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Volume XVI Issue 3 May-June 2025 54 pages ₹ 20

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Sustainable approach

With so much chaos in the past few weeks, Indian travel sector has seen uncertainty, speculation and anxiety among others. This conflict situation forced corporates to explore different disasters and chaotropic situations and create a mitigate programme around it to be ready for such emergency situations.

While this was the scenario on corporate world, the supplier service providers faced sudden cancellations, a different level of understanding was

other items got the attention of our reports such as the food truck and alternative catering opportunities for event management companies. These created sustainable approaches, while adding a new experience and bringing a fresh outlook.

The Arabian Travel Mart (ATM) this year was a huge success with lot of opportunities, new exhibitors and maddening visitors. With right support from the governments, tourism continues to thrive.

{ ATM this year was a huge success with lot of opportunities, new exhibitors and maddening visitors. With support from govts, tourism continues to thrive }

expected in order to stay humane and supportive, but still run the organisation.

Though a lot of emotions flow, but in reality, the general traveller was effected. Did he or she actually change his or her lifestyle—social commitments to support and explore better approaches to the situation.

Media narratives drove madness, sudden patriotic *josh* and boycotting of destinations. What was the impact did other destinations get the spill or did their requirement vanish... we are not sure. While we wait and watch further... on this front, few

The media coverage look more at creating an article than reporting an event. The pre-event marketing through rightful articles on what to expect makes the journey futile than reading it as an afterthought.

Do we need to deep dive to look at coverage as information and opportunities as a information broadcast? Looking forward to hearing back from you all on your thoughts...

Warm regards
Jyothi Varma, Consulting Editor

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20 Business travel revenue dips amid US policy shift



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MICEtalk is printed, published, edited and owned by Sanjeet, printed at Modest Print Pack Pvt. Ltd., C-52, DDA Shedi, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase - I, New Delhi - 110020 and published at 72, Todarmal Road, New Delhi - 110001



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Travel Meet Asia awaits

TMA 2025 is back to stimulate tourism partnerships across Asian markets; early bird rates are available for trade visitors until 20 June.



By MT Bureau

The influential B2B trade show, Travel Meet Asia (TMA) 2025 is all set to take place from 25-26 June at Swissôtel Jakarta PIK Avenue in Jakarta, Indonesia. This year's edition promises to be a powerhouse gathering, uniting 400 top-tier buyers and sellers from across the leisure, MICE and business travel landscapes. The two days event is going to offer the opportunity of high-impact networking, strategic deal-making and will unlock the next wave of growth across Asia's most dynamic travel markets.

Gracing the opening ceremony as Guest of Honour, **Ni Made Ayu Marthini**, Deputy Minister for Marketing, Ministry of Tourism Indonesia, will officiate the opening ceremony of the event, underscoring the government's strategic commitment

TMA is bringing forth opportunities for Southeast Asian buyers & sellers to unlock potential in source markets

to strengthening global tourism partnerships and stimulating economic growth across Southeast Asia. Regional associations such as Association of the Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies (ASITA), Association of the Indonesian Tour and Travel Agents (ASTINDO) and Thai Travel Agents Association (TTAA), among others are enthusiastically supporting the upcoming edition of the event.

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

The Travel Meet Asia conference programme will feature a strong line-up

of speakers from renowned brands such as Accor, Google, Sabre Corporation, Uniworld Boutique River Cruises, and UP Group Asia. They will share data driven insights and practical strategies across six key themes — market overview and trends, travel and destination marketing, hotels and alternative accommodations, MICE and corporate travel, travel tech and transportation, and logistics. Since its launch in 2019 by Messe Berlin Asia Pacific, TMA is bringing forth opportunities for Southeast Asian buyers and sellers to unlock potential in source markets. ➔



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Culinary experience on wheels

Beauty of food trailers lies in their adaptability, offering tactile way to engage people, says **Rajiv M Raghavendra** Founder, TheBoxLab, stressing on its rising demand in events.

By **Janice Alyosius**

As the MICE industry continues to evolve, stakeholders are turning to creative, immersive elements to elevate attendee engagement during events. One such rising trend is the use of food trailers. In an exclusive conversation with MICETalk, **Rajiv M Raghavendra**, Founder, TheBoxLab, shared how these mobile culinary hubs

are reshaping event experiences—from logistics to local flavour. He opined, “Food trailers break away from traditional buffet format, providing an interactive milieu. They are cost-effective, low-maintenance, scalable and easy to customise as per theme or audience size. Their rise is largely driven by the increasing demand for immersive and memorable experiences at events.”

Q In what innovative ways are venues using food trailers?

A Venues are incorporating food trucks/trailers not just as a dining option but as a central feature of the guest experience. Some hotels use branded food trailers as mobile Food and Beverage (F&B) outlets at pool decks, courtyards, or during outdoor movie nights. Convention centres are using them to activate underutilised outdoor spaces, provide themed networking



RAJIV M RAGHAVENDRA
Founder
TheBoxLab

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“Food trailers are evolving from simple catering solutions into multi-functional experiential tools.”

zones, or even support hybrid event breaks with mobile snack stations. They are also being used for ‘surprise-and-delight’ activations—like rolling in a dessert truck at the end of a long conference day.

Q How do food trailers help promote local flavours and sustainability efforts?

A Food trailers are a direct line to local culinary talent and artisans, offering authentic regional dishes that reflect the destination’s identity. Many trailers source locally, aligning with sustainable event goals. From zero-waste packaging to farm-to-truck concepts, food trucks support both eco-friendly and cultural narratives at events—something increasingly important to both planners and attendees.

Q What are key logistical challenges you face and how do you overcome them?

A Few common challenges that I have noticed include local licensing and permits, access to utility connections, and unpredictable weather. We mitigate these by working closely with venues and city officials in advance.

- **Permissions and zoning:** Venues may require special permits for mobile kitchens. So, coordination with local authorities and early planning is critical.
- **Accessibility:** Accessible terrain and proximity to power or water sources is a must. Some trailers have limited storage capacity for fresh water and wastewater storage, so pre-event site inspections and modular layouts can help overcome these hurdles.

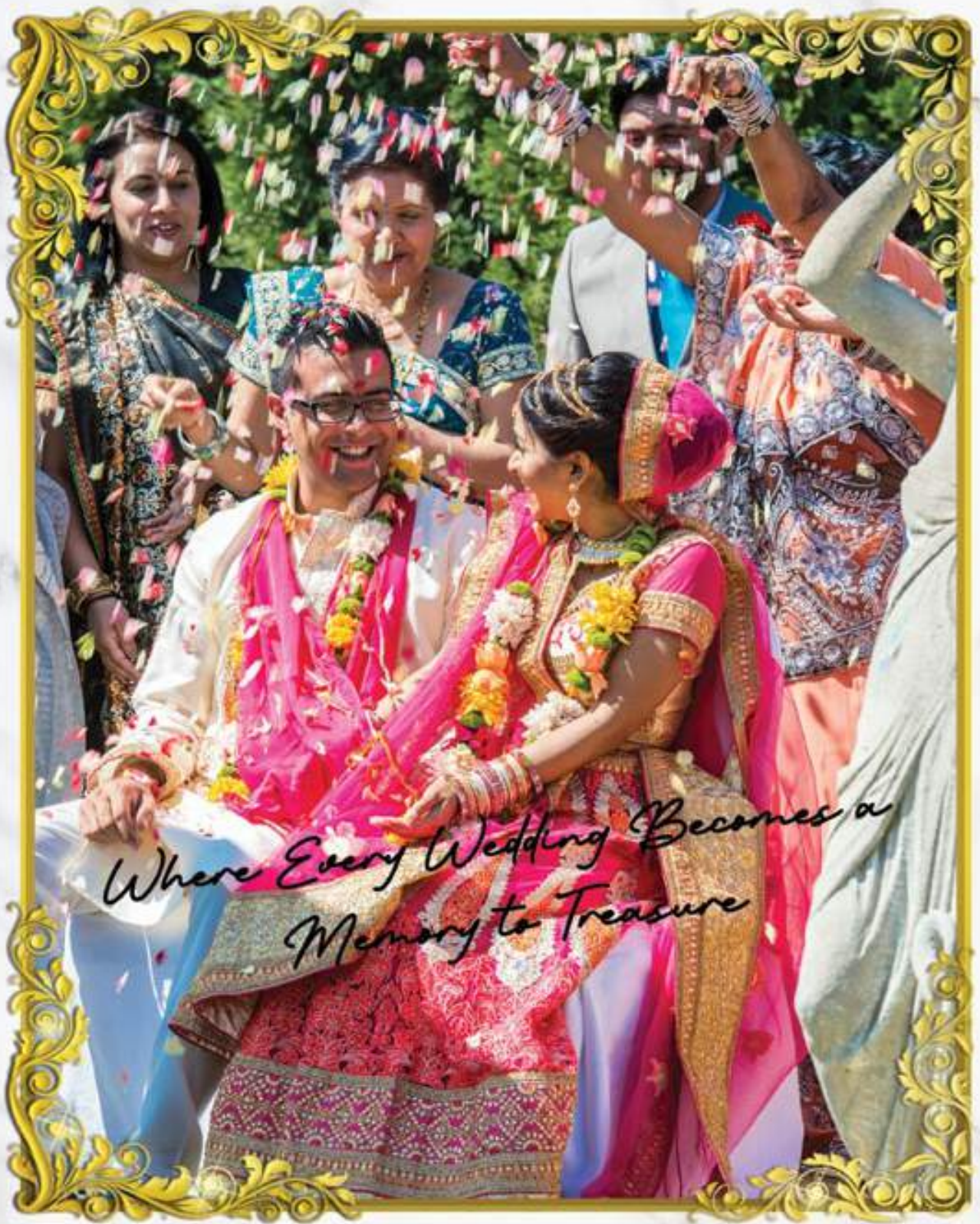
- **Weather conditions:** Rain or heat can dampen the experience. Backup tenting, climate-control units, or indoor trailer setups help mitigate this risk.
- **Power supply:** Generators can be noisy or unsustainable. Many event planners require trailers to plug into venue power or use solar solutions.

Q Looking ahead, how do you see role of food trucks evolving in the event industry?

A Food trailers are evolving from simple catering solutions into multi-functional experiential tools. We are seeing them used as mobile brand activations, merchandise outlets, or even information kiosks at events. With tech integration—like ordering via apps or AI-driven personalisation—food trucks can deliver data-enhanced experiences

Stressing on the significance of food trailers in anchoring a brand roadshow, Raghavendra concluded, “As expectations for events continue to evolve, food trucks are well-positioned to meet demands for authenticity, flexibility, and impact.” ➔





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Smarter airports

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India's airports are changing into business enablers by integrating technology, co-working pods and automated baggage handling to reduce disruptions for corporate travellers

By Janice Alyosius

With business travel steadily rebounding and MICE activity gaining traction, airports are no longer just transit points; they are evolving into strategic touchpoints that can shape the perception of India as a global business hub. This transformation is being driven by government vision, private investments and the rising expectations of travellers who value efficiency, comfort and connectivity above all.

At present, the aviation sector is soaring to new heights with infrastructure growth and a sharp focus on sustainability. From 74 airports in 2014, there are now 160 operational airports, with plans to add 50 more in the next five years and a total of 200 in the next two decades.

Delhi's IGIA now ranks as the 9th busiest airport in the world, handling 77 million passengers annually. The global outbound market share of Indian carriers has climbed from 36 per cent in 2019 to 47 per cent in 2024. Major metros such as Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai and Bengaluru are investing in second airports—Navi Mumbai, Jewar, Parandur and a new proposal for Bengaluru.

EXPECTATIONS

Corporate travellers expect airports to offer speed, comfort and seamless connectivity. **Varun Bhardwaj**, Head, Corporate Sales, Teleperformance, “The ability to check-in and access boarding passes via mobiles is essential. Business travellers rely on airport apps that provide accurate flight updates, navigation help and other travel-related services.” Highlighting the importance of biometric technology for faster security clearance, he added, “Mobile and laptop charging stations and wellness amenities such as spas, currency exchange counters, ATMs and sleeping pods, enhance the travel experience.”

Despite improvements, Indian airports face persistent issues. He explained, “Congestion and long queues are major pain points. Security checks often require removing electronics and shoes, which slows down the process. Getting to check-in gates at Delhi and Mumbai airports can be challenging due to sprawling terminals.”

When comparing Indian airports with global business hubs, he noted, “India is making rapid progress. The government is planning to upgrade infrastructure, streamline security and immigration processes.” He said, “Indian airports are on the path to become global biz hubs, but there is still work to be



From 74 airports in 2014 in the country, there are currently 160 operational airports, with plans to add 50 more in the next five years and a total of 200 in the next two decades

done to fully meet the expectations of corporate travellers.”

TMCS AS CONNECTIVE TISSUE

Corporate travellers get weary of chaotic airport experiences—long security lines, unclear gate changes and confusing terminal layouts. **Naomi Dias**, Commercial Director, FCM Travel India, commented even frequent flyers can feel lost amid the disarray at Indian airports, especially when last-minute changes are not well communicated. “Executives do not want surprises. They want speed, clarity, and order,” she said.



NAOMI DIAS
Commercial Director
FCM Travel India

To bridge the gap, FCM has rolled out real-time app notifications for gate changes and boarding updates.

Dias sees potential in digital initiatives such as Digi Yatra to ease congestion and speed up entry. She noted airport support services are often either pricey or poorly developed. To resolve that, she recommended affordable and dedicated helpdesks, especially for elderly and differently-abled travellers. “For a seamless corporate travel experience, TMCs must work with airports to build data-led, AI-powered systems to minimise travel friction,” she

added. As per her, Hyderabad and Delhi stand out for smart services and infra upgrades and others should follow suit.

Prateek Wadhwa, Director, Dreamtrip4u, drew attention to the inconsistencies at Indian airports. “Unpredictable baggage handling and weak intermodal transport options derail travel experience,” he explained. These delays can impact corporate agendas, especially for travellers trying to squeeze meetings into tight schedules.

He urged Indian airports take cues from as Singapore’s Changi and Dubai international airports, where biometric check-ins, smart navigation, and seamless luggage transfers are the norm. “It is time to prioritise automation and build business-friendly spaces,” he said. Real-time baggage tracking, co-working pods and high-quality executive lounges are non-negotiable, Wadhwa listed.

He commended the Delhi India Gandhi International Airport metro link and express lanes, the Bengaluru’s artificial intelligence-driven rebooking features and the Mumbai’s redesigned terminals. Wadhwa said connectivity to city centers still needs to be worked upon. “For the MICE travellers, an event begins the moment a traveller lands. So, the Indian airports must see themselves as part of the event delivery system,” Wadhwa concluded.



PRATEEK WADHWA
Director
Dreamtrip4u

INSIDE STRATEGY ROOM

“We are implementing biometric-based facial recognition from the terminal entry to boarding gates,” said **Christoph Schnellmann**, CEO, Noida International Airport. Promising a seamless journey, he said that self-service kiosks for check-in and baggage tagging will shrink queues and put travellers in control. The airport is also integrating DigiYatra and has partnered with the Mahindra Logistics Mobility to offer premium electric taxi service with curbside pickup, which is ideal for time-sensitive executives.





The true measure of airports' success lies in delivering seamless, tech-enabled and stress-free experiences to corporate travellers



CHRISTOPH SCHNELLMANN
CEO
Noida International Airport

The NIA's luxe lounge, developed with Travel Food Services, will offer live culinary stations, a cocktail bar and spa services alongside a luxury zone for relaxation. Schnellmann shared plans to explore a high-speed rail link linking New Delhi and Varanasi via NIA. This could reduce travel times and enhance connectivity. The airport has implemented many technology-driven solutions to reduce waiting times,



PRADEEP PANICKER
CEO
GMR Hyderabad International Airport

revealed **Pradeep Panicker**, Chief Executive Officer, GMR Hyderabad International Airport. "We offer self-service kiosks for check-ins and automated bag drops, reducing the queue size," he said. The NIA has integrated DigiYatra making entry, security and boarding contactless. There are check-in and security lanes for domestic business class passengers. e-gates speed up immigration with

facial recognition as part of Fast Track Immigration programme.

The airport has premium services with Prive Lounge at international gates. There are plans set up two more at domestic and international terminals. Business travellers benefit from transit sleeping pods and co-working spaces at the Isprout Flyers Club. The FASTag Car Park system, with RIFD technology, reduces wait times for parking .

An Airport Predictive Operations Centre unifies airside, landside and terminal ops using real-time data. Plans are afoot to set up business centres, meet and greet services and privacy pods for corporate travellers. "We aim to offer a seamless experience of keeping pace with the demands of busy business travellers," he said.

GROWTH ENABLERS

The true measure of the airports' success lies in delivering seamless, tech-enabled and stress-free experiences to corporate travellers. As India positions itself as a MICE and business travel powerhouse, its airports must evolve from gateways to growth enablers. ➔



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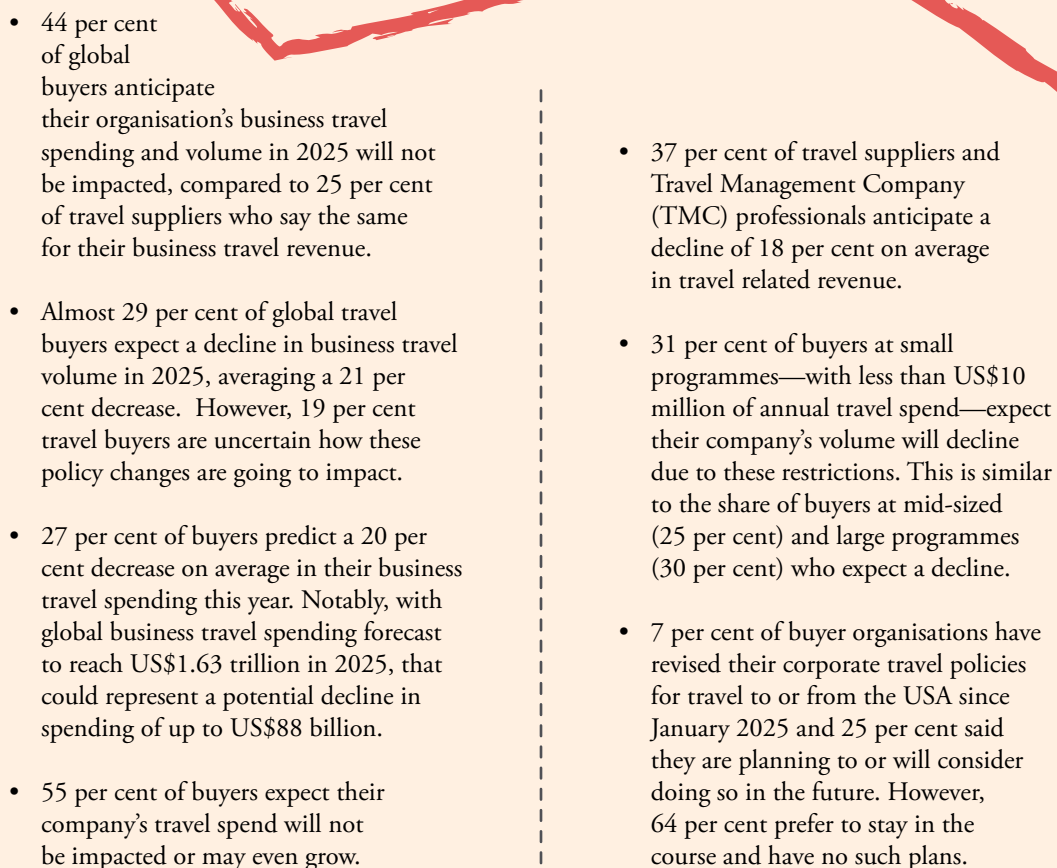
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Business travel downswings amid US policy shifts

As per GBTA, about 37% of global travel buyers foresee a dip in travel-generated revenue, signalling business slowdowns across industry.

THE KEY FINDING OF THE SURVEY REVEALED

- 
- 44 per cent of global buyers anticipate their organisation's business travel spending and volume in 2025 will not be impacted, compared to 25 per cent of travel suppliers who say the same for their business travel revenue.
 - Almost 29 per cent of global travel buyers expect a decline in business travel volume in 2025, averaging a 21 per cent decrease. However, 19 per cent travel buyers are uncertain how these policy changes are going to impact.
 - 27 per cent of buyers predict a 20 per cent decrease on average in their business travel spending this year. Notably, with global business travel spending forecast to reach US\$1.63 trillion in 2025, that could represent a potential decline in spending of up to US\$88 billion.
 - 55 per cent of buyers expect their company's travel spend will not be impacted or may even grow.
 - 37 per cent of travel suppliers and Travel Management Company (TMC) professionals anticipate a decline of 18 per cent on average in travel related revenue.
 - 31 per cent of buyers at small programmes—with less than US\$10 million of annual travel spend—expect their company's volume will decline due to these restrictions. This is similar to the share of buyers at mid-sized (25 per cent) and large programmes (30 per cent) who expect a decline.
 - 7 per cent of buyer organisations have revised their corporate travel policies for travel to or from the USA since January 2025 and 25 per cent said they are planning to or will consider doing so in the future. However, 64 per cent prefer to stay in the course and have no such plans.



By MT Bureau

With a lot of stir in the corridors of White House of the United States of America (USA), including tariffs and entry restrictions, it is crucial for global business travel fraternity to weigh the scale of uncertainty sweeping in regarding the potential impact on business travel volume, spending and revenue for 2025.

According to a new survey conducted by the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), business travel can take a blow primarily due to the entry restrictions policies for travellers from specific countries and advisories against travel to the USA. Underlining that travelling for work plays a vital role in supporting business growth, strong diplomatic ties and valuable connections, **Suzanne Neufang**, CEO, GBTA, opined, “Productive and essential business travel is threatened in times of economic uncertainty. This undermines economic prosperity and damages many sectors that rely on global business travel to survive and thrive.”

Overall, GBTA’s survey serves as a wake-up call, hinting that a downturn in business travel could ripple through and strain global economies. ➔

- Approximately 20 per cent buyer organisations are considering cancelling, moving or pulling attendance from meetings located in the USA.
- 8 per cent have cancelled events from the USA. 12 per cent of buyers outside of the USA have cancelled meetings in America, or have relocated meetings (14 per cent) and events (10 per cent) somewhere else.
- 10 per cent are planning or considering cancelling employee attendance at USA events.
- 54 per cent of business travel professionals’ top concern was higher cost as tariffs can bring in inflation.

- 46 per cent were concerned about additional visa/passport processing hurdles.
- 23 per cent worry about the loss of market access/market share after the shift in policies.
- For travel suppliers (56 per cent) the major concern was business travel budget cuts.
- 23 per cent of global industry professionals personally know someone whose trip has been affected by the travel policy changes made by the USA.

Indians re-route amid border conflict

Amid recent tensions between India & Pakistan, the GCC & Southeast Asian region attract Indians as numbers decline for Türkiye & Azerbaijan.

By Hazel Jain

Türkiye and Azerbaijan were preferred destinations for Indian MICE and wedding groups in the past, however, their recent political stand has affected the choice of Indian travellers and corporates.

In 2023 alone, it is estimated that more than 500 Indian weddings were hosted in Türkiye, contributing over ₹1500 crore to the country that

has pledged support for Pakistan. Therefore, many members of the travel trade industry have stopped sale for these countries, from a strong sense of strategic responsibility— as every rupee we spend abroad is a vote, both economically and politically.

Jaipur-based Seven Wonders Vacations has organised many weddings in Antalya and Azerbaijan in the past. However, following their anti-India stand, clients are refusing to opt for these two destinations—some even bearing the entire cost of cancellation including airfare and hotel bookings.

Nittin T Dubey, Director, Seven Wonders Vacations, shared, “We are now suggesting alternate destinations such as Georgia and Uzbekistan because they offer similar culture and are close to each other geographically. Both destinations are also competitively priced. Corporates are completely refusing to travel to Türkiye and Azerbaijan at this time.” He cautioned that until the situation is resolved, people’s sentiments would not change, as this decision is purely emotional.

Alternative destinations are offering value in terms of global appeal—making them strong replacements



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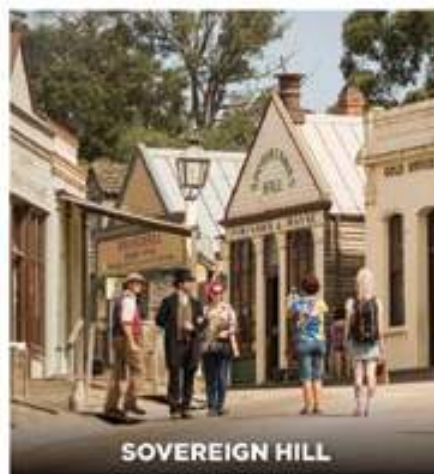
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Echoing similar sentiments, **Kanika Sethi**, Founder & CEO, Kanika Sethi Weddings & Events, rued the situation and discouraging weddings in these destinations. “We have nurtured good relationships with the wedding fraternity in Türkiye over the years but at this moment, it would not be possible for us to go to either of these destinations. Keeping in mind the current situation, we will now divert traffic from them to countries such as Oman, Egypt and Qatar,” she affirmed.

Türkiye and Azerbaijan have enjoyed patronage from Indian travellers for far too long and the market has only grown bigger every year given the ease of travel visa. **Birju Gariba**, Founder & CEO, ISKRA, explained, “Antalya, Bodrum, Istanbul and Baku were definitely on top of the list for clients planning wedding celebrations and for corporates but this changed the very day we saw how these countries aligned with the other side, not only from our clients but also for us, as a responsible agency

who puts our country first.” He predicted that destinations like Vietnam, Dubai, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Thailand and Bali, which have been crowd’s favourites, will clearly gain from this, however, they keep pushing destinations within India under ‘Wed in India’ initiative. He added that some of the more exotic weddings will now go to the European favourites such as Italy and France but immediate replacements for Türkiye and Azerbaijan are Morocco and Jordan.

Trishal Rao, Chief Sales Officer, SKIL, revealed, “We had three to four inquiries of about ₹1 to 1.25 crore revenue for these two destinations but we are not actively pursuing these destinations at the moment. Interestingly, two corporate groups that were considering these two destinations have independently opted to explore alternatives like Prague, Spain and Vietnam.” As per him, these destinations offer value in terms of experiences and global appeal, making them strong replacements. ➔

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EMBRACE ELEGANCE

Madhya Pradesh's (MP) Chanderi, known for its silk-cotton blend sarees, is celebrated for its delicate texture and royal motifs all across the globe. Legend has it that Emperor Akbar once received this fabric, wrapped in bamboo, as a tribute to its rare beauty. Today, Chanderi's legacy continues in sarees, suits and scarves, embodying timeless elegance.

Maheshwari sarees, born from the patronage of Queen Ahilyabai Holkar along the Narmada River, are woven from fine cotton and silk. Their iconic five-striped border adds a classic touch to this luxurious fabric, making each piece a symbol of heritage and grace.

Inspired by ancient Buddhist paintings near Dhar, Bagh prints feature intricate geometric and floral patterns created with finely carved wooden blocks and vegetable dyes, adorning sarees, kurtas, lehengas and high-quality home linens,

adding a timeless charm to any wardrobe.

Nandna prints, a tribal block-printing tradition from the Bhil community, are crafted by the Chippa artisans of Tarapur. Dyed with natural pigments, these pure cotton creations narrate scenes from the legend of Dhola Maru.

In Bhopal, discover the regal craft of Zari-Zardozi embroidery, once favoured by the Begums of Bhopal. Intricate gold, silver and metallic threads, alongside beads and sequins, come together to create dazzling garments and accessories that shimmer with royal allure. Near Ujjain, Bherugarh offers an Indian twist on Batik, using wax-resistant dyeing techniques to create vibrant apparel and linens. ➔

CREATIVE CRAFT

From Sironj's colorful durries to Bhedaghat's marble magic, Madhya Pradesh's tiniest towns weave stories that enchant every corner, such as:

- **Dhokra** metal-casting technique by Gond and Bharia tribes of Betul, brings lifelike brass and bronze figurines of tribal life, animals and deities to life.
- **Turi** tribe of Betul and bamboo artisans from Shahdol, Mandla and Balaghat craft functional treasures like baskets furniture and trays, showing reverence for nature.
- Gond paintings from Mandla & Dindori grace corporate offices across the globe.
- Indore's artisans create miniature to life-sized animal figures from treated leather.
- Ujjain is home to Papier Mâché crafts, turning scrap paper into works of art.
- Gwalior's Batto Bai dolls, crafted from recycled materials showcase eco-friendly craftsmanship.





Venues that boost revenues

India's convention centres are not just buildings but are catalysts for tourism & economic growth, says, **Dhruv Saxena**, Assistant Vice President, Invest India.

By **Janice Alyosius**

As countries compete for their share of the global business events market, India is taking bold steps to position itself as a serious contender, not just through promotional

campaigns but with long-term investments in infrastructure, policy reform and destination development.

At the centre of this strategy are the country's rapidly expanding convention centres, which are doing far more than hosting events, they are catalysing

economic activity, global partnerships and regional development. "Convention centres are more than venues, they are platforms that connect industries, enable knowledge exchange and drive local economies," said **Dhruv Saxena**, Assistant Vice President, Invest India.

BUILDING ECONOMY

From regional summits to global forums, India's venues are more than just built environments—they are engines of impact. Supporting this growth trajectory is a strong market outlook. A 2024 report from the Events and Entertainment Management Association (EEMA) revealed that India's organised live events sector grew by 15 per cent, generating ₹13 billion (US\$ 156 million) in revenue. Saxena attributed much of this momentum to the direct and indirect economic benefits that major convention centres bring. "Events like Vibrant Gujarat or G20 summit not only generate visibility but

also inject capital into local economies, create employments and strengthen India's standing as a global business destination," he explained.

FACTORS SHAPING FUTURE

As industries diversify, so do the expectations for corporate events. Saxena highlighted a number of evolving preferences, "We are seeing a major shift toward hybrid formats that blend physical and virtual participation, making events more inclusive and far-reaching," he noted.

"Equally important is the rise of sustainability, organisers are increasingly committed to eco-friendly practices that align with ESG goals. Technology too is transforming the attendee experience, with AR/VR, AI-based matchmaking and data analytics impacting how events are designed and delivered."

In addition, Saxena pointed at the growing popularity of tier II and III cities. "Smaller cities are emerging as competitive destinations due to improved infrastructure and lower operational costs," he added claiming that these transformations are going to shape the future of events in India.

INDIA FOR GLOBAL BUSINESS

Highlighting India's consistent efforts to



“Events like Vibrant Gujarat or G20 summit not only generate visibility but also inject capital into local economies.”

develop world-class infra, Saxena said, "Venues such as Bharat Mandapam and Yashobhoomi are designed to host large-scale, world-class events," however, he added, "It is not just about buildings. We are also working on policy reforms to streamline permissions, enhance ease of doing business for event organisers and ensure connectivity across the country." The government's MICE tourism strategy under the Incredible India campaign are central to this transformation. Saxena affirmed, "The hosting of the G20 summit in India was a turning point, it demonstrated our ability to host high-profile global gatherings." Looking ahead, Invest India



DHRUV SAXENA
Assistant Vice President
Invest India

projects foreign tourist arrivals to reach 30.5 million by 2028, with foreign exchange earnings estimated at US\$50.9 billion. As per Saxena, India is no more a 'potential' market, it is a 'performance' market with clear ambitions. For global planners, and associations, the evolving Indian landscape offers several opportunities: First-mover advantage in emerging destinations; access to government-supported platforms; and integration of technology and sustainability into event delivery

As India continues to align its events' strategy with national development goals, its convention centres are not just keeping pace, they are leading the way. ➔

Gobindgarh Jaisalmer

Regal face of celebrations



Perched amidst sand dunes beneath clear sky, Gobindgarh Jaisalmer infuses Royal grandeur into weddings, enriched by sensorial charm of Thar desert.

By **Lipla Negi**

Jaisalmer is many things — a marvel of the Thar Desert, a treasure trove of historic hill forts, the resplendent Golden City of Rajasthan and perhaps the very place where celestial bodies seem to descend at night, weaving a tapestry of the most magical night sky. Yet, above all, Jaisalmer stands as a living testament to the rich, timeless heritage, culture and history. Unsurprisingly, it pops as the most popular wedding destination on every couple's wish list, and at its heart, Gobindgarh Jaisalmer by Godwin Hotels emerges as the newest and most enchanting venue for opulent celebrations and festivities.

Like a royal fort, the hotel's architecture embraces honey-hued golden-yellow stones, reflecting the royal aesthetic and sensibilities. Expansive and luxurious, it is the ultimate dream wedding destination, offering nine uniquely designed venues for various festivities and traditions.



The property boasts 80 suites, with a private plunge pool, along with a state-of-the-art gym and the signature dining outlet — Neel. A pillarless banquet hall spanning 10,000 sq ft with soaring high ceilings can accommodate over 600 guests, while an even grander 13,000 sq ft hall caters to up to 1,000 people. Overlooking a lush garden, the banquet space seamlessly blends indoor and outdoor settings, offering an enchanting backdrop for celebrations. For

connoisseurs of luxury, the customised tented accommodations with private pools offer breathtaking views of the Thar Desert, creating the perfect vantage point to witness the sky's ever-changing hues from sunrise to sunset.

The outdoor spaces are a canvas of versatility, inspiring and assisting wedding designers in crafting extraordinary experiences, larger-than-life stage concepts. Colossal banquet halls, oasis-like gardens carved as serene sanctuaries and unique outdoor settings bring alive the grandeur of Jaisalmer's bygone era.

The vastness of the property, enhanced by the infinite wilderness of the desert, allows wedding planners to envision and execute bespoke wedding themes with ease.

The best kept secret of the property is its enchanting staircased *Baori* (stepwell) — a timeless masterpiece born of heritage and imagination. A breathtaking venue, embracing the classical elements of fire, air, water and earth to create a truly celestial celebrations and a divine



experience. The architectural marvel is a proud testament of the legacy of the destination. Just imagine the *Baori* aglow with *diyas* and candles, adorned with exquisite floral arrangements – a stunning backdrop that brings unmatched magic and charm to your wedding photography. In essence, it is every bride's and her wedding planner's dream setting, for an unforgettable celebration.

From impeccable room service to an exquisite culinary experience, the hotel's highly trained staff ensures seamless hospitality, making every guest feel indulged in regal opulence.

Jaisalmer itself has been a magnet for international travellers for centuries and Gobindgarh Palace now elevates this experience with 5-star luxury in the heart of a blooming desert.

If you have been planning a wedding in India from anywhere in the world, this is where your dream celebration unfolds like a serendipitous desert melody. The Big Fat Indian Wedding finds its truest expression at Gobindgarh, Jaisalmer turning every couple's dream into palpable reality. ➔

Gobindgarh Jaisalmer is the ultimate dream wedding destination, with 9 uniquely designed venues





Mapping metrics


of mandap
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30 May-June 2025

Travel

WEDDING SHOW



By Janice Alyosius

India's

wedding industry, one of the fastest-growing and most dynamic sectors, demands seamless collaboration between planners, hotels, airlines and tourism boards to create unforgettable experiences. The Travel Wedding Show at Anantara Jewel Bagh Jaipur took a bold step in this direction by hosting a focused, high-impact event—bringing together the country's top wedding planners and key industry players, where they discussed the challenges and proposed resolutions to tackle them.

What made this show truly unique was its streamlined approach; no small suppliers were involved, allowing wedding planners to engage directly with hotels, airlines, national tourism boards and insurance companies in structured 10-minute meetings. This setup enabled meaningful conversations without the usual clutter.

In just two days, participants accomplished what might typically take six to eight months of meetings—accelerating potential partnerships, while ensuring that regular business operations remained disruption free.

By fostering such focused collaboration, the Travel Wedding Show underscored the growing importance of synergy amid the stakeholders of India's wedding industry and has set a new benchmark for how business can be done efficiently and effectively.

As India's wedding industry transforms at breakneck speed, planners face cascade of fresh challenges. Industry experts convene to decode the chaos at Travel Wedding Show, sharing strategies to redefine the rulebook





Wedding planners

With the evolving dynamics of wedding industry in India, stakeholders find inflation, demand for visually appealing milieu, quest for pininterest-worthy settings and limited infrastructure as the new set of bottlenecks blocking the road to sectors' growth.

ESCALATING WEDDING COSTS

Industry experts believe that post-pandemic, the weddings are witnessing heftier price tags due to inflation. With costs climbing across hotel bookings, décor and logistics, both couples and planners are feeling the pinch. “A wedding for up to 200 people that earlier costed ₹2 crore is now closer to ₹3 crore,” said **Harsheen Bincymon**, Director, Enjay Weddings & Luxury Events. Although he also pointed out that the surge in hotel prices is driven by sheer demand. Agreeing with Bincymon’s claim, **Nittin T Dubey**, Director, Seven Wonders Vacations, shared, “In Rajasthan, the hotel buyout alone costs ₹3 to ₹4 crore. With décor and entertainment, a luxury wedding easily crosses ₹5 crore for two nights.”

Solution: Value for money

With demand driving up prices, planners are focusing on delivering value so that the customer feels that every rupee is well spent. “Clients are now smarter and more aware. Our job is to help them prioritise and ensure they get value for money. Whether it is a destination or local wedding, we help them consolidate events to keep it efficient,” said Bincymon, asserting that it is the only way forward to resolve the rising issue of inflation.

REEL VS REAL

Social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest have turned wedding planning into a visually driven fantasy—often stretching far

With demand driving up prices, planners are focusing on delivering value so that the customer feels that every rupee is well spent



Picture credit: Sakshi & Rohan by Picture Perfect Moments



HARSHEEN BINCYMON
Director
Enjay Weddings & Luxury Events



NITTIN T DUBEY
Director
Seven Wonders Vacations





Picture credit: Mostlysane Instagram page

beyond what is financially or logistically feasible. “Young couples see weddings on Instagram and want the exact same thing,” said **Vandita Bawa**, Senior VP, WDNE. “But their parents are paying and they are usually more conservative with spending. This gap creates friction.” Additionally, “too much information can be misleading. Something trending online is often mistaken as the norm”, warned Bincymon.

Solution: Fact-checking fairytales

To bridge the gap between dreamy social feeds and real-world budgets, planners suggest turning to experience-led consultations showcasing real-life case studies. “I always tell my clients—do not go by Instagram alone. Come and see things in person,” said Bawa. “We create a more personal connect by showing real décor, setups and references.” Bincymon emphasised, “We encourage fact-checking and open conversations. It is about building trust through education.”



VANDITA BAWA
Senior VP
WDNE

INCONSISTENT PRICING

Many hotels and venues, especially in emerging destinations, are not fully equipped or trained to handle high-end weddings. Stressing on the challenge, Dubey said, “Some hotels are simply not prepared, especially newer or standalone properties. Pricing fluctuates wildly depending on inventory or demand and there is no standardisation.”

Solution: Consistent rate cards

To resolve pricing issues, wedding planners suggest stronger collaboration across the hospitality industry, starting with standardised pricing and a deeper understanding of wedding-specific requirements. “There should be a standard rate card for at least four to six months for wedding segment,” suggested Dubey.

LIMITED INFRASTRUCTURE

Planning weddings in offbeat or smaller destinations—domestic or international—brings challenges in connectivity, infrastructure and access to services such as Indian catering or experienced vendors.

“Planning in Jaisalmer or Jodhpur can be hard with limited flights and few hotel options. Many international destinations such as Spain or Portugal do not have direct connectivity from India,” explained **Amit Hooda**, Founder, The Wedding Connections.

Solution: Advance planning

Planners are working around these gaps by mapping destination suitability based on weather,



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While international weddings remain aspirational, many families are now opting for domestic destinations

guest count and logistics. They are also lobbying for support from tourism boards. “We help clients choose destinations based on accessibility and local support,” said Hooda. “If they help with smoother visas and paperwork, we could plan more global weddings. In the UAE, Indian catering is easily available, but in Europe, we have to fly in chefs—adding huge costs. We suggest options that meet dreams as well as practicalities,” he added.

ACCESSING GLOBAL DESTINATIONS

While global weddings remain aspirational, many families are now opting for domestic destinations due to government policy shifts, tax scrutiny and currency limitations. “With the PM’s push to hold more weddings in India and increased focus on white money, families are preferring to stay within India without any complications,” stressed Bawa.

Solution: Rise of Desi Destination

Planners are adapting by bringing the international wedding experience to Indian venues, paying more heed to smaller towns. “Even if it is a local wedding, people prefer doing it in a two-day destination style to maximise time and minimise hassle. The intent is to be under one roof and stress-free” said Bincymon.

DEMAND FOR ENTERTAINMENT

Entertainment is central to Indian weddings

but sourcing quality performers, tech riders and managing logistics can be time-consuming and expensive affair for the planners. Highlighting this challenge, he said, “Entertainment—from anchors to musical *phas*—is non-negotiable. Around 25 to 35 per cent of the budget goes to this.”

Solution: Quality performers

To deliver top-notch quality entertainment, planners are investing in top-tier production to delight guests. “Each event, *sangeet* or *mehendi*, demands its own unique vibe,” emphasised Hooda, suggesting, “So we bring in performers who can transform the milieu.”

INFLUENCE OF TECHNOLOGY

Recognising the ubiquity of AI across sectors, **Rachit Jain**, Director, Rashi Entertainment, highlighted its inevitable influence on the wedding industry. “The technological innovations happening in weddings will increase the effectiveness of organising them, offering a different experience altogether. Recently, we used QR code invites in one of the weddings, which made it easier for guests to attend it. We even use VR cameras that allow guests to relive the celebration anytime,” he shared.



RACHIT JAIN
Director
Rashi Entertainment



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Airlines

As couples embark on the journey to their dream wedding for seamless travelling experience, airlines are coming up with unique ways to resolve pertinent issues related to handling of guests, baggage space and last-minute changes in guest-list.

RISE OF WEDDING CHARTERS

What was once a luxury is now almost essential—chartering aircraft for weddings has taken off in a big way, especially for families who want full control of the guest experience from takeoff to landing. “Today, families do not want the hassle of coordinating 40 to 50 individual tickets or worrying about flight delays for guests. They would rather book out an entire aircraft,” shared **Dhanashree Nagarkar**, Manager India Leisure MICE & Groups, Oman Air.

“We have handled full charter operations where everything—from boarding cards with wedding logos to in-flight meals matching Indian tastes—is customised. We even coordinate with ground teams for special handling at departure and arrival,” Nagarkar added.

The ability to personalise each and every step of the journey has made charters particularly popular for weddings in the Middle East, Thailand and Mauritius, due to relaxed visa rules and manageable flight durations. She shared, “We work closely with wedding planners, tour operators, and even decorators, if needed. We have had families request

traditional music during boarding the plane and special seating for the bride and groom.”

NAME CHANGE FLEXIBILITY

In Indian weddings, guest lists are notoriously fluid. Oman Air and other airlines are stepping up with generous name change policies in order to accommodate late decisions. “We understand the Indian wedding dynamics—names get confirmed



DHANASHREE NAGARKAR
Manager India Leisure
MICE & Groups
Oman Air



In elaborate Indian weddings, guest lists are notoriously fluid. Oman Air and other airlines are stepping up with generous name change policies in order to accommodate late decisions.



late, there are last-minute swaps, sometimes due to visa issues or family emergencies,” she explained. “That is why we allow name changes free of cost before ticketing and post-ticketing changes come at a nominal fee. We just need a notice of 72 hours and our teams would make it happen,” she added

ENHANCED BAGGAGE ALLOWANCES

A single family’s baggage could include wedding

attire, jewellery boxes, return gifts and even puja material. That is why the airlines are pre-emptively offering additional baggage allowances and working with the ground teams in a bid to ensure VIP handling. “We have also seen families carry as much as 15 to 20 kilogrammes per guest, which is above the normal limit, and we plan for it much in advance. We also ensure that group check-ins are seamless,” Nagarkar said.





Insurance

Despite spending crores on a dream wedding, many Indian families still skip wedding insurance, leaving them vulnerable to disruptions, cancellations or damage. But a new generation of travel and event insurance providers is working hard to change that.



ONE EVENT, HUNDREDS OF RISKS

“Weddings are emotionally loaded and financially risky events in a family’s life—but most go uninsured,” said **Kunal Choudhary**, VP, Sales, Asego, pointing out, “A single vendor default, venue accident or political disruption can cause ₹10–50 lakh losses overnight and yet, because insurance is not at the top of the mind, families only realise it when something goes wrong.”

Asego and similar providers
are building customised
insurance plans as per Indian
wedding dynamics

He recalled a recent case where a multi-crore destination wedding was nearly cancelled due to floods—but had no backup plan. “They had invested in décor, hotel rooms, logistics—everything was ready—but did not insure the event. They lost close to ₹1.2 crore. Insurance would have costed them just ₹1.5 to 2 lakh,” he explained.

INSURANCE TAILORED FOR WEDDINGS

Asego and similar providers are building customised plans as per Indian wedding dynamics—from gold theft to event cancellations or flight disruptions. “We do not offer cookie-cutter solutions. Every wedding is different. If the focus is on jewellery, we cover that. If it is travel or weather risk, we tailor the premium accordingly,” said Choudhary.

LAST-MINUTE BOOKING

Families often think it is too late to insure once vendors are booked or guests are flying in. That is not true, as per Choudhary, he informed, “We can activate a policy as close as seven days before the event.” While early planning is ideal, last-minute requests are not a dealbreaker. “We do not turn anyone away just because they are in a crunch,” he added, while asserting, “The more high-profile the wedding—global locations, high-value jewellery—the more critical it is to get insured quickly.”



KUNAL CHOUDHARY
VP, Sales
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National Tourism Offices

National Tourism Offices are going beyond promotional events and activities. Instead, they are rolling up their sleeves to prepare local ecosystems, serving Indian cultural needs and offering incentives to planners and guests alike.



INCENTIVES FOR PLANNERS

Thailand, a long-time favourite for Indian weddings, is actively wooing planners and guests. “We currently offer ₹800 per guest for weddings above 150 passenger,” said **Pinki Arora**, Marketing Representative, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), adding, “We also reimburse tickets for planners and have earlier offered spa vouchers or welcome dances such as Thai classical shows. It is our way of making them feel valued.”

CULTURAL TRAINING

Thai service providers are being trained to understand Indian customs. “Indians eat lunch later, prefer vegetarian menus and expect personalised service,” Arora noted. “Before promoting a destination, we run tourism clinics to educate local

vendors. This includes chefs, drivers, florists—everyone involved. It makes the experience smoother and more authentic,” she added.

As Indian weddings scale new heights of grandeur, so do the stakes. From soaring costs to shifting guest lists, planners now juggle logistics with emotions—teaming up with airlines, insurers and tourism boards. Together, this ecosystem is redefining how modern Indian weddings are planned, priced and protected—blending opulence with operational precision. ➔

“We currently offer ₹800 per guest for weddings above 150 passenger.”

PINKI ARORA, Marketing Representative, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)



India's first state convention bureau

Maharashtra launches its convention bureau to attract global business events to its shores with central focus on cities like Mumbai, Pune, Nashik and Nagpur.

Maharashtra has blazed a trail by becoming the first Indian state to launch its own Convention Bureau—marking a landmark leap for business tourism in the country. Unveiled at IMEX Frankfurt, the Maharashtra Convention Bureau (MCB) will be headquartered in Mumbai and will focus on drawing global conventions and high-impact events in the state. With the 2024 Maharashtra Tourism Policy placing emphasis on bolstering visitor economy, MCB will aim in transforming the state into a magnet for global delegates.

Working in partnership with event organisers, venues and hotels, the Bureau will chart directions—from planning logistics to enhancing delegate experiences. Maharashtra's dynamic cities—Mumbai, Pune, Nashik, and Nagpur—will be the focus of this initiative, offering a mix of venues for events of various scales. With the state contributing nearly 15 per cent of India's GDP, the Bureau aims to amplify its intellectual capital and establish Maharashtra as the hub for global business events. ➔



New advisory panel for GBTA India

The association's new advisory board in India will be led by **Ajay Bhatt**, Group Head, Corporate Services, Godrej Industries Group.



By **MT Bureau**

Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) APAC Conference 2025 held in partnership with the Cimeira Regional WERC® at the Raffles City Convention Centre has announced the new advisory boards for various regions, bringing together professionals from leading

organisations to provide strategic advisement and local market insights as GBTA continues to expand its footprint across Asia Pacific region. For GBTA India, **Ajay Bhatt**, Group Head, Corporate Services, Godrej Industries Group, will serve as Chairperson of 15-member advisory board including:

- **Siva Sankar Ala**, Director, Travel & Hospitality, Dr Reddy's Laboratories

- **Sri Arardhi**, Co-Founder, Fast Collab Systems
- **Rajan Bahadur**, CEO, Tourism & Hospitality Skill Council of India
- **Monica Bhatnagar**, Assistant Project Officer, The World Bank
- **Rajan Dua**, Founder & MD, Udaan India
- **Dev Karvat**, Founder & CEO, Asego
- **Amarnath Lal Das**, India Travel Lead and Global Crisis and Compliance, Accenture Solutions
- **Manian SGS**, Associate Director, Mindsprint
- **Gaurav Shekhar Nagwekar**, Head Travel Logistics & Corporate Service Administration, Reliance Industries
- **Jehangir Press**, VP, Strategic Accounts Management Group & Commercial Director, Qmin, The Indian Hotels Company
- **Sudha Prasad**, Senior Manager, Compliance (Travel Industry), Mphasis
- **Prasad Shriyan**, VP, Corporate Travel, Thomas Cook
- **Santosh Sharma**, Co-founder & CEO, Foresee Aviation
- **Sakshi Vij**, MD, Carzonrent India ➔

Asego unveils Asia Travel Special Plans for summer

This new offering underscores Asego's commitment to deliver reliable travel protection solutions to Indians choosing international holidays, particularly in Southeast Asia.



By MT Bureau

With countries like Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and Sri Lanka among the top choices for Indian tourists, Asego's specially curated plans offer comprehensive protection that starts before departure and continues through the duration of the trip.

COMPREHENSIVE COVERAGE

Asego's Asia Travel Special Plans offer emergency medical assistance and evacuation services available 24/7, ensuring immediate help in case of unforeseen circumstances. For thrill-seekers, Asego provides coverage for adventure sports-related injuries and accidents, offering medical compensation of up to ₹10 lakh.

COVERAGE FOR DELAYS

Travel disruptions such as missed connections, flight cancellations or rescheduling are common travel

setbacks, particularly during peak seasons. Asego's plans include flight-specific coverages that minimise the financial and logistical impact of such incidents. Additionally, the protection plans include Asego TrackMate, a real-time baggage tracking solution. Travellers can monitor their checked-in luggage during transit

and in case baggage is not located within 96 hours (4 days), Asego offers a guaranteed compensation*.

HEALTH COVERAGE

These plans also provide coverage for pre-existing conditions during life-threatening medical emergencies. This is a crucial feature for travellers managing chronic health issues, offering assurance that they will receive the necessary care if the unexpected occurs.

Travellers can purchase these plans through Asego's network of travel agent partners or connect directly with Asego's representatives for personalised plan selection. Speaking on the launch, **Dev Karvat**, Founder and CEO, Asego, shared, "Summer travel is a time of joy, exploration, and bonding with loved ones. We believe it should also be a time free from anxiety and worries. With our new Asia Travel Special Plans, travellers can focus on creating memories, while we take care of the uncertainties that may arise." ➔



DEV KARVAT
Founder & CEO, Asego



yet impactful and we approach them as personal narratives, creativity, flexibility and seamless execution.”

TWO-IN-ONE

With 520 rooms, Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield, proudly holds the title of Karnataka’s largest single hotel inventory, making it the go-to destination for large-scale buyouts and global gatherings. Just steps away, the Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Centre amplifies this appeal with vast event spaces and exceptional versatility. Together, they form a unified MICE corridor—a seamless ecosystem where event planners can think bigger, plan smarter and execute flawlessly.

Naik pointed out, “We have been leveraging our combined inventory of 881 rooms and a 15,000 sq ft convention center to position Whitefield as a leading MICE destination. Our ability to offer 700+ rooms per night under one brand allows us to host large-scale delegations, product launches and big medical conferences with ease and consistency.” ➔

Setting stage for global events

Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield is witnessing an acceleration in incentive-driven corporate travel business from GCC region.

By MT Bureau

Breaking away from the conventional business, Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield is experiencing a notable surge in incentive-driven corporate travel and thoughtfully organised group engagements, — especially from countries in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region.

Anjali Naik, Director, Sales and Marketing, Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield said, “Our location in the heart of Whitefield’s IT corridor gives us a strategic advantage in catering to this demand. What differentiates us is our ability to personalise every detail from culturally inspired welcome rituals to well-planned group itineraries ensuring each experience is both globally aligned and locally relevant.”

Affirming that the dual capability of managing both large-scale corporate events and social celebrations like weddings, positions Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield uniquely in the market, Naik explained, “Weddings, for instance are becoming more intimate



With 520 rooms, the hotel, proudly holds the title of Karnataka’s largest single hotel inventory for large-scale buyouts

ANJALI NAIK, Director, Sales and Marketing, Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield

Tap the big ticket boom

Big-ticket events have evolved from mere glitzy spectacles into powerful catalysts for tourism growth, innovation and long-term resilience, reshaping MICE opportunities.



Left to Right: SanJeet, Director, DDP Group; Dev Karvat, Founder & CEO, Asego Global Assistance; Noor Ahmad Hamid, CEO, PATA; H.E. Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority and Sebastien Doussin, SVP, Global Travel Services & Destination Management at ATM 2025

By MT Bureau

At the Arabian Travel Market 2025, a high-energy panel titled ‘The Big Ticket Events – Global Impact and Learnings’ shed light on a powerful truth: mega events are no longer just crowd-pullers; they are economic engines and branding platforms for the MICE industry. Moderated by **SanJeet**, Director, DDP Group, the session brought together top minds from tourism, insurance and destination management to unpack the potential of these blockbuster gatherings.

“Big ticket events are not just expensive to attend or organise; they are a magnet for tourism growth and a blueprint for economic diversification,” opened SanJeet, setting the tone for a conversation that resonated with corporates, hoteliers and event planners alike.

DRIVING ECONOMIC STRATEGY

H.E. Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority,

emphasised that such events play a strategic role beyond numbers. “You cannot measure the Return on Investment (ROI) of big-ticket events through direct sales only. It is about brand positioning, global exposure and aligning with your destination’s long-term vision,” he said. He further stressed the need for governments to act as facilitators, stating, “UAE thrives on public-private partnerships, where regulations are designed with the industry’s feedback at the core.”

INSURANCE SHIFT

Bringing in the perspective of ‘protection,’ **Dev Karvat**, Founder & CEO, Asego Global Assistance, opined, “Standard silver-gold-platinum insurance packages are outdated. Today’s travellers want event-specific coverage—from cancellations to missed flights to on-ground emergencies.” His team recently developed event-centric insurance plans catering specifically to attendees of global events. Highlighting that a brand’s product should be curated as per the changing needs of the industry,

he added, “If your product is not relevant, it is not even in the game,” he added.

TECHNOLOGY AT CORE

Underlining, technology is another factor behind the core transformation of the event sector, **Sebastien Doussin**, SVP, Global Travel Services & Destination Management, dnata, pointed out that technology is both a disruptor and an enabler. “We have moved from static ticketing to dynamic, user-driven platforms. Apps now let you upgrade, split tickets and access live content in ways that elevate the entire experience,” he said. On whether technology deters physical attendance, Doussin responded, “Far from it. It amplifies engagement. Think F1 in Abu Dhabi—it is now a full-blown entertainment experience, not just a race.”



{ Big ticket events are not just expensive to attend or organise; they are a magnet for tourism growth and a blueprint for economic diversification }

CULTURE & REGIONAL TENSIONS

Noor Ahmad Hamid, CEO, PATA, spoke about the balancing act between exclusivity and regional collaboration. Citing the Taylor Swift concert in Singapore, which barred other ASEAN nations from hosting her, he reflected, “Big-ticket events are now being used as destination-defining tools. But destinations must ensure long-term local impact, not just the media buzz.” He underscored the evolving definition of ‘big ticket’, mentioning

Bangkok’s 50+ annual concerts, many of which cater to youth and boost extended stays.

For stakeholders, the message is clear: think bigger, plan smarter and align with the high-impact wave. Whether it is about curating immersive experiences, integrating tech, or building crisis-ready insurance models, the opportunities are as large as the events themselves. As H.E. Al Midfa aptly concluded, “It is not just about hosting an event. It is about building legacy.” ➔



French elegance in BKC

Marking 13 years of operation in Mumbai's Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC), Sofitel Mumbai BKC continues to blend luxury with timeless French flair.



By Hazel Jain

Reflecting on the last 13 years, **Manish Dayya**, General Manager, Sofitel Mumbai BKC, winner of 'Outstanding Leadership in Luxury Hospitality' at the India Travel Awards 2024, said, "Over the past 13 years, Sofitel Mumbai BKC has woven modern luxury into its DNA while holding firm to our roots of heartfelt hospitality and French elegance." He explained, "Operationally, innovation has been our compass—digital check-ins, personalised concierge services and seamless guest journeys are now hallmarks of our offering. But beyond technology, it is about intuition; anticipating needs before they are voiced." Shifting focus to events, his tone warmed. He shared, "Culinary storytelling defines us today. Whether it is a Michelin-starred chef collaborating with local spice masters or a pop-up celebrating Maharashtra's monsoon harvest, our events blend global techniques with India's soul. Every gathering, corporate or intimate, is a canvas for personalised narratives."



Hinting at the bold transformations after 13 years, Dayya revealed, “We are actively exploring an expansion of our inventory, which includes the addition of state-of-the-art banqueting spaces, new restaurant concepts and best-in-class rooms that reflect evolving lifestyle preferences including plans for refurbishment of the rooms and other existing spaces to ensure every visit feels both familiar and inspiring.”

REDEFINING WEDDINGS

Dayya observed that the Indian wedding is no longer a spectacle—it is an anthology of curated moments. “With Jio World Convention Centre’s (JWCC) rise in popularity as a venue, couples prioritise emotional resonance over sheer scale. A wedding here might span a week: rooftop cocktail nights under fairy lights, mehendi ceremonies with live folk artists and receptions, where menus narrate family stories,” he explained.

CHANGING LANDSCAPE

BKC is not just Mumbai’s financial nerve—it is now a global crossroads of culture and commerce. He explained,



Manish Dayya, General Manager, Sofitel Mumbai BKC, receiving ‘Outstanding Leadership in Luxury Hospitality’ at India Travel Awards 2024

“We are exploring an expansion of our inventory, which includes addition of state-of-the-art banqueting spaces.”

MANISH DAYYA, General Manager, Sofitel Mumbai BKC

“With the rise of iconic landmarks such as the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre (NMACC), JWCC and Jio World Plaza, BKC has transformed from a corporate hub into a vibrant

destination for global conventions, high-end retail, cultural performances and luxury experiences.” For Sofitel Mumbai BKC, this milieu presents an exciting opportunity. The proximity to JWCC and NMACC has opened doors to new guest segments from global business travellers and conference delegates to artists, dignitaries and cultural patrons. It allows the brand to position the hotel not just as a place to stay but as a preferred partner for culture, commerce and community.

TRAVEL ADVISORS

Dayya highlighted that micro-influencers as powerful storytellers who help convey the hotel’s unique blend of heartfelt hospitality, cultural links and committed luxury to the right audience. “They do not just showcase a place, they shape perception and build aspirational value through lived experiences. Travel advisors also play a parallel role; they are the original influencers, trusted by their clients for tailored recommendations; these voices influence decision-making in impactful ways,” he explained.

Hotels are no longer pitstops—they are portals of experiences, Dayya stressed. “At Sofitel Mumbai BKC, we are not just hosting guests; we are crafting memories that linger long after checkout. Our mission is to ensure every stay, event, or meal feels like a chapter in someone’s unforgettable story,” he concluded. ➔





Putting quiet corners on wedding maps

Radisson Hotel Group's strategic expansion into hidden gems across India is attracting wedding & MICE segment to tier II cities.

By Hazel Jain

With about 15,000 keys and 130 operating hotels in India so far, Radisson Hotel Group (RHG) will focus on opening another 20 hotels across the country this year.

Nikhil Sharma, Managing Director & Chief Operating Officer (South Asia), Radisson Hotel Group, said, "The new destinations, where we are now open includes Saputara, Khopoli and Karjat in Maharashtra." Explaining why RHG is focusing on tier II cities, he averred, "India is not limited to its metros; if you

want to grow in India, you have to grow in its tier II, III and IV cities and create new destinations, which we are doing. We believe in the 'Bharat' story and that is why more than 50 per cent of our hotels are in smaller cities such as Katra, Amritsar, Ayodhya and Varanasi."

Highlighting the brand's latest offering, Sharma revealed, "We have introduced a new initiative called 'The Art of Weddings'. Today's couples are rewriting the rules—our research shows that over 42 per cent prefer to self-fund their weddings and focus on creating meaningful experiences. This initiative



NIKHIL SHARMA
MD & Chief Operating Officer
(South Asia), Radisson Hotel Group

is designed precisely for them, offering end-to-end wedding curation reflecting their unique stories and values.”

JEWEL ON HIGHWAY

Tucked near the Gujarat border, Saputara remains one of Maharashtra's unexplored gem. Although it is currently picking up as a destination but since the opening in June 2024, Radisson Resort Hatgad Saputara has attracted many destination weddings and MICE events. Pointing out the reasons why people prefer this venue, **Poonam Nair**, General Manager, Radisson Resort Hatgad Saputara, said, “We get a lot of weddings from Nashik, Surat, Vapi, Mumbai, Pune and even Nagpur as we are centrally located between Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Saputara is still not very commercialised and offers organic food. Moreover, we are a pure vegetarian hotel, which really works for us as our clientele is largely from communities that prefer vegetarian menu. However, we also have a menu with plant-based meat.”



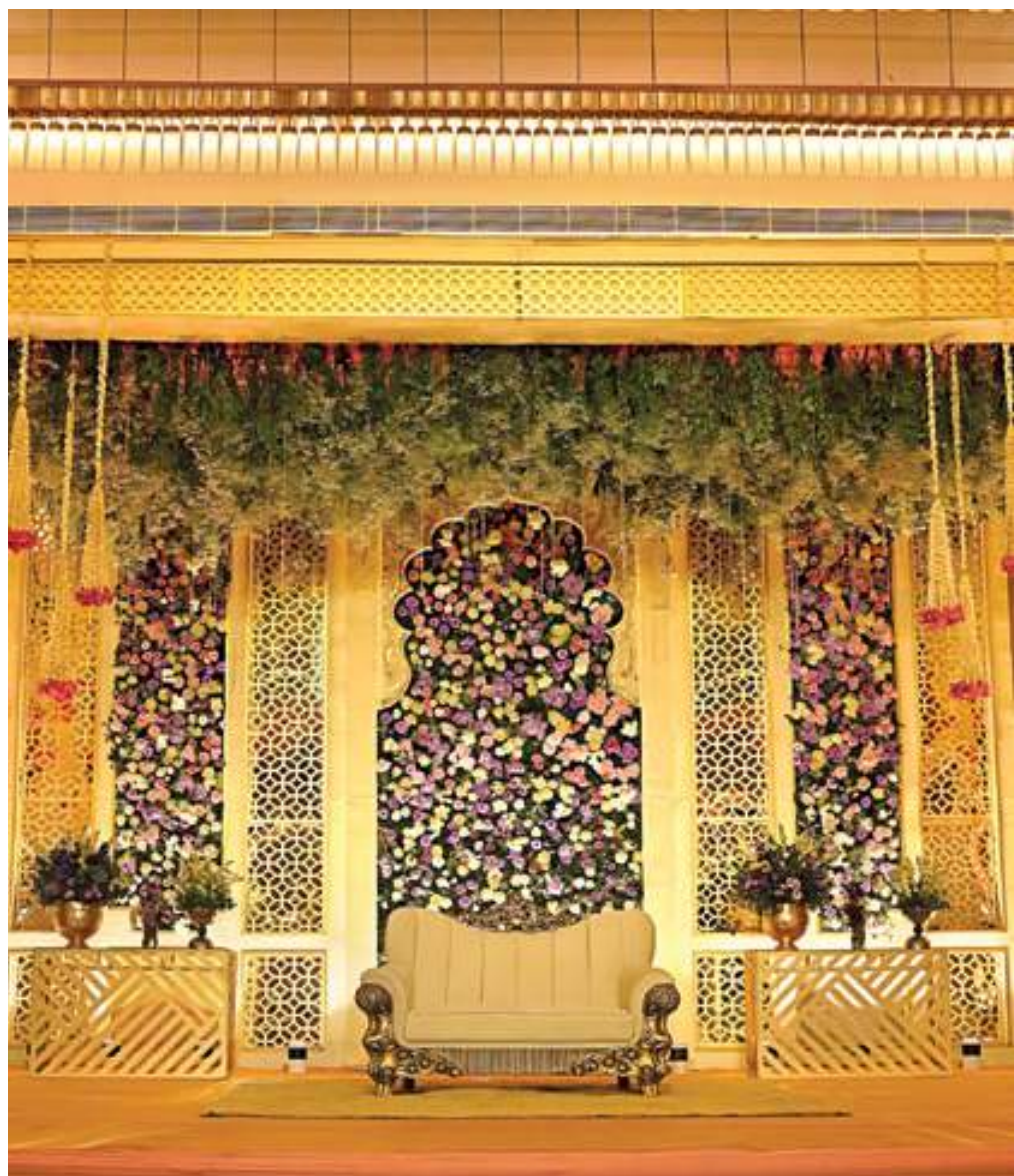
POONAM NAIR

General Manager, Radisson Resort Hatgad Saputara



ANKUR MEHROTRA

General Manager, Radisson Blu Hotel, Guwahati



**Radisson Blu
Hotel, Guwahati,
is the first 5-star
hotel in the city
with 200 keys**

Nair added that MICE is not that big a segment at the moment because people think Saputara is far from Bombay and Pune. “However, we are just five hours drive from Bombay and Pune and with the Samrudhi Expressway coming up, we believe we will get more MICE business,” she said.

GATEWAY FOR NORTHEAST

Kolkata used to be the gateway for

the northeastern region but Guwahati has completely taken over, making it a hot tub of commercial activity. **Ankur Mehrotra**, General Manager, Radisson Blu Hotel, Guwahati, is proud to say this is the first 5-star hotel in his part of the country with 200 keys and five F&B outlets and is currently undergoing expansion. “We have new convention facilities up and running with 75,000 sq ft of banqueting space plus an open-air garden. We will also be adding another 85 keys, taking the total number to 300 keys. Guwahati and Assam overall does around 80-85 per cent year-to-date occupancy and the segmentation for this is 40 per cent from government sector, MICE and of course weddings,” he said, explaining, “This is why this year we are focusing on weddings.” ➔

MOVEMENTS



**PRACHOOM
TANTIPRASERTSUK**

President, TICA (2025–2026)

Prachoom Tantiprasertsuk, VP, Operations (Central & Southern Thailand) and Government & Business Relations at Dusit International, has been appointed as the President of Thailand Incentive and Convention Association (TICA) for 2025–2026. She brings an extensive industry experience of 30 years to her new role. Drawing on Dusit's four core pillars—Service, Locality, Well-being and Sustainability—she aims to embed these values into TICA's evolving national MICE strategy.



**CHRIS CARTER-
CHAPMAN**

Event Director
WTM London

Chris Carter-Chapman has been appointed as the Event Director of World Travel Market (WTM) London. With 15 years of experience in media and events, Chris has held senior roles including Head of Content, Commercial Director and Event Director, managing events across Europe, North and South America. In his previous role at Centaur Media, he led major marketing events like Festival of Marketing. His proven commercial acumen is going to be instrumental in leading WTM's continued growth.



SAURABH SHUKLA

Head of Sales
Messe Berlin India

Saurabh Shukla has been appointed Head of Sales at Messe Berlin India. He will lead sales for ITB India and contribute to the growth of ITB Asia from the Indian market. With expertise in forging strategic alliances, in his new role, Shukla will engage closely with tourism boards and travel brands to amplify India's presence in international market. His appointment reflects Messe Berlin's focus on India's booming travel sector and its intent to drive international partnerships and visibility.



SANDEEP JOHRI

Area General Manager,
Karnataka, Accor

Accor has appointed Sandeep Johri as Area General Manager – Karnataka. With a distinguished hospitality career spanning over 30 years, including 20+ years in senior leadership roles, Sandeep will lead Accor's strategic and operational initiatives across its Karnataka portfolio. In addition to his current role as General Manager of Novotel & Ibis Bengaluru Outer Ring Road, he will oversee Grand Mercure Bengaluru Gopalan Mall, Grand Mercure Bangalore, Grand Mercure Mysore, and ibis Styles Mysuru.



NIBU MATHEW

General Manager
Hyatt Regency Trivandrum

Hyatt Regency Trivandrum has appointed Nibu Mathew as its new General Manager. With over two decades of cross-continental experience, Mathew has held leadership roles at renowned brands including Hyatt, Marriott, Starwood, Shangri-La and IHG. Known for his operational expertise, people-centric leadership and deep insight into luxury hospitality, he will frame strategies to elevate the hotel's market presence and is expected to set fresh benchmarks for the brand.



PRASOON PANDEY

General Manager
The Leela Palace Udaipur

Prasoon Pandey has been appointed as the General Manager of The Leela Palace Udaipur. He is known for his expertise in operations driven leadership roles, shaped by his experiences across top city and leisure destinations. In his previous role at The Leela, he has played an important role in enhancing guest journeys, strengthening team culture and supporting sustainability efforts. In his new role, Pandey will drive deeper engagement across guest and community touchpoints.



SHREESH MISHRA

General Manager
Fortune Select SG
Highway Ahmedabad

Fortune Select SG Highway Ahmedabad has appointed Shreesh Mishra as General Manager. With over 12 years of experience across hospitality brands like Accor, Hyatt, Taj and Sayaji—Mishra will oversee hotel operations, the addition of 14 rooms and a new restaurant. Known for his people-first leadership, innovation and commitment to personalised service, he will be instrumental in enhancing guest satisfaction and operational excellence in line with ITC Hotels' 'Responsible Luxury' philosophy.



DHANANJAY NANGARE

Director of Rooms
Sheraton Grand Pune
Bund Garden Hotel

Sheraton Grand Pune Bund Garden Hotel has appointed Dhananjay Nangare as Director of Rooms. Known for his leadership skills, innovation and excellence in guest service, Nangare's strong analytical, communication and interpersonal skills will be instrumental in elevating operational standards and guest satisfaction. In his new role, he will oversee all aspects of the rooms division—including front office, housekeeping and guest services—ensuring seamless experiences at every touchpoint.



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