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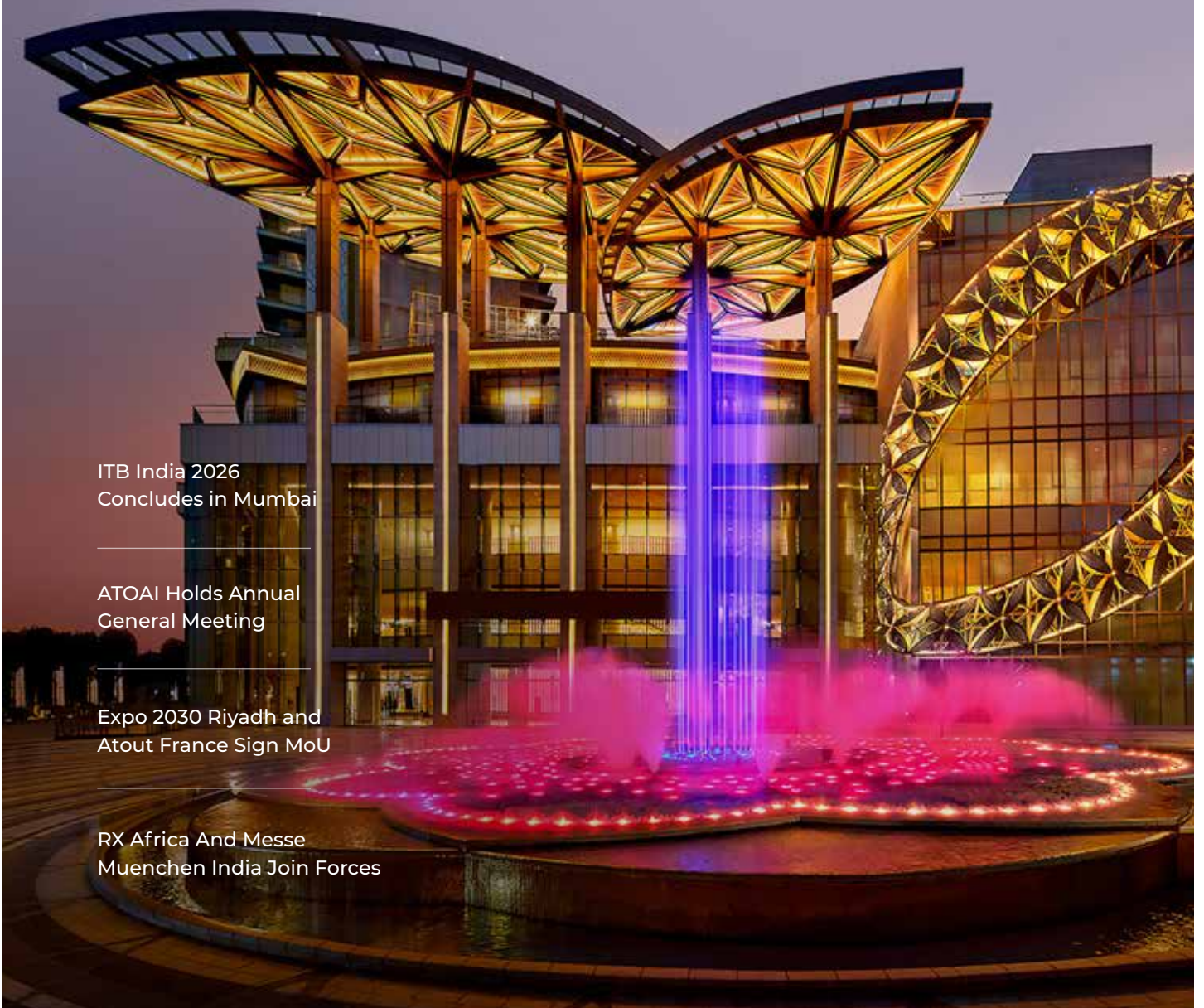
Beyond The Ballroom: The New Face of India's MICE Infrastructure

ITB India 2026
Concludes in Mumbai

ATOAI Holds Annual
General Meeting

Expo 2030 Riyadh and
Atout France Sign MoU

RX Africa And Messe
Muenchen India Join Forces



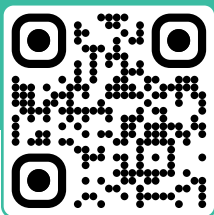
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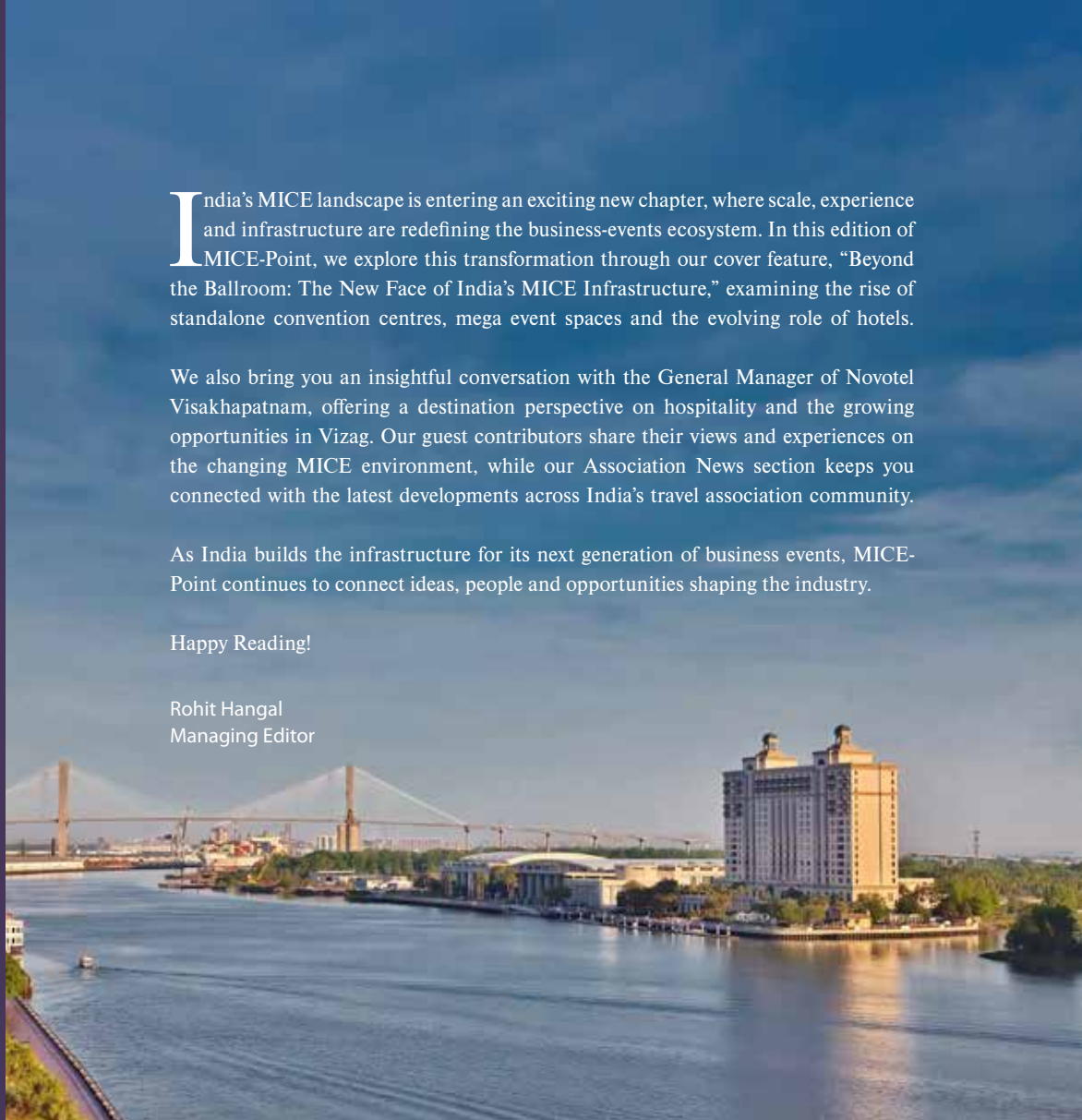
India's MICE landscape is entering an exciting new chapter, where scale, experience and infrastructure are redefining the business-events ecosystem. In this edition of MICE-Point, we explore this transformation through our cover feature, "Beyond the Ballroom: The New Face of India's MICE Infrastructure," examining the rise of standalone convention centres, mega event spaces and the evolving role of hotels.

We also bring you an insightful conversation with the General Manager of Novotel Visakhapatnam, offering a destination perspective on hospitality and the growing opportunities in Vizag. Our guest contributors share their views and experiences on the changing MICE environment, while our Association News section keeps you connected with the latest developments across India's travel association community.

As India builds the infrastructure for its next generation of business events, MICE-Point continues to connect ideas, people and opportunities shaping the industry.

Happy Reading!

Rohit Hangal
Managing Editor



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ITB India 2026 Concludes in Mumbai, Strengthening Global Connections with the Indian Travel Market



■ MP BUREAU

ITB India 2026 conducted its fourth in-person edition at the Jio World Convention Centre in Mumbai, bringing together leading international travel brands, industry professionals and key buyers for three days of business, networking and knowledge exchange. The event connected the global travel industry with business opportunities across India and South Asia, reinforcing the region's growing importance in the international travel landscape.

The 2026 edition featured more than 100 exhibiting brands and 600 travel trade buyers representing Leisure, MICE, Corporate Travel and Travel Technology. Over the course of the three-day event, ITB India facilitated more than 4,800 one-to-one meetings, providing exhibitors and buyers with opportunities to establish new connections,

explore partnerships and identify potential business opportunities.

International participation remained a defining feature of the event, with exhibitors from Southeast Asia, South Asia, Europe, Africa, Northeast Asia and South America represented on the show floor. Participants included Columbia Pictures Aquaverse, DoubleTree by Hilton Jakarta Kemayoran, Hotel Indonesia Kempinski Jakarta, IHCL, MakeMyTrip, Northern Lights Villages, oneworld alliance, Philippine Airlines, Sarawak Tourism Board, Seibu Prince Hotels & Resorts, Tokyu Hotels Japan, Visit Maldives Corporation and Visit Northern Finland, among others. Commenting on the edition, Darren Seah, Executive Director, Messe Berlin Asia Pacific, said, "ITB India 2026 demonstrated the strong interest in India and South Asia as im-

portant growth markets for the global travel industry. He highlighted the quality of conversations between exhibitors and qualified buyers, noting that clear business objectives led to focused discussions, new connections and opportunities for future partnerships."

The event also introduced new formats aimed at strengthening strategic industry dialogue. The inaugural ITB India Leadership Roundtable, held in partnership with global strategy consultancy Simon-Kucher, brought together senior decision-makers from tourism, hospitality, travel technology, investment, destinations and government for a closed-door exchange. Discussions explored India's evolving role in global tourism, traveller segmentation, destination competitiveness, connectivity and changing traveller behaviour.

The Cruise Capsule returned for its

second edition, bringing together cruise experts, travel trade leaders and MICE specialists to discuss developments and opportunities in India's cruise market, including cruise tourism and MICE at sea.

Running alongside the exhibition, the ITB India Conference 2026 featured 40 sessions and 80 speakers across four curated tracks—Knowledge, MICE & Corporate, Travel Technology and Experiential Travel. Across 1,440 minutes of content, industry leaders addressed developments in MICE, Corporate Travel, Hospitality, Travel Technology and evolving traveller expectations.

Following the conclusion of its 2026 edition, ITB India is looking ahead to 2027, continuing its role as a focused B2B platform connecting the international travel industry with the Indian and South Asian markets.



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ATOAI Holds Annual General Meeting, Announces New Leadership for 2026-28

■ MP BUREAU

The Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) conducted its Annual General Meeting (AGM) for FY 2025-26, followed by elections for its Office Bearers and Executive Committee for the 2026-28 term. The proceedings marked an important milestone in the Association's continued efforts to strengthen and advance India's adventure tourism sector.

The AGM brought together members of the adventure tourism fraternity for an important review of the Association's work and a discussion on the future direction of the sector. The proceedings included the presentation of the Annual Report for FY 2025-26, consideration and adoption of the Audited Financial Statements, appointment of the Statutory Auditor for FY 2026-27, and discussions on matters concerning the Association and the wider adventure tourism industry.

Presenting the Annual Report and addressing the AGM, ATOAI Vice President Arshdeep Anand highlighted the Association's continued commitment to building a stronger and more responsible adventure tourism ecosystem in India.

Over the past year, ATOAI has continued to focus on strengthening safety, sustainability, professional standards, training and capacity building, while deepening engagement with government institutions, tourism authorities and industry stakeholders. The Annual Report reflected the Association's efforts to create greater awareness around responsible adventure tourism and support the indus-



try through advocacy, knowledge sharing, professional development and initiatives aimed at raising standards across the sector.

The AGM also reaffirmed the importance of a united industry voice as adventure tourism in India enters a period of significant opportunity and growth. Following the conclusion of the AGM, elections for the 2026-28 term were conducted under the supervision of Returning Officer Rajeev Kohli.

The newly elected Office Bearers are

- Tejbir Singh Anand, President, Holiday Moods Adventures Pvt. Ltd.

- Vaibhav Kala, Senior Vice President, Aquaterra Adventures India Pvt. Ltd.
- Ronny Singh Gulati, Vice President, Youreka Campouts Services Pvt. Ltd.
- Paras Loomba, Honorary Secretary, GHE Impact Ventures Pvt. Ltd.
- Yog Chinmoy Dutt, Honorary Treasurer, Junoon Adventure and Eco Tours.

The Executive Committee includes

- Shekhar Babu of Transcend Adventures Pvt. Ltd.
- Amit Periwal of Clubside Tours and Travels Pvt. Ltd.

Speaking on his election, Tejbir Singh Anand, President, ATOAI, said, "As we take this leadership forward, the new incoming team is deeply committed to building upon the strong legacy created over the last thirty years. Our core focus will be on delivering tangible membership benefits, fostering active mentorship, and truly listening to the evolving needs of our community. By encouraging and equipping our members to adopt the highest operational and safety standards, we will strengthen the industry from within and firmly establish India on the global map as a premier, responsible adventure destination."



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Expo 2030 Riyadh and Atout France Sign MoU to Promote Strategic Collaboration



■ MP BUREAU

Expo 2030 Riyadh and Atout France, the National Tourism Development Agency of the French Republic, have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish a cooperative framework that seeks to promote strategic collaboration and strengthen technical and knowledge exchange. The milestone agreement aims to advance Expo 2030 Riyadh's preparations to deliver an exceptional World Expo for millions of visitors from around the world and support its long-term legacy and contribution to the Kingdom's economic, cultural and tourism goals.

As part of the agreement, Expo 2030 Riyadh and Atout France will

work closely across key areas of Expo planning and delivery, drawing on shared expertise to optimise operations, enhance the visitor experience and advance legacy planning. The partnership will bring together public and private sector stakeholders to foster greater collaboration around the Expo, with a particular focus on sustainable tourism and environmental stewardship. In parallel, the cooperation will also create opportunities to strengthen Saudi French ties through cultural cooperation and innovation showcases.

The agreement was signed in Paris, France, by Talal Al-Marri, Chief Executive Officer of Expo 2030 Riyadh and Adam Oubuih, Chief Executive Officer of Atout France. Commenting on the agreement,

Talal Al-Marri, Chief Executive Officer of Expo 2030 Riyadh, said: "Atout France brings deep expertise in tourism development, destination promotion and creating compelling visitor experiences, making them a valuable partner as we prepare to welcome visitors from around the world to Riyadh in 2030. This collaboration gives us an opportunity to draw on that experience as we plan and deliver an exceptional World Expo, while also exchanging knowledge around sustainable tourism and how we create a lasting destination beyond the six-month event. Our collaboration with Atout France reflects the kind of international partnership that a World Expo is about, bringing together expertise and ideas to create shared value and lasting impact."

Adam Oubuih, Chief Executive Officer of Atout France, said: "This collaboration provides an opportunity for Atout France to mobilise its tourism expertise and institutional network in support of Expo 2030 Riyadh. Drawing on our experience in destination development and major international events, we look forward to providing technical support and sharing expertise as Expo 2030 Riyadh prepares to welcome the world in 2030. We are pleased to contribute to this cooperation and to support the ambition to deliver the World Expo to the highest international standards, while strengthening the exchange of expertise between the French and Saudi tourism ecosystems."

The MoU combines Expo 2030 Riyadh's scale and global platform with Atout France's expertise in tourism, destination development and major international events. The cooperation will focus on enhancing the visitor experience, drawing on Atout France's expertise across areas including visitor journeys, crowd management, security and accessibility.

This latest milestone reflects the strong momentum and continued progress behind Expo 2030 Riyadh. Taking place from 1 October 2030 to 31 March 2031, the Expo will bring the world together for a six-month celebration of innovation, creativity and culture, with daily events, exhibitions and performances. Held under the theme of "Foresight for Tomorrow", Expo 2030 Riyadh will focus on innovation, sustainability, and the collective power of nations to shape a better future for all and will allow countries to forge partnerships that deliver real impact.



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RX Africa And Messe Muenchen India Join Forces to Strengthen Business Platforms in Africa



■ MP BUREAU

Messe Muenchen India has announced a strategic partnership with RX Africa to strengthen the scale, reach and market impact of its co-located trade fairs, analytica Lab Africa and IFAT Africa, ahead of their 2027 editions. As part of the collaboration, the Africa Automation Technology Fair (AATF) will join the co-located platform from 6-8 July 2027 at Gallagher Convention Centre in Johannesburg, creating an integrated environment for scientific, environmental and automation technologies.

RX Africa, part of RX Global, is one of Africa's leading exhibition organisers, with an established portfolio of events across key industries and markets. Its local expertise, experienced team and strong relationships with industry stakeholders, associations and business communities will support the continued development of analytica Lab Africa and IFAT Africa. The partnership also aligns with Messe Muenchen India's strategy to expand its presence across the African continent. IFAT Africa is Southern Africa's

leading trade fair for water, sewage, refuse and recycling, serving as an important platform for environmental technologies across South Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. Co-located with analytica Lab Africa, the region's leading exhibition for laboratory technology, analysis and biotechnology, the two events connect technology providers with industries focused on environmental management, research, testing, quality control and scientific development.

Adding a further dimension to the platform, AATF brings a 28-year legacy as Africa's leading and comprehensive automation technology trade fair. The integration of the three exhibitions will bring scientific analysis, environmental technologies, industrial-scale implementation and automation technologies together within one business environment. Over the years, the co-located exhibitions have facilitated international business relationships and technology transfer by bringing together government bodies, municipal authorities, industry stakeholders, market leaders and scientific researchers. Previous editions have also featured country pavilions from Germany, China, the

United Kingdom and the USA, alongside seminars, technical training workshops and forums addressing regional infrastructure and analytical challenges.

Stefan Rummel, CEO, Messe München, said, *"Africa is an important growth market for Messe München. Through this partnership with RX Africa, we are strengthening analytica Lab Africa and IFAT Africa as platforms for technology transfer, international business and long-term industrial development across the region."*

Bhupinder Singh, President - IMEA (India, Middle East, Africa), Messe München and CEO, Messe Muenchen India, added, *"The alliance would deepen connections between local buyers and international exhibitors, creating a more impactful trade environment."*

The 2027 editions will feature an enhanced supporting programme led by international experts, offering local buyers access to global market leaders and technologies.

Carol Weaving, Managing Director, RX Africa, said, *"The collaboration would bring regional insight and on-ground expertise to strengthen market relevance and deliver greater value to the industries served by the exhibitions."*

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Korea Tourism Organisation New Delhi Office Hosts Travel Mart and Roadshow in Chennai



■ MP BUREAU

The Korea Tourism Organisation New Delhi Office (KTO) hosted a travel mart and roadshow in Chennai on September 11, 2026, at the ITC Grand Chola, bringing together Korea's tourism industry with Tamil Nadu's

travel trade community. The roadshow was attended by more than 500 travel trade professionals, with participation from 16 Korean destination management companies (DMCs) and 5 airline partners. Representatives from the Korea Visa Application Centre were also present,

offering attendees direct insight into visa processes for travel to Korea.

The roadshow saw participation from several distinguished guests, including Hyeran Chun, Consul General, Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Chennai, Raja Gopal Sunkara, IAS, Director of

Tourism & Managing Director of Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation and Nam Soo Park, Head, Korea Visa Application Centre. Members of leading travel trade associations, including TAAI, TAFI, OTOAI, ETAA, and SKÅL International India, also attended, reflecting strong industry interest in the growing tourism relationship between Korea and the southern region.

Cho Yoonmi, Director, Korea Tourism Organisation New Delhi Office, made her first visit to Chennai. She shared: "The presence of 16 DMCs and five airline partners in one room here in Chennai shows just how seriously the industry is taking Korea as a growing destination for Indian travellers. I was genuinely encouraged by the enthusiasm we saw from the trade today. We are also working closely with our airline partners to strengthen connectivity from the southern region, making it easier than ever for travellers here to explore Korea. This is just the start. We're committed to building long-term partnerships across Tamil Nadu and the southern region."

Mauritius Strengthens India Ties as Indian Arrivals Grow 14.5% in the First Half of 2026



■ MP BUREAU

Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA) deepened its engagement with India through a four-city initiative across Pune, Chennai, Kolkata and Hyderabad — its third marketing operation in the country since January 2026 — reaffirming the country's importance as a key tourism market and strengthening the longstanding

cultural and people-to-people ties between Mauritius and India. From January to July 2026, Mauritius welcomed 51,005 Indian visitors, recording a 14.5% year-on-year growth. The rise reflects the destination's continued popularity among Indian travellers and growing interest across a wider range of travel segments. The four cities were selected for their growing outbound travel potential and role as regional travel hubs. The

initiative brought together 20+ tourism partners from Mauritius, including hotels, DMCs and airlines, for direct interactions with travel professionals across the markets. The engagements highlighted Mauritius beyond its established appeal for beach holidays, honeymoons and weddings, showcasing opportunities across leisure, family travel, luxury, MICE, wellness, golf, gastronomy and adventure. Travel advisors also

gained insights into evolving traveller preferences and the destination's diverse accommodation and experience offerings, helping them develop more varied Mauritius itineraries for their clients.

Commenting on the Indian market, Benoit Harter, Director - India, Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority, said: "India is much more than an important tourism market for Mauritius; it is a market with which we share deep cultural and historical connections. The warmth and familiarity between our two countries create a natural bond that extends into travel. Our engagement across Pune, Chennai, Kolkata and Hyderabad was an opportunity to strengthen this relationship, understand the evolving Indian traveller and showcase the different facets of Mauritius. By engaging with the market ahead of the travel season, we wanted to give our partners the time and confidence to plan and promote Mauritius more effectively."

ITC Grand Chola Celebrates 14 Years of Responsible Luxury and Hospitality Excellence in Chennai

■ MP BUREAU

ITC Grand Chola will celebrate its 14th anniversary on September 15, 2026, marking more than a decade of redefining luxury hospitality in Chennai. Since opening in 2012, the iconic property has established itself as a landmark destination where Tamil Nadu's heritage, world-class hospitality, culinary excellence and sustainability converge. Spread across eight acres, ITC Grand Chola draws inspiration from the grandeur of the Chola dynasty. Its architecture pays homage to South India's celebrated temples, including the Brihadeeswara Temple, Gangaikondacholapuram Temple and Airavateswara Temple. From its intricately carved façades to the majestic Sangam lobby and the iconic Grand Staircase featuring the symbolic Wheel of Life design, the hotel reflects a deep appreciation of India's artistic and

cultural traditions.

The property today features 522 guest rooms and 78 serviced apartments, complemented by one of the country's largest integrated conference, banqueting and exhibition facilities. This has made it a preferred destination for global summits, business gatherings, weddings and celebrations. At the core of ITC Grand Chola's philosophy is Responsible Luxury, demonstrating how sustainability and luxury can coexist. The hotel has been a sustainability pioneer since its inception, having been among the largest LEED Platinum-certified hotels and subsequently achieving LEED Zero Carbon and LEED Zero Water certifications.

Its sustainability practices span energy-efficient infrastructure, water conservation, eco-embedded products, eco-easy services and sensitisation of associates. The hotel also operates Sunya Aqua, ITC Hotels'



zero-mile water initiative, through which purified water is bottled in reusable glass bottles, reducing single-use plastics and transportation-related carbon emissions. Over 14 years, ITC Grand Chola has also contributed significantly to Chennai's culinary landscape. Its diverse dining portfolio includes Avartana, Peshawri, Royal Vega, Ottimo Cucina Italiana, Pan Asian,

Madras Pavilion, Café Mercara Express, Fabelle, Yura Artisanal Scoops and Ritvah, along with Cheroot Malt Bar and Tranquebar. Beyond hospitality, ITC Grand Chola has become an integral part of Chennai's social and business landscape, hosting global dignitaries, business leaders, landmark weddings, international conferences and cultural events.

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Chasing Shadows: How To Address Unapproved IT In Travel

By Brett Wheeldon, VP, Solution Advisory – APAC, SAP Concur



Technology now sits at the heart of business travel. Digital transformation, cloud services and the rapid adoption of artificial intelligence across India have made corporate travel more connected, efficient and capable. At the same time, these developments have expanded the technology footprint of organisations, creating more opportunities for unsanctioned tools and channels to enter the travel process.

Shadow IT is not a new challenge, but its impact is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. The use of unapproved applications and platforms can expose organisations to security, financial and regulatory risks. The growing adoption of consumer AI adds another dimension. According to WalkMe, 78% of employees admit to using unapproved AI systems at work. For business leaders, therefore, the question is not simply how to stop this behaviour, but what it reveals about the employee experience. Employees rarely bypass approved travel tools

simply because they want to disregard company policy. More often, they do so because the authorised journey feels slower, less intuitive or less useful than the alternatives available to them.

Friction can appear at almost any stage of the travel journey. Hotel content may load slowly, travellers may be unable to save preferred properties or use familiar payment methods, and loyalty benefits may not always be integrated into the booking experience. Some employees may also believe that consumer travel websites offer lower fares or a wider range of options. Every additional point of friction increases the likelihood that a traveller will abandon the approved process in favour of something more convenient. This is why the objective must go beyond compliance. Organisations need to deliver a seamless experience from search and booking through payment and expense, while keeping policy, control and traveller wellbeing embedded throughout the process.

When bookings and expenses move outside approved systems, organisations lose more than transaction visibility. Fragmented travel activity can undermine cost control, operational efficiency, employee support and confidence in enterprise data.

Off-channel bookings can make it harder to identify fraudulent receipts, duplicate claims and inflated expenses. Employees may also unknowingly use fraudulent websites or unverified

suppliers, increasing the risk of financial losses and chargebacks. Organisations can simultaneously miss out on negotiated rates, preferred suppliers, corporate discounts and other commercial benefits secured through managed travel programmes.

The administrative impact can be equally significant. Manual processing, fragmented information and reconciliation across multiple platforms create additional work for finance and travel teams. What begins as an individual's attempt to save time can ultimately increase the organisation's operational burden.

There is also a clear duty-of-care implication. In a geographically diverse market such as India, organisations need reliable visibility of traveller itineraries to provide timely assistance during disruptions or emergencies. When bookings take place outside the managed programme, that visibility can be compromised, making it harder to locate and support employees when they need help.

Security and compliance risks further compound the issue. Unapproved tools may process personal, financial and itinerary data without enterprise-level safeguards, creating exposure around privacy, data retention, financial reporting and payment-card obligations.

Consumer AI tools have made travel planning faster and more personalised, but convenience can sometimes obscure risk. AI-generated

information may be outdated or inaccurate, while recommendations could direct employees towards suppliers that fall outside corporate agreements or approved policies.

There is also the risk of sensitive information entering unmanaged AI platforms. Employees may share company information, travel itineraries or personal details without fully understanding how that data is stored or processed. Receipt scanning provides a practical example. Consumer scanning applications, browser extensions and free optical character recognition tools may upload receipt images to third-party cloud services. Receipts can contain personal information, transaction details and insights into travel patterns. What appears to be a simple productivity shortcut can therefore become a significant data-governance and traveller-safety concern.

The challenge is not AI itself, but the use of AI without the governance, security and integration required in a corporate environment.

Organisations will not solve shadow IT through restriction alone. Sustainable change requires IT, HR, finance, legal, operations and travel leaders to work together to create an environment where employees understand expectations while having fewer reasons to work around them.

Employees need practical guidance on approved tools, data handling and responsible AI

use. Training is more effective when policies are connected to tangible outcomes, including protecting company information, maintaining financial control and ensuring traveller safety.

Organisations should also treat workarounds as experience data. The tools employees choose outside the managed programme can reveal where the approved experience is falling short. These patterns may highlight gaps in content, usability, payment options, speed or personalisation. Rather than simply blocking alternative tools, leaders can use these insights to improve the authorised journey.

Ultimately, the strongest control is an approved platform that employees actually want to use. Intuitive, secure and user-friendly experiences reduce the incentive to seek alternatives while giving organisations the visibility and governance required to manage corporate travel effectively.

AI can play a constructive role when embedded within a governed travel and expense environment. Conversational trip planning can allow travellers to express their requirements naturally and build itineraries around their preferences. AI can also enable policy-aligned personalisation by combining individual preferences with corporate rules, ensuring that recommendations remain within the managed programme.

Integrating expense context earlier in the journey can further reduce friction. Greater visi-

bility of pricing, travel-class rules and justification requirements can minimise uncertainty when expenses are eventually submitted.

Shadow IT should be viewed as both a risk and a diagnostic signal. It highlights weaknesses in governance, but it also reveals where the employee experience is failing to keep pace with changing expectations.

For business leaders in India, the opportunity is to bring these perspectives together. Strengthening governance, educating employees and investing in a travel and expense experience that is secure, intelligent and easy to use can address the underlying causes of shadow IT rather than simply treating its symptoms.

The future of managed business travel will depend on finding the right balance between control and convenience. Organisations that understand why employees seek alternatives, and then use technology to remove those pain points, will be better positioned to protect their people, data and travel programmes.

The ultimate goal is simple: the compliant path should also be the best path. When employees can access the convenience, flexibility and personalisation they expect within a secure and governed environment, organisations can turn technology from a source of risk into a strategic advantage—and maximise the value of every business journey.

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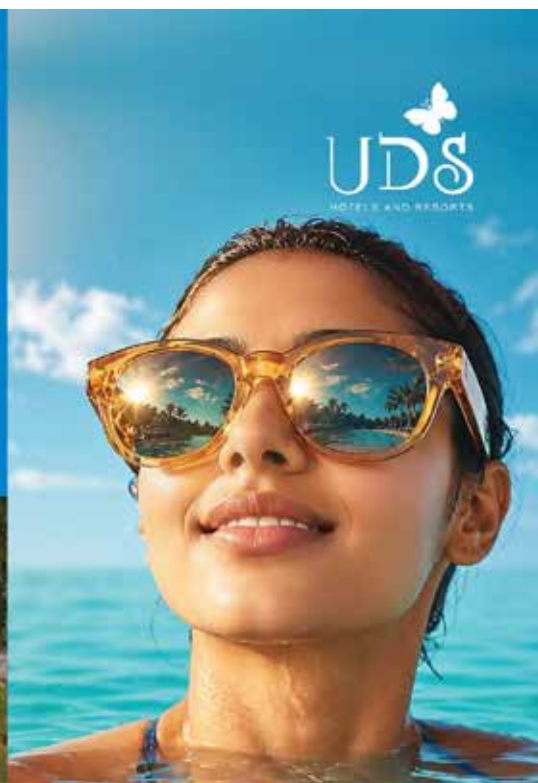
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Beyond The Ballroom: The New Face of India's MICE Infrastructure



■ ROHIT HANGAL

How do convention centres fit as a necessary component when hotels being built go into multi-utility mode? As you scroll down the data on the inventory being added in India and the speculations thereof, the Indian hotel industry has never had it so good:

Around 100,000 additional branded hotel rooms are in the pipeline through 2030, according to NITI Aayog, taking branded inventory substantially higher from its 2024 base of roughly 200,000 rooms. HVS's Asia-Pacific outlook identifies 950+ hotels and more than 104,000 keys by 2029, with projected overall room growth of about 9.5% CAGR from 2025 to 2029, while CBRE estimates that listed hotel operators alone could add more than 70,000 rooms by 2030. Even JLL's report indicates that branded hotel signings reached

51,647 keys across 424 hotels in 2025, up 23% year-on-year, with 71% concentrated in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities.

As the demand to create wealth meets new venues to host events, India seems to have hit a sweet spot, with more infrastructure being inaugurated. City-based Convention Centre infrastructure is at an all-time high, with venues for mega conventions for over 5000 delegates being commissioned as we speak. The rise of multi-sized, multi-utility stand-alone convention centres will surely impact demand for hotel convention centres and their ballroom-focused business model. As event managers, wedding planners, and companies seek more independent operational advantages, hotels will have to move with the changing client requirements.

While leading MICE hotels have used their brand value to pull in events, independent convention centres will take their service standards to a level to match the holistic services a discerning hotel provides. Soon, hotel-run banquet halls and convention infrastructure may operate independently and be marketed as a brand with its own P&L.

Hotels in India are seeing multi-specialised value propositions at a rate that was seldom seen before. As multi-brands and sub-brands to a tune of over 100 emerge on the Indian hospitality skyline, it is only a matter of time before profit centres such as convention spaces, restaurants, gymnasiums, or, for that matter, even laundry services will have to be siphoned off as a unique brand identity.

A day when you will have branded and franchised event spaces is not far. Creating and managing an 'event space brand' will bring in event standards, improved guest feedback and enhanced occupancies. Creating unique brand identities and a focus for event spaces will also attract branded hotels, especially in the four- and five-star segment. It is not far behind that, with increased demand for more technology and enhanced client requirements, an era of specialised companies managing event spaces is not far behind! Outsourced Venue Management!

Coherent Market Insights stated in its 2025 report that 'India meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions market is estimated to be valued at USD 4.59 billion in 2026 and is expected to reach USD 14.62 billion in 2033, exhibiting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 18% from 2026 to 2033.'

The Indian Exhibition Industry Association

(IEIA) values the Indian trade fair industry at USD 49.4 billion in 2024 and projects it to grow to USD 103.7 billion by 2030.

The need for mega event spaces will be the vital cog in the wheel if India targets a 5-7 trillion-dollar economy in the next decade. The planned mega convention and exhibition centres will catalyse economic activity and create marketplaces. Indian industry needs bigger event spaces, which will only spruce up economic activity. The desire, especially in tier 2 and tier 3 cities, to play host to these mega event venues will only add to the economic fortune, along with the proliferation of new airports. More than tourism departments seeking event infrastructure, it would add more value to the city if it were a mandatory objective of every municipal corporation.

Every mega convention or exhibition centre brings in an ecosystem with varied hotel options, retail spaces and office networks in the vicinity. One industry benchmark noted that 'a 10,000-delegate convention could generate demand for nearly 2,000 rooms at the primary hotel cluster and 3,000 rooms across surrounding hotels, restaurants, transport, DMC services, entertainment, and shopping. When you bring in the component of pre- and post-tours, the ability of the state to generate sizeable taxes can only bring in validation of manifesting an enhanced convention facility.

The country's business-events economy is on a new trajectory. It is already happening in some cities, where event venues are integrating with mega hotel inventory nearby to create a sizeable economic ecosystem. There is an incoming challenge to the traditional hotel-led meeting model, but at the same time there is an opportunity to connect accommodations, venues, business networking, connectivity, technology and experiences into a unique MICE ecosystem.

The option will not be about choosing between hotels and convention centres; it will be about who can create the most attractive ecosystem around the delegate or an event. Standalone convention centres and mega event spaces bring scale, while hotels bring inventory, hospitality and the vital human touch. India has the infrastructure ambition, the market and an appetite for creating demand. What it needs now is a practical integration. Because the future of MICE may not belong to the biggest or most expensive venue—it will belong to the destination that makes the biggest event feel like the most memorable journey.



Conventions to look out for...



City / State	Project	Current indication	MICE significance
Bengaluru, Karnataka	KTPO Global Convention & Exhibition Hub, Whitefield	Newly announced/planned	Potential major international convention + exhibition hub
Bengaluru, Karnataka	New International Convention Centre	Proposed	Could address Bengaluru's shortage of large standalone convention capacity
Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra	CIDCO Convention Centre	Planned / development pipeline	Potential large-scale convention and exhibition facility
Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh	International Convention Centre for MICE	Government-sanctioned	Dedicated MICE infrastructure; 99.38 crore project
Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh	Mega Convention & Exhibition Centre, Satgarhi	Planned	Linked to the state's plans for major investment/business events
Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh	Siang Adventure & Eco-Retreat Convention Centre	Government-sanctioned	Smaller destination-MICE opportunity
Gujarat	Tented City & Convention Centre	Government-sanctioned	Destination/event-oriented convention infrastructure
Haryana	Yadavindra Garden Convention Centre	Government-sanctioned	Heritage/destination MICE opportunity
Lakshadweep	Bangaram MICE Convention Hall	Government-sanctioned	Resort/island incentive and boutique conference market

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Where Meetings Meet the Sea



■ ROHIT HANGAL

Visakhapatnam is steadily emerging as a vibrant coastal destination, bringing together business, leisure, nature, culture and MICE opportunities.

Voyager's World speaks to Lakshmi Sridhar, General Manager, Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach, in an exclusive interview about the city's evolution, growing MICE potential, bleisure trends, tourism opportunities and the destination's future.

Visakhapatnam is emerging as an important leisure and business destination on India's east coast. How would you describe the destination's evolution over the past few years?

Visakhapatnam has evolved significantly from being regarded primarily as an industrial and business hub to becoming one of India's most promising coastal destinations. Today, the city offers a compelling mix of business opportunity, natural beauty, heritage, culture, cuisine and leisure experiences, making it increasingly relevant for both corporate and leisure travellers.

Its strategic coastal location and role as a gateway to Andhra Pradesh give Visakhapatnam a distinct advantage. Travellers can use the city as a base to explore Araku Valley, heritage and Buddhist circuits, coastal destinations and cultural attractions across the region. At the same time, improved hospitality infrastructure and growing interest in MICE are encouraging

visitors to stay longer and experience the city more deeply.

What, in your view, are the biggest opportunities for Visakhapatnam to position itself as a preferred destination for MICE and leisure travellers?

Visakhapatnam's biggest opportunity lies in its ability to bring business and leisure together within one destination. For MICE travellers, the city offers a strong corporate and industrial base, established hospitality infrastructure, convention-ready hotels and a scenic coastal setting that adds character to meetings, conferences and incentive programmes.

For leisure travellers, the destination offers beaches, heritage, nature, local cuisine and access to memorable regional experiences. The next step is to package these strengths more effectively for different traveller segments. Better air connectivity, seamless last-mile movement and stronger collaboration between hotels, tourism bodies, airlines, tour operators and local attractions can help create richer itineraries and encourage longer stays.

With the IATO Convention being held in Visakhapatnam, what significance does the event hold for the destination and the local hospitality industry?

The IATO Convention is a landmark opportunity for Visakhapatnam. It brings together influential members of the travel and tourism fraternity who play a key role in shaping destination narratives, designing itineraries and influencing demand. For the city, it is a chance

to showcase not only its tourism potential, but also its readiness to host high-quality national and international business events.

For Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach, it is an honour to host the convention and be part of this important moment for the destination. The event gives us the opportunity to present the strength of our property, the warmth of our hospitality and the wider possibilities that Visakhapatnam offers for MICE, leisure and business travellers. Its impact can extend well beyond the convention itself by encouraging tour operators to explore the city, include Andhra Pradesh more prominently in their programmes and consider new routes and itineraries.

Novotel Visakhapatnam has an important role to play in the city's hospitality landscape. How has the property evolved to meet the changing expectations of today's travellers?

Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach has evolved alongside the destination and the changing expectations of today's guests. While our beachfront location continues to be one of our strongest differentiators, travellers now seek experiences that are seamless, personalised and memorable.

As a multi-segment property, we welcome corporate and MICE guests, families, social groups and leisure travellers. Our convention facilities allow us to host large-format conferences and events, while our sea-facing rooms, dining venues and beachfront setting create an attractive environment for cele-

brations, weekend breaks and destination-led stays.

We have also continued to strengthen our food and beverage offerings, with a focus on diverse culinary experiences for both residents and in-house guests. Today, hospitality is about much more than accommodation; it is about thoughtful service, personalisation, responsible practices and creating moments that guests remember long after their stay.

Finally, what is your message to the IATO fraternity and international tour operators attending the Convention in Visakhapatnam?

My message to the IATO fraternity and international tour operators is to look at Visakhapatnam with a fresh perspective. The city brings together coast, culture, cuisine, nature, business opportunity and warm hospitality, while also offering access to the larger tourism possibilities of Andhra Pradesh. The IATO Convention is an ideal platform to experience this potential first-hand and consider how Visakhapatnam can be positioned within both domestic and international travel programmes.

From a hospitality perspective, there is tremendous scope to build longer-stay and experiential itineraries rather than treating Visakhapatnam only as a transit point. With collaboration between government, the tourism fraternity and the private sector, the city can strengthen its position on India's tourism map and emerge as a distinctive coastal gateway for travellers seeking both business and leisure experiences.



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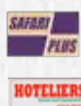
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IATO Sets 10% Tourism-to-GDP Ambition, Calls for Strategic Export Status at 41st Annual Convention

■ MP BUREAU

The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) has set an ambitious target of doubling tourism's contribution to India's GDP from around 5% to 10%, calling for stronger policy support, sustained global marketing, improved connectivity and closer government-industry collaboration to unlock the country's tourism potential. The call was made at the 41st IATO Annual Convention in Visakhapatnam, held under the theme "India: The World's Next Tourism Opportunity." The convention has brought together more than 1,000 delegates, including tour operators, hospitality leaders, travel trade professionals, state tourism representatives and media, to discuss the next phase of growth for India's inbound tourism sector.

IATO President Rajiv Gosain said tourism could become a significant engine of inclusive economic

growth and contribute to the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. He emphasised the need to move beyond fragmented promotional efforts and adopt a sustained, professionally managed global marketing strategy to strengthen India's presence in key international source markets. As part of its international outreach, IATO has launched the Namaste India Roadshow in Europe following ITB and plans further promotional initiatives after WTM in November. The association has called for consistent and adequately funded global campaigns to re-energise the Incredible India brand.

IATO has also reiterated its demand for tourism to be accorded Strategic Export Sector status, citing the sector's foreign exchange earnings, employment generation and contribution to thousands of MSMEs. According to the association, such recognition would enable tourism to receive policy treatment commensurate with its economic contribution. "India

has reached a point where tourism can no longer be viewed only as a service sector; it must be treated as a strategic economic opportunity. The next leap will require sustained international marketing, seamless connectivity, skilled manpower and a visitor journey that is simple from visa application to the last mile," said Gosain. Technology and responsible tourism have also emerged as key priorities. IATO has trained more than 600 tour operators in technology and artificial intelligence, while the convention marks the formal launch of its Responsible Tourism Mission, supported by a policy framework and Standard Operating Procedures. The association has also initiated a carbon audit in collaboration with the Indian School of Nature and conducted beach-cleaning activities in Visakhapatnam under the Swachh Paryatan Abhiyan. Aviation and connectivity featured prominently in the discussions. Union Minister of Civil Aviation Kinjarapu

Ram Mohan Naidu highlighted the relationship between aviation and tourism, noting that India's airport network has grown from 74 airports in 2014 to 166 today. He also highlighted the government's extended UDAN vision, which envisages an investment of 28,840 crore for 100 additional airports over the next decade.

The convention has also placed Andhra Pradesh's diverse tourism offerings in focus, including its coastline, Eastern Ghats, Buddhist heritage, Simhachalam Temple, Araku Valley and coffee culture. IATO has proposed a joint working mechanism with the state government to identify and package tourism circuits, develop marketable experiences and organise familiarisation tours for trade partners. With tourism, aviation, technology, sustainability and destination development emerging as central themes, the convention seeks to establish a stronger roadmap for India's inbound tourism growth and global positioning.

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VIJAY MOHAN RAJ

Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), AP & Telangana Chapter



The Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), AP & Telangana Chapter, has unanimously elected Vijay Mohan Raj as Chairman. A veteran of the travel and tourism industry, Vijay Mohan Raj returns to TAAI's leadership after a 20-year gap.

Speaking on his election, Vijay Mohan Raj said: *"Returning to the leadership of TAAI after 20 years, particularly in its 75th year, is both a privilege and a responsibility. I look forward to working collectively with our members and stakeholders to make our travel trade stronger, more united and future-ready."*

KRISHNAN BALAKRISHNAN

President & Chief Operating Officer - FLY91



Krishnan Balakrishnan brings more than three decades of experience across the global aviation industry. At FLY91, he will lead the airline's day-to-day operations, drive operational excellence across the organisation and work closely with aircraft manufacturers and strategic partners to support the airline's continued expansion.

Manoj Chacko, Managing Director & CEO, FLY91, said, *"As we prepare for our next phase of growth, I am delighted to welcome Jitendra to our leadership team. His depth of experience, proven leadership and shared commitment to excellence will be invaluable as we continue building a world-class regional airline that connects underserved communities and creates lasting value for our customers, employees and stakeholders."*

NEHA LIZ CHUNGATH

Hyatt Centric MG Road Bangalore



Hyatt Centric MG Road Bangalore has announced the appointment of Neha Liz Chungath as Assistant Manager - Marketing Communications (MARCOM). In her new role, Neha will be responsible for supporting and strengthening the hotel's marketing and communications initiatives.

Speaking about her new role, Neha Liz Chungath said, *"I am excited to join Hyatt Centric MG Road Bangalore and become a part of a brand that is known for creating dynamic and engaging guest experiences."*

MOHAMED MANSOUR

General Manager - OBLU XPERIENCE Ailafushi & OBLU SELECT Lobigili



Atmosphere Core announces the appointment of Mohamed Mansour as General Manager of OBLU XPERIENCE Ailafushi and OBLU SELECT Lobigili, strengthening the leadership of two distinctive island resorts within the COLOURS OF OBLU portfolio. In his new role, Mohamed will oversee the operations, bringing his extensive operational experience and leadership approach to both resorts.

Commenting on his appointment, Mohamed Mansour said, *"We put people at the heart of everything we do. True leadership transforms challenges into opportunities and teams into families, all while delivering extraordinary guest experiences." that reflect the distinctive standards of the brand."*

ANUJ CHAUDHRY

General Manager - DoubleTree by Hilton Bengaluru Airport



DoubleTree by Hilton Bengaluru Airport has announced the appointment of Anuj Chaudhry as General Manager. In his new role, Anuj will lead the hotel's overall operations, with a focus on driving business performance, strengthening guest experiences, building a strong service culture and developing a high-performing team.

Commenting on his appointment, Anuj Chaudhry said, *"It is a privilege to be part of a brand known for creating warm and memorable experiences, and I look forward to working closely with the team to build on that promise for every guest." tives that enhance guest satisfaction while maintaining the highest standards of hospitality."*



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