



VOLUME 1 | ISSUE 1

# INDIA TRAVELLER

VOICE OF INDIAN TOURISM

COVER STORY

**The Great  
Indian  
Coastline**

**CITYSCAPE**

48 Hours in Mumbai

**SPOTLIGHT**

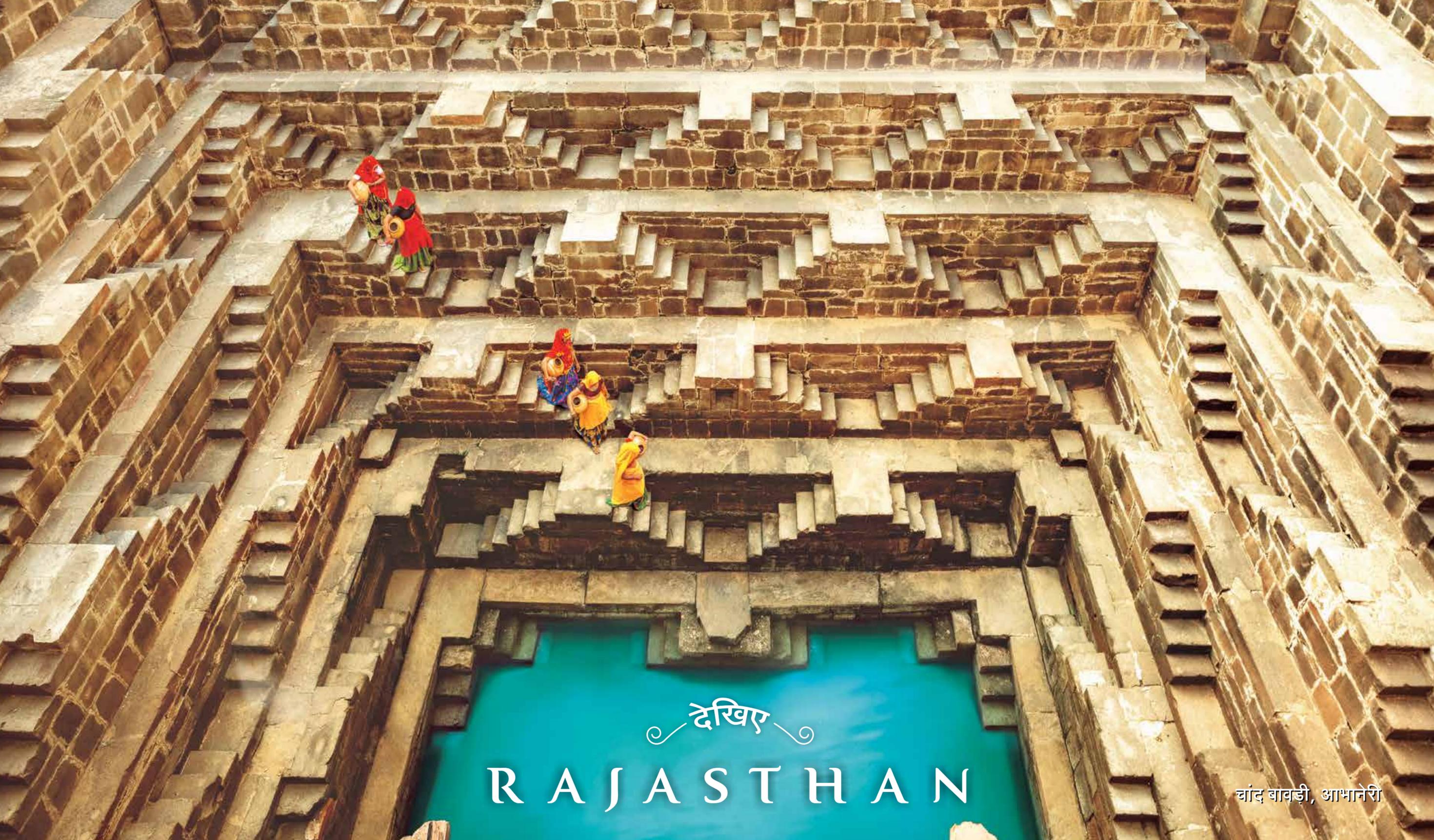
India's Best Kept Secret: Odisha

**DESTINATION**

The Playground of the Royals

**BUSINESS OF TRAVEL**

India's Mice Opportunity



देखिए

# RAJASTHAN

चांद बावड़ी, आभानेरी

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Department of Tourism, Government of Rajasthan



राजस्थान  
भारत का अतुल्य राज्य !

## EDITOR'S NOTE



## The maiden voyage

When Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama sailed for the East, little did the world anticipate that when he landed at the Malabar coast in 1498, the first European to reach India by sea, he would trigger a series of events that would change the map of the subcontinent, and the history of the world.

Many moons later, India's staggeringly beautiful coast, stretching approximately 7,500 kilometres is still vastly virgin, apart from a few pockets of development such as Goa, Kerala, Puducherry and Tamil Nadu. You may wonder why.

There are many such conundrums that confront India's tourism sector and we are happy to launch The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry's (FICCI) *India Traveller*—an incisive magazine that fills the gap for the industry between India's tourism reality and its infinite potential. Expect voices of leaders, debates and opinions, and an insider's perspective to the best India has to offer. Our first issue looks at Odisha's refreshed tourism outlook, examines in detail India's coastal opportunities and delves deep into the magnificence of the royal city of Udaipur, and much, much more.

For the past two decades FICCI has been championing the cause of tourism in India, a country that elicits reactions touching on the extreme ends of the spectrum from those unfamiliar with her. Love her or hate her, India is a country of many moods and diverse experiences, and most importantly a land with a soul.

We're also ecstatic to announce FICCI's Travel & Tourism Excellence Awards, authoritative, independent and transparent awards that celebrate the heroes of Indian tourism, who like us, are bringing the best of the country to the world.

It will take many lifetimes to understand the dynamic spirit of India, her mesmerising diversity and her rich cultural outpourings. In the land where guests are God, this is our humble attempt to try. 

*Neeti Mehra*  
NEETI MEHRA  
Editor



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*The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts* has been rated amongst the  
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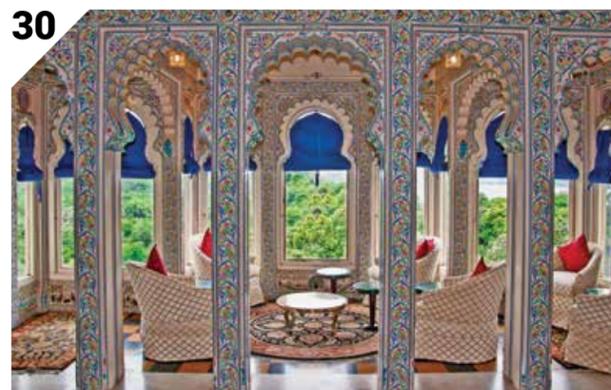


THE LEELA  
PALACES HOTELS RESORTS

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पर्यटन एवं संस्कृति राज्य मंत्री (स्वतंत्र प्रभार)  
भारत सरकार, नई दिल्ली



Minister Of State (IC) For Tourism & Culture  
Government Of India, New Delhi

प्रहलाद सिंह पटेल  
PRAHLAD SINGH PATEL

## MESSAGE



Tourism plays a vital role in the economy of many countries. This industry serves as a principal source of income, employment, private sector growth and infrastructure development, especially in a nation blessed with nature's abundance. Due to this, tourism development also contributes to the overall economic growth.

In India, tourism is a ₹9.4 lakh crore industry. According to The World Travel and Tourism Council, it generated ₹16.91 lakh crore (US\$240 billion) and supported 42.673 million jobs, amounting to 8.1 per cent of India's total employment. The sector is projected to grow at an annual rate of 6.9 per cent to ₹32.05 lakh crore (US\$460 billion) by 2028, a total of 9.9 per cent of GDP.

There has been considerable growth in the industry in the past five years owing to the initiatives taken by the government. India moved 12 places up from the 52nd to the 40th position in the Travel and Tourism Competitive Index of the World Economic Forum. This is clearly reflected in the growth of international tourist arrivals in India, which hit 10.56 million in 2018, a country which continues to charm international tourists with its vast cultural heritage and natural resources. In terms of price competitive advantage, India is ranked 10th, while it is ranked 55th in international openness.

A positive correlation exists between bountiful nature, historical marvels and places of religious prominence a country has to offer. While tourists are enthralled by the aforesaid attractions, the major driver for them to visit these locations are a combination of support services like available infrastructure, financing mechanism and most importantly, the outreach planned to reach out to the target group of tourists. These factors not only sustain tourist flow, but also contribute to its immense growth over the years. Improvement of tourism infrastructure, therefore, throughout the country, has been a key area of focus for the current government. The ministry has been actively working towards the development of quality tourism infrastructure across various tourist destinations and circuits in the states and union territories by sanctioning expenditure budgets across schemes like SWADESH DARSHAN and PRASHAD.

The Ministry of Tourism has been actively promoting India as a 365 days tourist destination, with niche tourism products in the country like cruise, adventure, medical, wellness and golf, along with MICE, eco- and sustainable tourism, film tourism, etc. The goal is to overcome the 'seasonality' challenge in tourism.

The ministry has also taken up a number of steps for the holistic development of the sector, with a vision to present India as the most preferred destination for global travellers. I would like to congratulate FICCI for their outstanding effort to publish this informative and very useful magazine—*India Traveller*, which will attract tourists to India, encouraging to visit and enjoy both iconic and offbeat destinations.

(Prahlad Singh Patel)

New Delhi  
14<sup>th</sup> August 2019

Incredible India

अतुल्यभारत

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# Tourism News

## Jaipur's World Heritage Status



The fabled Pink City, Jaipur has entered the elite club of UNESCO World Heritage Sites after the 43rd session of the committee. It was one of the 35 nominations, with an

edge for its exemplary town planning and architecture which demonstrated an amalgamation of ideas in the late medieval period. Founded in 1727 by Sawai Jai Singh II, Jaipur was built according to a grid plan interpreted in the light of Vedic architecture. On being inscribed as a World Heritage Site, Eric Falt, Director and UNESCO representative in India, commented, "Jaipur is an exceptional example of interchange of ancient Hindu, Mughal and contemporary Western ideas in town planning and architecture."

Jaipur's streets feature continuous colonnaded businesses, in distinct hues that earned it the moniker of Pink City, which intersect in the centre at large public squares called chaupars. Designed to be a commercial capital, Jaipur has maintained its local commercial, artisanal and cooperative traditions and its continuous, uniform facades have won accolades for its planning. [whc.unesco.org](http://whc.unesco.org)

## Icons of India

In a bid to create a world-class experience for tourists, The Ministry of Tourism has shortlisted 17 sites across 12 clusters, which will be developed as iconic tourism sites. The sites will be developed holistically, smoothing out issues concerning connectivity, offering better facilities, investing in skill development and the local community, while bringing in private investments.

These include the Taj Mahal and Fatehpur Sikri in Uttar Pradesh, Ajanta & Ellora in Maharashtra, Amer Fort in Rajasthan, as well as Humayun's Tomb, Red Fort and Qutub Minar in Delhi, Colva Beach in Goa, Somnath and Dholavira in Gujarat, Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh, Hampi in Karnataka, Mahabalipuram in Tamil Nadu, Kaziranga in Assam, Kumarakom in Kerala and Mahabodhi Temple in Bihar.

Recently, the Culture Ministry decided to keep 10 heritage sites open for public from sunrise to 9pm. These extended timings will be applicable to Humayun's and Safdarjung Tomb in Delhi, Rajarani Temple in Bhubaneswar, Dulhadev Temple in Khajuraho, Sheikh Chilli Tomb in Kurukshetra, the Group of Monuments at Pattadakal in Karnataka, Gol Gumbaj in Karnataka, and a few more. [tourism.gov.in](http://tourism.gov.in)

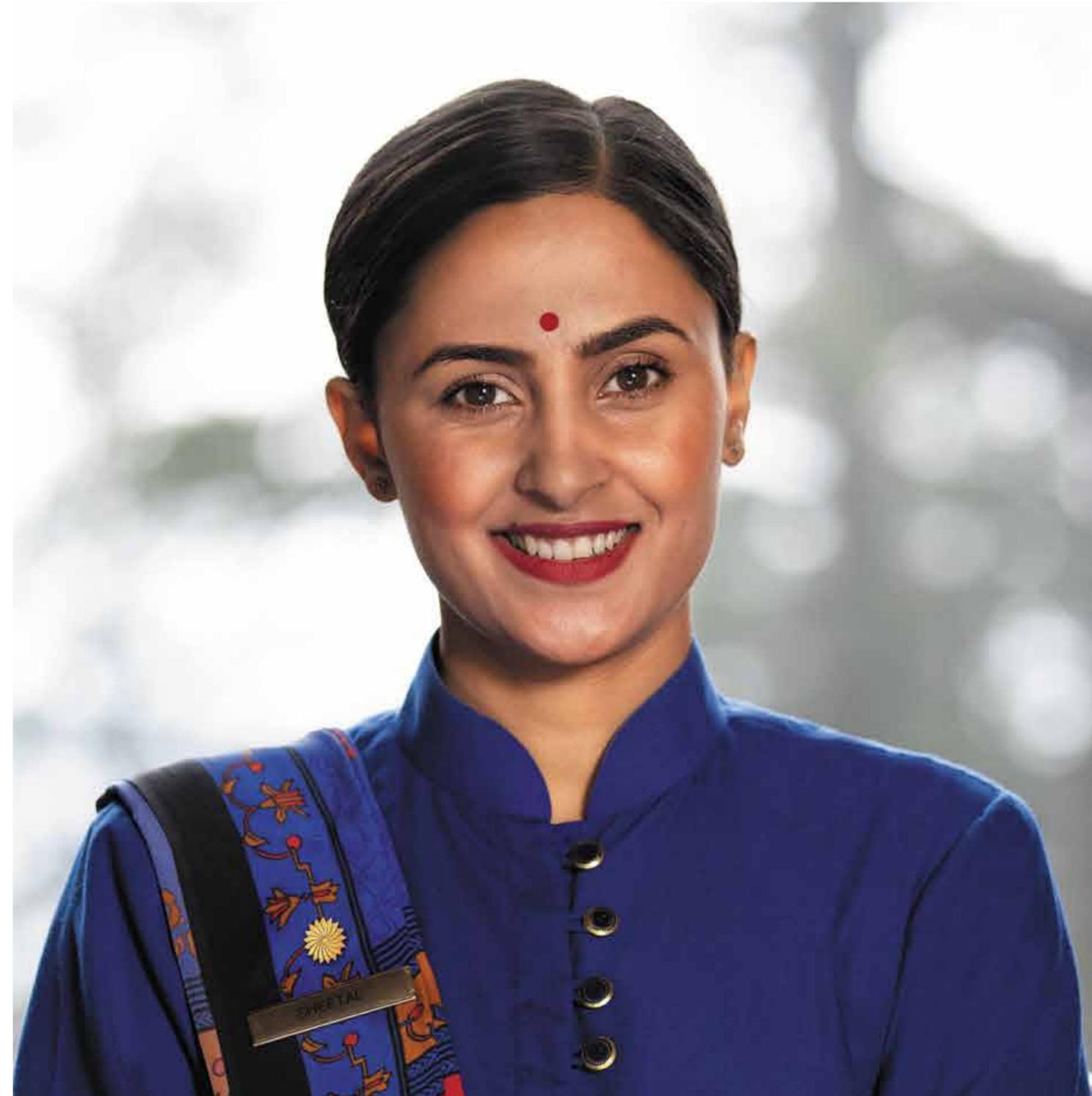


## India's Airlines' Global Ambitions

Spreading wings beyond India, full-service carrier Vistara has launched international flights, beginning with daily flights from Delhi and Mumbai to Singapore. Also starting 21st August are daily direct flights on the Mumbai-Dubai sector, a popular destination for the Indian traveller. Vistara has also entered into a codeshare agreement with Singapore Airlines and its regional arm SilkAir for international flights.

Meanwhile, Indigo has announced daily direct flights on the Kolkata-Hanoi route, apart from direct flights on the Delhi-Dhaka, Mumbai-Singapore, Kolkata-Yangon and Mumbai-Bangkok as well as the Mumbai-Dubai, Mumbai-Kuwait and Delhi-Jeddah routes. GoAir too is adding five new international services to the Gulf region and two to Bangkok. The National Carrier Air India will launch direct flights to Nairobi, Kenya in October and will increase flights to Dubai.

According to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) shows that both foreign and Indian carriers together flew 16.4 million passengers in the first quarter of the year. [airindia.in](http://airindia.in); [goair.in](http://goair.in); [goindigo.in](http://goindigo.in); [airvistara.com](http://airvistara.com)



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### EASTERN STAR

With the launch of ITC Royal Bengal, luxury has a new address in Kolkata

Prachi Joshi

With colonial-inspired architecture and modern design, ITC Hotels' 14th Luxury Collection hotel, ITC Royal Bengal has come up right next to ITC Sonar and Science City. What impressed me were the little touches that paid homage to Kolkata's rich history and culture—traditional kantha craftworks on the walls, murals depicting local block printing, vintage artefacts and paintings of stunning Bengali ladies from Satyajit Ray's movies. A massive painting of the iconic Victoria Memorial by eminent Bengali artist Sanjay Bhattacharya adorns a lobby wall.

My suite was elegantly appointed with a king-size bed, a work desk, two TVs (with Netflix), and a massive bathroom with twin basins and a luxurious deep bathtub. I loved that I could see the verdant East Kolkata wetlands from my full-length windows. The in-room iPad helped control everything from the lights to the TV, as well as to order room service, call butler assistance, etc. The valet cupboard, with external access, is a clever touch. The staff could pick up and drop my laundry without having to ring the bell.

Lunch was at the bustling Grand Market Pavilion inspired by Kolkata's New Market, an all-day buffet restaurant with an extensive spread. I tried the North-Eastern spread with specialities from Assam, Nagaland and Sikkim. Dinner was a vegetarian affair at Royal Vega, where I tasted the nearly forgotten Sheherwali cuisine of the Murshidabad Jains. Humble vegetables like bottle gourd, pointed gourd and long beans were elevated into an art form on the plate. But it's Sky Point, a rooftop bar with sweeping city views, scheduled to open soon, which will give you a glimpse into Kolkata as it is today—the old juxtaposed with the new.

#### Fact File

ITC Royal Bengal is located 16 kilometres from Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport. The hotel has 374 rooms and suites and 82 serviced apartments. Its 15 venues offer 38,000+ square feet of banquet and meeting space, the largest in the city. Doubles from ₹10,250+

### A TRIBUTE TO DESIGN

Port Muziris Kochi, taking its name from the old port town of Muziris, is a design centric property, the first Tribute Portfolio Hotel in South Asia

Nivedita Jayaram Pawar

It's a little past 3pm in the afternoon and the Kerala sun is beating down mercilessly. But thankfully, Port Muziris Kochi—a Tribute Portfolio Hotel, is just a short drive away from the Cochin International Airport. Marriott International's first Tribute Portfolio flag in South Asia, Port Muziris is an intriguing boutique hotel with an indie spirit and heart. It is steeped in a strong sense of place, taking inspiration from the grand old Dutch colonial villas of the past.

Featuring 54 artistically designed rooms, including three executive suites, my room had hand-painted walls, teakwood furniture, colourful upholstery and hand-loomed textiles, which created an environment as tactile as it is photogenic, with fabulous views to boot. The eccentric art installations scattered around the public spaces celebrated beautiful niches. Artists with roots in the Malabar Coast, living across the world in the present day, were handpicked to create the art at Port Muziris.

There are three F&B options to indulge in. Lila's Kitchen is the all-day dining outlet, which serves local delicacies cooked the traditional way. I highly recommend the kozhi muringakka charu, chuttulli meen, amarakka parippu, nadan njandu curry and attirachi biryani. The Kettle serves a delectable high tea. Local snacks unnakaya and meen samosa served as bar nibbles are highly addictive. The Verandah is designed like a patio in a traditional Kerala house for you to enjoy a leisurely meal. There is also a gym and an outdoor swimming pool looking on to the coconut trees, a reminder that we indeed are in Kerala.

#### Fact File

Located less than a mile from Cochin International Airport, the hotel is located near the CIAL Golf Course. It features a 1,700 square feet event space that has a maximum capacity of 150. Tariff: ₹8,000+ for the rooms; Suites at ₹11,000+

### LAKESIDE IDYLL

The Conrad Bengaluru overlooking the Ulsoor Lake is the chain's second property in India

Charukesi Ramadurai

Even before I entered the gates of the Conrad Bengaluru, I knew that its location made it a winner. It looms 24 storeys over the Ulsoor Lake, with every one of its 285 rooms and suites offering a calming view amidst Bengaluru's bustle. From my spacious executive suite on the top floor, all I could see was water. Not just the green and blue sprawl of the lake, but also the infinity swimming pool on the third floor.

This level became my preferred haunt, given that Tiamo, the al fresco poolside Mediterranean Bistro turned out to be a firm favourite from the hotel's dining options, and that the spa was also located there. I even ended up joining in an early morning aqua aerobics fitness class in the pool, after which I wolfed down a scrumptious south Indian breakfast at the all-day diner, Caraway Kitchen (thus undoing any benefit from the exercise). I followed this up with another stab at wellness, with a long potli massage at the spa, where I almost fell asleep under the careful ministrations of my therapist.

This is the second India property from Conrad Hotels and Resorts, the luxury hotel chain owned and operated by Hilton Worldwide. The focus here is on international standards of service, with an Indian touch. And that bit is served up most efficiently through its other restaurants: Mikusu with pan-Asian cuisine and Indian Durbar, with recipes from the royal kitchens across the country.

Ulsoor Lake may well be one of Bengaluru's oldest urban oases, but the Conrad is definitely one of its newest.

#### Fact File

Conrad Bengaluru, just off MG Road is roughly 38 km from Kempe Gowda International Airport. The Grand Ballroom (7,555 square feet) is one of the largest meeting and event spaces in the city. Doubles from ₹11,680+

### A WELLNESS GETAWAY

Luxe wellness Prakriti Shakti Clinic run by the CGH Earth Group is a haven of holistic healing

Geeta Rao

I am in the Panchalimedu hills in Kerala above rubber plantations and cardamom estates, lying on a sun bed, a cold compress on my eyes, letting the warm rays seep into my body.

Prakriti Shakti Clinic of Natural Medicine by CGH Earth takes its commitment to naturopathy seriously. Unlike Ayurveda, there are no medicated oils or ghee, no herbal powders or tonics to ingest. Just mudpacks, sunbathing, steam boxes and water therapies harnessing the five natural elements. Fasting helps cells rejuvenate. Raw food is an important part of the healing and the kitchen runs with no heat, no gas and no processed foods.

Nature and naturopathy work in tandem and in my seven days I experience torrential rain, walls of mist, bright sunshine and blue skies in quick succession. Soaking wet in rain on a nature walk, the doctor says it's all a part of nature's healing. He is right. I feel energised.

The centre nests on a ridge in a secluded part of the Western Ghats eco-sphere. There are limited rooms, some are chalet-style rooms, and some are private cottages. My beautifully appointed cottage comes with a sun bed and a private lawn facing the hills, my haven between treatments at the healing centre.

What's important to know is that this is not a spa resort and there is no room service menu. It is meant for people looking to take charge of their health, encouraging long-stay guests trying to tackle chronic diseases. The doctors use the DREMMER approach—focussing on diet, rest, exercise, the microbiome, the mind, environment and natural rhythms to bring you back to a state of optimal wellness or at least, let you start the journey. With a little help from Mother Nature.

#### Fact File

Prakriti Shakti Clinic of Natural Medicine by CGH Earth is a three-hour drive from Kochi Airport. Programmes start from 7 days, 10 days, 21 days or longer. From ₹1,53,000 for a seven days detox programme in a cottage with a private balcony. **T**

The Lalit Grand Palace Srinagar was originally designed and built by Maharaja Pratap Singh in 1910

# The Grand Dame of Hospitality

Intelligent entrepreneurship, technological innovations and relevant incentives will transform India's tourism industry

BY NEETI MEHRA

From the exquisite The LaLiT Great Eastern Kolkata, the longest continuously operating luxury hotel in Asia, which was built in 1841 to The LaLiT Grand Palace, overlooking the picturesque Dal Lake, The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group has a conscious strategy of creating luxury hotels, palaces and resorts as well as mid-market hotels in unique locations, with a philosophy of celebrating inclusivity and diversity. One of their key focuses is in developing destinations, while rejuvenating the region's culture, with some eclectic initiatives such as the Ponython in Gulmarg, traditional polo in Kargil, ice hockey in Leh, a shikarathon in Srinagar, as well as The LaLiT Arts Festival, among others.

The company opened its first hotel in New Delhi in 1988, under the leadership of Founder Chairman, the late Lalit Suri. In 2006, Dr. Jyotsna Suri took over the reins of the company following his death, as the Chairperson & Managing Director, Bharat Hotels, which runs luxury hotels The LaLiT, under The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group. She has taken the chain to new levels of excellence. The group operates 12 luxury hotels, palaces and resorts under The LaLiT brand and two midmarket segment hotels across the country. It also holds exclusive management rights to operate a hotel in London, The LaLiT London.

The current Chairperson of the FICCI Tourism Committee, Dr Suri has also been the past President of the organisation. She has been instrumental in initiating FICCI's Travel & Tourism Excellence Awards, which will be held at The LaLiT Hotel, New Delhi. She speaks about leveraging technology, tackling challenges and driving excellence in the sector.

**What can we expect from the inaugural edition of the awards?** FICCI is proud to announce its first edition of Travel & Tourism Excellence Awards on August 23, 2019 at The LaLiT New Delhi. The awards have been conceptualised with an aim to recognise states, organisations and individuals for their contributions to India's travel and tourism industry. The marquee event will also encourage innovation and entrepreneurship in the space of travel and tourism.



**Dr Jyotsna Suri**  
CMD, Bharat Hotels &  
Chairperson, FICCI Tourism Committee

## What are your plans as the chairperson of the tourism committee of FICCI?

As Chairperson of the FICCI Tourism Committee, it has been a privilege for me to support the tourism industry of India. The Government of India intends to achieve the ambitious target of capturing three per cent of worldwide Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA) by 2023. In 2017, India's share stood at 1.17 per cent. Our focus is to support the government in every way and we have already submitted our recommendations with respect to policy measures to be adopted by the government to achieve this target.

Apart from these, FICCI is creating various networking platforms to ensure the objective is achieved, namely the Tourism Investors Meet, Great Indian Travel Bazaar, Uttar Pradesh Travel Mart, Vibrant Gujarat, Odisha Travel Bazaar and several other state tourism and niche tourism initiatives.

## What impact have these platforms had?

The platforms like Great Indian Travel Bazaar are a gateway to improve inbound and domestic tourism in India. The Great India Travel Bazaar itself attracts more than 250 Foreign Tour Operators from various countries to visit India, to meet the local travel industry. More than 11,000 structured face-to-face business meetings were held in GITB this year in April 2019. From 2008 onwards till date, a total of 2,929 Foreign Tour Operators (FTO) have been invited and 1,01,005 B2B meetings have been conducted. 2,784 Indian exhibitors have also participated in the last 12 GITB events. Apart from business meetings the FTO are taken for familiarisation trips to various parts of the country to showcase various destinations.

## What are FICCI's recommendations to the newly appointed government?

There is always scope for improvement in every field and sector. Tourism is no exception. The key challenges at present are to develop infrastructure in railways, aviation, shipping and transport at a rapid pace, bring in more private investment, improve land acquisition process, remove GST ambiguities

to name a few. Our policy recommendations are to improve tourism infrastructure by bringing in more private investment, revisiting GST, relooking the high visa fees, incentivise those who travel within India, grant export industry status for the tourism industry to help in infrastructure development and the provision of industry status for amusement parks.

We also recommend to strengthen the National Tourism Advisory Council (NTAC) under the Ministry of Tourism by including representatives from various state governments. The advisory council can provide inputs for policy level decision making and be the approving authority for large scale projects.

## How can Brand India align with the expectations of the new age traveller?

The new age traveller is tech savvy. He seeks seamless connectivity while travelling. Digitisation is the key growth driver and tourism can't be an exception. To achieve this on a countrywide scale, the government could focus on boosting service adoption by ensuring public services are online. Easier identification through Aadhaar, improved access to banking infrastructure and POS machines and availability of internet connectivity and telecommunication networks, even in remote areas, are some key steps for enabling a seamless experience for travellers, especially foreign tourists.

Local skill development is crucial. Tourism is the only enabler which can even create employment in remote areas. Digital training could be made readily available to the local workforce.

## So, how can private players give a fillip to domestic and inbound tourism?

The government should encourage more entrepreneurship and innovation in travel. It needs to support tech-based travel startups, improve IT literacy for the local workforce and data security. Smaller hotels must be encouraged to invest in automation and digital technology to personalise customer experiences.

The need of the hour is to incentivise private players to invest in unserved or under-served tourism projects. A different incentive structure may be adopted for sustainable development of the lesser explored destinations. Tourism is the only industry that generates the maximum number of employment in the country. The allotted budget for tourism must be increased substantially to support the growth of the sector.



The Lalit Great Eastern Kolkata is the longest continuously operating luxury hotel in Asia, which was built in 1841

## What tourism strategy does the country need to compete with other popular short and long-haul destinations, positioning India as a safe, VFM, preferred destination for our source markets?

In terms of variety and choices of destinations, I think we have it all. From snow clad mountains to beautiful beaches, jungles, wild life, desert, flora and fauna—we have it all. Word of mouth is the best marketing and image building tool. The more we improve the infrastructure, ease of travelling, aesthetic value, safety and security of tourists in our country, the more tourists we will attract.

## The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group has led the way in being one of the most progressive hospitality chains in India. What is your vision going ahead?

The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group is an inclusive and equal opportunity organisation. We actively hire from the LGBTQ+ community, aim to increase the women workforce in the group to 25 per cent and employ the differently-abled to ensure we maintain balance of our workforce. We provide safe spaces for all our employees and guests.

We are extremely responsible towards our environment and make a conscious effort to protect it. As part of our initiatives we have planted lakhs of trees across India and our in-room amenities are free from harmful chemicals such as sulphur and paraben. Our hotels are equipped with Radiation

Management Solutions to provide a controlled radiation environment and we distribute fresh food to the needy through organisations like Robinhood Army and Mother Teresa's Missionary home.

Our vision is to position The LaLiT as the most preferred hospitality chain for our guests as well as our employees. We would like to create unique experiences for our guests so that they come back again and again to explore the hidden gems of this beautiful country. Our motto always has been of "Developing Destinations" and not just hotels. We engage with the local community, drawing from their cuisine, handicraft, traditions and integrating them into our hotels. [f](#)



Ice hockey in Leh is one of the local sports played in the region

## 48

## Hours in Mumbai

India's financial capital, Mumbai, is a dichotomy. As you move from its charming old-world southern tip to the bustling modern northern end, savour its splendid British-era architecture, diverse regional cuisines and eclectic shopping

BY AATISH NATH

Often overwhelming, Mumbai as a city peels itself open to visitors over time, much like an onion. If you have only two days to spare, you will scarcely scratch the surface of what defines the megapolis. Mumbai's past co-exists with the present. From the Bandra-Worli Sea Link, you can see the city's vertical growth spurt, which is redefining its skyline. With several infrastructure projects under Mumbai's belt, in a few years the city will have completely transformed. Until then, traffic snarls are unavoidable, as you enjoy Mumbai's vibrant energy, cosmopolitan outlook and Instagram-worthy cityscape.

## Day 1 Morning

## EXPLORE COLABA'S VERDANT CHARMS

Start your day with some history and kheema pav at the century-old **Olympia Coffee House**, whose shutters have bullet marks from the 26/11 attack in 2008. The food offers a glimpse of Mumbai's Irani cafes, which used to be ubiquitous in the city. Having served illustrious gentry over the decades, including the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, it has lots of non-vegetarian



Try the kheema and naan at Olympia Coffee House

options, but the mutton fry masala, special kheema and naan are the most popular. After you've finished, walk over to **The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai** to soak in its architecture, and of course, get a photo

under its imposing dome. The historic

hotel is an icon in the city. Along with the **Gateway of India** next door, it will transport you to another era.

From there, explore some of the newer shops that have put down roots in Colaba. While **Nappa Dori's** leather goods have won it a following all over the world, their stationery and small leather goods make great gifts. Next, visit **Raw Mango**, where designer Sanjay Garg brings India's textile heritage into the 21st century with his saris and couture. Designed by leading interior specialist Ashiesh Shah, it is also a showcase for the country's skilled artisans. **Clove** is another lifestyle store tucked away in a corner of Churchill Chambers. Started by hotelier Samyukta Nair, it showcases a host of local labels across clothing, home furnishings, beauty and skin care. The inviting vibe and apartment-like layout lends a sense of discovery to the entire shopping experience. End with lunch at **Miss T**, where modern Vietnamese is served in a bi-level space. The cocktails are superb as is the tomato salad, red snapper rolls and jungle curry. Leave room for dessert because the yuzu tart with black sesame ice cream will have you ordering seconds.



Couture meets chic at Raw Mango

## Day 1 Afternoon and Evening

## SHOP TILL YOU DROP IN TONY KALA GHODA

After lunch you might need an espresso to get through the rest of the day. A quick pit stop at Kala Ghoda's **Zen Café** will sort you out. After all, the café micro roasts its own beans and is known for its exacting standards. Then take the time to visit the recently restored **Keneseth Eliyahu Synagogue** where you can learn about its history and about the small but dedicated Jewish community. It features structural improvements and its stained-glass windows have



Visit the Keneseth Eliyahu Synagogue

been restored. Nearby, you'll find a range of stores to check out, but the ones you mustn't miss include **Filter**, for their design-forward ethos and carefully curated collection of small local brands. At the entrance to the same street is **Kunal Rawal's** menswear store, at the legendary Rhythm House building, that puts a twist on Indian clothing and updates it. **Soham Dave, Kaveri's** and **Gopi Vaid** are some of the smaller labels with stores in the area, serving as appetisers for the over-the-top immersiveness of

the **Sabyasachi** store. The Kolkata-based designer's museum-like emporium is spread across two floors and is done up with antiques, ornate chandeliers, displaying couture and jewellery fit for royalty. Take the 10-minute walk to **Kitab Khana** where you can buy books on the Maximum City such as Vikram Chandra's *Scared Games* or Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower*, or any other titles from their well-curated shelves.

## DISCOVER THE HIDDEN GEM OF KHOTACHIWADI

Chowpatty is a cab ride away and offers the chance to step onto the sand and see the city's skyline as it stretches south past the glittering Queen's Necklace at Marine Drive to Cuffe Parade. It is a change of pace from the chaos of the city, though the sound of cars honking will remind you that daily life continues behind you. Next head to Khotachiwadi, a heritage village of East Indians, to James Ferreira's bungalow where you'll find his designs alongside a curated collection of women's clothing from **NO BORDERS**. Creative Director Kanika Karvinkop brings together local and international brands which are known for their craftsmanship. The eclectic selection spans local and international brands, and in a rare move, also features vintage clothing.

End with a dinner back in Kala Ghoda at **Americano**, chef Alex Sanchez's newest eatery. It is cuisine agnostic, but their pastas and pizzas are the best in the city. Paired with one of bartender Darren Crawford's cocktails, you'll be sure to have a meal that's high on taste, in a great space to match.

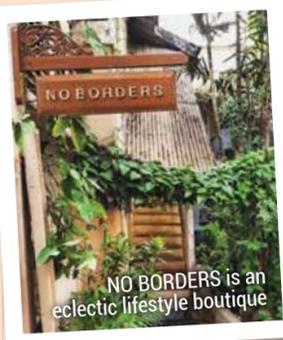
## Day 2 Morning and Afternoon

## TAKE AN OFFBEAT TOUR OF MUMBAI

Start your day with a typography tour by **Tanya George**, taking you through urban typography on signboards through the city, as you marvel at the Victorian, Gothic and Art Deco buildings. She usually starts her trail at Fort, and details can be found on her Instagram @tanyatypes. For groups, she can customise a walk. Those looking to venture off the beaten track can choose the Byculla walk, which brings the area alive and transports you to life during colonial times.

## VISIT THE GLITZY BUSINESS DISTRICT BANDRA-KURLA COMPLEX

Make your way to the futuristic Bandra-Kurla Complex where you'll be surrounded by glittering, newly built office towers. The streets are wide, the buildings are modern and the area boasts an array of superb restaurants. For modern Indian, Chef Himanshu



NO BORDERS is an eclectic lifestyle boutique



Sweetcorn 'Ribs' at Americano

Saini's **Trèsind** has been winning rave reviews for his tasting menu. The original is in Dubai, but this Mumbai outlet has quickly become a must-visit as well. While the khichdi is one dish that's most popular on Instagram, there's a lot more to look forward to, especially their cocktails that lean on spices and local Indian ingredients for zing. Once done, head over to Godrej BKC to see **Subodh Gupta's Aakash, Patal, Dharti** sculpture that's installed as a public artwork just outside the building entrance. It's a great spot for selfies, if you're so inclined.



Private Dining Room at Trèsind

## Day 2 Evening

## INDULGE IN YOUR ARTISTIC SIDE

Indulge in some contemporary art mid-town, where the city's textile mills are giving way to gated apartment complexes, large office parks and shopping malls. The **Piramal Museum of Art** is a cutting-edge gallery housed innocuously enough in Peninsula Corporate Park. The 7,000 square feet space has played host to shows by artists like the late S.H. Raza and Raja Ravi Verma, and is one of several private spaces that are working to foster a cultural community

in the city. Soak in the vibe of the space started by one of India's largest business houses.

Eat dinner at the buzziest new eatery in town, **Qualia**, which is housed at the base of the city's tallest building – Lodha's World Tower. Here, Chef Rahul Akerkar makes his return to the kitchen in a space that's imposing but not intimidating. The cuisine is modern serving dishes such as charred pumpkin and buff loin and quirkily named cocktails such as Djinn Gin, Citrus Cubed and Q-Mary.

End your visit to Mumbai with the best view of this city. Make your way to **Aer**, the luxe rooftop watering hole at the Four Seasons Mumbai, where ace mixologist and bartender Philip Bischoff has done wonders with the cocktail menu. The million-dollar view though is breathtaking, offering a sweeping 360-degree perspective of Worli Sea Face, Mahalaxmi Race Course, and the city to the south, promising tantalising prospects of places to visit on your next trip. **f**



Qualia is the hottest new restaurant in Mumbai



AER is one of the best rooftop party lounges in Mumbai

# FICCI's Travel & Tourism Excellence Awards

The first edition of the awards will be held at a glittering ceremony on the 23rd of August at The Lalit Hotel, New Delhi

For the first time in the history of the organisation, FICCI announces the launch of its Travel & Tourism Excellence Awards, which will be held on August 23, 2019 at The Lalit Hotel, New Delhi. The awards have been conceptualised to recognise states, organisations and individuals for their exceptional contribution to tourism in India, while encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship in the space.

For the first edition, we have received an overwhelming response from various organisations and individuals, competing across 48 categories. The awards are divided into several categories: Accommodation Facility, Tour Operator, Transport and Travel Agency, Connectivity, Infrastructure, Skills, Technology, Leading State Tourism Initiatives and Innovative initiatives.

The awards will be decided on various criteria laid down by our knowledge partner, Ernst & Young LLP in conjunction with

our eminent jury members, including Pronab Sarkar, President, Indian Association Of Tour Operators (IATO), Vinod Zutshi, Ex-Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and Kapil Kaul, CEO, South Asia, CAPA Centre For Aviation. (for the complete list of jury members refer to box). The Partner State is Odisha, and the Feature State is West Bengal.

The aim of the awards is to give a boost to inbound and domestic tourism across various platforms, undertaking special initiatives as well as addressing key industry issues, while acting as a catalyst for policy change.

In light of this, the need for an authentic voice to reward excellence in the travel and tourism sector was essential, given that the segment is one of the key growth drivers for the Indian economy. The future looks bright. On this day, FICCI will applaud the best and the brightest in India's travel industry. 

## Award Categories

### Accommodation Facility

- Best 3 Star Hotel
- Best 4 Star Hotel
- Best 5 Star Hotel
- Best Heritage Hotel
- Best Differently-abled Friendly Hotel
- Best Green Hotel
- Best Business/MICE Hotel
- Best Hill Resort
- Best Apartment Hotel
- Best Beach Resort
- Best Wellness Resort
- Best Debut Hotel
- Best Bed & Breakfast / Home stay Establishment

### Skills

- Best Chef (Male & Female)
- Best Tour Guide
- Best Photographer (Tourism)
- Best Blogger (Tourism)
- Best Travel & Tourism Institute

### Tour Operator

- Best Inbound Tour Operator
- Best Outbound Tour Operator
- Best Domestic Tour Operator
- Best Adventure Tour Operator (Domestic)
- Best Adventure Tour Operator (Inbound)

### Technology

- Best Tourism Related Website (Govt. & Private)
- Best Tourism Mobile Application
- Best B2B Travel Technology Provider

### Transport and Travel Agency

- Best Transport Company (Passenger services)
- Best Online Travel Agency

### Leading State Tourism Initiative

- Best State Tourism Marketing Campaign
- Best State Tourism Policy
- Best Eco Tourism initiative
- Best Cultural & Heritage Destination
- Best Adventure Tourism Destination
- Best Wildlife Destination
- Best Beach Destination
- Best Fair & Festival

### Connectivity

- Best Domestic Airline
- Best International Airline
- Best Domestic Airport
- Best Adventure Tour Operator
- Best Railway Station
- Best Luxury Train

### Infrastructure

- Best Theme Park
- Best Way Side Amenity
- Best Standalone Convention Center

### Innovative initiatives

- Best Travel Startup
- Best Heritage / Cultural Walk
- Special Contribution to Travel & Tourism Industry
- Best Travel Insurance Provider

## JURY MEMBERS



**PRONAB SARKAR,**  
PRESIDENT, INDIAN ASSOCIATION OF TOUR OPERATORS (IATO)  
One of the founder members of Destination Management Company Swagatam Tours, Pronab Sarkar has recently been elected as the President of IATO, prior to which he was the Hon. Secretary of the organisation, an institution he has been associated with for last 15 years in various capacities.



**VINOD ZUTSHI,**  
FORMER SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF TOURISM, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
An IAS officer, Vinod Zutshi served as Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, from 2015 to 2017. He has 35 years of experience in public policy and administration, tourism, management, law, HRD, cooperatives, housing and elections. An Alumni of Harvard Kennedy School, he has completed an MBA from FMS, Delhi University and LLB from Law Faculty, Delhi University.



**DILIP CHENOY,**  
SECRETARY GENERAL, FICCI  
Formerly the Managing Director & CEO of the National Skill Development Corporation, Dilip Chenoy is a member of the Board of Governors, IILM, New Delhi and is on the board of studies, All India Management Association (AIMA). He is also Director General of ICC India, and of Indian Council of Arbitration (ICA). He advises start-ups in the digital, education, skills and livelihood space. He also serves on the Executive Committee of Bureau of Indian Standard (BIS) and is a Director of Invest India.



**DR. BHANWAR LAL,**  
DIRECTOR, TOURISM, GOVERNMENT OF RAJASTHAN  
An IAS officer from the 2014 cadre and the Director of Rajasthan's Tourism Department, he has recently been given additional charge as Managing Director, Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation.



**KAPIL KAUL,**  
CEO, SOUTH ASIA, CAPA CENTRE FOR AVIATION  
Kapil Kaul has 20-years of experience in the aviation and hospitality industry, with extensive knowledge of airline operations, marketing and management in India. He has helped develop business and financial plans for a number of carriers.



**SAVI MUNJAL AND VIDIT TANEJA,**  
GLOBE TROTTERS & TRAVEL BLOGGERS  
Savi and Vidit are full time travel bloggers and explorers whose article and photographs have been published in leading magazines, newspapers, and online portals including BBC Good Food, National Geographic Traveller and The Huffington Post. They have also appeared in a number of TV shows on Discovery Channel and TLC Asia.



**CAPT. SWADESH KUMAR,**  
PRESIDENT, ADVENTURE TOUR OPERATORS ASSOCIATION OF INDIA (ATOA)  
A pilot, mountaineer, environmentalist and explorer, Capt. Swadesh Kumar is also the founder of Shikhar Travels, a leading destination management company and pioneer in adventure tourism. With over four decades of experience, he is the founder president and current head of ATOA.



**SUNIL GUPTA,**  
FORMER CEO, ITC WELCOME HERITAGE HOTELS  
The Former CEO of WelcomHeritage Hotels, Sunil Gupta began his career with The Ashok Group of Hotels, and in 1995, he joined the ITC Hotels. Now, he independently promotes tourism, heritage tourism in particular, through a newly created forum called New India Tourism.



**MAHENDRA VAKHARIA,**  
PRESIDENT, OUTBOUND TOUR OPERATORS ASSOCIATION OF INDIA (OTOAI)  
With three decades of experience in the hospitality and the travel industry, Mahendra Vakharia is the Founder and Managing Director of the Ahmedabad-based Pathfinders Holidays and is also the President of OTOAI.



**PP KHANNA,**  
PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATION OF DOMESTIC TOUR OPERATORS OF INDIA (ADTOI)  
A post-graduate diploma holder in tourism and hotel management and a masters in public administration, PP Khanna is the director of Diplomatic Travel Point and is leading ADTOI for the second term as President.

# Renergising India's *tourism sector*

With tourism expected to contribute 9.3 per cent of the country's GDP in 2019, FICCI outlines its roadmap for the sector

BY SAMEERA SHAH

Last year, Dilip Chenoy took over as Secretary General of FICCI, which has been championing the cause of travel and tourism for more than two decades. An industry leader who wears several hats, in his last role, he served as Managing Director & CEO of the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), whose objective is to foster private sector investment and initiatives in training and skill development. According to Chenoy, the private sector has a large role to play in the development of tourism infrastructure. He believes that well thought out incentives for private players will go a long way in boosting arrivals.



*Dilip Chenoy*  
Secretary General  
FICCI

infrastructure in India. In fact, FICCI in its recommendation to the Ministry of Tourism has highlighted this point on incentivising private players to invest in unserved or under-served tourism projects. A different incentive structure may be adopted for sustainable development of lesser explored destinations.

India is still facing a huge deficit in terms of hotel rooms compared to the growing demand, as the number of tourists is growing every year. We have recommended infrastructure status for hotels and resorts to invite more investment in the hospitality sector. We also urge the government to come out with a mechanism for ease of land acquisition in PPP model to develop tourism infrastructure.

**FICCI has recommended bold reform measures required for a higher growth trajectory of the economy. What are your expectations from the new government vis-à-vis tourism?**

Tourism plays a significant role in the economy. It is expected to contribute 9.3 per cent of the country's GDP in 2019. The Indian tourism sector is a significant source of foreign exchange and an important source of employment, especially as it helps local and host communities. It is the third largest foreign exchange earner and is a key source of employment, directly accounting to 26.7 million jobs in 2018.

Being a focus sector for the Government of India, the recent budget laid a lot of emphasis on infrastructure development in rail, road, shipping and aviation. All these sectors directly or indirectly play a vital role to boost tourism in the country. But various issues, whether attracting direct investment for tourism infrastructure, giving incentives, ease of land allotment process, GST ambiguities, etc also need to be addressed, going ahead.

On a positive note, the various steps taken by the government to encourage a digital payment system in the country will also help in the growth of tourism.

**A recent knowledge paper from FICCI states that India must enhance its value proposition and build a supportive infrastructure to double the foreign tourist arrivals in the country. How can private investments grow this value proposition?**

Private investment is the key to developing tourism

**Having worked closely with skill development, in accordance to you, how can the sector create more jobs while training a cadre with the right skill sets?**

Tourism is one of the sectors which can create jobs at the local and regional level. Be it a remote village of India or a Smart City, it is the highest contributor in terms of employment generation. India's tourism potential lies in the states. Hence, along with the central ministry, the local governments will have to come forward to promote their respective states, create infrastructure and market their tourism products. Some states are already doing it and have allocated a specific budget for tourism. However, a lot needs to be done. In terms of skill development, the private players have to play the main role to develop skills at the grassroots level, along with the authorities.

**What is the road map for FICCI vis-à-vis tourism in the foreseeable future?**

Apart from policy initiatives, FICCI has created several networking platforms to increase in-bound tourism and investment in tourism infrastructure, like the Great Indian Travel Bazaar, focussing on inbound tourism, and Tourism Investors Meet, focussing on investments. FICCI also works with several state governments to increase in-bound and domestic tourism. Some important state initiatives with respect to tourism are Uttar Pradesh Travel Mart and Odisha Travel Bazaar, among others. [i](#)



Knowledge provider



# TRAVEL & TOURISM Excellence Awards

August 23, 2019

The Lalit, New Delhi

**PANEL OF JURY**



**Vinod Zutshi**  
Former Secretary Tourism  
Government of India



**PP Khanna**  
President - Association of  
Domestic Tour Operators of India



**Dilip Chenoy**  
Secretary General  
FICCI



**Pronab Sarkar**  
President, Indian Association  
of Tour Operators (IATO)



**Dr. Bhanwar Lal**  
Director - Tourism  
Government Of Rajasthan



**Capt Swadesh Kumar**  
President, Adventure Tour  
Operators Association of India



**Mahendra Vakharia**  
President - Outbound Tour  
Operators Association of India



**Sunil Gupta**  
Former CEO  
ITC Welcome Heritage Hotels



**Savi Munjal**  
Travel Blogger & Explorer



**Vidit Taneja**  
Travel Blogger & Explorer



**Kapil Kaul**  
CEO, South Asia,  
CAPA Centre for Aviation

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**Event Partner**



# The Great *Indian Coastline*

Stretching from West Bengal in the east to Gujarat in the west, the Indian coastline is a staggering 7,500 km long and is a treasure trove of India's natural history and cultural diversity

BY ANITA RAO KASHI

At the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, Kanyakumari, the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal merge with the Indian Ocean

Standing at the Southern tip of the country at the Vivekananda Rock Memorial at Kanyakumari, the country's coastline disappears into the distance in an ever-widening V, with the Arabian Sea on one side and the Bay of Bengal on the other. Viewed from up above, in an airplane or through a drone, it is even more spectacular: two rugged coasts home to golden beaches and hidden nooks.

Straddling a distance of over 7,500 km (about 6,100 km lies on the mainland, while the remainder is the circumference of the islands), the Indian coastline is an astonishing melange of cultures and cuisines, natural and manmade seaside attractions and diverse flora and fauna. Approximately 18 per cent of India's population lives in the 72 coastal districts that comprise 12 per cent of India's mainland.

Developing India's coasts has been a priority. The proposed CRZ Notification, 2018 will promote economic growth in India's coasts, while respecting the conservation of the surrounding region. The government has undertaken 17 development projects on the shoreline across the country at a cost of ₹2,000-crore in the past several years.

Under the flagship Sagarmala Programme, projects such as developing cruise infrastructure and lighthouse tourism has been undertaken. An estimated 78 lighthouses are to be developed on a PPP basis. And state governments are working towards earning the coveted Blue Flag (an international certification for clean and developed areas) for beaches at Gujarat's Shivrajpur, Daman and Diu's Ghoghla, Goa's Miramar, Karnataka's Kasarkod and Padubidri, Kerala's Kappad, Puducherry's Eden, Tamil Nadu's Mahabalipuram, Andhra Pradesh's Rushikonda, Odisha's Chandrabhaga and Andaman's Radhanagar.

Here's a lowdown of coastal developments, spectacular beaches and hotels when you travel along the coast from West Bengal to Gujarat.

## WEST BENGAL

West Bengal's relatively short coastline (about 160 kilometres) overlooking the Bay of Bengal has the added attraction of being home to the Gangetic delta and beautiful coastal settlements. There are several popular tourist beaches such as Digha, Mandarmani and Tajpur. Mandarmani, famed for its red crabs, is India's longest driveable beach (13 kilometres), a scenic journey.

**Coastal development:** Efforts are on to showcase the Sunderban Mangroves, through the Jharkhali tourism hub project. Boosting cruise tourism is another measure, with the focus on Ganga

Sagar Mela, one of the country's biggest fairs after Kumbh Mela, held at Sagardwip. In addition, a tourist hub in Gajaldoba and an eco-tourism project in Sabuj Dweep are underway. Alongside, the route from Digha Beach to Henry Island is under development.

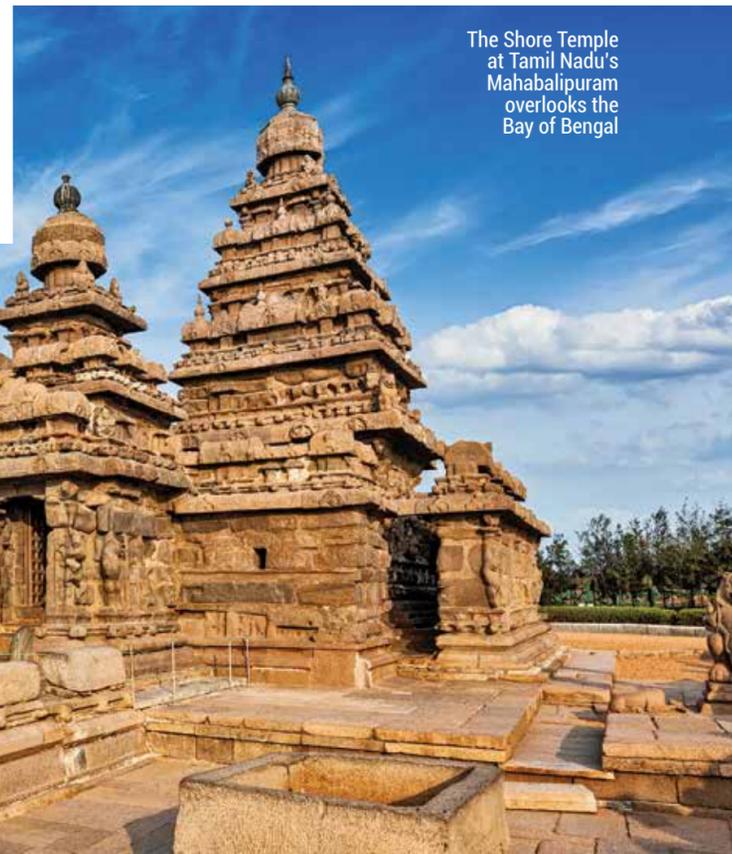
**Beach getaways:** Some of the popular coastal resorts in West Bengal include the Anutri Beach Resort, a family resort, and the Sana Beach Resort near Mandarmani. The closest international airport is Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport Kolkata.

## ODISHA

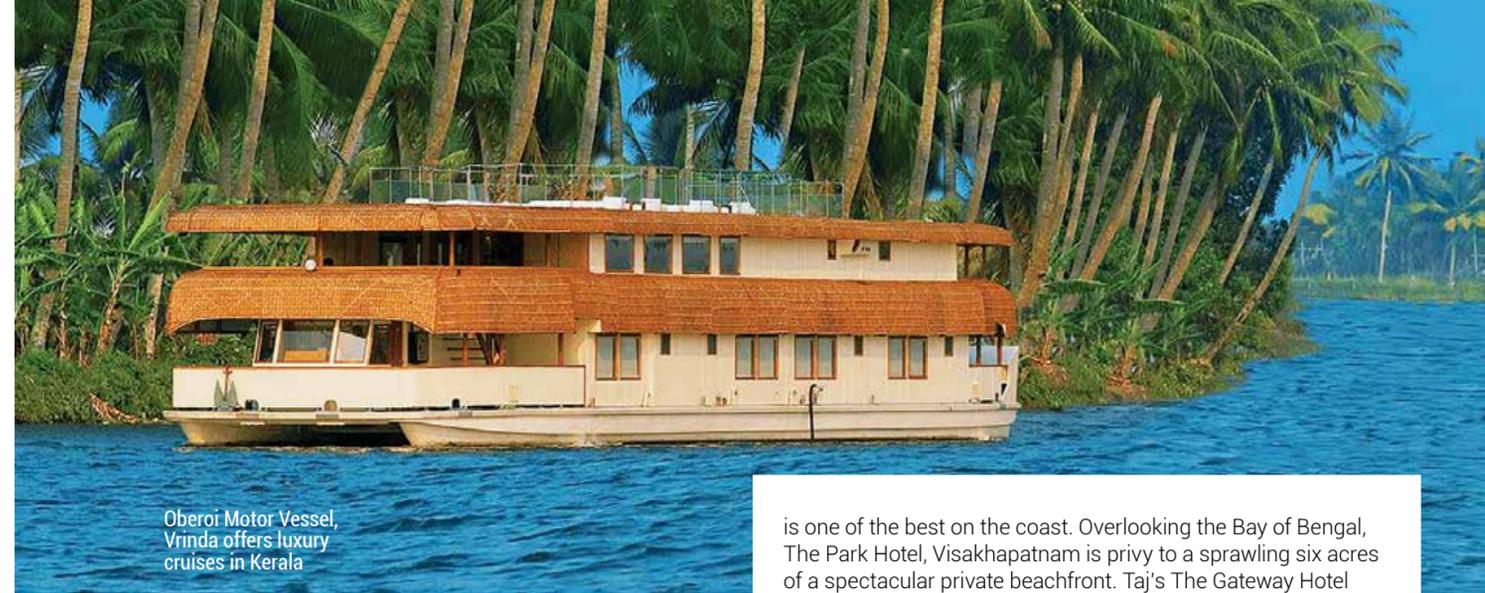
Odisha's approximate 480 kilometres of shoreline is speckled with virgin beaches, the most popular being Puri, which hosts one of India's most vibrant festivals in November every year, celebrating the state's cultural heritage. Odisha is also home to the world's largest rookery for Olive Ridley turtles, which nest at the Gahirmatha beach, part of the Gahirmatha Marine Wildlife Sanctuary, and Rushikulya beach. It has hidden gems too, such as Gopalpur-on-Sea, South of Puri. Once a seaport for the British, this sleepy outpost was the epicentre of a thriving trade route with Burma.

**Coastal development:** In the Swadesh Darshan Scheme's first phase, around ₹80 crore have been invested in developing a coastal circuit encompassing Gopalpur-on-sea, Barkul, Satapada and Tampara. Infrastructure, such as spanking new tourist reception centres, jetties and gazebos will come up, as well as a water sports park, floating restaurants and boating facilities.

Luxury and semi-luxury beach resorts are being developed all along the coast, in regions like Talsari, Udayapur, Chandrabhaga, Shamuka (Puri) and Gopalpur-on-Sea. Tourists can soon expect a sand art park, a marine museum, musical fountains and eco-cottages along the coast and restaurants that serve finger-licking coastal cuisine.



The Shore Temple at Tamil Nadu's Mahabalipuram overlooks the Bay of Bengal



Oberoi Motor Vessel, Vrinda offers luxury cruises in Kerala

**Beach getaways:** Odisha's coast is home to several home grown premium chains, such as the Mayfair Hotels & Resorts, which operates Mayfair Heritage and Mayfair Waves in Puri, located right off the beach. At Gopalpur-on-Sea, spread over a lush 12 acres of seaside sprawl, is the Mayfair Palm Beach Resort, with gazebos and sit-outs, else you can stay at the other local chain, Swosti, at the tranquil Swosti Palm Resort. The Swosti Chilika Resort is located near the brackish water lagoon Chilika. The primary international airport is the Biju Patnaik Airport at Bhubaneswar

## ANDHRA PRADESH

Boasting India's second largest coastline of around 974 kilometres is Andhra Pradesh, with 21 beaches dotting its shores. RK Beach near Dolphin's Nose, Mypadu for water sports, the beachside fishing village of Manginapudi, the coconut-tree lined Vodarevu and family-friendly Suryalanka are all tourist magnets.

The state's best beaches are clustered around Visakhapatnam, such as RK, Rushikonda, Bheemili and Yarada. Visakhapatnam's beaches are also home to several festivals such as the Visakha Utsav and the Yachting Festival. But for a truly offbeat seaside experience, Baruva (around 120 kilometres north of Srikakulam) ticks all the boxes, a former seaport during British colonial rule.

**Coastal development:** The government is angling for investments for beach resorts, beach front recreational and sports activities at Kalingapatnam, Baruva in Srikakulam District, Suryalanka Beach and Manginapudi Beach. It has also instituted the Bhawani Island Tourism Corporation for the development of the island near Vijayawada as a tourism destination. Under the Swadesh Darshan scheme, Hope Island, located off the coast of Kakinada city has been allocated ₹67.84 crore for creating the Kakinada-Hope Island-Coringa wildlife sanctuary loop.

**Beach getaways:** The Bheemli Resort—managed by Accor Hotel's magnificent infinity pool and locally-inspired architecture



The annual spectacle of Olive Ridley turtles nesting at Odisha is a big tourist attraction

is one of the best on the coast. Overlooking the Bay of Bengal, The Park Hotel, Visakhapatnam is privy to a sprawling six acres of a spectacular private beachfront. Taj's The Gateway Hotel Beach Road, Visakhapatnam is a sought-after hotel for both business travellers and leisure seekers. The nearest international airport is the Visakhapatnam Airport.

## TAMIL NADU

It's a problem of plenty on the Tamil Nadu coastline. From the region surrounding the capital Chennai, all the way down to Kanyakumari, the coast is bestowed with spectacular beaches and shore temples, including those at Mahabalipuram, Rameshwaram and Kanyakumari. But for sheer jaw-dropping beauty, the place to go is Dhanushkodi, just off the city of Rameshwaram. It is here where the mythical bridge to Sri Lanka, the Ram Setu is said to begin.

**Coastal development:** State-of-the-art cruise facilities are being developed around Chennai. A coastal tourist circuit encompassing Chennai, Mahabalipuram, Rameshwaram, Manpadu and Kanyakumari is under development. On the East Coast Road (ECR) stretch, an adventure water sports complex is being created with an oceanarium and underwater ocean park, etc.

**Beach getaways:** With plush rooms and an alluring coastal view, The Leela Palace Chennai is a perfect bleisure getaway. Built on the ramparts of an old Dutch fort, Taj Fisherman's Cove Resort & Spa, Chennai, promises a sumptuous stay. Located on the ECR, the sprawling Sheraton Grand Resort and Spa is a popular wedding location. And you can surf under the sun while staying at InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort. The closest airport is Chennai International Airport.

## PUDUCHERRY

Despite its small size, Puducherry has some of the country's most beautiful beaches. It hosts the annual cultural fiesta—the Pondy Beach Festival and the musical extravaganza—the Catamaran Beach Festival. Head outside Puducherry to Auroville Beach where tourists indulge in beach yoga or to Bodhi Beach to surf.

For a truly leisurely experience, a short ferry ride on the Chunnambar River takes one to Paradise Beach, located at the mouth of the backwaters. It is a narrow strip of golden sand where you can indulge in a backwater tour or hop on a cruise into the sea to see pods of dolphins swimming.

**Coastal development:** Theme-based circuits in coastal villages and a sound and light show at Puducherry's botanical gardens are the newest attractions coming up.

**Beach getaways:** The Windflower Resort and Spa Pondicherry, set in Veerampattinam, between the backwaters and the Bay of

Bengal is close to Paradise Beach. Spread over 14 acres, Le Pondy offers 70 rooms including stylish pool villas. The closest airport is Puducherry Airport, a domestic airport.

## KERALA

Along with Ayurveda, the fishing nets, and the pristine beaches, the Malabar coast is irresistible. While Kovalam Beach is the most popular, other famous beaches include Varkala Beach in Thiruvananthapuram, Cherai Beach in Kochi, Beypore and Kappad Beach in Kozhikode and Bekal Fort Beach in Kasaragod. The Kerala coast also has some stunning coastal forts such as the ones as Thalassery, Kannur and Bekal. Bekal, one of the country's largest coastal forts, is India's first planned beach destination, developed without disturbing the eco-balance of the region.

**Coastal development:** Under development are the Malnad-Malabar theme-based cruises. The themes include a Kalari cruise on Mahe River, a spice cruise on Anjarakkandy River, a Malabari cuisine cruise, a Theyyam cruise, a mangrove cruise, etc. On the cards is also a coastal tourism circuit around Fort Kochi and Mattancherry.

Also, on the anvil is an amusement and entertainment park on a 35-acre land in Kozhikode at a cost of ₹140 crore, replete with water parks, a resort and other entertainment options.

**Beach getaways:** The Kerala coastline boasts some of India's finest hotels and wellness retreats. The popular luxury hotels are Taj Bekal Resort and Spa, with 66 laterite villas and rooms inspired by the design of Ketuvallam houseboats. The LaLiT Resort & Spa Bekal in Kasaragod, Kerala operates 38 suites each featuring relaxing private jacuzzis.

At Kovalam, one of the best addresses is Taj Green Cove Resort & Spa Kovalam, featuring Balinese style villas nestled on a hillock overlooking the ocean with a lagoon in between. On Lake Vembanad, The Oberoi Vrinda, Luxury Kerala Cruiser sails along the backwaters. For the best view, check-in to cliff-top beach resort The Leela Raviz Kovalam, a wellness retreat that offers holistic therapies. Kerala is India's first state to have four international airports, located in Kannur, Kozhikode, Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram.

## KARNATAKA

An emerging wellness destination with rich heritage, wildlife, spirituality and adventure tourism, the state's relatively short coastline is probably its best kept secret. Coastal towns like Mangalore, Gokarna and Karwar are popular, along with Murdeshwar, one of India's best diving spots. And one cannot

Chinese fishing nets at Fort Kochi

refer to the Karnataka coast without thinking about Udupi, known for its ancient Krishna temple, Sri Krishna Matha, as well as its cuisine, which is popular across the globe. However, our pick of the lot are the tiny isles, St Mary's Islands, a cluster of four, off Malpe near Udupi with intriguing columnar basaltic rock formations.

**Coastal development:** In Karnataka, Dakshina Kannada, Udupi district and Uttara Kannada Beaches are slated for facelift and improvement of facilities, including connectivity.

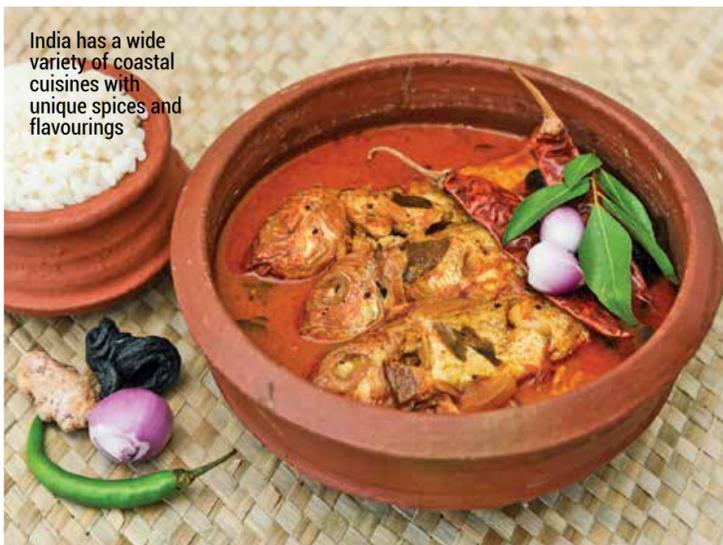
**Beach getaways:** Perched on Gokarna's Om Beach is CGH Earth's SwaSwara, a luxurious healing retreat that uplifts the senses. Or you can check into Kahani Paradise, a villa located in 20 acres of thick forest in Gokarna.

The Gateway Hotel in Mangalore overlooks the Gurupura and Nethravathi rivers and the Arabian Sea. Karnataka has two international airports, the Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru and Mangaluru International Airport.

## GOA

India's answer to a beach paradise, Goa has been popular with tourists over the decades for its sun, sand and surf. From Morjim's Olive Ridley turtles and the shacks of Calungute, to South Goa's easy breezy Betalbatim and Agonda, there's

India has a wide variety of coastal cuisines with unique spices and flavourings



something for everyone. While South Goa is where you go to relax on beaches such as Majorda and Colva, the north of Goa is buzzing with new restaurants, bars, wellness centres and hotels.

**Coastal development:** The Ministry of Tourism has established the National Institute of Water Sports in Goa which offers long and short-term courses on water sports. Tourist hot spots are being improved, such as the Aguada Fort and Jail, along with beaches such as Sinquerim, Anjuna, Baga, Vagator, Morjim and Keri. The government is giving a fillip to cruise tourism too, with cruises plying on Mandovi River such as Galaxia Galante, while Angriya Cruises has started services between Goa and Mumbai. Other initiatives include excursion boats, scuba diving and snorkelling, sea rafting at Arambol beach, motorised paragliding at Mandrem beach and tourism activities.

**Beach getaways:** All the leading hotel chains have a presence in Goa and you're spoilt for choice. Built in the proximity of a 17th century Portuguese coastal fort is the Taj Fort Aguada Resort & Spa, Goa, while the Taj Exotica Resort & Spa, Goa is spread over a sprawling 56 acres of lush greenery. A popular getaway with families is the Taj Holiday Village Resort & Spa, Goa, overlooking the Sinquerim Beach. The Leela Goa at Cavelossim boasts of its own 12-hole golf course and offers al fresco dining along the Sal River. Dabolim Airport or Goa Airport is the sole international airport in the state, but by 2020, the first phase of Mopa International Airport, replete with casinos, will open.

## MAHARASHTRA

While Maharashtra's beaches aren't as well-known as other states, dig a bit and popular names such as Tarkali, Kashid and Ganapatipule come to mind. The Malvan Coast is also known for its fiery and delicious cuisine. Choose to cruise the backwaters, indulge in water sports, including scuba diving and snorkelling, and enjoy some fiery Malvani dishes such as Malvani mutton curry, mori masala or shark curry and bombil fry, while watching the sun set.

**Coastal development:** Mumbai is to be developed as the country's cruise tourism hub with a state-of-the-art terminal, expected to be completed by December 2019. Jalesh Cruises will start trips later this year, with trips initially to domestic destinations such as Ganapatipule, Diu and Goa, expanded later to Muscat and Dubai as well. A ropeway is being constructed between Elephanta Island and Sewri Fort and a lighthouse is being built at Kanhoji Angre Island. The Sindhudurg coastal circuit is also being developed to attract tourists.

**Beach getaways:** With tourism on the Maharashtra coast fairly undeveloped, there are few coastal options. The Radisson Blu Resort & Spa—Alibaug offers easy access to the beautiful beaches of Nagaon, Varsoli and Alibaug.

In Mumbai, enjoy the setting sun in the Arabian Sea from JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu. The over a century-old, iconic The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai overlooks the magnificent Gateway of India. The Oberoi, Mumbai is an elegant, charming hospitality stalwart with magnificent views of Marine Drive.

Maharashtra has several international airports such as the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport in Mumbai, Pune International Airport, Shirdi International Airport and the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar International Airport in Nagpur.

## DAMAN AND DIU

Under Portuguese rule for over 450 years, Daman and Diu often gets lost in the country's vast coastline. The horse-shaped Nagoa Beach is popular for beach activities such as the unique Hoka palm trees, and camel and pony rides. Jallandhar, Chakratirth and Ghoghla beaches are also worth a visit.

**Coastal development:** Around ₹1,000 crore is being invested in the region to improve infrastructure. This will include boosting air connectivity to the region under the Udan scheme as well as a helicopter service connecting Daman and Diu.

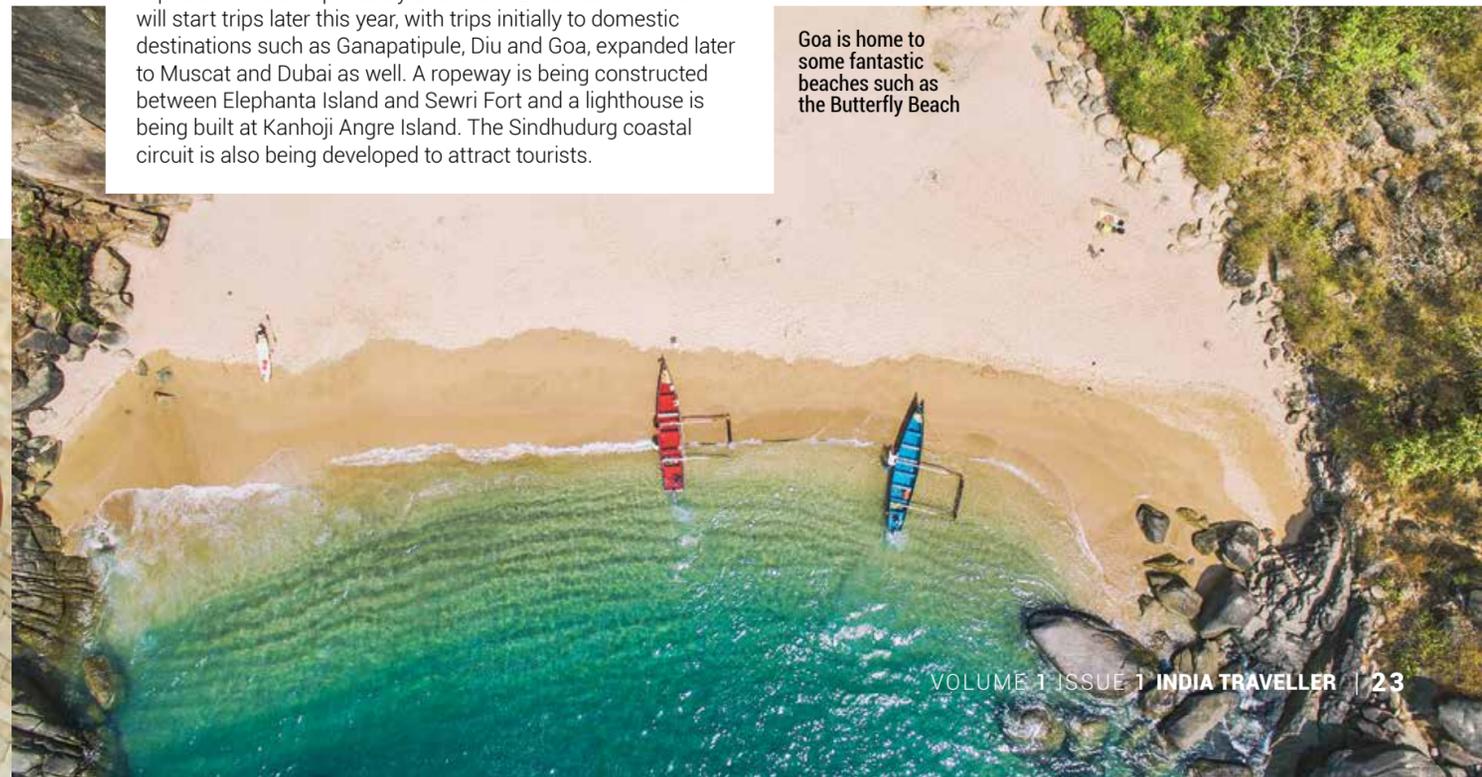
**Beach getaways:** Spread across two acres of the Devka Beach in Daman is The Gold Beach Resort that's highly rated in the region. The Deltin, Daman is just a short distance from the Daman Beach, has a sprawling pool and a pool bar and a spa.

## GUJARAT

Gujarat has the distinction of being the Indian state with the longest coastline, a jaw-dropping approximately 1,600 kilometres! A pilgrimage destination, some of the most popular temple sites are on its shores, such as the ancient cities of Dwarka and Somnath. It attracts a large segment of business travellers too, and is home to over three dozen ports.

One of the most popular festivals is the Rann Utsav, held at the Great Rann of Kutch, one of the biggest salt deserts in

Goa is home to some fantastic beaches such as the Butterfly Beach





Flamingos at the Modhva Beach near Mandvi in Gujarat's Kutch region

the world. For a relaxing beach getaway, head to the historical port town of Mandvi in the Kutch area, a region dotted with shipbuilding yards, where wooden ships are still built by hand.

**Coastal development:** Under development is a Blue Flag Beach on Pirotan Island, a Maritime Museum in Lothal and beach improvements in Mandvi and Nargol. The government is also seeking to enter into a PPP for developing a slew of coastal tourism facilities such as resorts and water sports facilities. And it is looking to promote cruise tourism, with a focus on luxe cruises covering areas such as Dwarka, Somnath, Ahmedpur-Mandvi, Kutch-Mandvi Dandi, Tithal, Umergaon, Dumas and Okhamadi.

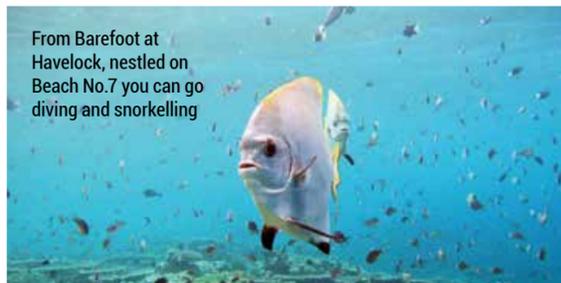
**Beach getaways:** Local hotel brands dominate the coastal region in Gujarat. At Mandvi, the Vijay Vilas Palace has featured in many Bollywood blockbusters. At Kandla Port, walking distance from the famous Gandhi Market is The Radisson Hotel Kandla. The closest international airport is the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport at Ahmedabad.

## INDIA'S EMERALD ISLES

### ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

Just off the southern tip of India, in the Bay of Bengal, are the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a total of 572 in number, lush green isles covered by swathes of evergreen forests and exotic flora and fauna. Andaman dominates with 550 islands, while Nicobar has just about two dozen.

From Barefoot at Havelock, nestled on Beach No.7 you can go diving and snorkelling



The islands are largely isolated, only about 38 islands are inhabited, including the capital Port Blair, with some occupied by the indigenous Andamanese tribes: the Jarawa, the Onge, and the Sentinelese. Andamans is also home to the Mahatma Gandhi National Marine Park. Mangrove forests and an astonishing number of snorkelling sites are found off the little islands in the park, like Jolly Buoy and Red Skin.

**Coastal development:** Four far-flung islands in the Andaman group—Smith, Neil, Aves and Long—will soon have tourist facilities including resorts to attract more visitors.

**Beach getaways:** At the capital Port Blair, built almost completely from the native 'Padouk' wood, a beautiful red timber, is the sea facing Fortune Resort Bay Island, which has been designed by the late architect Charles Correa. At Havelock Island, Taj Exotica Resort & Spa, Andamans 50 modern luxury villas on stilts, is a luxurious gateway to a globally significant biodiversity hotspot. Barefoot at Havelock, nestled on Beach No.7, amidst pristine tropical forests, comprises 31 elegantly designed thatch

tents, cottages and villas. The islands are served by the Veer Savarkar International Airport in Port Blair.

### LAKSHADWEEP

A tropical archipelago of 36 atolls and coral reefs in the Laccadive Sea, Lakshadweep loosely translates into 'a hundred thousand islands,' and is the smallest Union Territory in India, straddling a mere 32 square kilometres. The most sublime islands can be found here, such as the teardrop shaped Bangaram Island, Agatti Island that's located on a coral atoll, and Kadmat or Cardamom Island. Blessed with powdery white sand beaches and turquoise waters, Lakshadweep is also very popular for scuba diving and snorkelling owing to its coral diversity and marine life.

**Coastal development:** In Lakshadweep, tourism projects have been initiated in the islands of Kadamat, Minicoy and Suheli, while Thinnakara and Cheriya islands are being explored for their potential.

**Beach getaways:** Located on Bangaram Island, set amidst sparkling coral reefs, turquoise blue lagoons, silvery beaches and lush green coconut palms is the eco-rustic Bangaram Island Beach Resort. In Agatti, check into the secluded Agatti Island Beach Resort on an island that's just 2.7 square kilometres. The only airport of Lakshadweep is located in Agatti. You can take helicopter rides from here to Kavaratti and Bangaram.

Lakshadweep is a tropical archipelago of 36 atolls and coral reefs in the Laccadive Sea



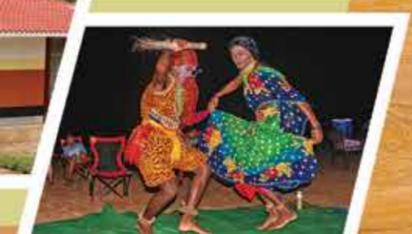
# Odisha ECOTOURISM

## Stay in the Wild



Luxury Nature-Camps that offers absolute comfort amid Beaches, Rivers, Lakes, Lagoon, Hill-stations and Forests teeming with Elephants, Bisons, Chittals, Tigers, Leopards, Sambars, Dolphins, Turtles, Red-Crabs, Muggers and more than 500 species of Birds.

Boating | Birding | Trekking | Cycling | Folk Dance-Music  
Star Gazing | Great choices of Cuisine





Odisha's attractions encompass wildlife reserves, beaches, temples, monuments, the arts and festivals

# India's Best Kept Secret: *Odisha*

As the state recovers from the aftermath of Cyclone Fani, the tourist trail grows beyond the popular Golden Triangle of Bhubaneswar, Puri and Konark

BY NEETI MEHRA

Before I visited Odisha, my first introduction to the state was through two beautiful books. The first was by British travel writer and conservationist, the brother of Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, Mark Shand's *Travels on my Elephant*. He covered his journey through the magnificent landscape of Odisha on his elephant Tara, over 800 kilometres from Konark in Puri, to one of the world's oldest elephant markets, the Sonepur cattle fair in Bihar. This life-changing journey on the pachyderm led him to start the foundation, the Elephant Family. The second book was about the life of Pradyumna Kumar, aka PK whose transcontinental love story was touchingly narrated in *The Amazing Story of the Man Who Cycled from India to Europe for Love*. PK, from a small village Angul next to the Mahanadi River in Odisha, cycled all the way to Sweden for love.

Fittingly, Odisha is the soul of Incredible India. Be it the region's rich cultural traditions—Odissi dance, the stylised Chhau dance and folk theatre Jatra. Or its art—the palm leaf paintings, sand arts and miniature paintings patta chitra. Or the incredible temple architecture, be it the Sun Temple of Konark or the Mukteswar Temple. Blessed with verdant forests,

the state has two national parks, 18 sanctuaries, one UNESCO World Heritage Site and the third largest concentration of tribal population in India, with their unique customs and culture.

Understandably, the number of tourists visiting Odisha has been steadily growing. The state's total tourist inflow increased by 9.23 per cent in 2017 as compared to 2016. In absolute numbers, 14.01 million domestic tourists and 0.1 million foreign tourists visited Odisha in 2017. Tourism revenue was estimated to be ₹150.5 billion for 2017-18, and was expected to grow at nine per cent to ₹164 billion this year, but due to Cyclone Fani, will be affected.

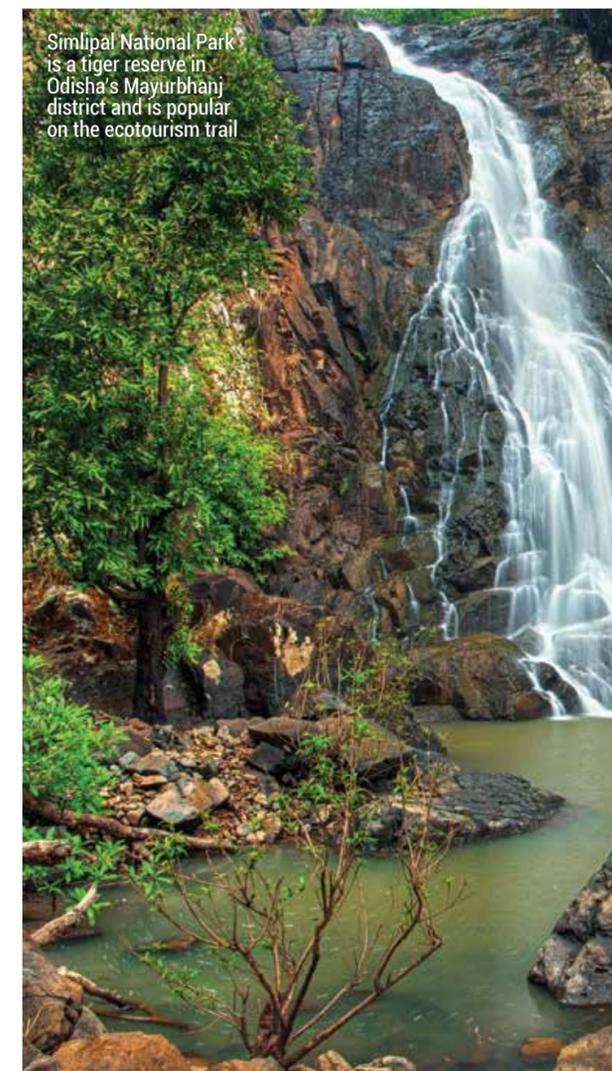
## UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

My first visit to Bhubaneswar, a palpably green city of temples, came as late as last year. As the past stronghold of the Kalinga dynasty, its modern complexion can be credited to German architect Otto. H. Koenigsberger, who in 1946 created the blueprint of a well-planned city with wide roads, multiple gardens and parks. Bhubaneswar along with Puri and Konark, form the Golden Triangle—the most popular tourist trail in Odisha.

It's hard to imagine that just a few months after my visit, Cyclone Fani battered the country's eastern flank, including Puri and the surrounding coastal regions.

Emergency services swung into action, ensuring minimal casualties and working overtime to restore electricity and water, nevertheless, tourism figures for the months of May and June were affected. According to Vishal K. Dev, Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Odisha Tourism and Department of Sports and Youth Services, Government of Odisha, "The total revenue loss for the tourism sector is approximately ₹1,300 crore," he said. (Read interview) The government has been focussing on compensating the losses and rebuilding the ecosystem, especially the unorganised sector, such as the boatmen, tour guides, arts and crafts villages, etc. "The aftermath of Cyclone Fani gives us the opportunity to remodel and restructure the developmental pattern in the Golden Triangle. Development will be more disciplined, in terms of optimising land use," he adds.

Besides the Golden Triangle, the State Tourism Advisory Committee has identified 11 priority destinations for development such as the Talsari-Chandipur Coast, Bhitarkanika National Park, Simlipal National Park, Chilika Lake Region, Tampara Lake Region, Gopalpur Coast, Chandaka



Simlipal National Park is a tiger reserve in Odisha's Mayurbhanj district and is popular on the ecotourism trail

Forest, Deomali Hill, Debrigarh Sanctuary and Hirakud Dam, the Buddhist Circuit (Udayagiri-Ratnagiri-Lalitgiri) and Satkosia.

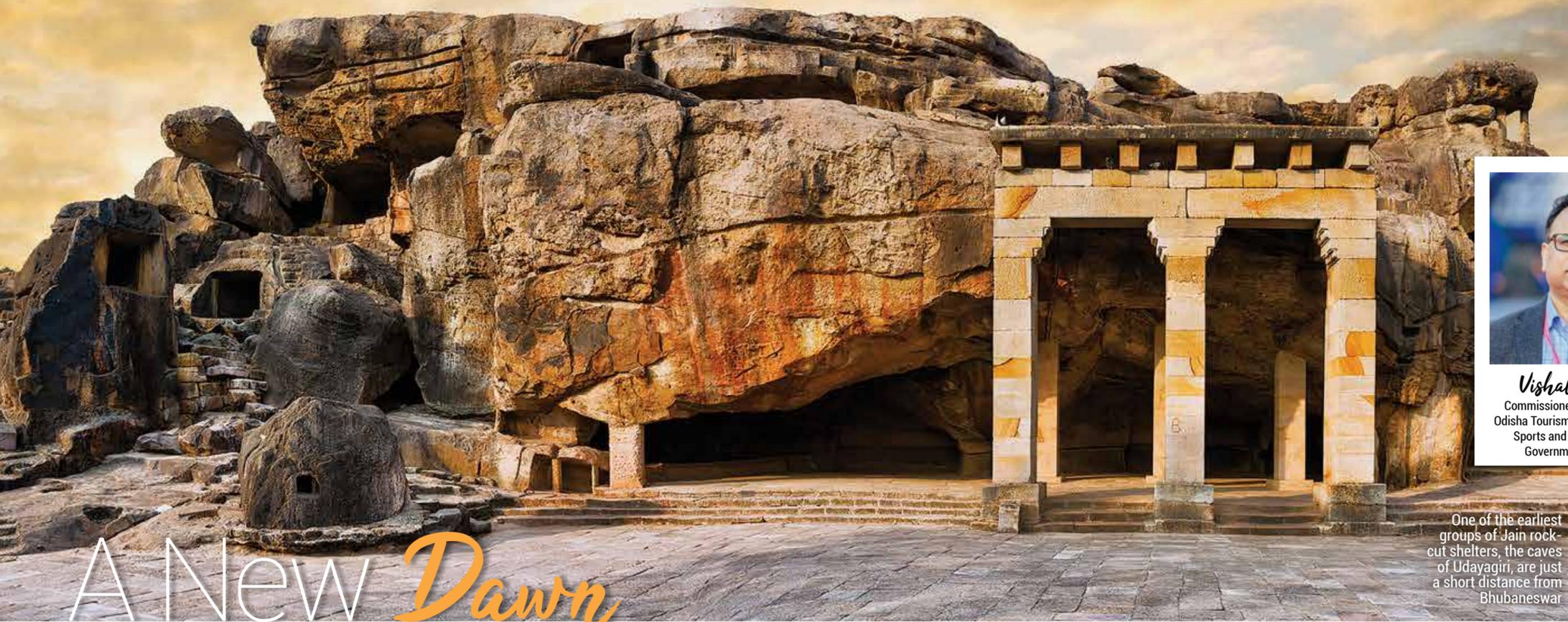
## SCENIC, SERENE, SUBLIME

The old tag line of Odisha Tourism was "Scenic, Serene, Sublime". While these words can indeed be attributed to Odisha and the experiences and sights one witnesses here, they felt the urge to rebrand Odisha Tourism to a simpler but curiosity invoking brand identity, and thus adopted "India's Best Kept Secret". The Chief Minister of Odisha, Shri Naveen Patnaik, recently relaunched the tourism website [odishatourism.gov.in](http://odishatourism.gov.in), adding that tourism is one of the most sustainable routes to maximising employment opportunities for Odisha's youth and ensuring shared prosperity through community participation.

The digital platform, apart from being rich in information, also has planning and booking tools, a travel agent search, etc. On a pilot basis, it will also launch an e-commerce platform for Odisha's stunning handlooms, promoting state brands Boyanika and Utkalika.

The ultimate goal is to empower smaller stakeholders in the sector by making this digital platform all-inclusive and participatory. "It will also empower lakhs of people, who can now leverage networks and reach out to tourists and potential business partners from far corners of the world, opening a huge window of opportunity," Patnaik was quoted as saying in a newspaper.

Both the books I read had a happy ending. While Tara retired to Kipling Camp in Kanha National Park, PK found marital bliss in Sweden. For Odisha, India's best kept secret is slowly being revealed to a larger audience, who can enjoy the pristine state's many treasures. 



# A New Dawn

With a brand new tag line, refreshed destination focus and a thrust on new themes, Odisha Tourism forges ahead

With a rich event calendar encompassing sports, cultural and religious festivals lined up for the remainder of the year, Vishal K. Dev, Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Odisha Tourism and Department of Sports and Youth Services, Government of Odisha, says the key going ahead is to aggressively market Odisha Tourism.

Post cyclone Fani, with a refreshed tourism strategy and a new tag line "India's Best Kept Secret," Dev says, "We want to promote what is unexpected and unseen in Odisha, which is not just culturally and ecologically rich, but also enriching, an experience which a discerning traveller takes back with him." Dev lays out the path ahead.

### Post Cyclone Fani, what is the government doing to attract investments to the state?

This year, we are striving to boost short-term returns through events and attract strategic investments. We have budgeted ₹168.10 crore for the tourism department for 2019-20, of which tourism infrastructure development constitutes ₹90 crore, while ₹34 crore has been provided for publicity and promotion.

As per the Odisha Tourism Policy 2016, the key incentives being offered are land at concessional rates based on the cost of the project, a 100 per cent reimbursement on land conversion charges to operational projects, capital investment subsidy up to 30 per cent based on location, quantum and category. There is an interest subsidy at five per cent for the initial five years, subject to a total limit of ₹1 crore, exemption from electricity

duties, training and tourist transport facility-related subsidies, as well as marketing and employment incentives.

### How has tourism's contribution to the state's GDP grown as compared to other segments?

The key challenge in collecting credible tourism statistics is due to the predominantly unorganised nature of tourism in India in general, and Odisha in particular. Hospitality forms the organised component of the tourism sector, contributing 10.37 per cent to Odisha's GDP in 2017-18.

The most credible estimate is based on NCAER studies, assuming an annual growth rate of two per cent, through which the current direct employment in the tourism sector is around 7.5 lakh, of which the hotel and lodging subsector would be accounting for approximately 70,000 employees. An indirect employment multiplier of four can be safely assumed for the tourism sector. Overall, tourism, is distantly lagging behind agriculture, manufacturing and mining.

### In terms of infrastructure developments, what is the government's focus?

Our key focus is on Odisha's vast coastline (see cover story) Some of the other projects include investments in the Daringbadi Hill Station. One extraordinary project is the Shamuka Beach Project whose master plan encompasses an area of over 972 acres. Under the PRASAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spirituality Augmentation Drive) some of

the projects include the development of Shree Jagannath Vishramsthal at Puri at a cost of ₹21 crore, the Gundicha Temple renovation project that's nearing completion, etc

### What measures are being taken to attract the well-heeled domestic and international tourist?

We wish to ensure that the tourism experience is seamlessly integrated with the infrastructural development plan, with a view to retaining visitors for a minimum duration of two-three days at any destination. During 2018, Odisha witnessed a total of 1,52,08,540 domestic tourist arrivals (DTA) and 1,10,818 foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs).

Our top 10 source markets for FTAs are the US, UK, Japan, China, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Malaysia and the CIS, with the top four markets contributing over 30 per cent of total FTAs. We are keen on promoting Odisha Tourism in the Middle-East.

While luxury and semi-luxury beach resort development all along the sea cost, including Talsari-Udayapur, Chandrabhaga, Shamuka (Puri) and Gopalpur-on-Sea would ensure perennial demand, special projects such as an annual beach camping festival, a revived surfing and sea sports festival at Chandrabhaga, and other flagship festivals such as the Sand Art Festival would attract a seasonal surge.

Wellness tourism and niche areas like homestays and caravan tourism have yet to be given impetus, which we intend to in the coming five years, through well targeted incentives and actionable guidelines. We are consulting with experts and public delegations, including 50 heritage properties to ensure the sustainable growth of homestays in Odisha. The key challenge to overcome is an acute shortage of experience-rich hospitality accommodation units.

### Is increased air connectivity on the anvil for the state?

Under the government's regional connectivity scheme Udan, five airports are covered: Bhubaneswar, Jharsuguda, Jeypore, Rourkela and Utkela (Kalahandi) in which the Bhubaneswar-Jharsuguda sector is operational, while Jharsuguda has also been connected to New Delhi, Raipur, Kolkata and Hyderabad.



**Vishal K. Dev**  
Commissioner-cum-Secretary,  
Odisha Tourism and Department of  
Sports and Youth Services,  
Government of Odisha

One of the earliest groups of Jain rock-cut shelters, the caves of Udayagiri, are just a short distance from Bhubaneswar

### Does Odisha have adequate classified rooms across all categories?

As per statistics in 2017-18, 315 hotels in the high spending group housed 10,822 beds, 418 medium spending group hotels housed 9,065 rooms, and 1,864 low spending group hotels housed 38,558 rooms. Currently, most new investments in the hotel sector are coming up in and around the Golden Triangle.

Some of the key properties coming up include Mayfair Hotels' five-star deluxe resort, including a golf course at Satapada, besides a complex with a world-class convention centre and 250 rooms

in Bhubaneswar. The ITC Group's Welcom Hotel, Vivanta by Taj and Ramada by Wyndham will open later this year. The Lemon Tree Group plans to invest in a luxury hotel in Bhubaneswar. There also are a few attractive medium scale resort investment proposals. The state has also put aside a total of over 1,200 acres of land bank, excluding the Shamuka Beach Project.

### How integral is the contribution of MICE to tourism revenues?

While Bhubaneswar, Puri and Cuttack have good quality infrastructure to organise MICE events, the more fundamental challenge is to design and build a wholesome tourism experience for MICE tourists. The select large investment proposals for convention centres that we have received in recent times are geographically limited to the Golden Triangle. As the tourism sector evolves in Western Odisha, which is primarily business and industry intensive, we may begin to see MICE investments flowing in as the demand firms up.

### Odisha has very distinct tourism experiences that distinguish it from other states, such as the Olive Ridley turtle nesting and the Irrawaddy dolphin viewing. How is the government promoting these themes while protecting them too?

Odisha boasts some unique tourism experiences which no other states in India has. Chilika Lake's Satapada region is famous for the Irrawaddy Dolphin. While several beach stretches, such as Rushikulya, Gopalpur-on-Sea, and Bhitarkanika are renowned across the globe as nesting sites for the Olive Ridley turtle.

At the same time, we must be careful of how we market and expose these ecotourism experiences to the world. In India, what we have observed is that mass tourism is still evolving. While it is very exciting to witness exotic wildlife up close, such as countless Olive Ridley hatchlings scurrying towards the ocean together, we must respect the fact that these are the most delicate and sacrosanct moments of their lives. Our department has been supplementing the efforts of the Forest & Environment Department in its drive to educate the citizenry and visitors about responsible tourism, while simultaneously promoting Odisha as a destination to witness such beautiful creatures. We have gradually introduced niche wildlife tourism through special events such as Chilika Bird Festival, which was, for the first time, organised earlier this year. 

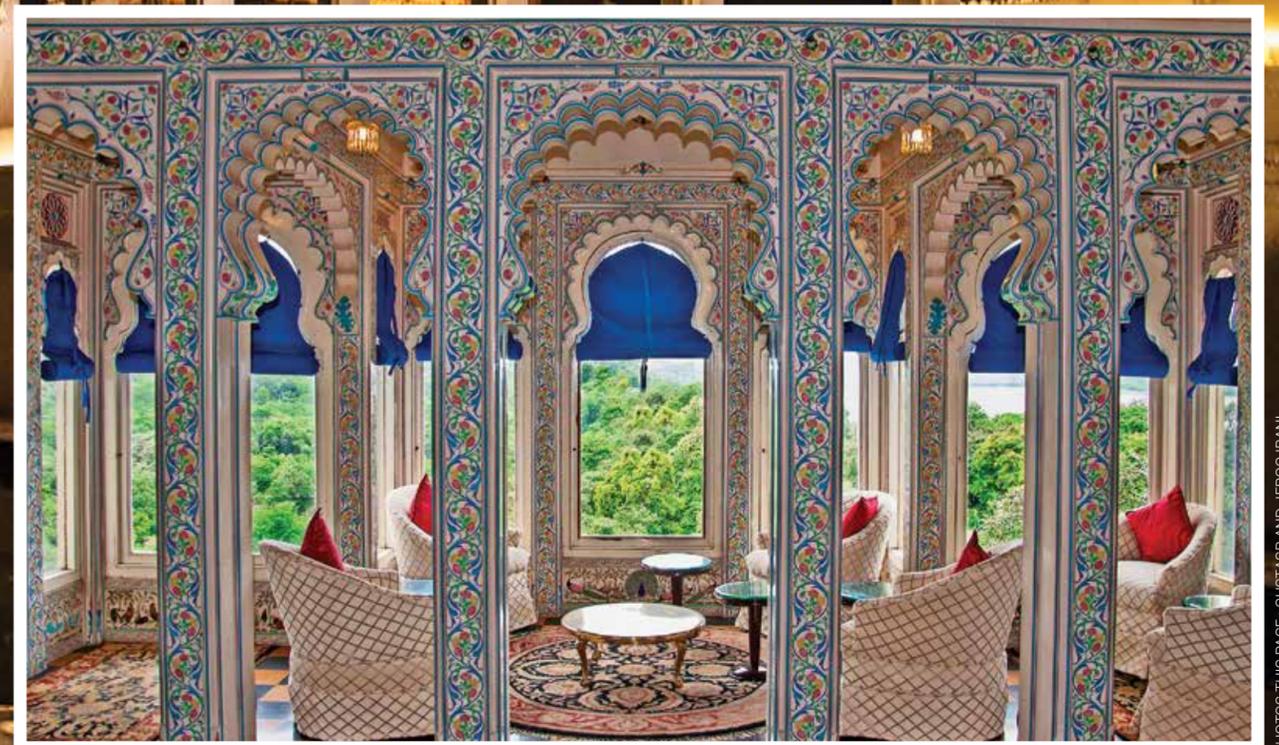
# The playground *of the royals*

Udaipur, the capital of the erstwhile Mewar Kingdom, has emerged as India's most glamorous bleisure destination

BY GUSTASP AND JEROO IRANI

Known as the Venice of the East, Udaipur was founded in 1553 by Maharana Udai Singh II. The Jag Mandir palace is built on an island in Lake Pichola;

Inset below: A royal suite at the Shiv Niwas Palace



## DESTINATION

The gorgeous bride disembarks from a flower-bedecked launch, her jewellery glinting in the sun and her dove-grey bridal outfit evanescent as a butterfly's wings. The groom, ramrod straight in a rustling silk, knee-length *sherwani* or coat, with three strands of pearls around his neck, walks by her side to the jetty and into the Jagmandir Island Palace, a former pleasure palace of the Maharanas of Udaipur. Their arrival, along with an entourage of guests, has a sense of style and occasion to it.

This perfectly describes Udaipur, an alluring getaway, founded in 1553 by Maharana Udai Singh II as the new capital of the erstwhile Mewar Kingdom. Located to the south of Nagda, it is also known as the Venice of the East. With its lakes, luxe hotels and living royalty, it is unique in the world, and was ranked in the Top 10 of the World's Best Cities 2019 by *Travel & Leisure (T+L)*.

Udaipur's cultural depth makes it the perfect mix for business and leisure travellers. According to findings of the Tourism and Culture Survey by UNWTO, 40 per cent of international arrivals globally are considered as cultural tourism arrivals, a figure which is steadily growing. One of the fastest-growing segments in the industry, heritage tourism racks up a \$171 billion annual spend. And for Udaipur, its living heritage is the biggest attraction.

### THE TOURISM TRANSFORMATION

The '60s and the '70s saw the city come on the radar of tourism, yet its growth was stymied with poor infrastructure, lack of connectivity, erratic electricity supply and even lack of air conditioning. Today, things are different. Udaipur lies on the route of the luxury train map—The Palace on Wheels, The Maharajas' Express, Royal Rajasthan on Wheels, etc. In June 2019, the Udaipur Dabok Airport operated 859 flights carrying an impressive 98,038 passengers.

It was the foresight of the royal family that changed Udaipur's fortunes. The progressive Maharana Bhagwat Singh



PHOTO: GUSTASP AND JEROO IRANI

Mewar, father of Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar of Udaipur—the 76th custodian of the House of Mewar and Chairman of the HRH Group of Hotels (Historic Resort Hotels), heralded the conversion of their summer palace, Jag Niwas, into the iconic Taj Lake Palace Hotel. It was unheard of back then, for royalty to open their palaces to guests. This heralded the beginning of palace tourism in the country.

This was followed by the conversions of Shiv Niwas and Fateh Prakash in the City Palace Complex into palatial hotels. "These are not just palaces; these are our homes that we share with our guests," says Prince Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar of Udaipur, Executive Director of HRH Group of Hotels. He adds, "I believe in the philosophy of doing the greatest good for the greatest number of people," he says, and part of that responsibility is to plough back most of the

HRH Group's profits into maintaining Udaipur's City Palace and the hotels.

At these royal hotels, 21st century management dovetails with old-world charm. These citadels are also repositories of local history. At the Fateh Prakash Palace's opulent Durbar Hall, the Instrument of Accession to the Indian Union was signed. It's a fascinating glimpse into royal life, be it learning about the department of key control that oversees around 10,000 locks and keys, some, nearly a foot long or interacting with two specialists invested in maintaining the chandeliers, a few which weigh 1,000 kg! Or visiting the Crystal Gallery, said to be the single largest private collection of crystal under one roof, ordered by Maharana Sajjan Singh in 1877 from the Birmingham-based F&C Osler company. The gallery houses the only crystal bed in the world. All of the above constitute a once-in-a-life time experiences for travellers.

### THE LUXURY GETAWAY

The epicentre of luxe tourism in Udaipur is the limpid Lake Pichola, an artificial fresh water lake, around which luxury hotels have changed the complexion of the city. A floating white marble pleasure palace built by Maharana Jagat Singh II of Udaipur on an island on Lake Pichola, Jag Niwas, in 1746 is now the Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur. Replete with hand-painted motifs, mosaics, silk bolsters, swings and stained glass, it swept on to the global map when the Roger Moore starring James Bond movie *Octopussy* was filmed at it, as the secluded lair of the film's eponymous Bond Girl. This heritage hotel has 65 luxurious rooms and 18 grand

suites. Commenting on Udaipur's development over the decades, Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, The Indian Hotels Company, said, "Taj has been instrumental in developing India's tourism potential in Rajasthan and putting the state on the global map with the iconic Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur since 1970." A new entrant in Udaipur is the Taj Aravali Resort & Spa, with 92 luxurious rooms, suites and tents, with panoramic views of the hills.

Creating a ripple globally when it opened was The Oberoi Udaivilas, Udaipur, which brought in the grandeur of a new age palace alive, previously unseen in the city. Spread over 30 acres of luxuriant gardens, the resort has been conceived as a splendid Mewari palace, constructed using local materials and craftsmanship, be it jharokhas, or the window seat, the miniature sheesh mahal, or mirrored palace encrusted with molten glass, and vivid colour accents such as tangerine, pomegranate and raspberry. Embracing the natural topography of the land, it was built on the former hunting ground of the Maharanas, a challenging terrain. Ambitiously conceived and brilliantly executed, right from its lavish rooms (the smallest is 600 square feet), its garden pavillions, dancing peacocks and discreet, impeccable service has garnered the resort every possible accolade.

Around a decade ago, the glamorous The Leela Palace Udaipur came up on the lake shore. Voted as World's Best Hotel by *Travel + Leisure USA*, Readers Award Survey 2019, the 72-room, eight-suite luxury property garnered a near perfect score. With breath-taking views of the Lake Pichola, the resort

Top: Peacock mosaic at the City Palace Complex;

Below: The newly launched Taj Aravali Resort & Spa is a 27 acres oasis surrounded by the rugged Aravalis



The Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur has 65 luxurious rooms and 18 grand suites

## DESTINATION



Also debuting will be Accor's ultra-luxe Raffles, a classic 101-room luxury resort to be set on a private island in the Udaï Sagar lake, opening by mid-2020. In an interview with a newspaper, Accor's Global Chairman and CEO, Sébastien Bazin observed that India was seeing a 12 per cent growth in spends, driven by the domestic travel market.

According to an HVS report, in 2016, Udaipur had around 1,200 rooms across categories, and by 2020-21, it would add another 800 rooms. And the consultancy states that the development of midscale hotels, such as Ananta Udaipur, Golden Tulip and Radisson have stimulated the domestic leisure and MICE market.

### WEDDING DESTINATION

A 2017 tourism study by market research agency MRSS India and FICCI estimated the wedding sector to be worth ₹1,10,000 crore. It stated that ₹23,438 crore could be attributed to destination weddings, a figure projected to grow to ₹45,000 crore by 2020. The history-webbed Udaipur, with a swoon-worthy backdrop, has become a popular venue for celebrity destination weddings.

The most recent and lavish were the pre-wedding celebrations of billionaire Mukesh Ambani's daughter Isha and Anand Piramal, held at The Oberoi Udaivilas, Udaipur and the Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur. For the occasion, the family had partnered with artisans and craftsmen to integrate local culture and traditions into the festivities. But the most awaited

has conceived unforgettable experiences for its guests, be it a tuk-tuk ride in the old city followed by high-tea in the dining room, culinary workshops with their chefs, an exclusive four course dinner at Sheesh Mahal, or a soulful 165-year-old temple ritual at their award-winning ESPA Spa. "It's a badge of honour for our young and passionate team members, who are committed to delivering memorable experiences to our guest," commented Rajiv Kaul, President, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, on winning this prestigious award.

## UDAIPUR'S TRANSFORMATION INTO A SMART CITY

The erstwhile capital of Mewar has faced several challenges in the past with crippled infrastructure and a piecemeal approach taken to revitalise the city. Chosen as a smart city for development, approximately ₹1,221 crore is ear-marked for development, keeping its heritage and cultural ethos intact while renovating its on-ground infrastructure. Though development work is proceeding slowly, a couple of measures being implemented include the elimination of all points of sewerage discharge into lakes, the construction of STP plants, removal of encroachments, the launch of a lake festival, establishment of new jetties, solar installations and LED lights, amongst other initiatives.

wedding was that of the young prince Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar of Udaipur with Princess Nivritti Kumari Singh Deo of Patna Balangir. The reception was held at the Shikarbadi Hotel, a former hunting lodge of the royals, and the entire city was decked up.

But Udaipur does not only carry on in the shadow of the city's grandiose past. Beyond royal Udaipur that is cloistered behind the multi-arched gateways of the City Palace Complex, the palace hotels and the traditionally carved *havelis* (stately mansions) converted into hotels, is modern Udaipur. Juxtaposed against glittering malls, are tiny shops brimming with *bric a brac*, silver jewellery, *ghagra-cholis*, turbans, *majdis* and replicas of miniature paintings. At a humble mobile stall called Palace Tea, the owner who has been brewing tea for four decades tells us, "The charm of Udaipur is that its people haven't lost their souls. You may meet a rickshaw driver who claims to be a descendant of Lord Ram or you might be served in the palace hotels by retainers who have worked for royalty for several generations." This is the enduring magic of the royal city. 📍

## FACT FILE

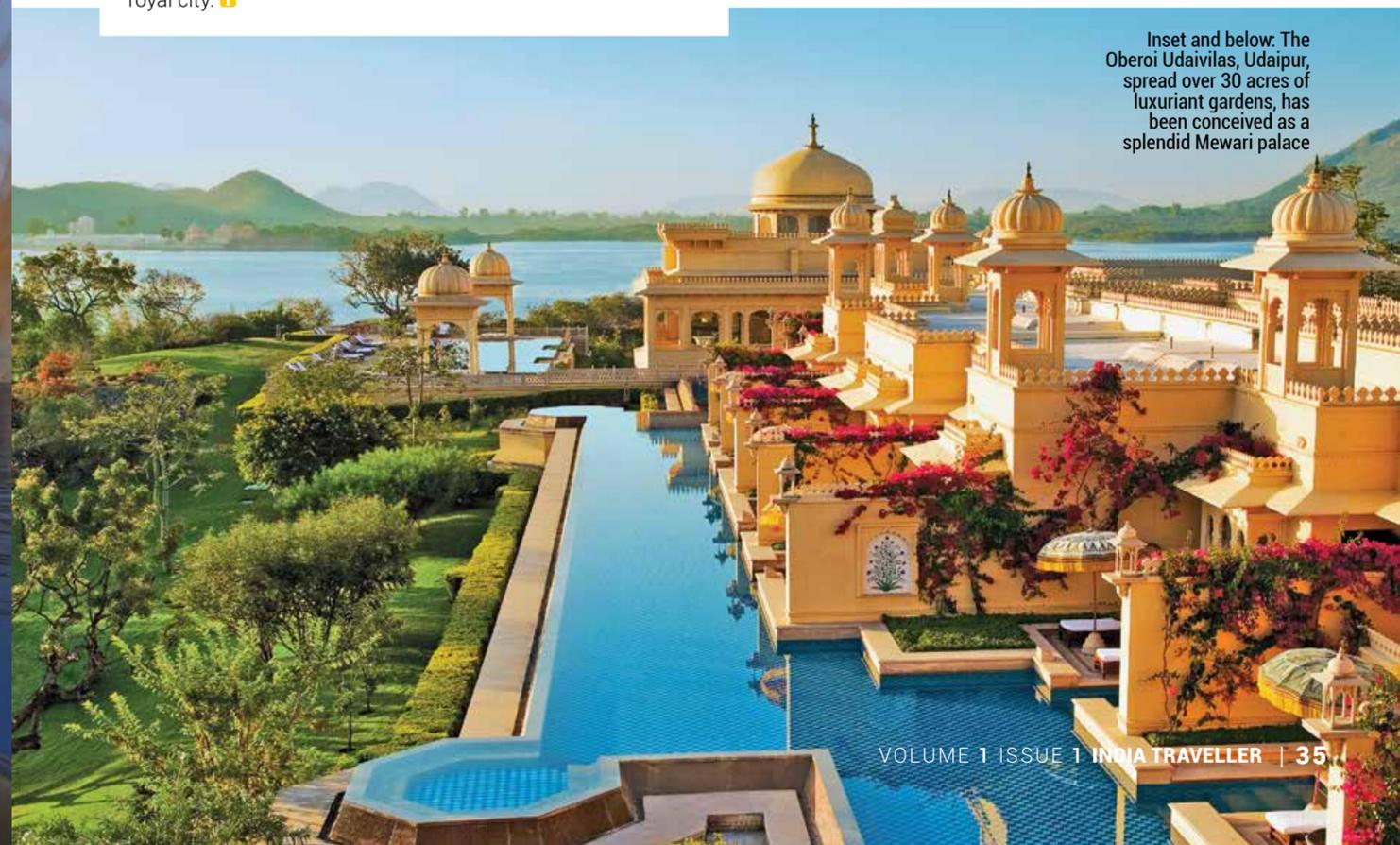
Udaipur is well connected by air, road and rail with the rest of India.

**Eat:** You can enjoy great meals under the stars at The Sunset Terrace, with live musicians regaling you and afternoon high tea at the Surya Darshan Bar, at the Fateh Prakash Palace. Paantya Restaurant at the Shiv Niwas Palace serves continental, Mughlai and authentic Rajasthani cuisine. Sheesh Mahal is a two-level, open-air fine-dining Indian restaurant, overlooking the lake at The Leela Palace. At The Oberoi Udaivilas, Suryamahal is the daytime dining area, serving Western and Indian cuisines, while Chandni is the adjoining alfresco dining. Taj Aravali Resort & Spa features an all-day diner Tiri, a speciality pure vegetarian restaurant Javitri, an alfresco grill Ridgeview, and Odeypore Lounge, perfect for a sundowner.

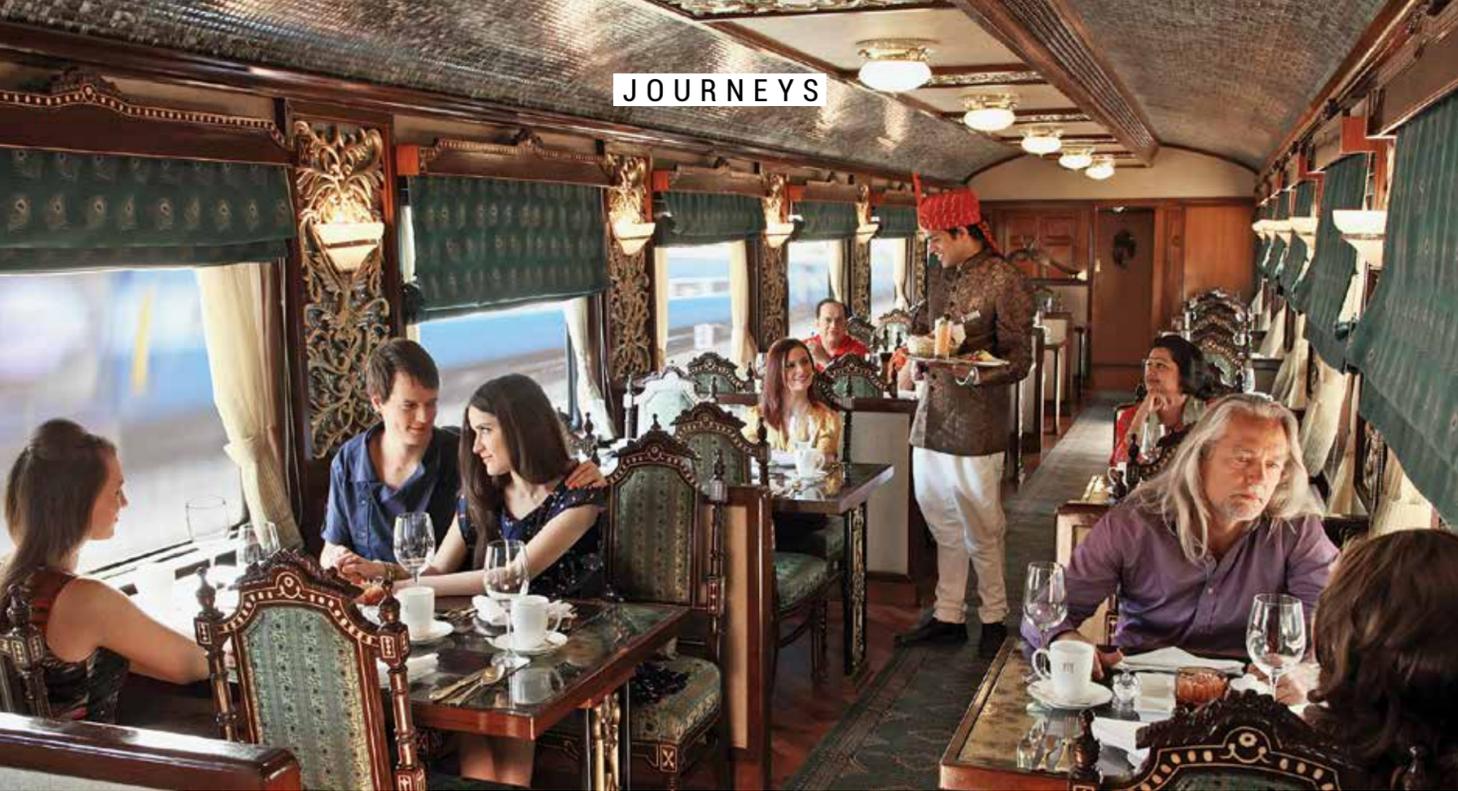
**Do:** Visit the City Palace Museum and see the light and sound show, visit the vintage car collection in the HRH Group's Garden Hotel, Sahelion ki Bari or the Garden of the Maids of Honour and Shilpgram, a crafts village west of Fateh Sagar lake where you can see traditional crafts people at work. Visit: [tourism.rajasthan.gov.in](http://tourism.rajasthan.gov.in)



Top and below: The Leela Palace Udaipur, a 72-room, eight-suite luxury property, has been voted as the World's Best Hotel by Travel + Leisure USA, Readers Award Survey 2019



Inset and below: The Oberoi Udaivilas, Udaipur, spread over 30 acres of luxuriant gardens, has been conceived as a splendid Mewari palace



# Maharajas' Express

*An experience unsurpassed*

## Journey Options

**Indian Splendour** (6 Nights/7 Days) starting in Delhi covering Agra, Ranthambore, Jaipur, Bikaner, Jodhpur, Udaipur and ending in Mumbai.

**Heritage of India** (6 Nights/7 Days) starting in Mumbai covering Udaipur, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Jaipur, Ranthambore, Fatehpur Sikri, Agra and ending in Delhi.

**Indian Panorama** (6 Nights/7 Days) starting in Delhi covering Jaipur, Fatehpur Sikri, Ranthambore, Agra, Orchha, Khajuraho, Varanasi and ending in Delhi.

**Treasures of India** (3 Nights/4 Days) starting in Delhi covering Agra, Ranthambore, Jaipur and ending in Delhi.

# All aboard the Maharajas' Express

The Maharajas' Express is a palatial getaway on wheels

BY SAMEERA SHAH

Since the first commercial steam engine trundled out of Mumbai in the colonial era, romantic rail road journeys are carefully wrought out in our imagination. Our Maharajas too were fascinated with these exquisite industrial era machines. Be it the Maharaja of Vadodara's delicate toy train or the Maharaja of Gwalior's silver-crafted, tabletop model that chugged along his banqueting board, trains summoned up memories of journeys across sylvan lands in utter luxury.

In modern times, the Maharajas' Express, a sumptuous luxury train that recreates the splendour of royal India has been ranked among the most luxurious vacations in the world. The flagship train of the IRCTC, it is the youngest and the most modern luxury train in the country. The Maharajas' Express recreates the same old panache of the personal carriages of Indian royalty, with modern creature comforts. The 23-carriage long train houses four different types of accommodation—Deluxe Cabins, Junior Suite Cabins, Suites and the Presidential Suite, which in total can accommodate 84 guests.

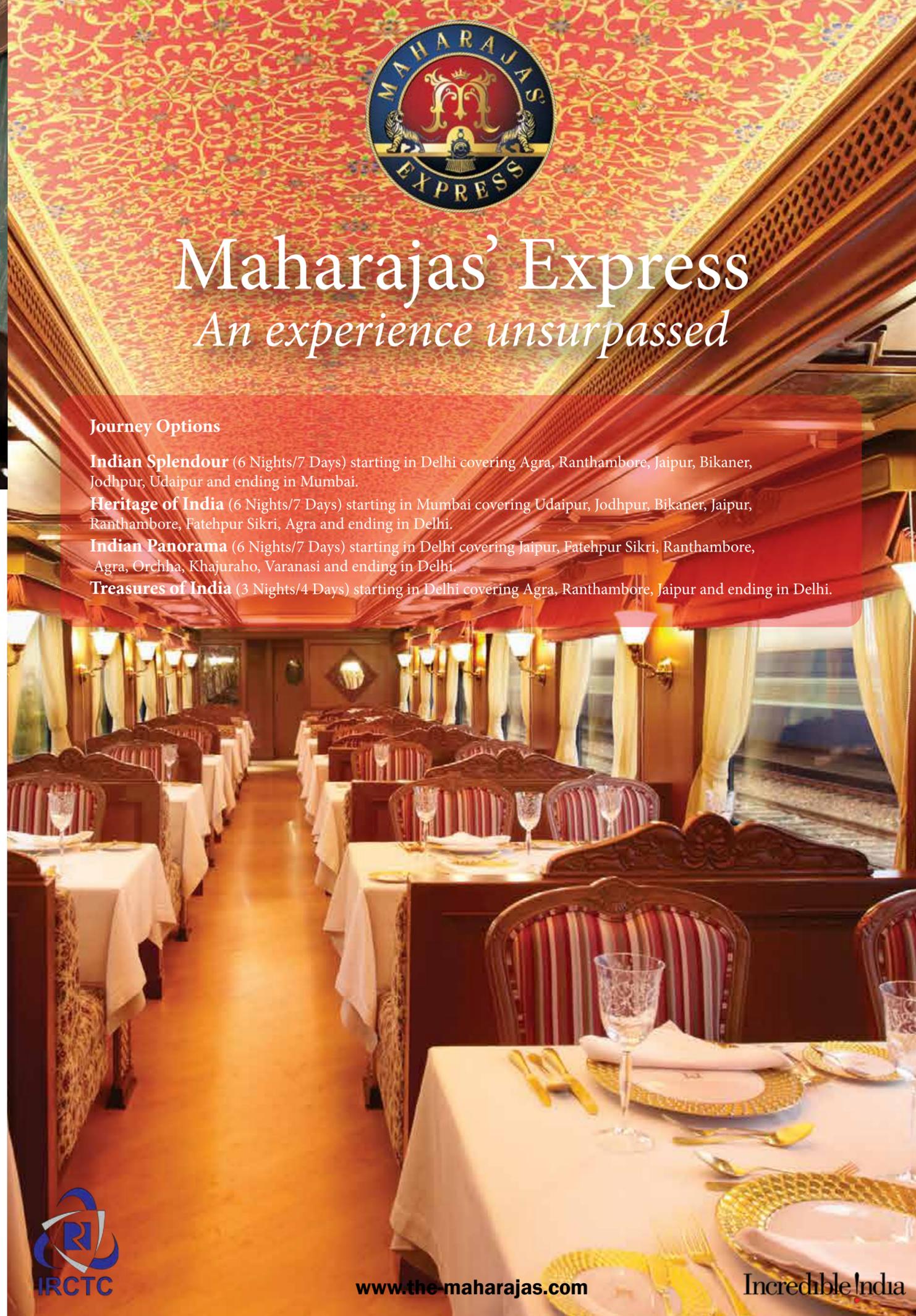
The epitome of luxury, the Presidential Suite is befitting for modern-day royalty, and spans an entire carriage. It is aptly christened the Navratna, signifying nine precious gems, which yield cosmic influence on the universe. Draped in a Lotus Theme, it features hand-painted ceilings, wall tiles of bathrooms, drapery and paintings, decorated with the nation's national flower.

What makes this journey special is that each car on the train has a private butler, and at each train stop, you are greeted with fresh flower garlands and a welcome ceremony. Each of its four different categories of spacious cabins boast Wi-Fi, eco-friendly powder rooms, an on board filtration plant and CCTV cameras. For your safety, the train has an on board paramedic and tour director travelling throughout the journey.

When hunger strikes, you can visit the two restaurants on board which have a seating capacity of 42 each, both with eclectic menus of Indian as well as international cuisines. Rang Mahal literally meaning 'Palace of Colours' has a vibrant hand-painted fresco ceiling showcasing the shades of India. The other restaurant, Mayur Mahal, pays homage to the National Bird of India, the Peacock. After a long day, you can settle for a tippie at the Safari Bar, which serves up the choicest of wines, champagnes and beer with delectable snacks. Or head to the adjoining Rajah Club, where you can sip on a single malt and read a tome on the subcontinent picked from the library.

The Maharajas' Express immerses you into India's cultural, architectural and natural splendours. It brings you up close and personal with tigers, polo matches and India's erstwhile royalty. Each experience is enthralling. Be it elephant polo involving pachyderms and camels. A cup of tea with India's erstwhile royal families. A sundowner at the dunes of Rajasthan, amidst folk music and traditional dance performances. Or the Ganga Aarti on the shores of the holy river at the Ghats of Varanasi. The Maharajas' Express gives you a magical and unforgettable glimpse of the majesty of India. 

ABOVE: The Maharajas' Express is the youngest luxury train in the country



# India's MICE Opportunity

With upcoming infrastructure and increased connectivity, India is emerging as a leading Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) destination in the Asia-Pacific region, where culture, nature and leisure meets business

BY GAYATRI VINAYAK

destinations," explains Rajeev Kale, President & Country Head—Holidays, MICE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India).

India's natural resources and traditions, juxtaposed with modern comforts and convenience, offer an amazing culturally immersive experience. "From the Taj Mahal to wildlife to beaches and mountains, we have a variety that few other countries can match," says Rajeev Kohli, Joint Managing Director, Creative Travel. Kohli says that an overwhelming majority of meetings in the world have less than 1,000 delegates, and India is well poised to accommodate the demand.

India is also a key destination for global investors, be it technology, pharma, electricals or engineering. Additionally, the country serves as a source market for technology, good quality raw materials for different industries and finished products. "With business travellers coming to India to source these products, MICE can be taken to the next level," explains Kale.

## HOSPITALITY LEADING THE WAY

Hotels have been at the forefront of developing the MICE market through building infrastructure and the concerted marketing of the destinations.



**Rajeev Kohli**  
Joint Managing Director,  
Creative Travel

India's strong and sustained economic growth, greater prominence at a global level and fast-paced development is building its growing perception as a lucrative MICE destination. As per a recently released FICCI-Yes Bank report, 'India Inbound Tourism: Unlocking the Opportunity,' in 2018, MICE tourism in India was pegged at ₹25,000 crore and is growing at eight per cent annually in the country.

The report states that in 2017, India ranked 24th globally in terms of international meetings organised, with 175 meetings taking place during the year. Out of a total 12,563 meetings globally, this is a mere 1.39 per cent share. The country ranks fifth in the APAC region, behind Japan, China, Republic of Korea and Australia. Though India is a late entrant to the segment, the nation is in the process of upgrading its MICE infrastructure (see box). The industry is estimated to currently have a space of about five lakh square metres, which is expected to cross 15 lakh square metres over the next two-three years. Clearly, opportunity abounds.

## ADVANTAGE INDIA

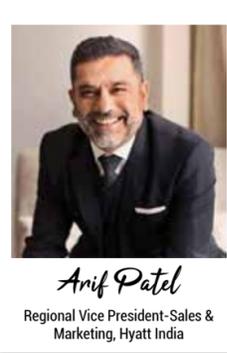
India's strategic location and its well-connected infrastructure with 31 international airports, five cruise ports and one of the largest rail and road networks in the world works in its favour. "Thomas Cook India has observed a growing demand of 20 per cent over last year for MICE travellers to India, with Delhi NCR, Agra, Jaipur, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai, Bengaluru, Goa and Kochi being among the most preferred

Accor's Hotel Fairmont Jaipur has emerged as a leading player in the MICE and weddings segment



The JW Marriott Mussoorie Walnut Grove Resort & Spa, provides for meetings with the hills as a backdrop

The Hyderabad International Convention Centre (HICC), the state-of-the-art convention facility managed by French multinational hospitality company Accor, has been a major factor in bringing Hyderabad on the MICE map. Accor's main source markets are USA, UK, Germany and France, primarily due to the strong growth of IT, pharma and defence in India. Accor is also looking to tap into new markets including Spain, Singapore, Japan, China and Australia, wherein they plan to attend sales missions and MICE fairs like IBTM Barcelona, FITUR Madrid, ITB Singapore, as well as others. "Weddings are also a key segment, considering that we have large wedding space and room inventory. We attend key wedding shows and events in India and abroad like EPEX and ICWF," says Jean-Michel Cassé, Chief Operating Officer (COO)-India & South Asia, Accor Hotels.



**Arif Patel**  
Regional Vice President-Sales & Marketing, Hyatt India

For Hyatt, the main source market, for now, is domestic. "We are focused on expanding our MICE potential in the country, especially for our hotels such as Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty, Grand Hyatt Mumbai, Andaz Delhi, Hyatt Regency Delhi and others in gateway cities," explains Arif Patel, Regional Vice President-Sales & Marketing, Hyatt India. With growing inbound demand from the South East Asian markets, the hotel group is looking to explore opportunities from Malaysia and Indonesia, as well. "The Middle East also has a lot of untapped potential, considering that India has the maximum flight connectivity with the region," says Patel.

Marriott International is focused equally on the domestic and international markets for MICE. While domestically the key metro cities contribute 60 per cent of the demand, the chain is also witnessing demand from secondary and tertiary markets. "The rise in the demand from tier II and III cities in India is a major opportunity for the MICE segment," explains Parul Thakur-Senior Area Director Sales and Distribution, South Asia,

Marriott International. The chain capitalises on the unique cultural experiences that the country offers. While the Westin Pushkar Resort & Spa targets the "Bleisure" (business and leisure) crowd, the JW Marriott Mussoorie Walnut Grove Resort & Spa, provides for meetings with the hills as a backdrop.

### TECHNOLOGY AN ENABLER

Technology is becoming a disrupter for tourism, and MICE, in particular. "We are now in the era of live streaming and participation. Technology is changing the game at every front, from trade shows and auto expos to seminars and rallies.

We should leverage technology to promote tourism in India by capitalising on our strengths and using mediums that appeal to a global audience," says Patel.

According to Thakur, while most planners use a big screen for main stage events or PowerPoint projectors for breakout sessions, these are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of event planner technology. "Our facilities provide proprietary tools like Meetings Imagined, that assists planners from inspiration through execution – all curated in line with the objective of the meeting," says Thakur.

Social media is being leveraged by many brands across different sectors, and Patel believes the medium needs to be optimised to promote tourism in India. "For instance, Spanish and Mandarin are some of the most widely spoken languages in the world. Curating highly engaging content in these languages could help us reach out to a larger audience," he opines.

Further, digital platforms have a huge influence on popular culture should be leveraged. "Photo sharing platforms like Pinterest, Instagram and Flickr can be used to inspire new ideas and garner excitement for travel and events of all types. LinkedIn connects you to professionals worldwide, which can be very useful in spreading your message," Thakur adds.

### OPPORTUNITIES AMIDST HURDLES

So, what is holding the country back? Kohli believes that the country's biggest strengths are ironically, its weakness too. "The persona we have built for ourselves over the years is one of a cultural and historical destination. We have boxed ourselves into a stereotype and that is now hurting our ability to expand our customer base," Kohli explains.

What the country needs is a targeted campaign for MICE, as the traditional 'one-size-fits-all' strategy that marketers have to sell a destination does not work. "We need to



**Kochi has seen an increasing growth in MICE Tourism as witnessed in the Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty**



**Rajeer Kale**  
President & Country Head-Holidays, MICE, Visa & Passport Services, Thomas Cook India

plans and start afresh. We need new thinking, new ideas and open minds. The day that happens, India tourism will change for the better," he says.

Going forward, Thakur foresees the Indian government working towards policy changes that would make the country one of the most preferred MICE destinations in the world. "Infrastructure will benefit the MICE industry. User-friendly technology innovations will also remain vital, along with F&B," she adds. What is also required is a concerted effort from all stakeholders involved to move ahead in unison. "It is important to understand that a single hospitality player alone cannot bring an increase in inbound tourism. We need collective effort as an industry, backed by support from the government, to increase international demand for India," concludes Patel. ■

understand that the MICE segment has different buyers and different requirements. While India has a strong internal base, it has been beaten into a price game, rather than creating a value proposition. Our domestic MICE business has been categorised mostly as cheap and mass business," Kohli laments.

Further, where India lags in comparison with other short-haul destinations such as Dubai, Hong Kong and Macau is the pace of development of hotels. "High cost of land and high-interest rates pose to be strong barriers to entry. The regulatory process is also multi-tiered and slow," explains Thakur.

While the Government's visa-on-arrival initiative has led to an increase in the number of inbound travellers, what is also required is a streamlined and simplified process of gaining permission for hosting events. "An Indian organiser who is hosting an international conference or convention has to apply for conference permissions to various ministries. Based upon those permissions, delegates need to apply for their conference visas. If the Government can make this into a simpler process it will create a positive impact, and international participation will increase," Kale says.

Further, easing visa restrictions and making it free-of-cost for certain countries, would drive inbound MICE tourism. "At present, India has a 10:35 ratio for inbound vis-à-vis outbound tourism. Easing visa restrictions could help bring a balance between inbound and outbound," says Kale. Thailand, for example, has seen an influx of tourists from India after it waived its visa costs.

### THE ROAD AHEAD

Kohli believes that a complete overhaul in policies and ideas is the need of the hour. "There is a need to tear up all old policies and

### KEY UPCOMING MICE INFRASTRUCTURE IN INDIA

- **BISWA BANGLA CONVENTION CENTRE, KOLKATA:** Among the largest convention centres in South Asia, the recently opened Biswa Bangla Convention Centre has an auditorium that can accommodate 3,200 people, and features banquet halls, exhibition halls, restaurants and accommodation.
- **INDIA INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION AND EXHIBITION CENTRE, NEW DELHI:** The \$4 billion centre spread over 90 hectares of land in New Delhi's Dwarka is expected to be completely ready by 2025. It will also be home to a multi-purpose arena which has a capacity to host 20,000 people. The venue will also house hotels offering nearly 1,500 rooms across categories, as well as serviced apartments.
- **INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE COMPLEX (ICCC), AKKULAM, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM:** The proposed project will have a 1500-seat convention centre across two levels and meeting rooms, along with a hotel and marina in the first phase.
- **JIO WORLD CENTRE, BANDRA KURLA COMPLEX, MUMBAI:** The mixed-use development will feature a convention centre, malls, hotels, restaurants, offices, a performing arts theatre and a rooftop drive-in movie theatre.



**Hyatt Centric Candolim Goa taps into the bleisure segment**

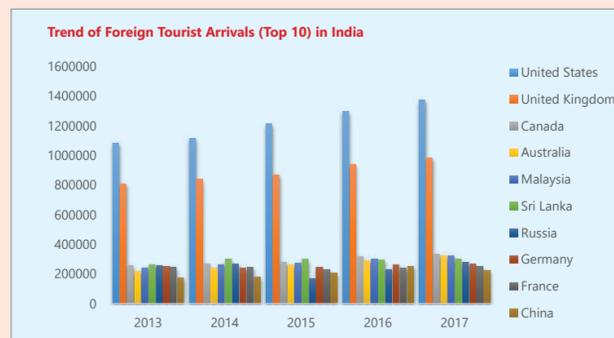
# Unlocking India's Inbound Tourism Potential

The recently released FICCI–YES BANK Knowledge Report 'India Inbound Tourism: Unlocking the Opportunity' highlights the current scenario and key themes shaping inbound tourism in India. Showcasing the initiatives being undertaken by the Central and State Governments, it provides key recommendations for India to become a preferred tourism destination globally. We present excerpts.

India has emerged as a tourism powerhouse in recent years and is the 8th largest country in terms of contribution to travel and tourism GDP. In 2018, the sector generated \$247.3 billion and was the source of livelihood generation for 42.7 million people. Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA) crossed the 10



million milestone in 2017 and the growth trend is expected to continue over the coming years. However, consumption by domestic tourists remains the key strength of the sector in India, much stronger than the global average. The segment is expected to grow further with growing disposable income, increasing inclination towards travelling across age groups and emergence of new destinations as well as new themes



of tourism. India also follows the global trend in terms of higher spending on leisure tourism as compared to business spending.

The top 10 source countries accounted for 65.80 per cent of the total inbound tourist flows in 2017, which includes Bangladesh, USA, UK, Canada and Australia. FTAs from most of the top source countries grew during the last few years. China, the largest market for outbound tourism, however witnessed a marginal dip. The introduction of e-visa has led to a strong surge in FTAs since its launch in September 2014. This scheme has been extended to citizens from 166 countries for visit to India through 28 international airports and five seaports. In 2018, 2.37 million foreign tourists availed the e-visa facility which represents 39.4 per cent increase over 2017.

## UNLOCKING THE OPPORTUNITY

The Government of India has recently been focusing upon fast-track infrastructure development and promoting tourism digitally. Sustained efforts have led to a jump of 25 places in World Economic Forum Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index ranking between 2013 and 2017. Infrastructure development for various thematic segments across the country has received a significant boost through the Swadesh Darshan and PRASHAD schemes. Further, initiatives such as 24/7 Tourist Helpline in 12 international languages, Swachh



Paryatan Mobile App, launch of Adventure Tourism Guidelines, among others have positively impacted the sector. The Government has been actively engaging on the publicity and promotion front as well and has launched the Incredible India 2.0 campaign with market specific content and advertising. Efforts of the Ministry of Tourism have been complemented by progressive initiatives by other ministries, such as UDAN scheme by the Ministry of Civil Aviation, tourist trains by the Ministry of Railways, Sagarmala project and development of lighthouses by the Ministry of Shipping, among others.

Traditional themes of culture and heritage, religious and nature-based tourism are still the frontrunners shaping the inbound tourism landscape in India. The country is widely recognised for these unique offerings, which also come at a very competitive price. While these segments remain popular



among domestic as well as foreign tourists, India is gradually also gaining popularity in some emerging segments of tourism. Availability of medical experts offering speciality treatment, advanced equipment and low costs have positioned India as a preferred medical tourism destination in several international markets. Further, India is also home to ancient medical and wellness practices of AYUSH. Adventure tourism is another rapidly growing segment. With the growing number of travel aggregators, start ups and travel operators offering unique and adventurous experiences, and increasing interest among the youth and urban dwellers for adventurous getaways, the segment is expected to witness exponential growth.

Rapid growth in India's tourism sector over recent years, a significant jump in international rankings and travel and tourism GDP are testimony of India's enormous potential.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- 1. Tourism competitiveness index/ease of doing business (EoDB) rankings for states/UTs:** The Ministry of Tourism (MoT), on the lines of WEF Tourism Competitiveness Index, needs to identify parameters according to the Indian tourism landscape for developing a Tourism Competitiveness Index or EoDB Ranking mechanism
- 2. Creation of a national tourism authority & advisory council:** A central level body can be created under the ambit of MoT which includes representatives from the government and private sectors. The advisory council will provide inputs for policy level decision making and also be the approving authority for large scale projects.
- 3. Incentivise private sector participation:** Government should incentivise private players to invest in unserved and under-served tourism projects.
- 4. Rationalising GST for hotels:** It is recommended to reduce GST with a ceiling of 18 per cent on hotel rooms to make the segment more competitive and keep aspirational luxury travel within the reach of a wider customer segment.

**5. Land bank repository:** Availability of a suitable land parcel is the preliminary step for assessment towards development of a tourism project. While few states regularly list the available land banks on their websites, the availability of updated information is a challenge.

**6. Greater coordination at state level:** India ranks 104th in 'Prioritisation of Travel & Tourism' pillars of WEF Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017. While the centre needs to finalise the National Tourism Policy, states will remain the driving force behind implementation of tourism developmental initiatives in their respective regions.

**7. Upgrading government-owned infrastructure through private sector participation:** Operation and maintenance of government-owned tourism infrastructure can be outsourced to private sector which would result in better upkeep of such properties, enhanced economic activity and also boost room inventory.

**8. Industry-oriented skill development:** Local skilling needs to be taken up on priority in consultation with the industry to train on specific skills required for development of thematic and niche tourism products.

**9. Supporting small enterprises:** There is a need for special provisions and incentives so as to enable access to cheaper credit. Further, facilitating ancillary industry linkages, such as use of local farm produce, handmade soaps, art and crafts, etc. by hotels and restaurants will lead to holistic development of the regions.

**10. Leveraging social media to boost inbound tourism:** Social media should be leveraged to promote highly customised content based on user behaviour. An annual conclave of such influencers can be organised in India along with personalised tours for them to promote India's tourist destinations through their channels.

**11. Technology penetration in tourism:** Technologies such as Big Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence should be employed to deliver insights into consumer behaviour, spending pattern, duration of stay, preferred destinations according to region, country of origin, age group, etc.

**12. Combined VISA options:** India can work with other member countries of BIMSTEC, SAARC and ASEAN to offer 'Combined,Visa'. Such a visa will result in conversion of stopovers to short-haul visits and will also add India on the itinerary of tourists on long visits to the South Asian region.

**13. Focus on source markets:** Campaigns should be structured around attracting tourists from large outbound tourism markets in the world, showcasing tourism products based on their preferences. For instance, Australia has developed China 2020 strategic plan to boost inbound tourist arrivals from China through various interventions.

**14. Focus on Northeast India:** With the implementation of RCS UDAN scheme, air connectivity in Northeast has received a much needed boost. There is an urgent need to focus towards development of quality accommodation infrastructure across the region to unlock the true potential of the Northeast. [i](#)

# “The future of travel lies in predicting and offering travel solutions from the beginning of the purchase life cycle”

Personalisation of services, tapping into the vernacular market and investing in Artificial Intelligence define online travel in India, says Deep Kalra, Founder and CEO of MakeMyTrip

BY AATISH NATH

As more transactions move online, it's not a surprise that MakeMyTrip, which was founded in 2000 has been a beneficiary. Founder and CEO, Deep Kalra explains, “While the first generation of consumers took almost a decade to book travel online, the new generation of the evolved Indian traveller have moved much faster. It takes mere months to upgrade to newer technology enabled options available to book their travel. The erosion of traditional silos is transforming travel like never before.” As a result, though competition has increased, Kalra is optimistic, pointing out how travel businesses are working to find new ways of bundling, unbundling and cross-selling travel products and services.

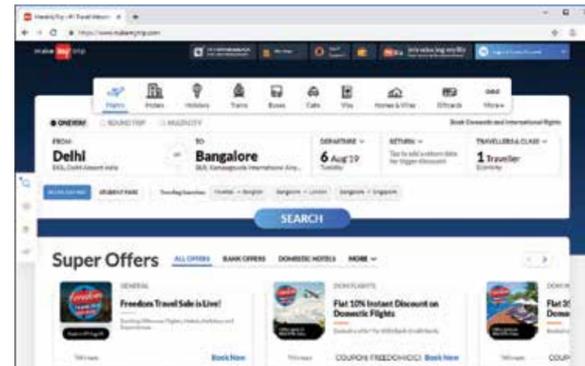
## THE CONSUMER IS KING

According to Statista, provider of market and consumer data, India is the second largest online market, ranked only behind China, with over 460 million internet users in 2018. By 2021, there will be about 635.8 million internet users in India. According to Kalra, the internet has become a battleground for those seeking to tap the country's lucrative travel market. After all, Amazon has recently started offering domestic flight booking online using Cleartrip's



**Deep Kalra**  
Founder and CEO,  
MakeMyTrip

platform. He isn't too worried about new players. MakeMyTrip has been, “constantly investing in technological solutions to enhance the overall user experience and reach—delivering highly relevant and more personalised content. Our investments in advanced Artificial Intelligence (AI) solutions and Natural Language Processing allows us to personalise results for consumers—from personalised videos to different listing orders to recommended hotels and flights.”



## A ONE-STOP-SHOP

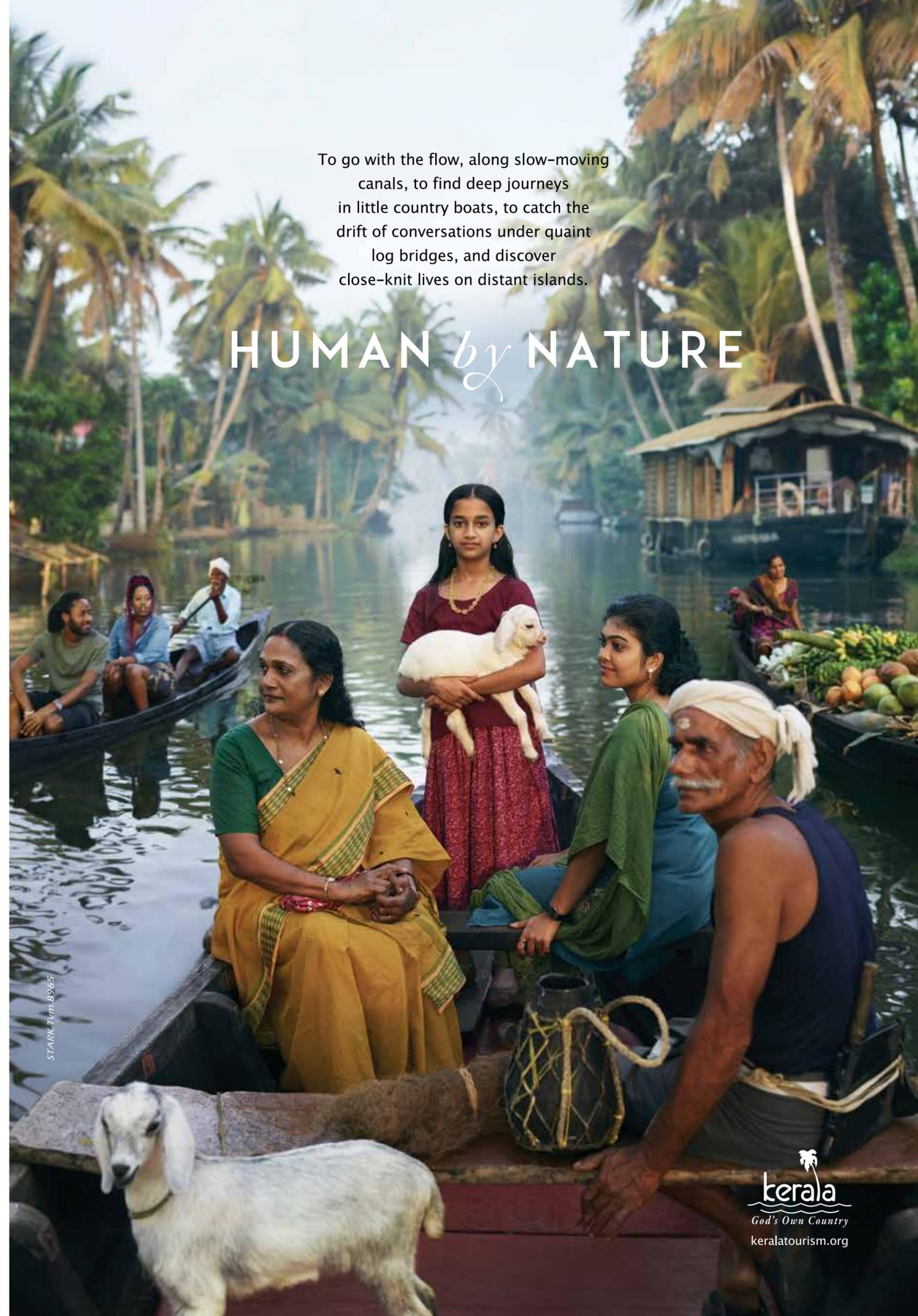
In the quest to becoming a hub for online trip planning, Kalra says that the company has been working to evolve at the same pace as its customers. Citing the platform's diversification and its goal to cater to all kinds of travel, Kalra says, “We have offerings for the entire spectrum, irrespective of their travel motives—from leisure to solo, from romantic to corporate, from pilgrimages to eco-tourism. We are consistently diversifying and venturing into new segments. We recently introduced a new category—weekend getaways that allows customers to plan long weekends in a hassle-free way.”

He's bullish about the future, pointing to a number of factors that allow the company to maintain momentum, “such as the new internet-savvy consumers, increasing discretionary income and penetration of e-commerce—coupled with the surge in use of smartphones.” These factors, along with an understanding of what customers want, like, “foraying into the untapped corporate travel segment, weekend getaways, hyper-local in-city leisure activities and carpooling services,” mean that MakeMyTrip is working both with larger demographic-based advantages, while also filling in gaps with the online services it offers.

## THE FUTURE IN ONE CLICK

Going forward, Kalra sees the company move beyond cashback and coupons and hopes to see customer retention rise, “for the value that the platform provides.” With increasing consolidation in the travel sector, there's also an opportunity on the vendor side, especially with independent partner hotels, which can leverage the platform's customer base to see business grow.

MakeMyTrip is using its ability to invest to drive new forms of business—whether conversational commerce or an approach to the vernacular market. With growing investments in AI and the ability to offer more relevant search results, Kalra sees growth for company and the industry, saying, “The future of travel lies in predicting and offering travel solutions from the very beginning of the purchase life cycle.”



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# HUMAN *by* NATURE

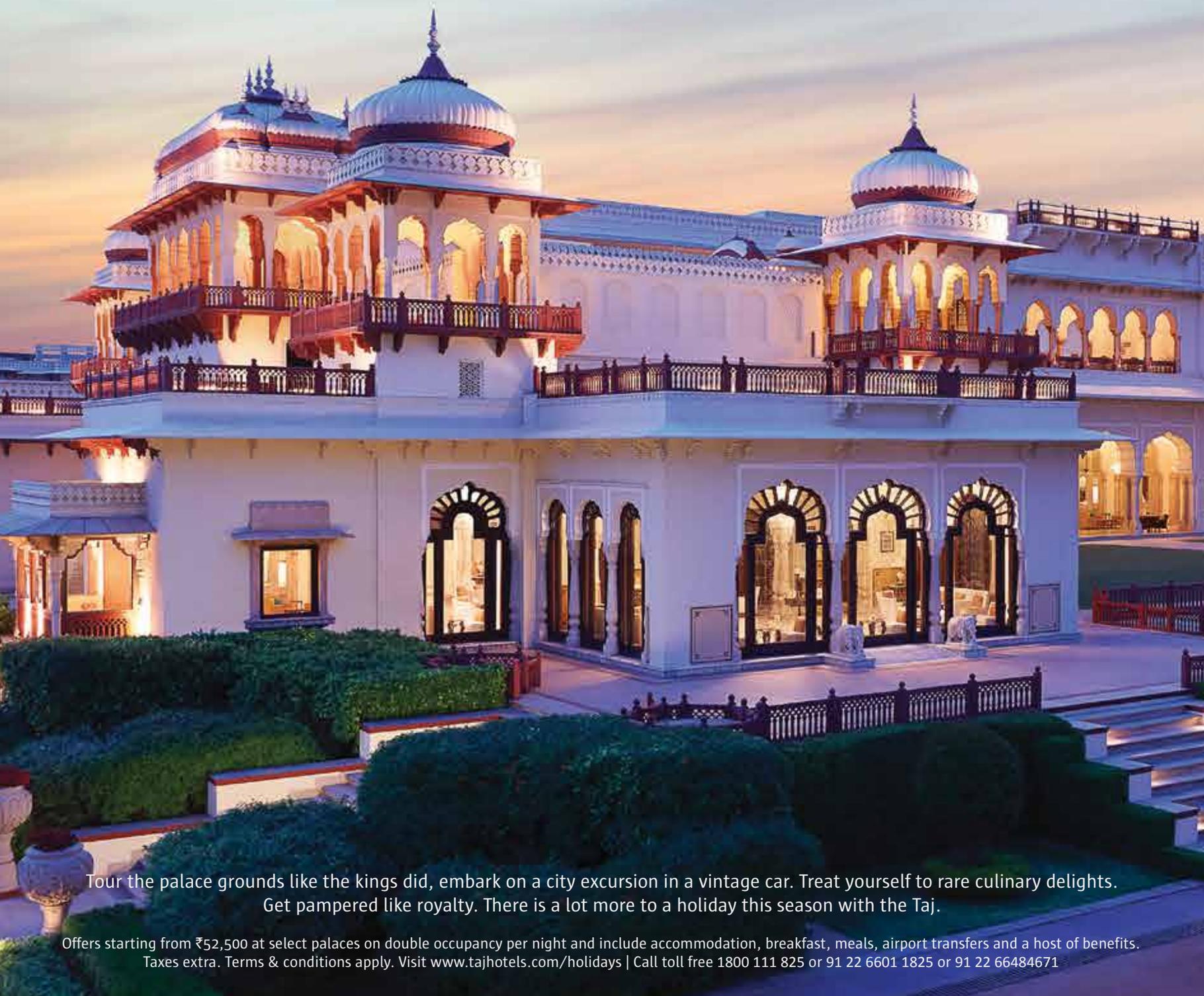
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