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# Events in an Era of Conflict: India's MICE Opportunity

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SOTC Travel's MICE Strengthens Focus on Australia

Hospitality Leaders Converge at HICSA 2026



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## CONVENTION THEME

Stewards of Standards

## CONVENTION TITLE

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## CONVENTION INSPIRATIONS

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## CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS:

- Unveiling “Stewards of Standards” via Concept Presentation by the Experts.
- Interdisciplinary Panel Discussion on “Leadership in the Art and Science of Housekeeping”.
- Housekeeping Design Thinking Workshops.
- Knowledge-Oriented Product Exhibitions.
- Personal Storytelling Stage Related to Stewards of Standards.
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The International Meeting landscape has always been a barometer of economic confidence and international cooperation. Today, however, it finds itself navigating an increasingly complex terrain shaped by geopolitical tensions, shifting alliances, and evolving security considerations, amid rising costs. For an industry built on the seamless movement of people, ideas, and investments, uncertainty is no longer an exception—it is becoming part of the operating environment. Even as planners and stakeholders recalibrate strategies, there is a visible shift toward adaptability—diversifying destinations, strengthening regional collaborations, and embracing hybrid formats that mitigate risk while sustaining engagement. India, in particular, stands at a crossroad, with its growing infrastructure, policy support, and strong domestic market positioning it as a reliable hub amid global volatility.

In this issue, we take a closer look at how geopolitical realities are influencing decision-making across meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions. The upcoming initiative by the Indian Exhibition Industry Association is a testament to the sector's forward-looking approach—bringing stakeholders together to exchange ideas, address challenges, and unlock new opportunities. Such platforms are critical in reinforcing confidence and fostering collaboration at a time when it is needed most. As the MICE ecosystem evolves, one thing remains clear: while uncertainty may shape the present, innovation and collective resolve will define the future.



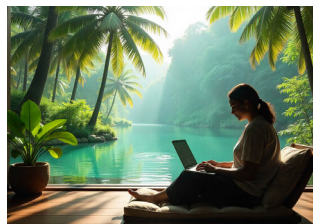
Happy Reading..

Rohit Hangal  
Managing Editor

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# FAITH to Host its Second Conclave on 16–17 July 2026

## ■ MP BUREAU

Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality (FAITH) has announced the holding of its second conclave on 16th and 17th July at the Taj Palace Hotel, Delhi. The two-day event aims to bring together key stakeholders from across the travel, tourism, aviation and hospitality sectors to deliberate on the future roadmap of India's tourism industry.

Building on the success of its inaugural edition in August, 2025, which was attended by multiple Union ministers, senior bureaucrats and tourism and hospitality industry luminaries, the FAITH Conclave 2026 will serve as a dynamic platform for industry leaders, policymakers and experts to engage in meaningful discussions on critical issues impacting the sector. The conclave will focus on and deliberate on strengthening



industry collaboration, enhancing global competitiveness and exploring innovative strategies for sustainable growth in Indian tourism.

The event will feature multiple high-impact sessions, panel discussions and keynote addresses

by eminent speakers from government and industry. Key themes are expected to include transportation, technology, talent, transformation and tourism enablers in the Indian tourism industry, which allow us to meet the potential this country holds.

Senior leaders and representatives from various ministries, state tourism boards, airlines, hospitality groups, travel companies and allied sectors are expected to participate, making it one of the most significant gatherings of the tourism industry in India.

# IATO to Host 41st Annual Convention in Visakhapatnam

## ■ MP BUREAU



The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) is set to host its 41st Annual Convention from 10th to 13th September 2026 in Visakhapatnam. The flagship industry gathering will be hosted with the full support of the Government of Andhra Pradesh. Key state leaders, including Kandula Durgesh, Minister of Tourism, Culture & Cinematography; Ajay Jain, Special Chief Secretary (Tourism & Culture); and Amrapali Kata, CEO of the Andhra Pradesh Tourism Authority.

Ravi Gosain, President of IATO, said that the theme and key highlights are being carefully curated to address emerging opportunities and challenges shaping the tourism sector.

The Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach will serve as the official venue, hosting registrations, the inaugural ceremony, business sessions, and evening programs. The Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh and the Union Minister of Tourism, Government of India, along with senior officials from the Ministry of Tourism, are expected to grace the inaugural session on 10th September 2026. Representatives from approximately 17–18 State tourism departments will also participate. Highlighting the scale of the event, Sanjay Razdan, Vice President, IATO, stated that the association aims to attract 900–1000 delegates from across the country. Curated post-convention tours will showcase Andhra Pradesh's diverse

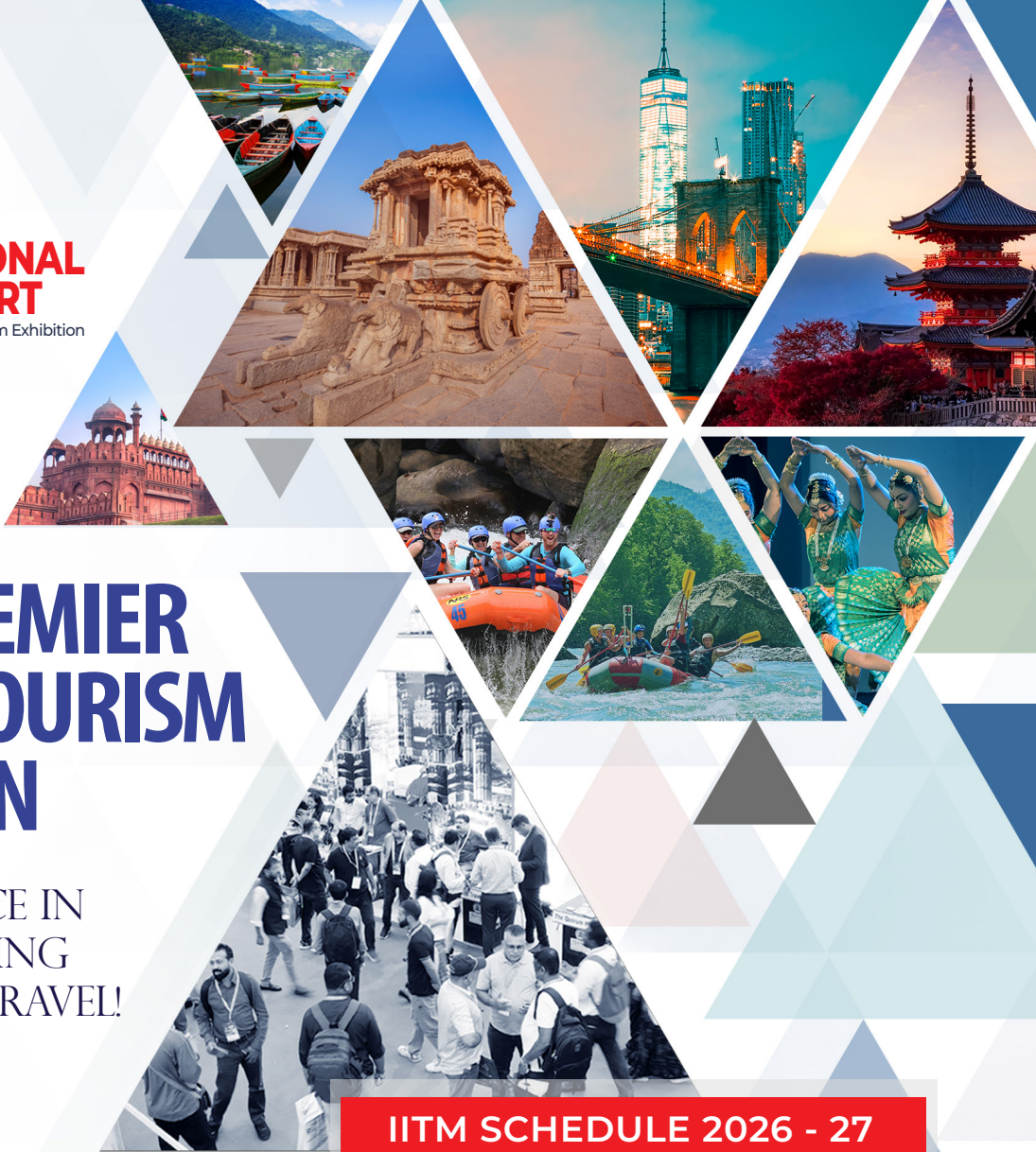
tourism offerings, enabling stakeholders to promote the state in domestic and international markets. The three-day convention will feature high-powered business sessions bringing together industry leaders, policymakers, and experts to deliberate on critical issues shaping the future of tourism. The program will also include the "IATO Run for Responsible Tourism," recognition awards across multiple categories, and vibrant evening entertainment.

With its strategic focus, strong participation, and rich cultural backdrop, the 41st IATO Annual Convention is poised to be a landmark event, reinforcing India's position as a leading global tourism destination.



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HYDERABAD	03, 04, 05 DEC 2026
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# Hospitality Leaders Converge at HICSA 2026 to Chart the Future of the Industry



## MP BUREAU

The Hotel Investment Conference South Asia (HICSA) 2026 concluded successfully at the Grand Hyatt Mumbai Hotel & Residences, bringing together over 800 hospitality leaders for two days of candid conversations, strategic insights and industry-defining dialogue.

The conference opened with a powerful keynote by Manav Thadani, Chairman of Hotelivate, who set the tone with a session titled Leadership in a World on Fire. Drawing from insights gathered from more than 100 industry leaders, the keynote underscored a central theme that resonated throughout the conference: volatility is no longer a phase but the new baseline for leadership.

The Signature Workshops offered focused discussions tailored to

key stakeholders. The Owners' Only Meet explored the evolving role of operators, balancing debt and sustainability, and navigating design costs and legal complexities. The HOSI General Manager's Workshop highlighted the transformation of the GM's role into that of a business leader, with sessions powered by Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne emphasising adaptability, AI-led transformation and evolving profitability metrics.

Leadership perspectives took centre stage during "Insights from the Corner Office." In conversation with Latha Venkatesh, Puneet Chhatwal of Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) discussed resilience in a disrupted world. William Heinecke of Minor International highlighted India as central to the group's growth journey, while Arjun Oberoi shared insights into building enduring

luxury brands. A fireside chat on the future of ITC Hotels outlined the company's asset-right growth strategy and strong focus on talent and food and beverage leadership. Panel discussions addressed the forces shaping hospitality today. Moderated by Achin Khanna, industry leaders, including Rajeev Menon, examined geopolitical tensions, AI disruption and the ongoing talent challenge. A development trends panel led by Uttam Dave featured leaders from Marriott International, Hilton and Radisson Hotel Group, highlighting the rise of flexible models, conversions and asset-light strategies across global markets.

The conference also celebrated excellence and leadership. Amitabh Kant received the HICSA Lifetime Achievement Award in conversation with Dr. Jyotsna Suri, recognising his contributions to India's tourism and glob-

al positioning. The MakeMyTrip General Manager of the Year Awards honoured outstanding leaders across segments, while the HICSA Hotels of the Year Awards recognised top-performing properties across seven categories.

Beyond the sessions, curated experiences added vibrancy to the event. Mentalist Suhani Shah captivated attendees, while networking events included the closing cocktails at ITC Maratha and the after hours gathering at Bombay Swim Club at ICONIQA Mumbai International Airport.

HICSA 2026 reaffirmed the hospitality sector's resilience and forward momentum. From redefining leadership to exploring new growth models and evolving guest expectations, the conference showcased an industry that continues to adapt, innovate and shape the future of global travel and hospitality.

# Beyond Houseboats: Kerala's Hospitality Awakening

■ NATASHA SREERANJ

Tranquil backwaters, Ayurveda traditions, monsoon landscapes, and a philosophy of slow travel have long shaped Kerala's tourism story. For decades, the state positioned itself as a serene landscape, attracting travellers seeking relaxation and rejuvenation. Today, however, Kerala's hospitality industry is moving beyond its traditional identity and evolving into a more dynamic, year-round travel economy powered by wellness tourism, experiential travel, destination events and a surge in domestic demand. The transformation is not merely about recovery after the pandemic; it signals a deeper structural shift that is redefining the future of hospitality in the state.

Kerala's tourism revival has been swift and confident. Domestic travellers played a decisive role in reigniting the sector, returning in large numbers as soon as travel restrictions eased. Families rediscovered road trips, young professionals embraced working remotely from scenic locations, and wellness travellers resumed long-stay Ayurvedic retreats. This surge in domestic travel provided a strong foundation for the hospitality sector to rebuild and expand. The impact of this recovery is vis-

ible across the state. Hotels and resorts have reported stronger occupancy levels, while many properties have undertaken renovation, upgrades and expansions to meet rising expectations. Investor confidence has returned, and the industry is no longer operating in recovery mode but has begun planning for long-term growth. Perhaps most importantly, the resurgence of travel has helped the sector move away from its earlier dependence on seasonal international tourism, creating a more balanced demand cycle.

One of Kerala's most distinctive strengths lies in the diversity of its accommodation landscape. Unlike many destinations where large hotel chains dominate, Kerala's hospitality ecosystem is layered and deeply connected to local communities. Luxury resorts coexist with boutique eco-lodges, heritage mansions, plantation stays and family-run homestays. Even houseboats have evolved into floating hotels, offering travellers a unique accommodation experience on the backwaters.

Homestays have emerged as a defining pillar of the state's tourism model. They represent a shift from conventional hospitality to immersive travel, where visitors experience local cuisine, traditions and everyday life. This model has

not only enriched the visitor experience but has also distributed tourism income across communities, strengthening the social and economic impact of the sector. This blending of professional hospitality with community participation has helped Kerala build a reputation as an experiential destination where travel feels personal and authentic. The traveller visiting Kerala today is very different from the one who visited a decade ago. Evolving lifestyles, new work cultures and changing travel motivations are reshaping demand in significant ways. Remote work has turned hill stations such as Munnar and Wayanad into extended-stay destinations. Reliable internet connectivity and long-stay infrastructure are now essential features, reflecting the rise of the workation traveller. The visitors often stay for weeks rather than days, bringing stability to occupancy patterns beyond peak seasons.

At the same time, wellness tourism has moved from niche to mainstream. Kerala's global reputation for Ayurveda has positioned the state as a leading wellness destination. Travellers increasingly visit not only for leisure but also for preventive health, detox programmes and holistic healing. Wellness travellers tend to stay longer and spend more, making

them particularly valuable for the hospitality industry.

Experiential travel has also gained prominence. Visitors increasingly seek meaningful activities such as village walks, culinary trails, kayaking, plantation experiences and cultural interactions. Passive sightseeing is gradually giving way to immersive travel, encouraging hospitality providers to design curated experiences that connect guests more deeply with the destination. Another emerging segment is celebratory travel. Destination weddings, boutique corporate retreats and intimate events are gaining traction, with Kerala's natural landscapes providing a compelling backdrop. This shift is positioning the state as an attractive location for small and mid-sized events and contributing to the growth of the MICE segment.

Kerala is entering a new investment cycle in hospitality, driven by growing demand and renewed confidence among developers and hotel brands. The focus of development is gradually shifting from large conventional hotels to smaller, experience-driven properties that align with evolving traveller expectations. Boutique luxury resorts, eco-friendly developments and wellness retreats are increasingly shaping the pipeline. Northern Kerala, which historical



15<sup>th</sup>



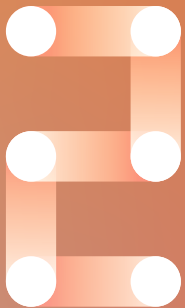
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# 15th IEIA Open Seminar & Exhibition Services Expo 2026 to Unite Global Exhibition Industry Leaders



## ■ MP BUREAU

The 15th edition of the IEIA Open Seminar & Exhibition Services Expo 2026 is set to bring together the most influential voices and innovators from the exhibition industry under one roof, reaffirming its reputation as the premier international conclave of India's exhibition ecosystem.

Organised by the Indian Exhibition Industry Association (IEIA), the annual open seminar has evolved into a flagship gathering that connects industry captains, decision-makers, and solution providers from India and across the world. With the theme "When the Right Dots Meet, Industry Moves," the 2026 edition promises to spark meaningful collaborations, powerful conversations, and future-focused strategies for the sector.

Now in its 15th edition, the event is expected to welcome more

than 1,200 industry leaders and international delegates, making it the largest and most influential gathering of professionals in the Indian exhibition industry. The event will bring together CEOs, Managing Directors, and key decision-makers, including exhibition organisers, heads of trade bodies and sectoral associations, government officials, service providers, and venue representatives from across India and around the globe. Participants will convene to discuss opportunities, explore collaborations, and develop strategies to accelerate the growth of this dynamic industry.

Over the course of two dynamic days, attendees will experience an engaging lineup of knowledge sessions, expert-led panel discussions, and the Exhibition Services Expo, showcasing the latest innovations, services, and solutions shaping the

future of exhibitions and events. The programme will also feature tech-enabled pre-scheduled B2B meetings designed to facilitate targeted networking, strategic partnerships, and meaningful business opportunities.

Participants can look forward to discovering groundbreaking innovations, new product launches, and high-impact networking opportunities within a collaborative environment that encourages knowledge exchange and industry advancement.

As India continues to strengthen its position as one of the world's fastest-growing economies, the IEIA Open Seminar & Exhibition Services Expo serves as a powerful platform to highlight the country's expanding exhibition landscape and its growing role in driving global business engagement.

# BAAFEx 2027 to Showcase Asia-Pacific's Next Chapter in Business Aviation



## MP BUREAU

The Business Aviation Asia Forum & Expo (BAAFEx) will return for its second edition from March 22–24, 2027, signalling a new chapter of expansion for the Asia-Pacific business aviation sector. Organised by Experia Events, the upcoming edition is set to build on the strong momentum of its successful debut and reflect the region's accelerating growth, rising wealth and increasing cross-border business activity.

The 2027 edition is expected to attract more than 3,000 industry professionals and trade visitors, with over 75 participating companies across exhibitions, sponsorships and the conference programme. The event will also feature a curated conference ad-

ressing critical topics shaping the sector, including sustainability, airport infrastructure and evolving regulatory frameworks. A static aircraft display is planned, with additional details to be announced.

Leck Chet Lam, Managing Director, Experia Events, says: "BAAFEx was launched to fill a clear gap in Asia Pacific's business aviation landscape, and the response to the first edition exceeded expectations. With the region entering a new phase of growth, the 2027 edition will be larger in scale, reflecting the momentum of the market and the increasing importance of bringing the industry together."

Industry data underscores the region's strong trajectory. According to Asian Sky Group, the Asia-Pacific business jet fleet

grew by 1.5% last year to reach 1,168 aircraft, up from 1,151 in 2024. India led regional expansion with the largest net addition of aircraft, while Vietnam recorded one of the fastest growth rates, highlighting the rising importance of emerging Southeast Asian markets. Southeast Asia remains the region's second-largest business aviation market after Greater China.

Against this backdrop, Singapore continues to strengthen its role as the region's premier business aviation hub. The city-state hosts more than 130 aerospace companies supported by a workforce of over 22,000 professionals. According to the Singapore Economic Development Board, the country's aerospace output exceeded S\$18 billion in 2024, growing 19% year on year and

accounting for roughly 10% of global maintenance, repair and overhaul output and close to 20% of global engine MRO output.

BAAFEx builds on the strong foundation established by its inaugural 2025 edition, which welcomed more than 2,000 visitors and over 50 companies from across the global business aviation ecosystem. The event forms part of Singapore's broader aviation landscape alongside major platforms such as the Singapore Airshow, further cementing the country's position as a trusted convening point for the global aviation community.

With demand rising and the region entering a new phase of development, BAAFEx 2027 is poised to play a key role in shaping the future of business aviation in the Asia Pacific.

# SOTC Travel's MICE Strengthens Focus on Australia



## ■ MP BUREAU

With strong air connectivity, world-class infrastructure, and a diverse range of experiences spanning wildlife, luxury, culture, and adventure, Australia continues to position itself as a highly attractive destination for India's rapidly growing MICE segment. In a strategic initiative to inspire its top corporate clients, SOTC Travel, a leading omnichannel travel and tourism company, partnered with Tourism Australia to host a high-impact MICE engagement in Mumbai.

The event witnessed strong participation from CXOs and senior executives representing leading multinational corporations and Indian corporate houses across sectors, including BFSI, paints, automotive, FMCG, electronics, manufacturing, and trade. The engagement brought together key stakeholders from Tourism

Australia and SOTC Travel, creating a dynamic platform for meaningful interactions and deeper engagement with the Australian tourism ecosystem.

Representatives from Tourism Australia, along with partners including Singapore Airlines and Business Events Sydney, showcased Australia's evolving MICE offerings and enhanced accessibility for Indian travellers.

With Indian corporates increasingly seeking unique and experiential destinations for global off-sites and incentive travel, Australia stands out for its seamless connectivity, premium venues, and distinctive experiences. The initiative aligns with SOTC Travel's strategic focus on expanding its MICE portfolio and driving demand for high-potential long-haul destinations such as Australia. SOTC Travel has, in the past, delivered customised programs incorporating unique experiences such as Harley Davidson

city rides, the iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge Climb, Sky Feast Fusion dining at Sydney Tower, and exclusive gala dinners at iconic cricket stadiums, including the MCG and SCG, with celebrity cricketers. Corporate itineraries have also featured curated city explorations in vintage cars, helicopter experiences along scenic coastal routes, heritage train journeys such as the Puffing Billy, and bespoke winery engagements in the Yarra Valley. These thoughtfully curated experiences have enabled organisations to create valuable moments for corporate groups and employees, leaving a lasting impression well beyond the program itself.

The event format enabled a seamless blend of business and networking, featuring engaging discussions and one-on-one interactions that allowed participants to explore destination opportunities and customised

MICE solutions.

SD Nandakumar, President & Country Head – Holidays and Corporate Tours, SOTC Travel, said, "India's MICE segment is evolving rapidly, with corporates looking beyond conventional destinations, seeking experiences that inspire, engage and deliver lasting value. This engagement marked our focused effort to strengthen Australia's positioning within the competitive MICE landscape. With its extraordinary landscapes, vibrant cities, and world-class MICE infrastructure, Australia offers a compelling proposition for Indian corporates. At SOTC Travel, we remain committed to delivering customised MICE solutions that cater to the evolving needs of our clients, while ensuring seamless and memorable experiences. We believe this initiative will further reinforce Australia's appeal as a preferred destination for MICE programs, with significant potential for growth in the years ahead."

# Events in an Era of Conflict: India's MICE Opportunity



## ■ ROHIT HANGAL

With no signs of an early closure to the war in the Middle East, as usual, the world of meetings and events has hit another storm. Given the rising energy costs affecting food and travel, is the meeting and events industry ready to face its biggest challenge post-Covid-19?

Quoting the World Travel and Tourism Council, “estimates that the escalating conflict in Iran is already impacting the Travel & Tourism sector across the Middle East by at least US\$600 million per day in international visitor spending, as disruptions to air travel, traveller confidence and regional connectivity affect demand. The Middle East plays

a vital role in global travel, with the region accounting for 5% of global international arrivals and 14% of global international transit traffic. Any disruption affects demand worldwide, which impacts airports and flights, hotels, car rental companies, and cruise lines. The major regional aviation hubs, including Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha and Bahrain, which together normally process around 526,000 passengers per day, have experienced closures and operational disruption as the conflict escalates, significantly affecting regional and global connectivity.” India, though, has been facing the brunt of rising food and beverage costs and has been quite measured in its approach. The airfares have already been a spoiler for anyone planning a conference. As the

norm is, when airfares are high, hotels invariably short-sell and vice versa. With the last couple of bumper seasons, it is probably a law of averages taking over.

The next couple of years will see more rooms being added in the country than ever before. Just last year alone, 550 new hotels were added in the country, with most of them in Tier 2, 3 and 4 cities. With most hotels now going for enhanced banqueting and conferencing space, the event space in India will get more competitive with pressure on rates and occupancies. In spite of all the new developments, Indian hotel inventory will continue to be undersupplied. With new standalone convention centres popping up in cities across the country, hotels will find themselves another com-

petitor. As standalone convention centres get organised and better managed, Indian hotels will find themselves vying for space, exclusivity and rates as well. The rating agency ICRA envisaged a growth of 9-12% in terms of revenue and clearly laid the onus on growing MICE sectors and rising domestic leisure.

The new financial year began soberly with the war clouds in the immediate neighbourhood, with energy resources on a sticky wicket. Most economic indices emanating from the companies are sound, with increased earnings across sectors.

India Tourism, for reasons best known to itself, has drastically cut marketing budgets for both international and domestic markets. Reducing budgets for tourism just

does not make sense. When you reduce budgets in a brutally competitive market, it also brings in an element of national security as we further lose the battle of narratives. On the MICE front, the ministry has introduced 'Meet in India' as a specialised sub-brand within the 'Incredible India' campaign. The press release did add, "This sub-brand hopes to enhance promotional initiatives, showcasing India as an appealing MICE destination equipped with top-tier connectivity, cutting-edge infrastructure, a vibrant knowledge hub and a plethora of distinctive tourist attractions!"

Just building world-class meeting infrastructure is not enough to bring events into the country. The success of 'Meet in India' will lie hugely in marketing the country as a viable, safe and stable meeting host. This will only happen when you back it with a sustained marketing campaign across markets and sectors.

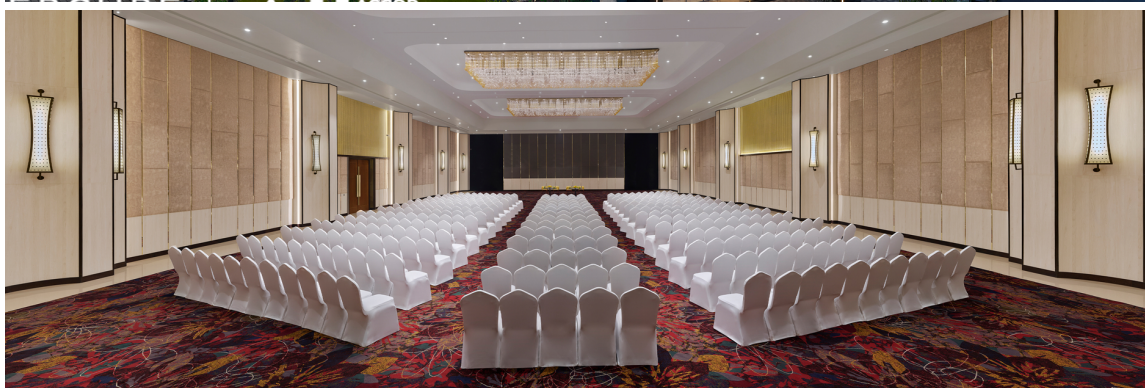
The G20 summit, which was held in India, brought in praise for showcasing the entire country as a meeting venue. Since then, the foot is off the pedal. There has been no consistency in marketing nor any effort to claim headlines. Recently, there has been an effort to revive the Buddh International Circuit in Noida. The Indian sports minister announced the possibility of India once again hosting the F1 as early as 2027. Though it looks unlikely at present, and with the current geopolitical situation, India might once again just make the pitstop. Last time around, India had to lose the opportunity to re-host the F1 due to a bizarre tax policy that treated it as entertainment rather than a sport! The tax laws have not changed yet, but it is a strange world!

The one huge star performer in the event space in the country over the last couple of years has been the world of concerts in In-

dia. A white paper released by the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, "India's Live Events Economy: A Strategic Growth Imperative," said, "India's live events landscape is transforming—from a fragmented sector to a structured and influential pillar of the country's cultural and creative economy. Key trends in the sector include the rise of event tourism, with nearly half a million attendees travelling specifically for live music events—indicating the emergence of a robust music-tourism economy. Premium ticketing segments—such as VIP experiences, curated access, and luxury hospitality—have witnessed over 100% year-on-year growth, pointing to an increasingly experience-driven audience. Participation from Tier-2 cities has surged, driven by multi-city tours and the growing popularity of regional festivals. In 2024, the organised live events segment recorded 15% growth, contributing

an additional ₹13 billion in revenue—establishing it as one of the fastest-growing verticals within India's media and entertainment ecosystem. Large-scale events in the current landscape typically generate approximately 2,000 to 5,000 temporary jobs each, underscoring the sector's growing contribution to employment and skill development."

The report also added that "India is on track to position itself as one of the top five live entertainment destinations globally by 2030!" In the real world, where organising events of this scale in India, where procuring event-based permissions is as good as wading through a sticky quagmire, if we achieve even half of our aspirations, it will signal a huge victory. As someone announced, "From boardrooms to ballrooms—and now to stadiums—India's MICE story is no longer emerging; it's arriving. And of course, increasingly ending with a concert."



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# Building India's Global MICE Brand: Insights from Dr. Nitin Mittal



## ■ ROHIT HANGAL

India's MICE industry is entering a transformative growth phase, driven by infrastructure development, global confidence, and experiential travel demand. Dr. Nitin Mittal, National Coordinator of the Network of Indian MICE Agents (NIMA), shares insights on the sector's evolution, opportunities, challenges, and the association's vision for shaping India into a global MICE powerhouse.

### How would you describe the current state of the MICE industry in India?

The global MICE industry has faced major disruptions—from the pandemic to geopolitical tensions—yet it has emerged stronger and more agile. In India, the sector is witnessing robust momentum fueled by rising corporate travel budgets, expanding infrastructure, and growing international confidence in India as a high-impact business and experiential destination.

### What inspired the formation of NIMA?

NIMA was envisioned as a credible and inclusive platform to give a stronger voice to core MICE operators across India, particularly from Tier 2 and Tier 3 markets. These markets contribute significantly to business volumes but often lack visibility and access. NIMA aims to bridge industry gaps, enhance professionalism, and promote knowledge-driven growth.

### What are the key drivers behind India's rise as a global MICE destination?

Improved international connectivity, world-class convention infrastructure, strong hospitality brands, and proactive government initiatives such as Meet in India power India's growth. The country's unique ability to combine business with culture, luxury, and immersive experiences gives it a distinct competitive advantage.

### Which emerging MICE destinations in India show the most promise?

While Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru remain established hubs, cities like Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Kochi, and Goa are rapidly emerging. These destinations offer upgraded venues, better accessibility, and strong destination narratives that appeal to international planners.

### What are the key initiatives undertaken by NIMA?

NIMA focuses on delivering tangi-

ble value through curated networking forums, knowledge platforms, familiarisation programs, and strategic advocacy. Skill development and market intelligence are also central priorities to help members stay competitive and future-ready.

### How does NIMA facilitate collaboration among stakeholders?

With its rigorous screening framework and free membership exclusively for dedicated MICE operators, NIMA has built strong credibility among global suppliers and tourism boards. The association actively connects corporates, destinations, airlines, hotels, and service providers to enable meaningful business engagement.

### What trends are shaping the MICE industry today?

Experiential incentive travel, sustainability-led planning, shorter booking cycles, unconventional venues, and hybrid event formats are redefining the global and Indian MICE landscape.

### How is technology and AI transforming the sector?

Technology—especially AI—is revolutionising MICE planning through predictive analytics, personalised experiences, virtual site inspections, smart contracting, and enhanced attendee engagement. It is making planning more efficient and experiences more impactful.

### What challenges must the industry address?

Collaborative action is needed to strengthen infrastructure, stan-

dardise contracting practices, build skilled talent, and create sustainable pricing ecosystems—particularly in an era of geopolitical volatility and changing travel dynamics.

### How can India compete with established MICE destinations like Singapore, Dubai, and Thailand?

India must prioritise visa facilitation, seamless logistics, destination branding, competitive pricing, and consistent global marketing. With these in place, India can compete strongly with global leaders.

### How important are international partnerships and roadshows?

They are critical. Strategic partnerships and global roadshows enhance destination visibility, build trust with international planners, and unlock new inbound MICE opportunities.

### What is your vision for India's MICE industry over the next five years?

With continued policy support and private investment, India is well-positioned to become one of the world's leading MICE hubs—defined by scale, innovation, and experiential depth.

### What role will associations like NIMA play in the future?

Associations will evolve beyond networking platforms into strategic enablers—driving thought leadership, advocacy, innovation, and collaboration to build a resilient and globally competitive MICE ecosystem.

# Driving the Future of Mobility: Deepali Dev on ECO Mobility's Growth Story



## ■ NATASHA SREERANJ

Ground mobility in India has evolved rapidly, becoming an essential part of the overall travel and hospitality experience. Today, travellers expect safe, reliable, and seamless transportation as part of their journey, whether for business or leisure. Organised and technology-driven mobility providers are playing a key role in meeting these expectations and shaping the future of corporate travel.

Voyager's World speaks to Deepali Dev, COO, ECO Mobility, in an exclusive interview to understand how the company is improving customer experience, embracing technology, and expanding its presence across India and global markets.

### How has ground mobility evolved within India's travel ecosystem, and what role has ECO Mobility played in shaping this transformation?

Ground mobility in India has undergone a significant shift, from being a fragmented, largely unorganised service to becoming a structured, technology-enabled ecosystem that is now integral to the travel value chain. Today, reliability, safety, and consistency are no longer optional; they are expected. At ECO Mobility, we have been closely aligned with this evolution. With nearly three

decades of experience and operations across 130+ cities in India and 30+ countries globally, we've focused on building a corporate and travel agent-first mobility model that prioritises service standardisation and accountability.

What truly differentiates us is our ability to combine scale with consistency, whether it's managing large enter-

prise travel programs or delivering premium chauffeur-driven experiences. We've also played a key role in formalising the sector by bringing in structured vendor ecosystems, trained chauffeurs, and integrated technology platforms that ensure seamless service delivery.

### In what ways does seamless mobility enhance the overall travel and hospitality experience for today's travellers?

Today's traveller doesn't view mobility as a standalone service; it is an extension of their overall travel and hospitality experience. The journey begins the moment they step out of their home or airport, and any friction at this stage can shape the entire experience. Seamless mobility brings predictability, comfort, and a sense of reassurance. For a business traveller, especially after a long journey, a well-coordinated pickup, a courteous chauffeur, and a smooth ride are as important as the stay itself. In India, we are guided by the philosophy of Atithi Devo Bhava and for us, that extends beyond hospitality into every movement of the guest.

At ECO Mobility, we work closely with hospitality partners, travel agents, and corporates to deliver an integrated experience. With real-time visibility, intuitive booking systems, and a diverse fleet, we

aim to make mobility almost invisible yet deeply felt.

### How is ECO Mobility leveraging technology to improve efficiency, customer experience, and operational scalability?

Technology is central to how we operate, but equally, people remain at the heart of everything we do. Over the years, we have built a full-stack, in-house technology ecosystem that powers our operations, from booking and dispatch to billing and analytics, while ensuring that human judgment and service sensitivity are never lost. Our platforms, including customer interfaces, chauffeur applications, and centralised transport management systems, provide real-time visibility and control. This enables better safety, smarter routing, improved utilisation, and faster response — all supported by trained teams who understand that service is ultimately delivered by people, not systems.

For our clients, this means greater transparency, efficiency, and customisation. API integrations allow seamless alignment with corporate and travel platforms, while data analytics helps optimise mobility patterns. At the same time, our teams continuously adapt these systems to client needs — blending technology with a high-touch service approach. This balance of Hi-Tech and Hi-Touch allows us to scale across geographies while maintaining consistency, reliability, and the human warmth that defines our service ethos.

### What are the key trends shaping the future of travel and corporate mobility in India, particularly with the changing work ecosystem?

We are seeing several structural shifts that are redefining corporate mobility in India. Firstly, the rise of Global Capability Centres

(GCCs are driving demand for organised, reliable employee transportation solutions. Secondly, with the hybrid work culture, travel patterns have become more dynamic, and there's a growing need for flexible, on-demand, and shift-based mobility solutions rather than fixed schedules. The trend of combining business and leisure is also adding to the growth.

Another important trend is the increasing focus on sustainability, with corporates actively exploring EV fleets and greener mobility options. Lastly, there is a clear shift from unorganised to organised players; travellers prioritise safety, compliance, and service quality, areas where structured providers like ECO Mobility have a strong advantage.

### Looking ahead, what are ECO Mobility's strategic priorities and growth outlook for the coming years?

Our focus is firmly on building a future-ready, technology-led mobility platform that can scale sustainably. In the near term, we are prioritising expansion into Tier II and Tier III cities, where demand for organised corporate mobility is growing rapidly. At the same time, we are strengthening our presence in existing markets by deepening relationships with our enterprise clients and increasing wallet share. We are also continuing to invest in technology, talent, and brand building, which are critical enablers of long-term growth. Additionally, expanding our service offerings and enhancing our global footprint remain key priorities. With strong industry tailwinds and a resilient business model, we are confident of capturing a larger share of the growing corporate mobility market and reinforcing our position as a trusted partner in managed mobility solutions.

# Malaysia Announces World Labour Day Celebration 2026 with the Rain Rave Water Music Festival in Kuala Lumpur



## ■ MP BUREAU

Malaysia will continue to move forward in a measured and responsible manner as Kuala Lumpur prepares to host the World Labour Day Celebration with the Rain Rave Water Music Festival from April 30 April to May 2 in Bukit Bintang. The festival presents a vibrant opportunity to welcome visitors from across the region and beyond to participate in a shared cross-cultural experience in Malaysia.

In addition to the flagship celebration in the capital, seven states have confirmed their readiness to organise complementary themed activities tailored to their unique cultural contexts. These include Negeri Sembilan, Johor, Melaka, Kedah, WP Labuan, Pahang and Terengganu, reflecting a nationwide celebration that highlights Malaysia's cultural diversity and tourism strength.

The event is co-organised by Tour-

ism Malaysia and The Fame as part of the broader Visit Malaysia 2026 tourism ecosystem. At a time of global uncertainty, Malaysia continues to prioritise initiatives that sustain economic activity, strengthen industry resilience and ensure tourism growth benefits local businesses and B40 communities.

Positioned as a strategic urban tourism activation, the Rain Rave Water Music Festival celebrates Malaysia's multicultural identity while bringing together industry partners, creative collaborators and commercial stakeholders. The festival is designed to drive visitor traffic and stimulate spending across retail, hospitality and service sectors.

Beyond entertainment, the event integrates Malaysian multicultural elements, local creative talent and curated lifestyle experiences to showcase the country's thriving creative ecosystem. Visitors can look forward to immersive rain-inspired environments, a di-

verse lineup of international and regional DJs alongside Malaysian performers, and curated local markets featuring Malaysian food, culture and creative expression.

Rooted in Malaysian identity, the festival transforms rain — a vital natural element in Malaysia's environment — into a creative and cultural expression. Traditional performances, food and games will highlight the nation's cultural diversity, while the Labour Day timing honours the contributions of working communities. The festival is set to become a signature annual event and a key highlight of Malaysia's tourism calendar, reinforcing the country's image as a youthful and energetic destination. The event is supported by a strong network of public and private stakeholders. Cultural and content contributions are provided by Istana Budaya, Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation, National Department for Culture and

Arts and Department of National Heritage, enhancing the visitor experience through arts, heritage and cultural programming.

Destination promotion is led by Tourism Malaysia, while the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture plays a facilitative and coordinating role alongside relevant authorities to ensure smooth execution, regulatory compliance and public safety. Comprehensive planning includes traffic management, crowd control measures, safety protocols and coordination with enforcement agencies to provide a safe, orderly and well-managed environment for all visitors.

Malaysia remains committed to balancing economic priorities with responsible execution. As the nation navigates a complex global landscape, the focus remains on sustaining growth, strengthening confidence and ensuring Malaysia remains competitive, stable and forward-looking.

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**WILLIAM WALSH**

Chief Executive Officer - IndiGo

The Board of InterGlobe Aviation Limited (IndiGo) has appointed William Walsh as the Chief Executive Officer. In his new role as IndiGo's CEO, Walsh will be responsible for the overall management and strategic direction of the airline with a focus on transformational initiatives to strengthen the operational performance, advance the company's network and commercial strategy while enhancing customer experience.

Commenting on his appointment, Walsh said, "I am delighted to have the opportunity to lead IndiGo. The airline has a strong foundation, a compelling vision and an exceptional reputation. I look forward to partnering with colleagues across the organisation to build a culture of excellence, innovation, collaboration and sustainable value for all stakeholders."



**ANJALI RAUTHAN**

Front Office Manager - Novotel Pune

Novotel Pune has announced the appointment of Anjali Rauthan as Front Office Manager. In her new role at Novotel Pune, Anjali will be responsible for overseeing the front office operations, enhancing guest satisfaction, and leading the team to deliver seamless and memorable guest experiences aligned with the brand's global standards.

Expressing her enthusiasm, Anjali Rauthan said, "I am excited to join Novotel Pune and be part of a brand that is globally recognised for its warm hospitality and guest-centric approach."



**SARITA SINGH**

Front Office Manager - DoubleTree by Hilton

DoubleTree by Hilton Bengaluru Airport has announced the appointment of Sarita Singh as Front Office Manager. In this role, Sarita will oversee all front office functions, including the overall arrival and departure experience, while focusing on strengthening service standards and ensuring seamless coordination across departments to deliver the warm hospitality associated with the DoubleTree by Hilton brand.

Commenting on her appointment, Ms. Singh said, "I am honoured to join DoubleTree by Hilton Bengaluru Airport and look forward to working alongside the team to further elevate the guest experience while upholding the brand's commitment to warm and attentive hospitality."



**ATUL ARORA**

Director of Conference and Events - Eros Hotel New Delhi

Eros Hotel New Delhi has announced the appointment of Atul Arora as the new Director of Conference and Events. With this appointment, Eros Hotel aims to reaffirm its commitment to providing an excellent experience to its patrons and position it as one of the renowned hotels in the capital for luxury events, weddings, conferences and meetings.

Expressing his excitement about joining Eros Hotel, he said, "I am delighted to accept this challenging role. I focus on developing genuinely innovative conference experiences and carefully organised events."



**ABHISHEK SINGH**

Director of Operations - The Leela Gandhinagar

The Leela Gandhinagar welcomes Abhishek Singh as Director of Operations, marking a significant leadership addition to the luxury property's executive team. In his new role, Abhishek will oversee the hotel's day-to-day operations, focusing on enhancing service excellence, optimising performance across departments, and further strengthening the brand's commitment to luxury and personalised hospitality.

Expressing his enthusiasm, Abhishek said, "I look forward to working closely with the team to build on the hotel's strong foundation, deliver exceptional guest experiences, and further strengthen its position as a preferred destination for discerning travellers."



**AYUSH ASHOK AGARWAL**

Director of MICE - Hilton Hotels Bengaluru

Hilton & Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park has announced the appointment of Ayush Ashok Agarwal as Director of MICE. In his new role, Ayush will spearhead the MICE vertical, focusing on driving revenue growth, strengthening client partnerships, and enhancing the hotel's positioning as a preferred venue for corporate and large-scale events.

He will also lead innovative sales strategies, optimise performance, and mentor high-performing teams to deliver exceptional results.

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