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## Transitioning towards brighter 2025

**A**s we are approaching the end of 2024... what were the learnings? The industry has been growing on the domestic and outbound front. Throughout the year, the focus was on sustainability, wellness, and technology incorporation in the sector. Solutions supported by Artificial Intelligence along with travelling experiences influenced by Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) took over the travel world.

with a shift toward new trends along with a focus on post-journey feedback to bridge the gap between stakeholders and customers.

On the technology front, AI will continue to revolutionise with dynamic SAAS-based solutions, personalised travel recommendations, and AI chat boxes for a better experience. The Internet of Things will allow suppliers to improve their turnaround time and guest experience. Contactless payments, sustainable technologies, and blockchain will

“Next year will prioritise travellers’ wellness, sustainability, and technology-driven improvements, with a shift toward new trends.”

The luxury segment has also seen new heights along with growth in the hospitality and airline sectors. The increased demand versus supply has changed the business landscape. Budgeting in advance has taken centre stage. More capacity building through takeovers, mergers, and new setups was the highlight of this year.

However, the quality of travel has been affected due to global warming, and other environmental challenges. The cost of travel has increased under the disguise of making travel simpler.

Next year will prioritise travellers’ wellness, sustainability, and technology-driven improvements,

redefine travel, while enhanced cybersecurity and seamless payment solutions become integral to the evolving ecosystem.

To ensure the bridge between initiatives and requirements events such as Travel MICE and Corporate Show will continue to create awareness through their one-to-one meetings, discussions, and keynote addresses.

Signing off for this year, wishing each one of you a blessed New Year!!!

Warm regards  
**Jyothi Varma**, Consulting Editor

## 24 MICE & Weddings: 2024 in review, 2025 in focus



Picture credit: PATA



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### Australia bets on Indian incentive market

#### PUBLISHER & EDITOR

SanJeet  
Devika Jeet  
devika@ddppl.com

#### CONSULTING EDITOR

Jyothi Varma

#### CHIEF EDITOR

Nisha Verma  
nisha.verma@ddppl.com

#### EDITORIAL TEAM

Janice Alyosius  
janice.alynosius@ddppl.com  
Amita Pandey  
amita.pandey@ddppl.com

#### DESIGN HEAD

Saurabh Mishra

#### ADVERTISING – DELHI

Arumita Gupta  
arumita.gupta@ddppl.com

Meetu Malhotra  
meetu.malhotra@ddppl.com

Jaspreet Kaur

#### ADVERTISING – MUMBAI

Harshal Ashar  
harshal@ddppl.com

Samantha Pereira  
samantha.pereira@ddppl.com

#### ADVERTISEMENT DESIGNERS

Nitin Kumar  
Aditya Pratap Singh  
Anil Khatri Chhetri

#### PRODUCTION MANAGER

Anil Kharbada  
Ramesh Gupta

#### CIRCULATION MANAGER

Ashok Rana



DDP Publications Private Limited

**New Delhi:**  
72, Todarmal Road, New Delhi - 110001, India  
Tel: +91-11-22320701 | 223207130  
E-mail: [talk@ddppl.com](mailto:talk@ddppl.com)

**Mumbai:**  
504 Marine Chambers, 43 New Marine Lines, Mumbai  
400 020, India  
Tel: +91-22-22070129, 22070130  
Fax: +91-22-22070131  
E-mail: [mumbai@ddppl.com](mailto:mumbai@ddppl.com)

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# 'Chalo India' for immersive weddings

'Wed in India' and 'Design India' initiatives offer the hotel sector an opportunity to customise, and elevate their wedding offerings, believes **Mugdha Sinha**.



By **Lipla Negi**

**I**ndia, with its rich cultural heritage, diverse traditions, and modern facilities, has long been a sought-after destination for weddings. However, the country must expand its horizon beyond the traditional one-time tourists

and focus on repeat visitors who choose India to celebrate their anniversaries and honeymoons, believed **Mugdha Sinha**, Director General, Ministry of Tourism.

Speaking at the 54<sup>th</sup> FHRAI Annual Convention in Goa, Sinha said, "We need to rethink our outreach strategies and create a framework to attract

global clients, particularly from the Indian diaspora. The Indian wedding industry ranks second only to food and groceries, with 54 per cent of people spending an average of ₹10 lakhs on a wedding. Although, we have not adequately conducted outreach for weddings in the global market."



The potential for wedding tourism in India is vast. “India’s appeal lies in its cultural antiquity, rich customs, food, and unique gifting traditions,” Sinha said. “Couples choose India because they want an authentic, culturally rich wedding experience. It is an untapped market with huge potential for growth,” she added. With the rise of the ‘Big Fat Indian Weddings,’ India is positioning itself to become a global wedding tourism hub. “Weddings are not just a big business in India; they are a part of the country’s very fabric, and the demand for destination weddings is expected to grow exponentially,” Sinha pointed out.



**MUGDHA SINHA**  
Director General, Ministry of Tourism  
Government of India

### EYEING EMERGING MARKETS

As part of its broader tourism strategy, the Indian government is looking to attract a wider audience through its ‘Incredible India’ campaign, targeting markets with large Indian diasporas in countries such as the USA, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. “We are not just looking at one-time visitors; we are aiming for repeat tourism,” Sinha said. “People are coming to India not just for their weddings, but also for anniversaries, honeymoons, and family celebrations, following in the footsteps of the royal couple from Bhutan, who celebrated their honeymoon in India. We already have a template for that kind of celebration,” she remarked.

Sinha added that alongside established markets, India is also targeting emerging regions such as Latin America and Africa, where community-based wedding traditions are deeply rooted. These regions,

“Couples choose India because they want an authentic, culturally rich wedding experience.”





to entice the new generation of wedding planners and couples. “If we can position India as a destination that is not only culturally rich but also sustainable, we can tap into these young, eco-conscious couples,” she opined.

Sinha highlighted the importance of integrating sustainable practices into the design of wedding venues. She cited the Qatar airport as an example of how design can address practical issues like crowd control and efficiency. “Let us design our wedding venues to meet the

she noted, are key to expanding the appeal of Indian cities, as they resonate with the multicultural, community-oriented nature of Indian weddings.

Shedding light on the government’s future plans, she shared a key goal is to develop new wedding destinations across India, particularly in lesser-known regions, by improving tourism infrastructure and offering an array of cultural experiences. “We are focusing on destinations with proper management systems, where we can offer themed wedding experiences—making them memorable for couples,” she added. The government is working to bridge the information gap between potential wedding tourists and the businesses that

cater to their needs. “We are developing our portal into a one-stop resource for wedding planners and couples, offering everything from destination details and travel diaries to booking needs,” she said.

**A SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS**

From *sanskar* to sustainability, she urged stakeholders to adopt planet-friendly practices for wedding events. “The big Indian wedding often leads to ecological challenges, including traffic congestion and waste management issues. By adopting sustainable practices, we can mitigate these impacts and set an example for responsible tourism,” she asserted. The Indian government is keen in making wedding tourism sustainable,

“We are developing our portal as a one-stop resource for wedding planners and couples.”

evolving needs of this business,” she advised. Emphasising on venue design, Sinha, asserted that the ‘Design in India’ initiative, recently announced by the Prime Minister, encourages hotels to collaborate with architects to design spaces that make wedding planning seamless and sustainable. →



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Tourism Administration, MOTC

# Integrating technology for cost-efficient corporate travel

Corporate travel is evolving with technology and sustainability at its core. Key trends include integration of personalised travel management platforms, collaboration with TMCs, and efforts to reduce environmental impact.



By **Janice Alyosius**

**T**echnology has become a cornerstone of modern corporate travel, streamlining processes and enhancing efficiency. From booking tools to real-time monitoring, technology is reshaping how organisations manage travel programmes. “Technology has elevated the corporate travel experience, while ensuring cost-efficiency,” **Vaishnavy**, Travel Lead, APAC & MEA, Ford Motor Company, said. She highlighted examples such as mobile applications for hotel check-ins, Travel Management Company (TMC) apps, and online booking tools.

Adding to this, **Ankush Bindra**, Category Lead, Mobility Services, Siemens, observed, “Travel Management platforms offer personalised options, automate processes, save time, for travellers and managers. Real-time monitoring also ensures safety and helps address disruptions swiftly. It also helps in addressing our duty of care towards our travellers. Data analytics enable cost control and better decision-making for future travel.”

With the belief that technology has revolutionised the corporate travel experience **Mritunjaya Chandra Mohan**, Senior Manager, Corporate Travel, Palo Alto Networks, said, “From seamless bookings to efficient expense management, technology has integrated processes, making business travel more efficient and enhancing the traveller’s overall experience.”

#### INVESTING IN TECHNOLOGY

When it comes to technology investments,

organisations often rely on a combination of internal resources and TMC expertise. “It is a mix of both,” said Vaishnavy. She elaborated, “We have invested in tools such as expense management solutions, while relying on our TMC for other advancements, based on market trends.” Similarly, Bindra highlighted the strategic balance Siemens has achieved. “We have implemented online booking tools and real-time monitoring internally. At the same time, our TMC support us with optimising travel policies and providing valuable insights,” Vaishnavy explained.

Meanwhile, Mohan emphasised the importance of selecting TMCs based on their technological capabilities. “Our organisation invests in technology, and depends on TMCs to enhance processes and efficiency. It is a collaborative approach that drives success,” he noted.

While highlighting the evolution of corporate travel management over time with the use of technology, **Ajaay Kapur**, a research scholar said, “Technology is crucial in enhancing customer

Travel Management platforms offer personalised options, automate processes, save time for travellers & managers



**VAISHNAVY**  
Travel Lead, APAC & MEA  
Ford Motor Company



**ANKUSH BINDRA**  
Category Lead, Mobility Services  
Siemens



**MRITUNJAYA CHANDRA MOHAN**  
Senior Manager, Corporate Travel  
Palo Alto Networks



**AJAAY KAPUR**  
Research Scholar



experience, optimising costs, and increasing productivity in corporate travel. The shift from manual processes to tech-based systems, summarised by the 'PPT model,' highlights this evolution. Today, self-booking tools, AI, and data analytics streamline workflows, improve compliance, and ensure cost-effective, efficient travel management."

#### OVERCOMING CHALLENGES IN TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

Despite its advantages, technology is not without its challenges. Reporting inefficiencies, pricing discrepancies, and integration gaps remain areas of concern for many organisations. "One of our biggest challenges is consolidating pre-and post-travel costs on a single dashboard," she averred. Stating about how they are addressing this challenge, Vaishnavy highlighted, "We are addressing this with API integrations and advancements in reporting technologies."

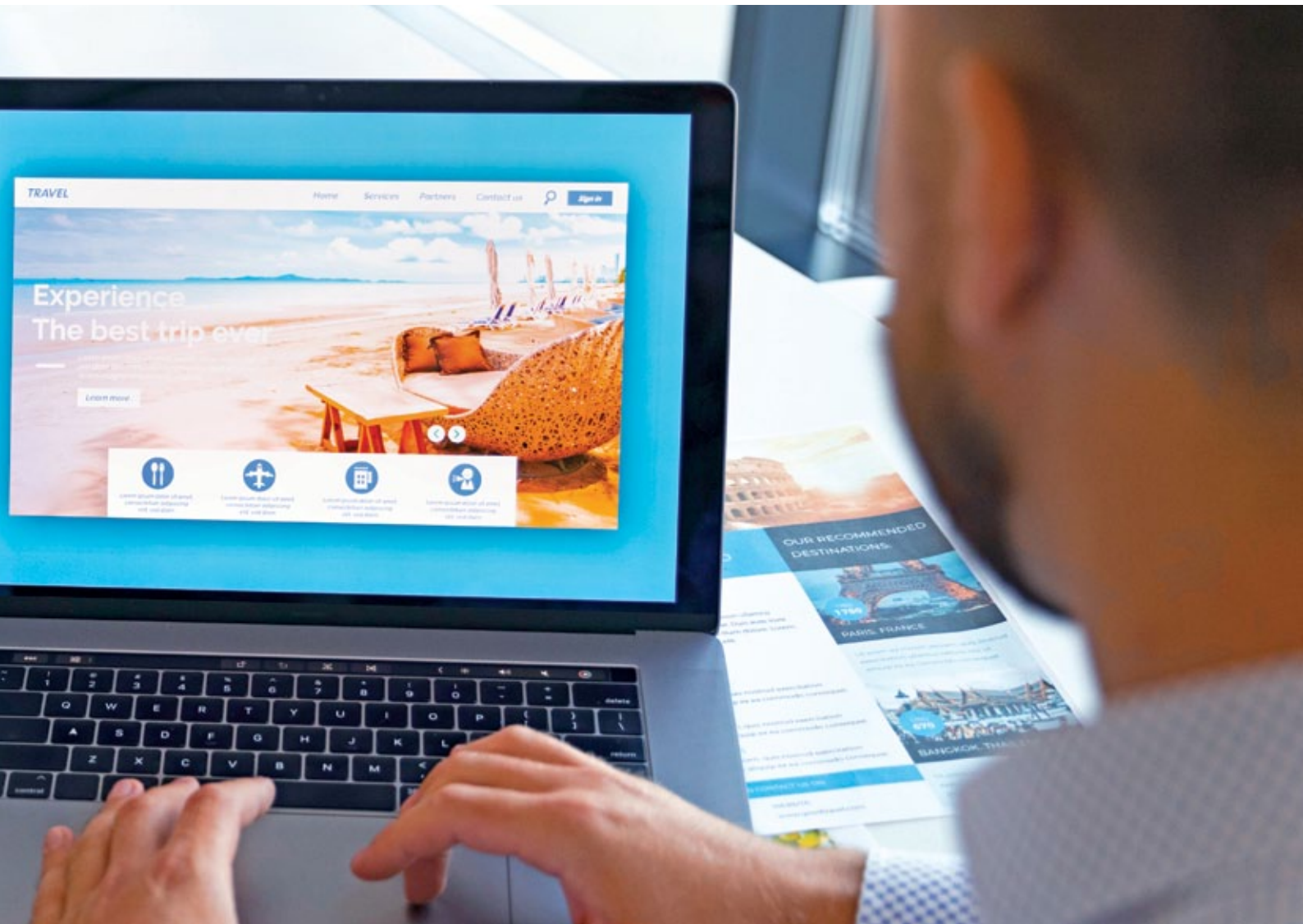
Bindra pointed out technical limitations in online booking tools, especially around cache-related pricing discrepancies. "Our TMC is working

on customised solutions, such as integrating Goods and Services Tax (GST)-related platforms to enhance compliance and savings," he explained. For Mritunjaya, resolving technology-related gaps requires close collaboration. "TMCs often provide workaround solutions for challenges. By highlighting our concerns and working together, we have managed to overcome many hurdles," he said.

#### ROLE OF DIRECT SUPPLIERS

As airlines and hotels adopt technology-driven booking systems, organisations navigate the resulting benefits and challenges. "The integration offers improved customer experience, better data insights, and greater transparency," Vaishnavy said. "However, technical glitches and the loss of personal touch in an automated environment remain drawbacks," she added.

Ankush stressed the importance of compatibility with corporate travel programmes. "Direct suppliers need to ensure their technology aligns with TMC-managed systems. Duty of care is paramount, and we do not allow employees to



book directly with airlines or hotels,” he said. While technology brings efficiency, integration remains key, Mritunjaya asserted. “Most suppliers are improving their systems, but ensuring smooth collaboration between corporates, TMCs, and suppliers is critical,” he added.

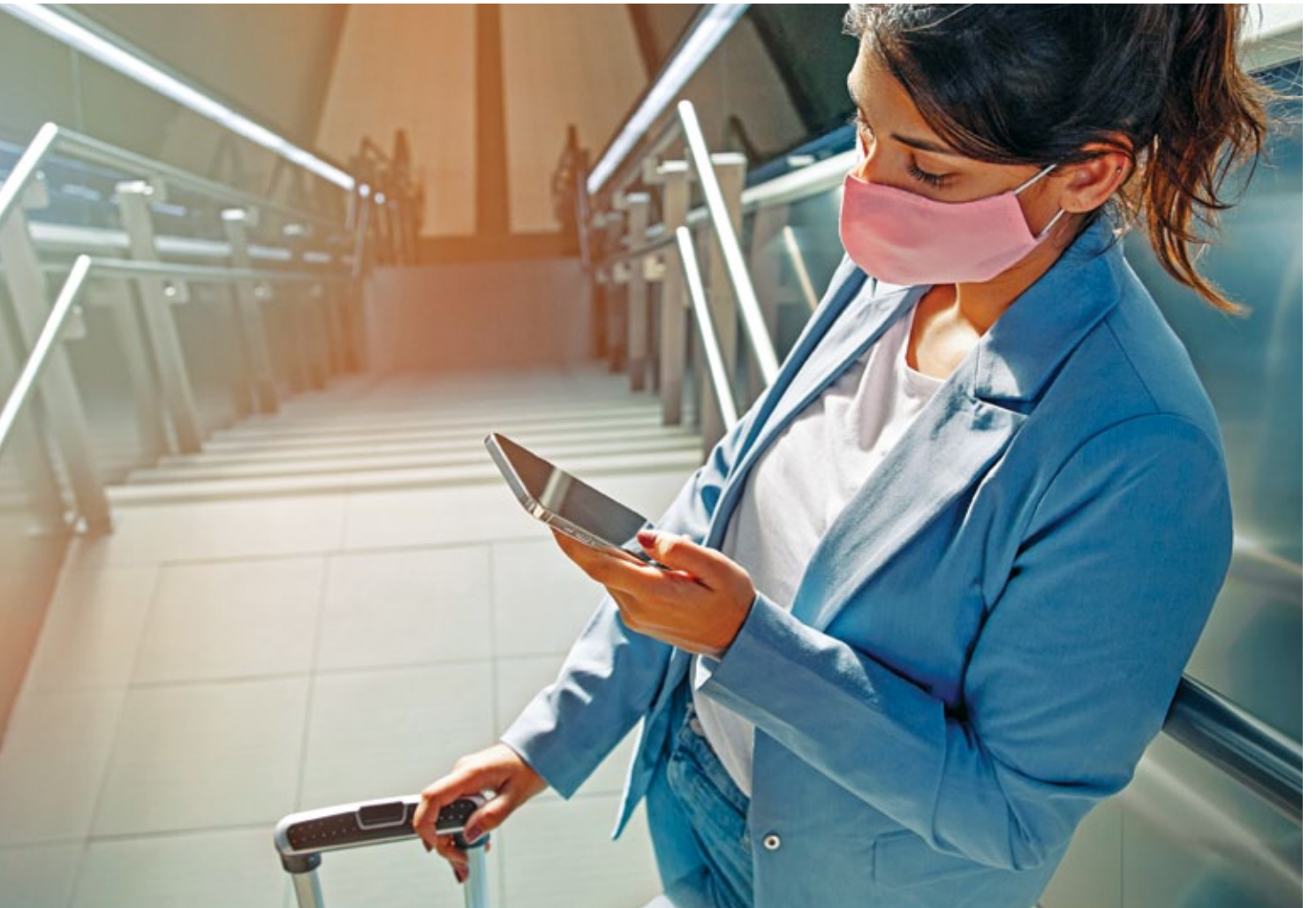
Corporate travel has significantly benefited from technology, enhancing the travellers' experience, while ensuring cost efficiency. One of the industry experts, Mubashar Ahmed said, “Technology has enabled us to manage the global travel programme remotely, focusing on usage of Online Booking Tool (OBT) and self-service models.” They have made indirect investments through TMCs, acknowledging the limitations of travel modules, while also encountering challenges such as New Distribution Capability (NDC) content gaps. With technology integrations from suppliers such as airlines and hotels, Mubashar stressed on the need for compatibility with TMC-managed travel programmes. He recommended to uphold the importance of duty of care, not allowing direct bookings by employees.

Self-booking tools, AI, and data analytics streamline workflows, improve compliance, and ensure cost-effective, efficient travel management

#### DRIVING SUSTAINABILITY IN TRAVEL PROGRAMMES

Sustainability has emerged as a key focus for corporate travel programmes, with organisations striving to reduce their environmental impact. “Our current efforts are in the early stages,” Vaishnavy said. She elaborated, “We are raising awareness and collecting baseline data from suppliers to benchmark our progress.”

Siemens has taken proactive steps, implementing Electric Vehicles (EVs) for employee ground transportation and integrating emission tracking



into booking tools. “We also assess our partners’ sustainability practices to encourage greener travel options,” Bindra said. For Palo Alto Networks, sustainability starts at the Request For Proposal (RFP) stage and extends to quarterly reviews. However, Kapur shared, “We have adopted digital business cards and itineraries to reduce paper waste and online events, directly cutting transportation emissions. We are tracking energy consumption and waste to identify opportunities for improvement.”

integrate AI, personalisation, and sustainability into our programmes while managing costs and risks,” she added.

Bindra anticipated adoption of hybrid MICE events. “We will see a continued focus on sustainability and personalisation, with technology playing a central role,” he said. Mohan foresaw stabilising costs and eco-friendly MICE events gaining prominence. “Green venues and sustainable catering will become the norm,” he said.

Highlighting the importance of technology in improving efficiency, Kapur said, “Digital tools have streamlined booking and communication, enhancing the travellers’ experience.” For the new year, he expected focus on cost optimisation and sustainability, with ESG standards becoming central to corporate travel and planning for MICE events. “The integration of advanced travel management platforms will be crucial in driving cost control and sustainability,” he added. Organisations are investing in collaborative strategies with TMCs, integrating advanced tools, and adopting eco-friendly practices. In the New Year, the travel industry leaders will focus on creating more efficient, personalised, and sustainable travel programmes. ➔

## Industry leaders will focus on creating efficient and sustainable travel programmes in 2025

### LEARNINGS FROM 2024 & EXPECTATIONS FOR 2025

Reflecting on this year, leaders agreed that technology and sustainability have redefined corporate travel priorities. “Key learnings include leveraging data analytics and enhancing traveller safety,” Vaishnavy said. “In 2025, we plan to



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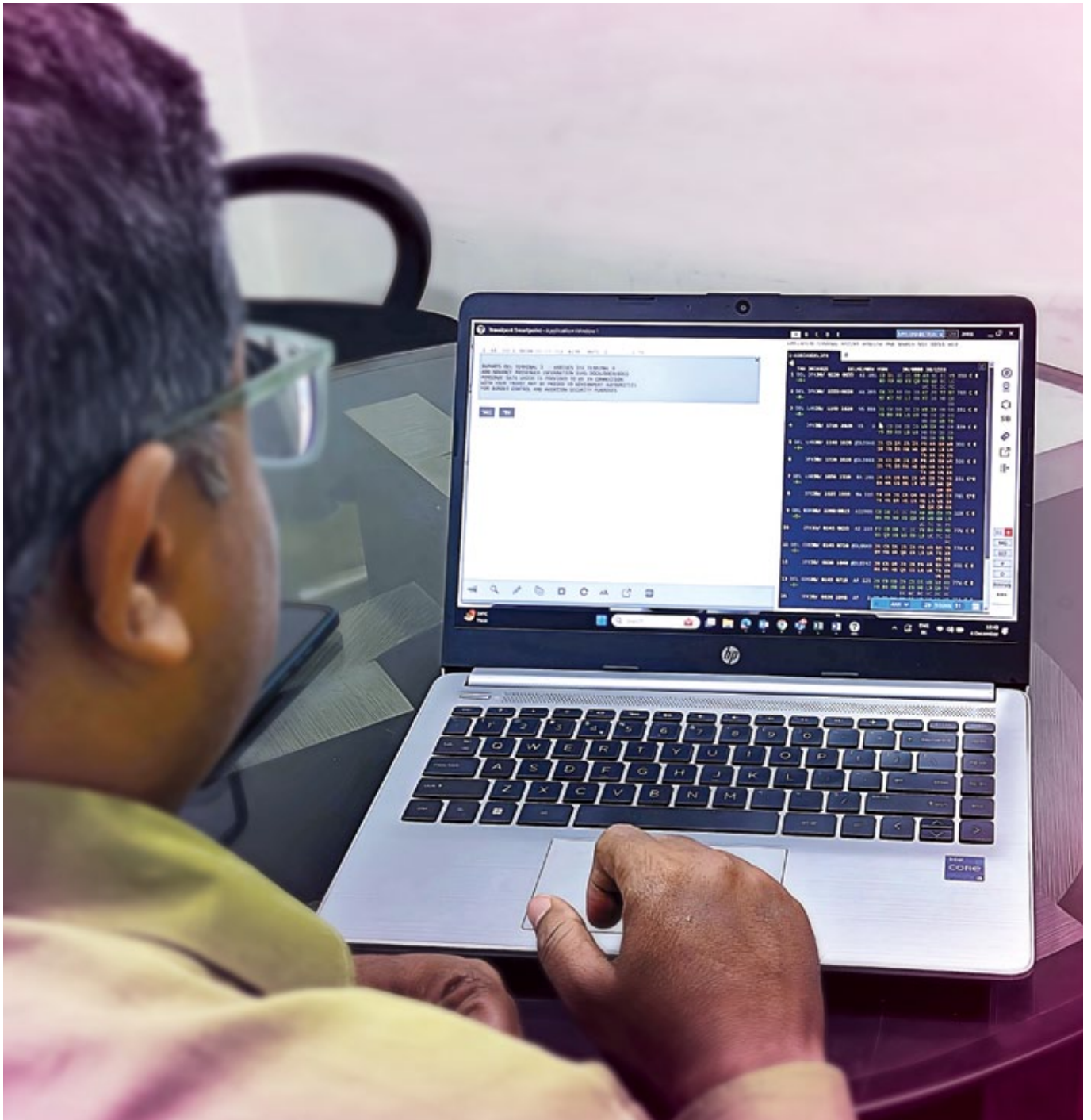
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# GDS takes a leap with travel innovation

As GDS technology evolves, the emphasis is clear- integration, personalisation, and sustainability. Both Sabre & ITQ are paving the way for a future where travel booking is intuitive, eco-conscious, and adaptable to dynamic market needs.





By **MT Bureau**

**T**he advancements in Global Distribution System (GDS) technology in 2024 signal a turning point for travel industry. For the MICE sector, this progress translates into greater efficiency, cost management, and an elevated experience for organisers and travellers alike.

#### DRIVING EFFICIENCY

According to **Brett Thorstad**, Vice President, Agency Sales & Airline Distribution, APAC, Sabre Travel Solutions, their GDS has transformed into a true multi-source content platform. “We now seamlessly offer New Distribution Capability (NDC), low-cost carriers (LCCs), and traditional EDIFACT content, normalised through our intelligent algorithms. What is crucial is that agents no longer need to switch between systems or tools—they can shop, compare, book, and service all types of content within one interface. It is about bringing simplicity and efficiency rather than a fragmented process,” he explained.

Similarly, ITQ’s integration of the NDC within Traveport+ has expanded content availability for travel agents, enabling a more comprehensive and flexible booking experience. **Anoop Tewari**, Chief Commercial Officer, ITQ,

Sabre’s Travel AI uses machine learning to model travel behaviour and optimise offer management

ITQ, noted “The launch of our Content Curation Layer (CCL) has been a game-changer. It uses advanced algorithms to filter and prioritise search results based on traveller preferences. This means agents can deliver more tailored options while also saving time during the search and booking process.”

#### PERSONALISATION VIA AI

AI is revolutionising the booking process. Sabre’s Travel AI uses machine learning to model travel behaviour and optimise offer management. “With AI, we are empowering travel agencies to not just process bookings but to predict traveller needs,” explained Thorstad. “For example, our Lodging AI can offer alternative hotel options if a preferred property is sold out, while our Schedule Change Predictor informs agents about



**BRETT THORSTAD**  
VP, Agency Sales & Airline Distribution,  
APAC, Sabre Travel Solutions



**ANOOP TEWARI**  
Chief Commercial Officer  
ITQ

the likelihood of flight cancellations or delays even before departure, enabling proactive service,” he elaborated.

For ITQ, the CCL within Traveport+ leverages AI to deliver personalised search results. “Our algorithms learn from every search and booking interaction. This means that over time, the system becomes smarter, offering options that are increasingly aligned with the unique preferences of each traveller. It is not just about efficiency; it is about creating a memorable and customised travel experience,” Tewari said.

**ADDRESSING MICE NEEDS**

Sabre has introduced automated servicing tools. “Business travellers expect the same level of convenience and personalisation they experience in their

daily digital lives. Hence, we are focused on tools that allow travel partners to automate servicing and provide self-service options,” Thorstad claimed.

ITQ has equipped Traveport+ with enhanced reporting tools to meet the needs of MICE organisers. “Our platform enables organisers to monitor travel patterns and expenses in real time. This means better budgeting and the

ability to adapt quickly to last-minute changes,” Tewari explained.

**SUSTAINABILITY IN FOCUS**

With a growing emphasis on eco-conscious travel, Sabre has introduced carbon emissions data into its point-of-sale tools and partnered with Google’s Travel Impact Model to analyse business travel emissions. “This data is not just

ITQ’s partnership with Ecotrans ensures that sustainable travel options on Traveport meet strict environmental standards



a number. It is a way for corporations to set measurable sustainability goals, empowering travellers to make informed, eco-friendly choices,” Thorstad shared.

Similarly, ITQ’s partnership with Ecotrans ensures that sustainable travel options on Traveport meet strict environmental standards. “We have integrated sustainability labels into our system, making it easy for agents to identify green options. This aligns with our environmental goals and with the growing demand from travellers for more sustainable choices,” said Tewari.

**COLLABORATION & GROWTH**

For Sabre, partnerships are vital. “Through our partnership with Google, we have built Sabre Travel AI, which is the backbone of our multi-source content platform. It is about accelerating innovation while keeping sustainability at the forefront,” Thorstad said. Meanwhile, ITQ’s expanded relationship with Air India and strengthened partnership with Hopper have bolstered Traveport’s retailing capabilities.

“Our focus for 2025 is advancing intelligent, adaptable, and open systems to help our partners navigate the evolving travel landscape,” Thorstad shared. Tewari echoed a similar sentiment and mentioned, “We want to simplify the travel booking process while expanding our sustainable and personalised offerings. It is about making travel better—not just for agents and organisers, but for every traveller.” ➔

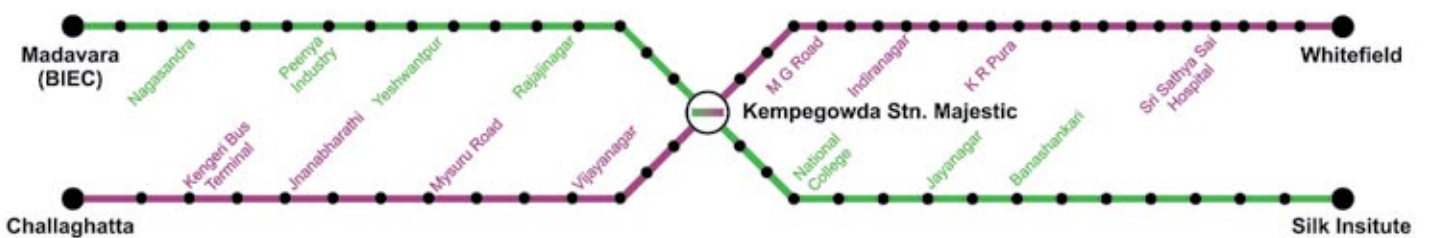


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# TrackMate: No more baggage worries

TrackMate is designed to make the baggage tracking process seamless with guaranteed compensation of up to ₹66,000 per bag if it remains unreturned after 96 hours.

Dev Karvat, Founder & CEO, Asego, shares more details.



This kind of proactive communication gives peace of mind, allowing passengers to focus on their journey.

**Q** What does the purchasing process look like for TrackMate? Is it accessible to all travellers?

**A** TrackMate is indeed accessible to all travellers as a bundled product with our Asego Plus Plan. However, soon we plan to offer it as a standalone solution, providing even more flexibility. Travellers can purchase it up until their flight's departure, which means even last-minute planners can now safeguard their baggage. It covers all checked baggage—even those bags that passengers might gate-check at the last minute.

**Q** How does TrackMate fit in with traditional travel insurance?

**A** It is important to note that Asego TrackMate is an add-on service specifically designed to cover delayed or lost baggage. While it provides substantial compensation for mishandled luggage, it does not replace traditional travel insurance, which covers a broader range of issues like medical emergencies and cancellations. Instead, TrackMate complements travel insurance, offering an extra layer of protection focused solely on baggage.

**Q** How does TrackMate enhance the offerings for travel agents?

**A** TrackMate empowers travel agents and partners by allowing them to offer a unique, reliable service that addresses one of the biggest travel pain points. For our partners, TrackMate can be a valuable differentiator, setting their services apart through this additional layer of customer care. It is a great way to demonstrate a commitment to the customer's journey, adding assurance and peace of mind that can enhance loyalty and customer satisfaction. ➔

By MT Bureau

**Q** Could you share insights on issue of mishandled baggage among travellers?

**A** Mishandled baggage is indeed a major issue. According to SITA, the global mishandled baggage rate spiked by 74.7 per cent in 2022, reaching 7.06 bags per thousand passengers. This increase is largely due to the resurgence of global travel post-pandemic and the operational challenges faced by airlines and airports. Out of the 28 million mishandled bags each year, 5 per cent are lost, 18 per cent are damaged, and 77 per cent are delayed. These figures highlight the urgent need for an effective baggage tracking solution like our all-new real-time baggage tracking solution—Asego TrackMate.

**Q** How does TrackMate address the baggage mishandling issue?

**A** TrackMate is designed to make the baggage tracking and retrieval process seamless and efficient. The service includes guaranteed compensation of up to ₹66,000 per bag if it remains



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▶ **SHEO SHEKHAR SHUKLA**

Principal Secretary,  
Govt of M.P. and  
Managing Director,  
Madhya Pradesh  
Tourism Board



◀ **RAJEEV JAIN**

Director &  
Founder  
Rashi  
Entertainment



▶ **HARPREET SINGH GROVER**

Director  
Destinations  
Unlimited

# 2024 Reflections 2025 Goals Future of MICE & Weddings



▶ **RAJAT SETHI**  
General  
Manager  
Fairmont  
Jaipur



▶ **PRITHVI ANAND**

Director  
Sales and  
Marketing,  
Novotel  
Hyderabad  
Convention  
Centre & HICC

As the MICE and wedding industry evolves, leaders pinpointed key growth drivers in 2024 and preparing for the challenges and opportunities of 2025.



◀ **BINDESHWARI PRASAD**

Executive  
Director  
Axplore  
Travelplus



▶ **NAVEEN KUKRETI**

Associate  
Vice President  
Head of Sales  
MICE – West  
SOTC Travel

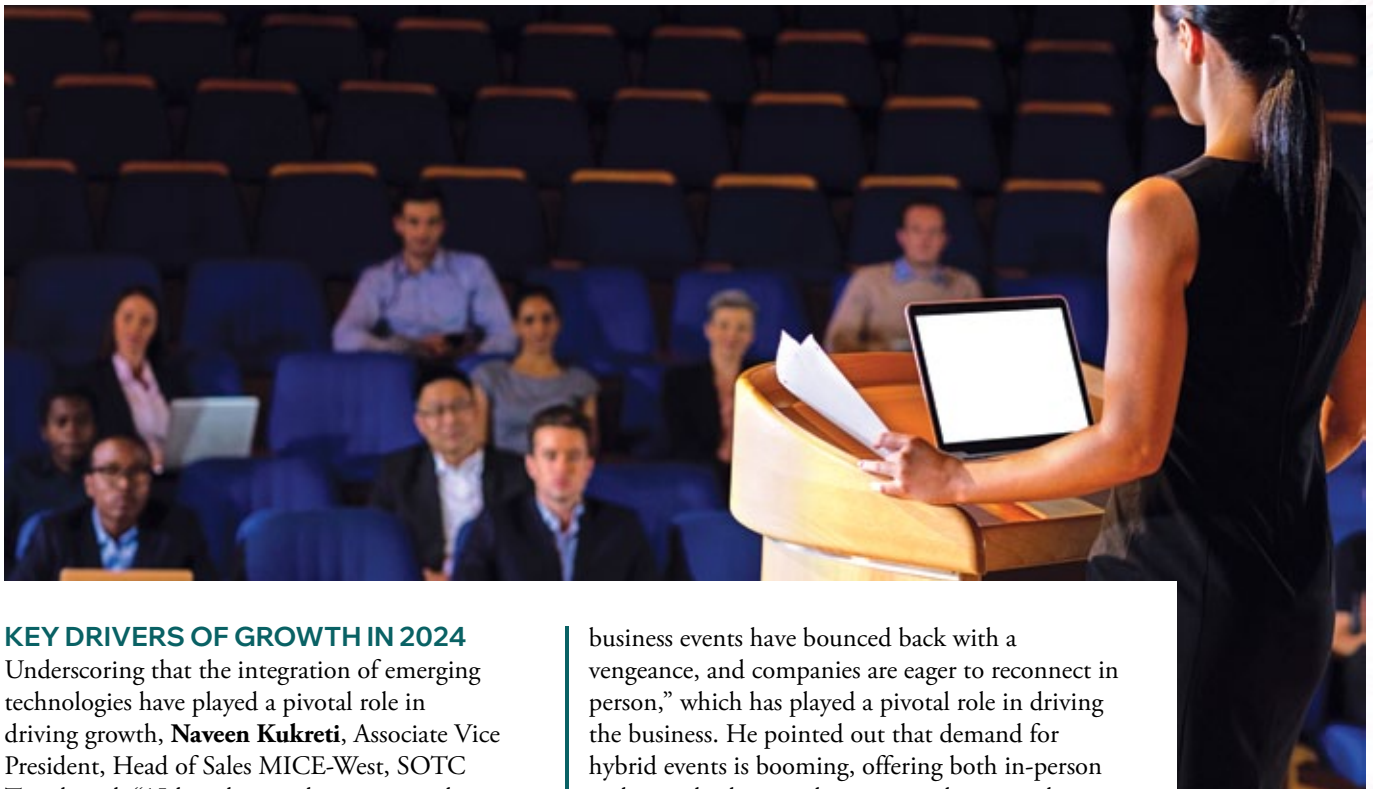


By Janice Alyosius



As we are approaching the end of 2024, leaders in the MICE and wedding industries reflected on the key drivers behind their success, the lessons they have learnt, and the strategies that are going to shape the future of these dynamic sectors in the year ahead.

Offering both in-person and virtual solutions that cater to diverse audience needs is leading to multifarious growth



### KEY DRIVERS OF GROWTH IN 2024

Underscoring that the integration of emerging technologies have played a pivotal role in driving growth, **Naveen Kukreti**, Associate Vice President, Head of Sales MICE-West, SOTC Travel, said, "AI-based visa submissions and dedicated applications have expanded flexible options for clients, making processes smoother and faster, while breaking down time-bound barriers. MICE clients are increasingly seeking personalised, tailored experiences, which has shifted our focus from large events to more intimate and meaningful engagements."

Identifying strategic growth as a key factor in 2024's success, **Bindeshwari Prasad**, Executive Director, Axplore Travelplus, affirmed, "We have experienced a 40 per cent growth in our MICE business compared to 2023. This was possible due to better air connectivity, new airports, and expanding hotel capacities. Emerging destinations such as Southeast Asia and Taiwan are now central to our offerings." He illuminated, "Indian corporates are increasingly looking beyond traditional venues, and there is growing interest in destinations offering adventure and luxury."

Meanwhile, **Harpreet Singh Grover**, Director, Destinations Unlimited, believed, "Post-pandemic,

business events have bounced back with a vengeance, and companies are eager to reconnect in person," which has played a pivotal role in driving the business. He pointed out that demand for hybrid events is booming, offering both in-person and virtual solutions that cater to diverse audience needs, subsequently, leading to multifarious growth opportunities.

Reflecting on the hotel industry, **Rajat Sethi**, General Manager, Fairmont Jaipur, highlighted the growth in the MICE and weddings sectors. "We have seen a significant uptick in the number of weddings and corporate events at our hotel," Sethi revealed. "In 2024, we have hosted six additional weddings compared to last year, bringing our total to 94 weddings, contributing an additional revenue of nearly ₹15 crore. Tailored packages and enhanced marketing strategies have been key to this growth," he added.

Echoing a similar perspective on MICE growth, **Prithvi Anand**, Director, Sales & Marketing, Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre & HICC, shared, "This year has been a milestone one for us, with the MICE segment experiencing a 35 per cent increase in revenue and a 25 per cent rise in ADR for group rooms. The growing demand for hybrid and sustainable events have shaped our strategies,

and we are keen to expand these offerings in 2025.” While highlighting that this year, Madhya Pradesh has seen significant growth in MICE business, **Sheo Shekhar Shukla**, Principal Secretary, Government of Madhya Pradesh and MD, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, said, “MP’s MICE business has been driven by world-class infra and successful hosting of international events such as G-20.”

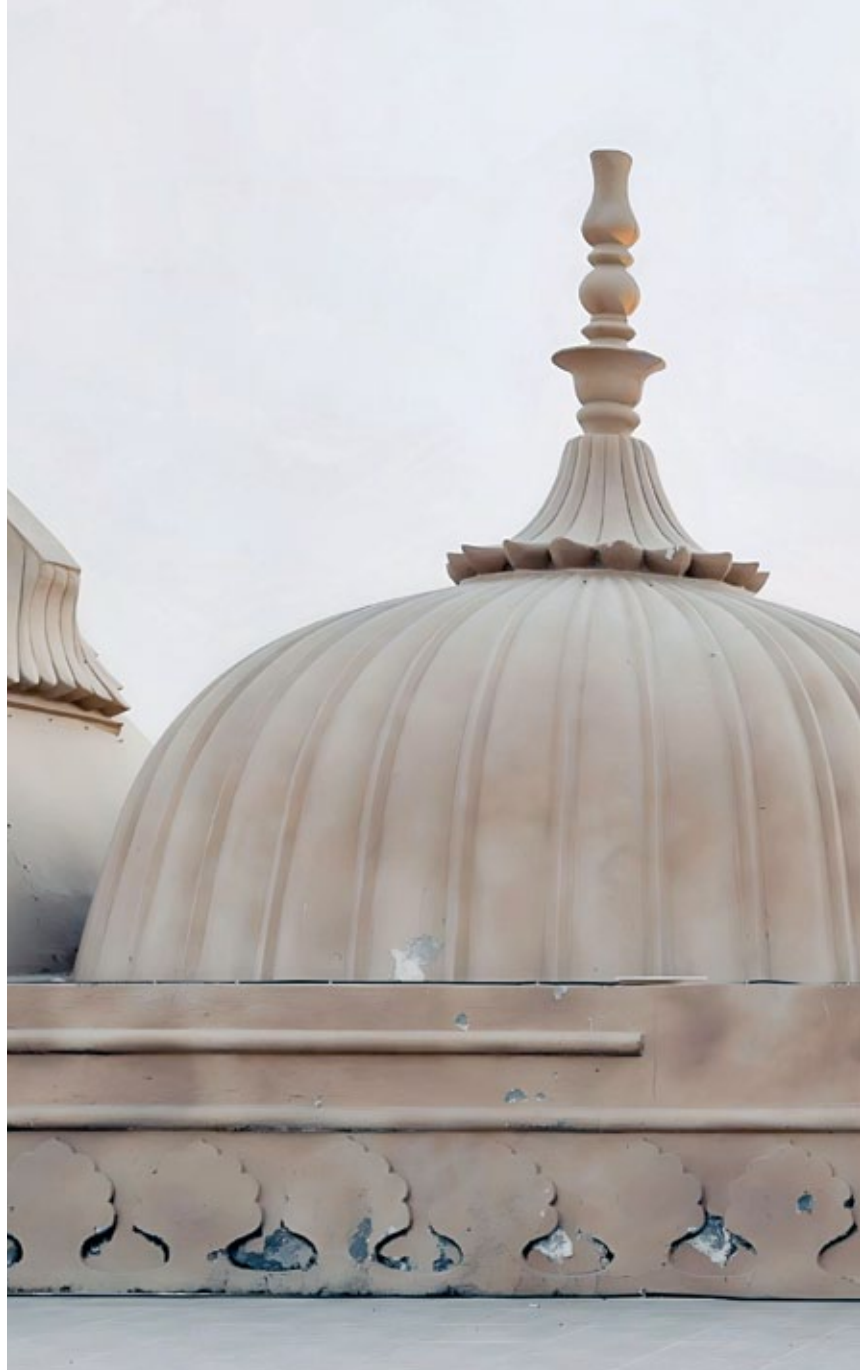
### KEY LESSONS FROM 2024

For Kukreti, adaptability has been one of the most important lessons learned. “Flexibility in planning and execution has been essential. We have learned to anticipate and react to changes quickly,” he averred. He stressed, “Technology also played a huge role in improving the attendee experience, and we will continue to focus on optimising technology for seamless management.”

Echoing similar sentiments, Prasad emphasised that a client-centric approach has been vital. “Being able to offer customised, tech-enabled solutions has helped us build long-term relationships with clients. In 2025, we plan to further integrate these solutions to enhance our service offerings,” he revealed.

However, for Sethi, flexibility in MICE and weddings is crucial. He asserted, “We have learned that personalised, flexible offerings are in high demand. While, in MICE, hybrid events are here to stay, our focus has shifted to making these events as seamless and interactive as possible.”

Reflecting on the 25 per cent growth of the wedding segment in 2024, **Rajeev Jain**, Director & Founder, Rashi Entertainment, said, “Destination weddings have been a major driver, with a 30 per cent increase in demand this year. To sustain this



As the industry looks forward to 2025, sustainability emerges as a common theme with the growing demand for eco-conscious practices



growth, we have been working on expanding unique destination options and collaborating with vendors to meet high expectations. Meanwhile, for MICE, experiential corporate events and hybrid retreats are the key growth areas.”

### STRATEGIES FOR 2025

As the industry looks forward to 2025, sustainability emerges as a common theme for the experts. Sethi is particularly excited about the growing demand for eco-conscious practices. “Sustainability is no longer optional; it is a must-have. This will be a core part of our strategy as we move into 2025. We are focusing on offering greener and more eco-friendly options for MICE and wedding events, from sustainable menus to waste reduction,” he added. Prasad is also enthusiastic about the sustainability

trend. “Our clients are becoming more eco-conscious, and we are responding by incorporating sustainable practices into our offerings. We aim to reduce the carbon footprint of our events and weddings by focusing on green venues and local sourcing,” he said.

Grover is particularly optimistic about the growing interest in wellness-focused events. “Wellness retreats and mindfulness workshops are gaining popularity in both MICE and weddings. These trends are here to stay, and we are excited to innovate in this space to offer experiences that promote health and well-being,” he revealed.

For Sethi, along with the thriving trend of hybrid events investing in technology is a priority. He said, “We are investing in cutting-edge technology to seamlessly integrate virtual and in-person



**KEY LEARNINGS FROM 2024**

**AI and tech-driven solutions** enhance client experiences, efficiency, and improve seamless planning

**Focus on personalised, lasting client relationships**, expanding niche markets, and experiential offerings

Growing demand for flexible, eco-friendly MICE and weddings, with a focus on **green venues** and responsible sourcing

Shift towards **interactive, immersive experiences**, and increased interest in experiential corporate events

**Hybrid events** offering in-person and virtual elements will continue to thrive



experiences, making the events more accessible and flexible for customers.”

In the year ahead, Jain saw immense potential in luxury and niche markets. He elaborated, "For weddings, we are expanding our destination options, particularly government properties that offer personalised themes. For MICE, experiential corporate events will continue to drive growth. We are also excited about the rise of green venues and eco-friendly materials, which will shape both segments moving forward.”

**TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS**

In 2024, advancement in technology has been significant in transforming the MICE and wedding sectors across the country. Sethi noted, "Advanced audiovisual setups have allowed us to offer seamless hybrid experiences for corporate clients and wedding couples. We are also leveraging immersive technologies such as virtual tours for weddings, which allow couples to visualise their big day from the ease of their homes without physically visiting the venue.”

Digital technologies are changing the way events are planned, from predictive tools to immersive experiences allow clients to virtually explore venues

Reflecting on how AI, AR/VR, and digital tools are reshaping the wedding industry, Jain highlighted, "These technologies are changing the way we plan events, from predictive tools to immersive experiences that allow clients to virtually explore their venues before making decisions. By 2025, we expect these tools to become even more sophisticated, offering more personalised and efficient planning experiences.”

Picture credit: PAITA



Resonating Jain's view that AI-driven solutions are enhancing the overall event experience, Prasad anticipated that these technologies will continue to evolve and play a key role in shaping the future of MICE and weddings. Moving ahead, Anand too mentioned they are investing in these technologies to make their MICE offerings even more seamless and innovative.

### SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

Revealing the various eco-friendly initiatives being implemented by the industry stakeholders, the experts highlighted that sustainability is going to be in demand in the upcoming year. Sethi's hotel has already implemented several sustainability initiatives, including smart kitchens and waste-reduction systems. "We have partnered with Orbisk, a system that helps reduce plate waste by 30 per cent," he said. "We also focus on responsible sourcing and minimising food waste through data-driven menus and live cooking stations that allow us to reduce overproduction," he added. However, in the wedding sector, Jain said, "We have introduced

reusable décor, waste management, and carbon offsetting initiatives. In the next year, we plan to focus more on green venues and materials, as well as digital solutions to minimise our carbon footprint."

Highlighting Madhya Pradesh's commitment to sustainability and innovation in MICE tourism, Shukla pointed out, "Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is also dedicated to sustainable practices, from waste management to eco-friendly venues. Our emphasis is on creating exciting MICE events that are not only memorable but also environmentally responsible experiences."

The MICE and wedding sectors are poised for continued growth, driven by technological advancements, sustainability initiatives, and personalised experiences. Industry leaders are shaping the future of these sectors by embracing innovation, focusing on client needs, and prioritising sustainability. As the New Year is approaching, the laser focus will remain on offering more tailored, eco-friendly, and immersive experiences that meet the evolving demands of clients in both sectors. ➔



# From luxury hotels to cultural experiences, Taiwan shines for MICE

From cutting-edge amenities to rich cultural experiences, paired with top-notch incentive plans, Taiwan offers countless reasons to host your next MICE event here.

By MT Bureau

Taiwan is a highly advanced economy with diverse tourism attractions, especially for meetings, conferences, and incentives. The country has seen an increase in Indian incentive groups visiting Taiwan due to the availability of reasonably priced flights.

Ease of visa starting from instant e-visas to group visas at no cost, the island offers various modern venues, more than 60 Indian restaurants, world-

class hotels with state-of-the-art facilities, and immersive cultural experiences with vibrant nightlife featuring pubs, clubs, and karaoke lounges.

The destination has a robust transportation system with three international airports—Taoyuan, Taipei Songshan, and Kaohsiung. Efficient internal transit, including metro, taxis, buses, and high-speed rail allows north-to-south travel in 96 minutes, optimising business and leisure time.

Cities like Taipei, Taoyuan, Taichung, and Kaohsiung are well-equipped to host

MICE events, offering an impressive range of hotels catering to large groups and high-profile events and conferences.

## TAIWAN INCENTIVE PLAN

The Taiwan Incentive Plan enhances the destination's appeal, offering subsidies of up to NT\$2,000 per person and NT\$500,000 per event, making Taiwan even more attractive for MICE groups. With modern amenities, cultural experiences, and natural beauty, Taiwan is the perfect MICE destination for Indian planners. ➔

## TOP MICE HOTELS IN TAIWAN

### THE GRAND HOTEL TAIPEI

Historic landmark hosting up to **1,500** guests with luxurious Chinese-inspired design.

### MANDARIN ORIENTAL TAIPEI

High-end venue for up to **1,200** attendees, offering five-star sophistication.

### GRAND HYATT TAIPEI

Prime location near Taipei **101** with facilities for **1,200** people.

### SHERATON TAOYUAN HOTEL

Ideal for international groups, located near the Taoyuan International Airport with a **700** guest capacity.

### LIHPAO RESORT TAICHUNG

Scenic resort blending business and leisure for up to **624** guests.

### THE GRAND HOTEL KAOHSIUNG

Vibrant southern Taiwan venue for events up to **800** attendees.

# ITB Asia records 45k meetings

ITB Asia 2024 was a resounding success and the next edition, set for 15-17 October 2025, in Singapore, promises even greater opportunities and innovation.



By **MT Bureau**

**A**sia's leading travel trade show, ITB Asia 2024, concluded with remarkable success, surpassing expectations and setting new records. The event hosted over 45,000 business appointments, attracting more than 18,500 attendees from 85 countries and featuring 1,950 exhibitors. With over 1,400 high-quality buyers, the

show created a dynamic business and networking environment. Additionally, 160 top speakers played a significant role in shaping the future of travel at the ITB Asia conference.

This year's edition broke records with unprecedented growth and innovation, positioning the event for an even more groundbreaking 2025 edition. ITB Asia 2025 is set to expand its highly popular Travel Tech Asia cluster, which will

provide deeper insights into cutting-edge hotel technology. The dedicated platform will showcase the latest advancements in reservation systems, equipment, AI tools, CRM platforms, design, and sustainability initiatives—set to redefine the future of accommodation and guest experiences.

**Joyce Wang**, Executive Director, Messe Berlin Asia Pacific, highlighted the event's significance, stating, "ITB Asia remains the leading platform for the travel industry in the Asia-Pacific region. The remarkable growth and innovation displayed that this year highlights the resilience and forward-thinking nature of our global travel community. We are excited to continue shaping the future of travel together, pushing the boundaries of what is possible."

This year's conference programme was nothing short of extraordinary, with over 4,000 minutes of high-powered content delivered through 100 sessions by 160 leading industry figures. ITB Asia 2025, scheduled for 15-17 October in Singapore, promises to build on the success of this year's event. Interested exhibitors can register by 31 October 2024 for Super Early Bird rates. ➔





# Rise of MICE

## in tier II cities

Smaller cities are adapting to meet the growing demand for immersive, eco-friendly, and culturally rich tourism experiences, positioning themselves as dynamic alternatives to major metro cities.

By **Charmaine Fernz**

**T**he MICE industry in India is undergoing a notable transformation, shifting its focus beyond metropolitan cities toward smaller, and non-metro cities. As companies seek unique experiences, value for money, and escapes from urban hustle, these smaller cities are becoming increasingly attractive for hosting MICE events. **Birju Gariba**, CEO, Iskra Events & Celebrations, highlighted the post-pandemic shift, noting the role of tourism boards in promoting new destinations. The increasing number of hotel developments and improved connectivity through air, road, and

rail networks have also contributed to this shift. Tier II, and III cities offer competitive pricing and collaboration opportunities between hotels and local proprietors, making them an appealing choice for companies with limited budgets. Emphasising that hosting events in smaller cities can be cost-effective and less congested, **Mukund Karpe**, Director, Sales & Marketing, Hyatt Regency Pune, Viman Nagar, pointed out that added attractions like cultural and natural sites enhance the overall experience. **Manish Goyal**, Founder, Stotrak Hospitality echoed similar sentiment, pointing out that local government incentives and infrastructure development are attracting more



Couples.



MICE events to these emerging locations. **Mayur Lokhande**, Assistant Food and Beverage Manager, Radisson Blu Pune Hinjawadi noted that the tranquillity of smaller cities offer a personalised experience, while **Rohit Pareek**, Managing Director, Earthian Hotels N Resorts highlighted the growing demand for authentic experiences. **Sanjay Sharma**, Founder and CEO, Eco Glamp – Kanatal saw this shift as part of a broader governmental push to develop infrastructure and promote India as a prime MICE destination. **Kavita Thapa**, Director, Sales, Sayaji Pune mentioned that this shift provides cost efficiencies and a refreshing change of pace for attendees of MICE events.

#### SOUGHT-AFTER OPTIONS

The growing shift away from city life in favour of more serene locations is becoming evident within the MICE sector. With major metros nearing

Local government incentives are attracting more MICE events in these emerging locations



## Tier II cities, such as Chandigarh, Coimbatore, and Lucknow are expanding their MICE capabilities

saturation in terms of infrastructure and experience, a new wave of emerging destinations is capturing attention. These include tier II cities such as Pune, Indore, Jaipur, and Goa as key contenders that offer a blend of modern amenities, accessibility, and rich cultural heritage as per Thapa.

Sharma named more tier II cities, such as Chandigarh, Coimbatore, and Lucknow, which are showing infra growth and expanding their MICE capabilities. Pareek and Lokhande both emphasised the immersive cultural experiences these destinations offer, blending history with contemporary comforts. For instance, cities such as Udaipur and Ranthambore, provide MICE delegates with heritage-rich venues alongside

brehtaking natural landscapes. The trend of tying MICE events to cultural and outdoor activities, has been seen in destinations such as Mussoorie, Rishikesh, and Coorg.

Additionally, eco-conscious tourism is in focus as well. As Karpe and Gariba suggested, emerging leisure and spiritual destinations such as Darjeeling, and Coorg will continue their growth trajectories, along with sustainable development.

### THE EXPERIENTIAL FACTOR

According to industry experts, these destinations offer immersive experiences that allow tourists to engage deeply with the place and its traditions. Gariba emphasised that these towns are merging their local elements with global service standards to create extraordinary experiential products.

Goyal stressed the role of preserving cultural heritage through events, workshops, and festivals, offering tourists hands-on experiences that include local traditions, architecture, and craftsmanship. Moreover, adventure activities such as hiking, kayaking, and birdwatching are contributing to the appeal as well. He also highlighted the importance of local cuisine, noting that food tourism is



becoming a major draw through farm-to-table experiences, food trails, and cooking classes.

Similarly, Lokhande and Pareek expanded on the idea that tier II cities are focusing on authentic engagement. Interactive workshops, and wellness activities such as yoga retreats and organic farming experiences are becoming key attractions.

Sharma highlighted the advantage of shorter commuting times and strong community values in smaller cities, enhancing visitor's experience. Thapa concluded by affirming that these smaller cities are carving out a unique space, offering authentic experiences to travellers.

### OPTING FOR THE BETTER

As smaller cities are emerging as attractive venues, they have their own distinct challenges. Thapa highlighted that smaller cities often lack the infrastructure for large-scale events, such as expansive convention centers and adequate meeting spaces. However, this opens doors for creativity—planners can transform heritage properties or boutique hotels into captivating venues. Lokhande pointed out that limited air connectivity and transportation options can hinder accessibility.



Trend of merging MICE events to cultural and outdoor activities, has been seen in Mussoorie, Rishikesh, and Coorg

Goyal emphasised the challenge of scarcity in local event vendors and services. This limitation can make sourcing supplies difficult, but it also presents an opportunity for collaboration with local businesses, planners, while supporting the community.

Karpe noted that limited infrastructure can complicate movement of logistics. However, overcoming these hurdles encourages innovative solutions. Gariba reminded us that by investing in infrastructure and fostering collaboration between state governments and private entities, smaller cities can elevate their MICE offerings. With creativity and collaboration, smaller urban areas can shine on the global stage, inviting organisations to engage and create lasting memories in unique settings. →

# Elevating industry engagement

SATTE has unveiled its ambitious '+1' marketing campaign, reinforcing its role as the leading platform for the global travel and tourism industry.



## HIGHLIGHTS OF SATTE 2025

- 1. Leadership Summit:** This summit will gather industry leaders to discuss and shape the future of travel and tourism industry, providing invaluable knowledge and strategic direction to the stakeholders.
- 2. Exclusive Golf Tournament:** A premier networking event offering opportunities for high-level interaction and collaboration among industry stakeholders.
- 3. Atithi & SEPC Partnership:** In collaboration with the Services Export Promotion Council (SEPC), SATTE will bring 250+ international buyers, enabling meaningful business-to-business connections and promoting global trade.
- 4. Innovative Initiatives:** SATTE 2025 introduces a host of new initiatives aimed at enhancing participant engagement and providing year-round value:
  - a. SATTE Awards:** Recognising excellence and innovation in the travel sector.

By MT Bureau

**S**outh Asia's Travel & Tourism Exchange (SATTE) 2025 will feature over 2,000 exhibitors and attract more than 40,000 visitors from around the globe, further solidifying its position as Southeast Asia's premier travel trade platform. Scheduled to take place from 19-21 February 2025, at Yashobhoomi, New Delhi, the 2025

edition of SATTE promises to be bigger, and more impactful than ever before.

The '+1' campaign reflects SATTE's commitment to innovation, growth, and providing enhanced value for participants by fostering stronger connections and delivering actionable insights that drive the future of the travel and tourism industry. This edition will have diverse business sessions highlighting trends in 2025 shaping the travel sector.



In collaboration with the Services Export Promotion Council (SEPC), SATTE will bring 250+ international buyers, enabling meaningful business-to-business connections

- b. **SATTE 365 Clicks:** A digital platform to extend networking and engagement opportunities beyond the event.
- c. **SATTE Podcast:** Offering insights through expert discussions on critical industry topics to disseminate valuable knowledge on diverse trends to empower the sector in the coming years.
- d. **Route 30:** Connecting tier I and tier II cities with global markets, facilitating greater access for smaller regions.
- e. **SATTE Connect:** A matchmaking tool designed to streamline business interactions between exhibitors and buyers.
- f. **SATTE Roadshows:** Expanding the reach to 4,027 cities across India, ensuring greater participation from both urban and regional areas.
- g. **Colours of SATTE & Shakti Awards:** Celebrating diversity, regional uniqueness, and women's contributions in the industry.
- h. **SATTE Association Reach Program:** Strengthening collaborations between key industry associations to foster sector-wide growth.

- 5. **Broader Geographic Footprint:** SATTE 2025 will extend its reach to 4,027 cities across India, including both tier I and tier II regions, ensuring unmatched national participation and showcasing India's diverse travel landscape.

#### DRIVING INNOVATION AND GROWTH

Highlighting the event's commitment to fostering meaningful connections and advancing the travel industry, **Pallavi Mehra**, Senior Group Director, SATTE said, "SATTE 2025 is set to be our most impactful edition yet. With the '+1' campaign, we are dedicated to creating a dynamic and enriching experience for all participants. Our goal is not only to provide a platform for networking and business growth but to drive innovation, highlight emerging trends, and offer solutions that will shape the future of travel. SATTE remains committed to evolving and will continue to be the premier event for the global travel and tourism industry." ➔



# Hotels must hit where **demand peaks**

India's hospitality sector is thriving amid a boom in domestic travel and wedding tourism, but rapid growth brings its challenges. Hospitality leaders stress the need for expanded infrastructure, rate parity, and balanced inventory, especially for weddings.

By Janice Alyosius

**T**he Indian tourism and hospitality sector is currently riding a wave of growth driven by a surge in domestic travel, wedding tourism, and inbound tourism. However, this momentum brings its own set of challenges: Managing inventory during peak wedding seasons, sustaining commitments to inbound travellers, and expanding infrastructure to meet future demands. Hospitality leaders shared insights into how their companies are navigating these challenges, unveiling a blend of innovative strategies to drive sustainable growth.

### DOMESTIC TOURISM AND GOVERNMENT'S ROLE

In recent years, tourism policies have increasingly focused on promoting domestic travel, and this shift is driving much of the sector's current growth.

**Ajay Bakaya**, Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels, observed that while inbound tourism remains crucial, domestic travel is currently the key market, "Domestic is the flavour," Bakaya said, noting that this area offers substantial growth potential. Sarovar is on track to deliver over 50,000 room nights this year, largely fuelled by domestic demand, he revealed. With "a stable government, strong, steady policies, inflation in check," Bakaya expressed optimism that the country's tourism environment is primed for significant expansion.

However, Bakaya pointed out that the prioritisation of domestic travel may require inbound-focused operators



**HOMA MISTRY**  
CEO  
Trail Blazer Tours



**AJAY BAKAYA**  
Managing Director  
Sarovar Hotels



**PRAVEEN CHANDER**  
Executive Vice President  
Sales and Marketing, IHCL



to look towards niche markets such as NRIs, medical, and religious tourism as the government supports domestic travel over international inbound tourism.

**WEDDINGS: IMPACT ON INVENTORY, INFRASTRUCTURE**

The growth of the wedding industry in India has led to intense demand for hotel space, often creating competition between weddings and inbound groups. “Today, because of weddings, it is very difficult to get rooms or accommodation,” said **Homa Mistry**, CEO, Trail Blazer Tours. This demand is particularly high in prime locations such as the ‘Golden Triangle’ and South India, where limited infrastructure restricts hotel capacity. Mistry pointed

to a need for hoteliers to set aside a portion of their inventory exclusively for inbound clients, “There must be a small percentage in your inventory—5 per cent or 10 per cent—even if there is a buyout, if there is a commitment already made, we will let it pass through for our international clients.”

**Praveen Chander**, Executive Vice President, Sales and Marketing, IHCL, discussed how IHCL is managing the surge in wedding demand. IHCL has implemented a policy of reserving 15 per cent of inventory out of buyouts, ensuring general availability for inbound clients even during peak wedding seasons. “For the entire financial year, we said that we are going to be very careful with buyouts,” he noted. However, “Sometimes this 15 per cent is also not enough because it is on a first come first basis,” acknowledged Chander.

To address these issues, IHCL has invested in expanding its footprint, especially in wedding hotspots such as Jaipur and Udaipur, which now have six IHCL properties combined. “The best way to meet demand is to build up more inventory,” said Chander, who sees infrastructure growth as key to meeting rising demand without overextending resources.

**MANAGING RATE PARITY DURING PEAK SEASON**

The challenge of balancing high-demand periods for weddings with commitments to global clients has prompted hotel





chains to implement strict rate parity and allocation policies. Sarovar Hotels, for instance, has made progress in this area. Bakaya shared that Sarovar's rate parity on net rates rose from 61 per cent in February 2023 to 84 per cent by August 2024, underscoring their efforts to maintain consistent rates across markets. This level playing field benefits inbound clients as well as wedding and event guests.

Mistry emphasised the challenges faced by tour operators when sudden buyouts for weddings conflict with prior commitments to inbound groups. He



**ANIL CHADHA**  
Divisional Chief Executive  
ITC Hotels



**SATYEN JAIN**  
Director and CEO  
Pride Hotels



To manage the rising demand in hotspots, hospitality leaders see an opportunity to develop new destinations

illustrated this with a scenario where, "All of a sudden they say, *shaadi aagayi*," leading to last-minute cancellations.

#### EXPANDING INTO NEW MARKETS

To better manage rising demand in traditional hotspots, hospitality leaders see a clear opportunity to develop new destinations and purpose-built wedding venues. Bakaya advocated, "Moving weddings to places such as Bhopal and Indore, away from the Rajasthan, Kerala, and Goa." He also highlighted the options of resort developments within a three-hour drive from major cities. "A resort which caters to weddings, conferences, and MICE events and does not interfere with inbound at all," Bakaya said, suggesting that it could unlock new growth opportunities in regions with lower development costs and less seasonal congestion.

**Anil Chadha**, Divisional Chief Executive, ITC Hotels, echoed the same sentiment. He noted India's wedding market is growing significantly. Chadha

observed, “Hotels have become more assertive in pricing for weddings, while two years ago, clients were spending more on decoration and less on accommodation.” Today, Chadha emphasised, hotels expect a fair compensation for the high demand they accommodate during wedding seasons.

He also urged the industry to maintain the value of India’s offerings, saying, “Have faith in your own hotels, your own hospitality.” His appeal is for tour operators and hoteliers alike to avoid over-discounting, reinforcing the premium value that India offers internationally.

**INFRASTRUCTURE EXPANSION**

Experts underscored the long-term benefits of infrastructure expansion. “If demand is so high, the answer is to build up more inventory,” said Chander, referring to IHCL’s aggressive expansion in Jaipur, Udaipur, and other key markets. These investments are designed to ease the pressure on availability, during peak seasons, and will contribute to the sector’s ability to meet both wedding and inbound tourism demand.

**Satyen Jain**, Director and CEO, Pride Hotels, said that Pride Hotels has set aside 15 per cent of its inventory to honour commitments to large events

and global clients. Jain also announced 30 hotels were in the pipeline slated for opening over the next two years, which he believes will help ease availability constraints. He acknowledged, “Cost of doing business has gone up,” partly due to high attrition rates within the industry, which is contributing to rising operational costs.

India’s hospitality sector is navigating a period of high demand across multiple segments, from booming wedding seasons to government-supported domestic tourism. By investing in new infrastructure, developing fair pricing and allocation policies, and exploring new destinations, the industry is taking proactive steps to ensure sustainable growth as well.

By embracing infrastructure growth and creating purpose-built venues, India’s hospitality leaders are positioning themselves to accommodate both today’s complex market needs and the tourism potential of tomorrow. ➔

**Infra expansion will contribute to the hotel sector’s ability to meet the demand of wedding and inbound tourism**



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# Oz bullish on India's booming biz travel

Tourism Australia is keen to engage targeted sectors of the Indian market and generate valuable business leads by showcasing their new products, and events experiences.

By **Lipla Negi**

**A**s Managing Director of Tourism Australia, **Phillipa Harrison** leads the organisation's strategies to drive sustainable global demand for Australia's tourism experiences. She also works with the tourism industry to support recovery following the events of 2020. India, as a key source market, is central to her strategy. "We are excited to expand our business events offerings by engaging targeted sectors across India to showcase new products, experiences, and destinations that cater to the needs

of our stakeholders," she said. Recently, Harrison, along with a delegation of 15 CEOs from Australia's tourism sector, visited New Delhi and Mumbai to strengthen partnerships and explore new opportunities. The purpose was to help Indian corporates discover Australia's unique business event experiences.

Alongside discussions about MICE business strategies, Harrison highlighted Australia's appeal to sports enthusiasts from India. "Our major cities, home to sporting venues such as Melbourne, Perth, and Sydney, are popular among markets like India, which are interested



**PHILLIPA HARRISON**  
Managing Director  
Tourism Australia

By December 2024, aviation capacity between Australia and India will be 333% of December 2019 with 26 flights per week

in timing incentive events around major sporting events, such as the upcoming Border-Gavaskar cricket series,” she said.

**IMPROVED AIR CONNECTIVITY**

The demand for business events in Australia has been bolstered by increased air connectivity and the simplified online visa process. Speaking about air connectivity, Harrison said, “Inbound aviation capacity between Australia and India recovered quickly after global travel resumed. By December 2024, aviation capacity will be 333 per cent



of December 2019, with 26 flights per week between the two countries.”

**DRIVING BUSINESS GROWTH**

India’s corporate travel sector is booming, and according to Deloitte, it is expected to double by 2030. Tourism

Australia recognises this potential and continues to focus on business events, which is a crucial part of our Australia’s visitor economy.” She added, “Australia offers a unique blend of destination appeal, and the ability to meet global event objectives for events of all sizes.”

This year, Business Events Australia’s flagship incentive showcase, Australia Next 2024, was held in Cairns, in collaboration with Business Events Cairns & Great Barrier Reef. Harrison explained, “The connections formed at Australia Next deliver tangible outcomes, vital to the success of our business events industry. We are confident that business leads from Australia Next Cairns will deliver for our industry, just as the incentive showcase has in the past.”

**ROBUST SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS**

Today, sustainability is an important consideration in destination selection for events. For Tourism Australia, sustainability is at the heart of every business event. “From low-carbon menus at ICC Sydney to the ReefConnect citizen science programme on the Great Barrier Reef, venues and suppliers across Australia are making pivotal strides to make events more sustainable,” Harrison affirmed hinting at Australia’s commitment to a greener future. ➔





# Global ties driving MICE

Asia Pacific Incentives and Meetings Event (AIME) 2025 is set to redefine the future of MICE, with expanded exhibitor numbers, a focus on sustainability, and innovative technologies like AI matchmaking.

By MT Bureau

As AIME 2025 approaches, **Silke Calder**, Event Director, AIME sheds light on the exciting plans for this landmark event, the emerging trends in the MICE industry, and the role of the event in fostering connections across the Asia Pacific and Indian markets.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF AIME 2025

Calder enthusiastically revealed, “The 2025 event is set to be our biggest one! We have expanded our footprint at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC) over 10 days to host over 600 exhibitors, 650 hosted buyers, and facilitate 20,000 meetings on the show floor. This builds on the growth of 2024 and cements AIME as the leading event for the international business events community in the Asia Pacific region.”

A notable addition for 2025 is the collaboration with the global exhibition association, UFI. “For the



first time, UFI will hold its Asia-Pacific Conference at MCEC following AIME. Hosting UFI delegates—senior-level attendees from major global organisations—is a privilege, and we are ensuring they feel welcome at AIME.”

Speaking about AIME 2024, Calder highlighted the expanded zones introduced in 2024, including The Boutique and DMC Network, catering to bespoke luxury experiences such as wineries and design-led venues. The hotel zone which saw a significant growth, alongside enhanced representation from Australian states like Victoria, NSW, and Queensland made 2024 edition a successful event.

### TRENDS SHAPING THE MICE INDUSTRY

Calder identified sustainability, technology, and hyper-personalisation as transformative forces shaping the future of MICE.

As per her, “Technology will continue to revolutionise events with tools like AI-powered matchmaking, personalised journeys, and immersive technologies such as Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR).”



“AIME provides Indian buyers unparalleled access to explore business opportunities across the Asia Pacific region.”

**SILKE CALDER**, Event Director, AIME

AIME’s commitment to innovation is evident in its partnership with Grip, an AI-powered matchmaking tool. “Grip analyses attendee profiles, preferences, and goals to pre-schedule highly targeted meetings, contributing to millions of dollars in business at previous events,” said Calder.

### AIME’S SUSTAINABILITY COMMITMENTS

Reflecting on the importance of sustainable acts, Calder shared, “AIME 2025, in partnership with NatureBoss, will plant a tree for every attendee—over 4,500 trees!” AIME is also part of the net zero carbon events initiative, which is promoting measurable sustainability outcomes. Additionally, the event benefits from its venue, MCEC, which holds a 6-star Green Star rating and EarthCheck Platinum Certification.

### ENGAGING THE INDIAN MARKET

Recognising the significance of AIME for Indian market, Calder emphasised, “AIME provides Indian buyers unparalleled access to explore business opportunities across the Asia Pacific region. With over 600 exhibitors representing destinations like



New Zealand, Fiji, Thailand, and Australia, AIME is a hub for Indian planners seeking diverse venues and experiences.”

The Hosted Buyer programme, with its AI-powered matching, ensures efficient and meaningful connections for Indian stakeholders, enabling them to explore tailored incentive travel options and gain insights through the Knowledge Program and Ideas Academy.

### VISION FOR AIME’S GROWTH

Calder underscored AIME’s impact on the MICE industry. She elaborated, “We are so proud that AIME won the Best Exhibition or Trade Show award at the 2024 Australian Event Awards for the third year running. This cements our status as the premier event in Asia Pacific region.”

AIME 2025 promises to not only strengthen its legacy but also paves the way for the future of business events in the Asia Pacific region as well as for global MICE industry. ➔

# MOVEMENTS



**ROHIT CHOPRA**  
Area Commercial Director,  
India, Minor Hotels

Rohit Chopra has been appointed as Area Commercial Director, India, by Minor Hotels. In his new role at Minor Hotels, Chopra will spearhead commercial activities across the group in India, emphasising driving revenue growth, building long-lasting client relationships, and enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty. Chopra holds 26 years of experience and has worked with global brands such as Marriott, Hyatt, and Accor. He holds an extensive experience in sales and marketing.



**RANDHIR GUPTA**  
VP - Commercial & BD,  
MAYFAIR Hotels & Resorts

MAYFAIR Hotels & Resorts has appointed Randhir Gupta as Vice President - Commercial and Business Development. With over 23 years of extensive experience, Gupta brings a wealth of expertise in sales, marketing, and business strategy. In his new role, he is expected to contribute to the brand's commercial growth and development initiatives. Previously, Gupta has been associated with renowned brands such as Accor India and South Asia, Radisson Hotels, and Sahara Airlines.



**SHYAM KUMAR**  
General Manager, DoubleTree  
by Hilton Bengaluru Whitefield

Shyam Kumar has been appointed as the General Manager of DoubleTree by Hilton Bengaluru Whitefield. With over two decades of experience managing luxury and upscale hotels, Shyam is expected to elevate the brand's reputation. Previously, he has shown his expertise by positioning DoubleTree by Hilton Agra as a top hotel for upscale weddings. Having begun his Hilton journey as Director of Ops at Conrad Bengaluru, Shyam played a pivotal role in establishing the property as a luxury landmark.



**PRATESH PATIL**  
General Manager, Operations,  
South & East India,  
The Fern Hotels & Resorts

The Fern Hotels & Resorts has appointed Pratesh Patil as the new General Manager, Operations for South & East India. In his new role, Patil will oversee the operations and management of current The Fern Hotels & Resorts' and expanding portfolio of properties across Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, and Kerala. Patil brings significant experience in operations management, team leadership, and business strategy. Patil's primary focus will be on driving operational excellence.



**ABDEALI ZOOMKAWALA**  
Director, Operations,  
The Khyber Himalayan Resort  
& Spa, Gulmarg

Abdeali Zoomkawala has been appointed as Director of Operations at The Khyber Himalayan Resort & Spa, Gulmarg. With more than two decades of experience, Abdeali has a proven track record of achieving operational excellence, maximising revenue and fostering guest satisfaction. In his new role, Abdeali is expected to continuously innovate to exceed the expectations of customers. Previously, he has worked with renowned brands such as The Taj Mahal Palace & Tower, Mumbai.



**SRIKANT KODALI**  
Director, Sales and Marketing,  
JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru

JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru has appointed Srikant Kodali as its new Director of Sales and Marketing. With over 13 years of diverse experience in the industry, Srikant brings a wealth of expertise spanning sales, marketing, and event operations. In his new role, Srikant will spearhead the sales and marketing team, focusing on elevating hotel's revenue while strengthening the brand's presence and reputation in the competitive market. Previously, Srikant held prominent leadership roles within Marriott International.



**MAYANK UPPAL**  
Director, Revenue, The Leela  
Ambience Gurugram Hotel &  
Residences

The Leela Ambience Gurugram Hotel & Residences appointed Mayank Uppal as Director of Revenue. Renowned for his excellence in revenue optimisation and market leadership, Uppal's expertise promises to fortify the hotel's stature in luxury hospitality. A distinguished member of the APEC Hall of Fame for his accomplishments in revenue strategy, he brings unparalleled skills in business development, project management, and market intelligence. Uppal's leadership is set to propel the brand's growth.



**PRAMOD SINGH KANYAL**  
Director, Food & Beverage,  
Novotel Hyderabad  
Convention Centre & HICC

Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre & Hyderabad International Convention Centre (HICC) has appointed Pramod Singh Kanyal as the Director of Food & Beverage. Kanyal holds 15 years of experience in restaurant management, banquet operations, and event management across the leading 5-star hotel. Pramod has expertise and experience in diverse areas in hospitality sector including large-scale operations, operational efficiency, budgeting, and exceeding customer expectations.





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