visitors into their homes, share festive sweets, and explain the stories and traditions behind the festival. This warmth and hospitality are quintessential to the Indian experience.

Many visitors choose to spend Diwali in Varanasi, where the evening Ganga Aarti (a devotional ritual by the river) is even more spectacular during the festival. The sight of thousands of floating diyas (oil lamps) on the sacred Ganges River is an ethereal experience that stays with travellers long after they've left India.



**Celebrating Divine Femininity**

In the eastern part of India, particularly in Kolkata, Durga Puja is one of the most important festivals, celebrated with grandiose rituals and unmatched enthusiasm. Dedicated to Goddess Durga, the festival honours the victory of the divine feminine over the forces of evil. What sets Durga Puja apart is the intricate artistry displayed in the creation of massive idols of the goddess and elaborate pandals (temporary structures), where rituals take place.

Travellers are captivated by the sheer artistry and community spirit that go into Durga Puja. The city of Kolkata becomes a carnival, with people hopping from one pandal to another to admire the stunning artwork, performances, and cultural programs. Travellers can join in, feeling the pulse of the city as they explore, eat local delicacies like rosogulla and fish curry, and become part of the festive mood.

For many, the highlight is Sindoor Khela, a ritual performed on the last day of the festival, where married women smear each other with vermilion as a symbol of auspiciousness and strength. Even as a visitor, you are encouraged to participate, sharing in the joy, passion, and cultural depth of this festival.





**A Festival of Generosity and Unity**

Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha are two major Islamic festivals celebrated across India with great zeal. For travellers, Eid is an invitation to witness India's rich Muslim heritage, from the grand mosques of Delhi and Hyderabad to the humble streets of Lucknow and Kerala, where communities gather for prayers, feasts, and charitable acts. One of the most cherished experiences for travellers during Eid is the sharing of traditional feasts with local families. Sweets like *sewaiyyan* (vermicelli pudding) and hearty dishes such as biryani and kebabs are generously offered, reflecting the spirit of hospitality and unity that defines the festival. Eid is a time for reflection, gratitude, and giving, and it offers travellers a chance to experience India's diverse religious practices in a setting that's as welcoming as it is spiritual.

**Welcoming the Elephant God**

In Maharashtra, particularly in Mumbai, Ganesh Chaturthi is one of the most awaited festivals. The city comes alive as devotees welcome idols of Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed god of wisdom and prosperity, into their homes and public spaces. The festival lasts for several days, culminating in a massive procession where the idols are immersed in water, symbolizing the god's return to his celestial abode.

For travellers, participating in Ganesh Chaturthi is a lively and emotional experience. As the streets fill with music, dance, and chants of 'Ganpati Bappa Morya,' visitors can join the processions, dancing alongside locals and feeling the pulse of Mumbai's energy. The immersion of the idols in the Arabian Sea is a spectacular sight, offering a rare blend of devotion, celebration, and community spirit that leaves a lasting impression.

**Harvesting Gratitude**

In South India, Pongal and Makar Sankranti are celebrated as harvest festivals, marking the end of winter and the beginning of the harvest season. Pongal, celebrated primarily in Tamil Nadu, is a four-day festival where families gather to offer thanks to the sun god and Mother Nature for the

bounty of crops.

Travellers visiting Tamil Nadu during Pongal can experience traditional Tamil culture in its purest form. Villages and towns host *jallikattu* (bull-taming) contests, prepare traditional Pongal dishes made from freshly harvested rice, and decorate their homes with colourful *kolam* (rice flour designs). These festivities are a celebration of simplicity, gratitude, and respect for nature—a message that resonates deeply with those who experience it. Indian festivals are more than mere holidays—they are deeply immersive experiences that allow travellers to step into the heart of Indian culture, tradition, and humanity. Whether it's dancing in the vibrant colours of Holi, lighting lamps during Diwali, or sharing a meal during Eid, the joy of being part of these celebrations is unmatched. For the global traveller, India's festivals offer not just a glimpse into a different culture but an invitation to celebrate the shared human spirit.





# TOFTigers Wildlife Travel AWARDS 2024



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THROUGH INNOVATION AND COLLABORATION**

## NOMINATE NOW FOR 13 AWARDS



[www.toftigers.org/AwardsNomination](http://www.toftigers.org/AwardsNomination)

Nominations closing midnight 15th October 2024.



### *Celebrating 20th Anniversary*

TOFTigers, in partnership with The Sanctuary Nature Foundation and Outlook Traveller, announces the 7th Wildlife Tourism Awards. Under the theme *"Celebrating Harmony: Fostering Sustainable Wildlife Tourism through Innovation and Collaboration,"* the Awards recognize eco-lodges, wildlife guides, tourism operators, community initiatives, photography & documentary experts and Climate guardians in India and Nepal for their leadership in sustainable tourism and conservation. *With over 200 global members,* TOFTigers continues to drive a vision where tourism actively supports the preservation of wildlife and natural heritage.

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### THE AWARDS CATEGORIES 2024

1. The John Wakefield Memorial Award for Most Inspirational Lodge (Four Awards will be awarded in this category - Outstanding, Quality, Footprint & Rising Star).
2. The Billy Arjan Singh Memorial Award for Wildlife Guide (Awards will be given in four regional categories - North, West, East, South)
3. Wildlife Promotion Company Award
4. Wildlife Tourism Community Initiative Award
5. Wildlife and Tourism Initiative Award
6. International Wildlife Tour Operator Award
7. Lodge Naturalist Award
8. Wildlife Conservation Photography Award
9. Wildlife Conservation Documentary Award
10. Wildlife Harmony Homestay Award
11. Kailash Sankhala Visitor Friendly Wildlife National Park Award
12. Sanctuary Asia Award for "Best State for Sustainable Wildlife Tourism."
13. Climate Guardian Award

For Further information visit:

[www.toftigers.org/WildlifeTourismAwards](http://www.toftigers.org/WildlifeTourismAwards)

For Sponsorship please contact:

Ms. Ritu Makhija

+9810117090 / +91 11 4100 6608

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TOFTigers is formed in 2004, galvanising those most active in the Indian nature travel industry to promote best operating practices. TOFTigers engages with global travel and tourism operators, Indian destination management companies and local wildlife lodges and resorts helping them all adopt practices that promote sustainable business, community support and tiger conservation. By doing so TOFTigers not only helps support the tigers, the parks and local communities, but also helps these companies provide their clients with a more inspired, fulfilling and enjoyable experience. A true 'win-win' scenario.

The Sanctuary TOFTigers Wildlife Tourism Awards are a celebration of what has been achieved so far, and perhaps more importantly, are an inspiration for what can be done in the future.



# ISLAND LIFE TRAVEL HOSTS INAUGURAL MALDIVES DIWALI CARNIVAL

Island Life Travel, hosted the inaugural Maldives Diwali Carnival in India. This significant milestone aims to strengthen the relationship between the Maldives and India. Bringing together over 500 industry professionals from all over India, the event highlighted the Maldives' significance as a preferred destination for Indian travellers. The Diwali Carnival featured over 22 exquisite Maldives resorts, each showcasing their unique offerings and experiences to the valued trade partners.





# MINOR HOTELS ROADSHOW HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INDIAN TOURISM MARKET

Minor Hotels, a global hotel owner and operator with more than 550 properties in 56 countries, has successfully concluded a three-city India roadshow in Mumbai, Delhi and Ahmedabad introducing signature travel experiences to Indian travel agents. Taking place between 21st -25th October 2024, the events saw representatives from 26 Minor properties from the Middle East, Europe, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Mauritius meet the country's leading travel agencies, luxury wedding planners and MICE companies for a series of networking events and sales calls.





## ATOUT FRANCE ORGANISES THE SIXTH EDITION OF ITS OFFSITE B2B SHOWCASE

France Tourism Development Agency recently organised the 6th edition of its annual B2B showcase Explore France at the JW Marriott in Goa from 7th to 11th October. A delegation of 23 key stakeholders representing the diversity of France's touristic offering interacted with 50 members of the Indian travel trade fraternity over two days of pre-scheduled meetings and also interacted with trade media representatives. An approximate of 1100 meetings took place over these two days enabling the partners and agents to understand the evolution of travel trends and discuss potential business opportunities.





## THE COCOON COLLECTION HOSTS EXCLUSIVE GET-TOGETHER FOR TRADE PARTNERS

The Cocoon Collection, in collaboration with TAWI LUSH, recently hosted an exclusive gathering for their trade partners in Mumbai and New Delhi. These events were organised to celebrate the exceptional performance of their Mumbai and Delhi-based partners and to express gratitude for their continued support. The events were graced by key members of The Cocoon Collection team, including Jay Ahmed, Toha Ali, Simmi Satyeash Pai, and Satyeash Pai. They took the opportunity to thank their partners and announce exciting new all-inclusive honeymoon offerings.





## German Tourism organises a showcase event

The German National Tourist Office (GNTO) successfully hosts an exclusive press conference spotlighting Germany's dynamic travel opportunities and its growing connection with the Indian tourism market. The event, graced by Mrs. Petra Hedorfer, CEO of the German National Tourist Board (GNTB), drew significant attention from leading Indian journalists. The engaging presentation highlighted Germany as a premier travel destination, with a special focus on sustainable and culturally enriching experiences.



## PHDCCI organises Wedding Tourism Summit & Expo

India is set to experience a surge in wedding tourism thanks to the initiatives spearheaded by Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Over the last few years, an estimated 25-30 crore people have risen from poverty to the middle class in India. According to Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Hon'ble Minister of Tourism and Culture, this economic shift coupled with India's young population has created a tremendous opportunity for the wedding industry.





## Korea Tourism Organization's organises Korea Travel Fiesta 2024 and Roadshow in New Delhi

The event left an unforgettable mark with its captivating performances, Korean beauty experiences, and culinary delights. The Korea Travel Fiesta 2024 attracted enthusiastic visitors eager to immerse them in the vibrant K-Wave. Actor Anushka Sen, a distinguished ambassador of Korea Tourism, added her star power to the event, energising the trade partners and celebrating Korea's cultural heritage.



## Nok Air launches nonstop daily flights between Mumbai and Bangkok

Nok Air begins its new nonstop daily flights between Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (BOM) and Bangkok's Don Muang Airport (DMK). This route operates by the state-of-the-art Airbus 737-800, featuring 189 comfortable seats. To celebrate the launch, Nok Air hosted a pre-launch party on October 18 at Radisson Blu Mumbai, attended by Chief Commercial Officer Ranon Viputsiri, Thai Consulate General Donnawit Poolsawat, and delegates from the Thai Tourism Authority, along with key travel agents, tour operators, and online travel agencies.





## APPOINTMENTS



### **Minor Hotels**

Global hospitality leader Minor Hotels announces the appointment of Rohit Chopra as the new Area Commercial Director for India. With over 26 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Chopra will lead commercial strategies across Minor Hotels' India operations, overseeing revenue growth, client relationships, and customer loyalty. His appointment comes as the group accelerates its expansion plans, with 50 new hotel openings targeted in the next decade.

### **TripJack**

Varun will lead TripJack's largest division with a focus on building new lines of business, driving process transformation, and enhancing capability development. His leadership will be instrumental in shaping the future of TripJack's flights portfolio as the company strengthens its position in the travel industry.



### **Villa Resorts**

Ahmed Faris joins Villa Haven with nearly 18 years of experience in the hospitality industry, bringing a rich and diverse background to his new role. He has worked for exposure and experience in various international locations, including Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, and Morocco. Ahmed has consistently demonstrated his dedication to exceptional guest service and operational excellence. Most recently, he served as Executive Assistant Manager at The Nautilus in the Maldives.

### **Tatabye DMC**

Tatabye announces the appointment of Somesh Basavaraj as Operations Manager. With over two decades of extensive experience in the travel and hospitality industry, spanning roles at leading travel agencies, international airlines such as Malaysia Airlines, Singapore Airlines, Emirates, and corporate entities like WIPRO, Somesh brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the team.







## BATHING DATES:

- |   |                                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Paush Purnima                                | - 13 <sup>th</sup> January, 2025  |
| 2. Makar Sankranti (1 <sup>st</sup> Shahi Snan) | - 14 <sup>th</sup> January, 2025  |
| 3. Mauni Amavasya (2 <sup>nd</sup> Shahi Snan)  | - 29 <sup>th</sup> January, 2025  |
| 4. Basant Panchami (3 <sup>rd</sup> Shahi Snan) | - 03 <sup>rd</sup> February, 2025 |
| 5. Achala Saptami                               | - 04 <sup>th</sup> February, 2025 |
| 6. Magh Purnima                                 | - 12 <sup>th</sup> February, 2025 |
| 7. Shri Mahashivratri                           | - 26 <sup>th</sup> February, 2025 |

## Experience Spiritual Grandeur in Unmatched Luxury

At the Mahakumbh 2025, tent cities are being set up at the banks of the Sangam and key areas like Parade Ground, Arail, and Jhunsi.

The tent city will offer sheer luxury with three categories of accommodation to choose from.

Villa, Maharaja, and Swiss Cottage-the three types of accommodation will offer unique amenities to suit various preferences of the travellers.

The site at Parade Ground will have 55 tents/Swiss cottages, while the site at Jhunsi will spread over 2.5 acres and accommodate 200 luxury cottages, while a larger tent city at Arail will feature 2000 cottages across 25 acres, with deluxe, super deluxe, and luxury options.

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