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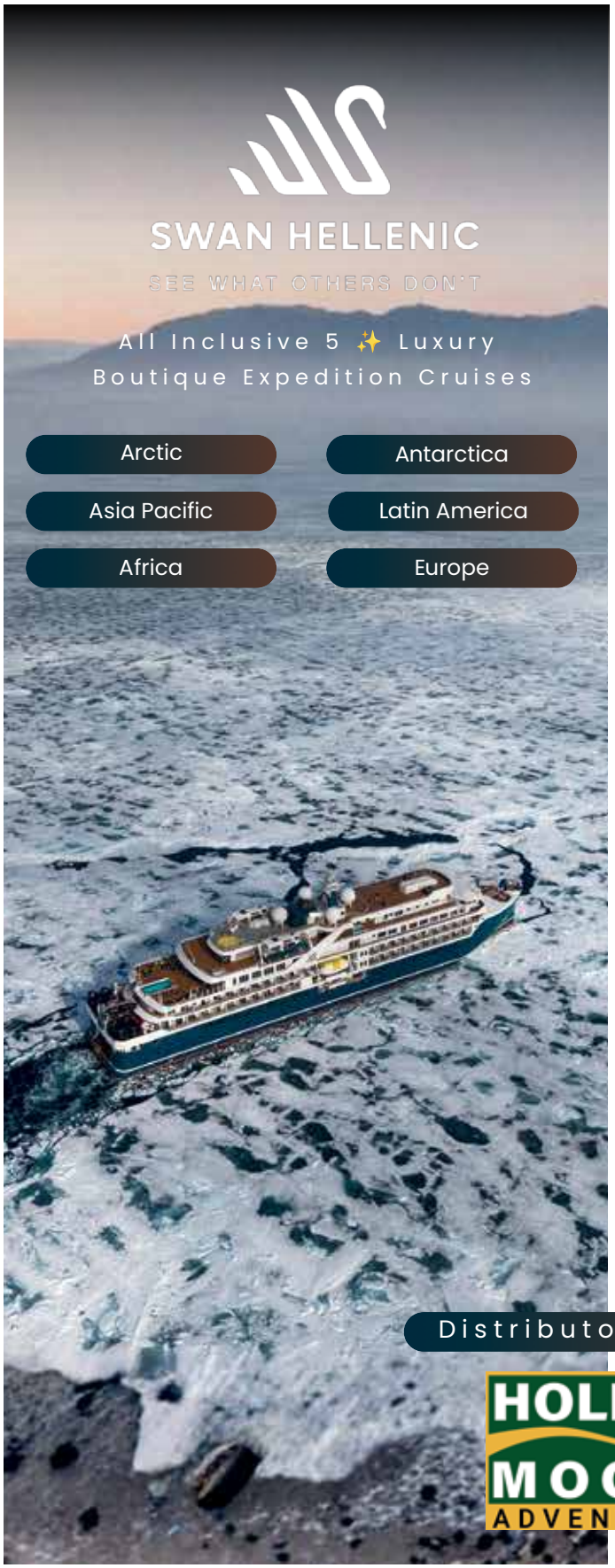
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India's MICE industry continues to gain momentum, with National Tourist Offices (NTOs) actively engaging the Indian travel trade through destination showcases, roadshows, networking meets and B2B interactions. These initiatives go beyond destination promotion, creating meaningful opportunities for Indian MICE planners, corporates, associations and event professionals to explore new markets, build partnerships and take business across borders.

This edition of MICE-Point takes a closer look at the various initiatives undertaken by international tourism boards in India and their growing engagement with the country's dynamic meetings and events industry.

We also explore an increasingly important subject – The ROI of meetings. In an industry where success is often measured by delegate numbers and event budgets, it is time to look beyond attendance and evaluate business leads, partnerships, knowledge exchange, brand visibility and long-term impact. It is also time to welcome the new team at the India Convention Promotion Bureau.

After all, a successful meeting is not just about bringing people together; it is about making those connections count!

Happy Reading!

Rohit Hangal
Managing Editor



Contents

Pg 06
Israel Ministry of Tourism Returns to India with Three-City Roadshow





Pg 10
Galit Hoffman on India and Tourism Growth

Pg 15
Shaping the Future of Business Travel





Pg 16
God's Own Country Welcomes the World at KTM 2026



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Israel Ministry of Tourism Returns to India with Three-City Roadshow



MP BUREAU

The Israel Ministry of Tourism (IMOT) conducted a series of roadshows across three major Indian cities- New Delhi on 12 October, Bengaluru on 14 October and Mumbai on 16 October 2026- marking its return to large-scale, in-person engagement with the Indian travel trade after several years. The events brought together approximately 300 travel trade professionals, including travel agents, tour operators and industry representatives. The roadshows also saw participation from destination management companies (DMCs) Amaris Tours and Events, Magi Holidays and Satguru Travel.

The events showcased Israel's diverse tourism offerings, including leisure and family travel, luxury tourism, MICE, culture, adventure and unique experiences, extending beyond its traditional image as a pilgrimage destination. The programme featured destination presentations, video screenings and face-to-face interactions with travel trade professionals, aimed at strengthening industry relationships and broadening awareness of Israel as a tourism destination.

A key highlight of the Mumbai roadshow was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Israel Ministry of Tourism and the Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI), marking an important milestone in the Ministry's relationship with the Indian travel industry. The agreement was signed by Himanshu Kesari Patil, President of OTOAI, and Galit Hoffman, Consul for Tourism Affairs, Israel Ministry of Tourism, India.

The MOU establishes a framework for long-term cooperation between the two organisations, including joint destination promotion, professional training, familiarisation (FAM) trips, marketing initiatives and other activities aimed at increasing awareness of Israel and developing business opportunities for the Indian travel trade.

Galit Hoffman, Consul for Tourism Affairs, Israel Ministry of Tourism, India, said: "There is no substitute for meeting our travel trade partners face to face. These interactions allow us to strengthen relationships, better understand the market's needs and explore new opportunities together. They have reinforced our belief in the tremendous potential of the Indian market. Our partnership with OTOAI goes far beyond the signing of an agreement. It represents a meaningful vote of confidence in Israel as a tourism destination; in the diversity of experiences it offers and in the future of tourism between our two countries. We deeply value the trust of our Indian partners and see this collaboration as a shared, long-term commitment to strengthening ties and unlocking our tourism potential. India is an important strategic market for us, and we remain committed to working closely with our industry partners to introduce more Indian travellers to the many diverse experiences Israel has to offer."

The roadshows and the partnership with OTOAI come amid encouraging signs of a gradual recovery in international tourism to Israel. According to the Israel Ministry of Tourism, approximately 140,000 tourists visited Israel in September 2026, an increase of 19% compared to September 2025. Based on current trends, tourist arrivals are projected to exceed 1.1 million by the end of 2026.

India is Israel's largest Asian source market and one of its top ten international source markets, highlighting its strategic importance and significant growth potential. Another important development for the Indian market is the upcoming resumption of Air India's direct Delhi-Tel Aviv flights from 1 December 2026, with five weekly services. The return of the route is expected to make travel to Israel more convenient for Indian visitors and create new opportunities for the travel industries of both countries.

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Regional Victoria Set to Attract More Business Events with New Government Grants



MP BUREAU

The Victorian Government has opened a new round of the Regional Business Events Program to attract more conferences, corporate meetings, trade exhibitions and incentive events to regional Victoria, supporting local businesses, creating jobs and strengthening the region's visitor economy. Delivered by Business Events Victoria and the Melbourne Convention Bureau, the program enables national and international organisations to host business events across regional Victoria. The initiative aims to strengthen the regional business events sector by encouraging visitors to stay longer, generating economic opportunities for local communities and creating prospects for repeat visitation.

The program offers funding through two streams. The Strategic Acquisition Events stream, delivered by Business Events Victoria, provides grants of up to $50,000 for eligible business events held in regional Victoria with a minimum of 25 delegates. The International Incentive Events stream, delivered by the Melbourne Convention Bureau, offers grants of up to $200 per delegate, depending on the location, for new international incentive events involving at least 10 delegates. Funding is available for eligible events scheduled before 31 March 2028. The grants can help cover a range of event-related expenses, including accommodation, venue hire, food and beverage, transport and other associated costs, making regional Victoria a more attractive destination for business event organisers.

The previous round of the program supported 80 new business events, attracting more than 6,530 delegates to regional Victoria and generating an estimated $16.5 million in economic benefits for regional communities. Building on these results, the latest round seeks to expand business event opportunities across the region while supporting tourism, employment and local enterprise.

Anthony Carbines, Minister for Major Events, said, *"From conferences to seminars, we're helping regional towns host more business events to boost local economies. These grants will get business events out to the regions, driving investment and keeping local businesses busy throughout the year."*

Adeline Keh, Executive Officer of Business Events Victoria, said, *"Regional Victoria offers an exceptional range of destinations and experiences for business events, and the Regional Business Events Program helps bring these opportunities to market. Attracting new conferences, meetings and incentive events delivers immediate benefits for regional communities and creates opportunities for future visitation, investment and growth."*

Julia Swanson, Chief Executive Officer of the Melbourne Convention Bureau, said, *"The Regional Business Events Program enables organisers to deliver memorable experiences in some of Victoria's outstanding regional destinations, driving visitation, supporting local businesses and creating jobs."*

Sri Lanka MICE Expo 2026 Opens in Colombo, Bringing Together Global Buyers and Local Industry Stakeholders





MP BUREAU

The Sri Lanka Convention Bureau (SLCB), the national organisation for MICE tourism under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism, officially inaugurated the Sri Lanka MICE Expo 2026 (SL-MICE Expo 2026) at Shangri-La Colombo on October 6. The multi-day event aims to strengthen Sri Lanka's position as a leading destination for MICE.

The Expo brought together more than 120 hosted international MICE and travel operators, along with media representatives from 26 countries, creating a platform for global engagement, business development and industry collaboration. The event showcased Sri Lanka's diverse MICE infrastructure, hospitality offerings and tourism experiences while connecting local suppliers with international buyers.

The official opening ceremony was held under the patronage of Vijitha Herath, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism; Prof. Ruwan Ranasinghe, Deputy Minister of Tourism; Santosh Jha, High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka; and Aruni Ranaraja, Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism, alongside other distinguished guests and industry representatives.

The programme commenced on October 5 with a MICE Business Forum and Welcome Reception at Cinnamon Grand Colombo. The forum featured a destination presentation and a high-level panel discussion exploring Sri Lanka's potential as an international MICE destination, highlighting emerging opportunities and the country's ability to cater to the evolving requirements of the global business events sector.

Through the Expo, Sri Lanka aims to strengthen engagement with international travel trade partners, expand business opportunities and showcase its ability to combine professional event facilities with cultural discovery, natural beauty and personalised hospitality. The initiative reinforces the country's efforts to attract a broader range of international MICE events and establish stronger connections with the global business events industry.



"Israel Is More Than the Holy Land": Galit Hoffman on India and Tourism Growth



NATASHA SREERANJ

Israel is inviting Indian travellers to discover a destination rich in history, culture, culinary experiences and contemporary attractions.

At the Israel Tourism Roadshow held at Taj MG Road, Bengaluru, on October 14, Voyager's World spoke to Galit Hoffman, Consul – Tourism Affairs for India, Israel Ministry of Tourism, in an exclusive interview about Israel's tourism revival, efforts to rebuild traveller confidence, strengthening India–Israel connectivity and the destination's growing potential across leisure, pilgrimage and MICE tourism.

What is the objective of the Israel Tourism Roadshow in Bengaluru, and what can the local travel trade expect from the event?

We are delighted to be in Bengaluru as part of our three-city roadshow, which also includes Delhi and Mumbai. We have not conducted a roadshow for the local travel trade since before the COVID-19 pandemic, so we are excited to reconnect with travel professionals in person.

The primary objective is to meet the travel trade, provide updated information about Israel and generate renewed interest in the destination. We want to give Indian travel professionals a glimpse of what Israel has to offer and rebuild their confidence in promoting the destination. The roadshow also provides an opportunity to address their queries about visas, culinary experiences, hotels, hospitality and the overall travel experience. We are also looking forward to engaging with the media and local stakeholders.

How is the tourism situation in Israel at present? Are international visitors, particularly Indian travellers, returning to the destination?

Tourist numbers are gradually increasing from across the world, although they are still below our expectations. We consider this a year of recovery, following the period of conflict, and we are encouraged by the gradual return of international travellers. Air India has announced that it will resume direct flights to Israel from December 1, 2026. This is an important development for us and reflects renewed confidence in the destination.

India has consistently been among Israel's top 10 source markets and has been our leading source market in Asia. Before the pandemic, we welcomed approximately 70,000 Indian travellers annually, and that remains an important benchmark for us. We want to rebuild those numbers and strengthen Israel's position among Indian travellers as the market recovers.

How is Israel positioning itself to attract the MICE segment from India?

MICE is certainly one of the important segments we are focusing on for the coming year. Israel has a strong offering for conferences, business events and industry gatherings, particularly in technology and innovation. We host major conferences such as Cybertec, which focuses on cybersecurity, and events related to water technology and other emerging sectors. Our message is simple: come for the conference and stay to explore the destination.

Business travellers can discover Israel's start-up ecosystem, meet technology companies and experience the country's cultural and historical attractions. In my earlier role with the Ministry of Defence, I witnessed large Indian delegations attending Cybertec and defence trade shows. We would like these visitors to extend their stays and explore destinations such as Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and the Dead Sea. This would allow business travellers to combine professional engagements with leisure experiences.

What are the key challenges Israel faces in promoting tourism, particularly in the Indian market?

The biggest challenge is the perception that Israel is not a safe destination to visit. We understand these concerns, but we believe that the gradual return of travellers and international airlines demonstrates growing confidence. The situation has stabilised, and tourist numbers are increasing. We want to address concerns through accurate information and direct engagement with the travel trade.

Visa-related apprehensions are another challenge. Travellers sometimes assume that obtaining an Israeli visa is complicated. However, the process is straightforward when applicants follow the prescribed instructions and submit the required documents. Israel introduced an electronic visa process last year, with India becoming the first country worldwide to receive access to this facility. This is an important step towards making travel more convenient.

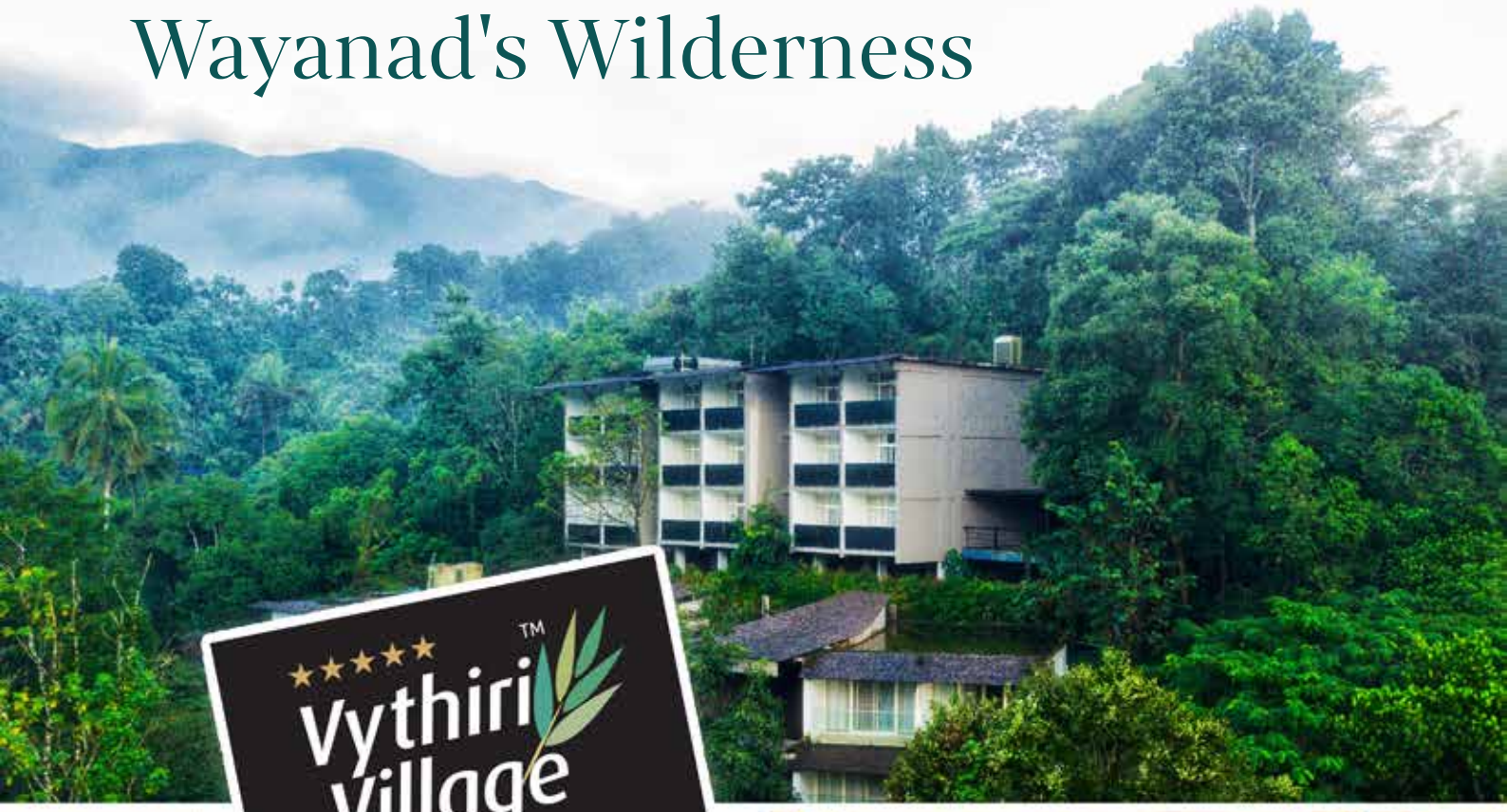
We also want to dispel misconceptions about food. Israel offers a diverse culinary scene, with plenty of vegetarian and vegan options. By addressing these concerns directly, we hope to encourage travel professionals to present a more comprehensive and accurate picture of the destination.

Looking ahead, how does Israel envision the future of its travel, tourism, aviation, hospitality and MICE sectors?

Many people know Israel primarily as the Holy Land, but the destination offers much more. While religious tourism and pilgrimage remain important, we want to showcase Israel as a well-rounded leisure destination. The country combines history, archaeology and spirituality with beaches, nightlife in Tel Aviv, culinary experiences, wineries, nature and adventure activities. These attractions appeal to different traveller segments, including families and multigenerational groups.

Alongside leisure and pilgrimage, we will continue to focus on MICE and business travel. Our aim is to broaden awareness of Israel's diverse experiences and encourage Indian travellers to discover the destination beyond its traditional image. We believe that a combination of these segments will be important in strengthening tourism ties between India and Israel in the years ahead.

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Making AI Work for Travel: Prashant Menon on the Road Ahead



NATASHA SREERANJ

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming travel, tourism and hospitality by streamlining operations, personalising guest experiences and creating new revenue opportunities. From AI-powered booking assistants to smarter distribution systems, the technology is reshaping how businesses serve travellers. However, successful adoption requires reliable data, seamless integration and a balance between automation and human interaction.

Voyager's World speaks to Prashant Menon, Director Business Development, HyperGuest, in an exclusive interview about AI's evolving role, its practical applications and the opportunities and challenges shaping the industry's future.

How is AI transforming the travel, tourism and hospitality industries?

AI is shifting from answering questions to getting things done, and for most hotels, WhatsApp is the easiest place to start. The early numbers are encouraging. According to HiJiffy's case studies, Paradise Resort on Australia's Gold Coast now takes 12% of its direct bookings through its chatbot, with an 82% WhatsApp open rate. GHT Hotels in Spain credited its website chatbot with €733,000 in direct booking revenue in 2024.

The next step is an agent that checks live availability, explains the options, sends a payment link and confirms the booking, even at 2 a.m. The hotels that get there first will quietly collect the bookings everyone else misses overnight. But an agent can't sell what it can't confirm. In my years in hotel distribution, mismatched room descriptions, occupancy rules and stale rates have always caused friction. AI makes them impossible to ignore. That's why direct, real-time connectivity, the space we work in at HyperGuest, matters so much.

How can AI help businesses deliver more personalised experiences and improve customer satisfaction across travel and hospitality?

Good personalisation makes a stay easier, not just more expensive. With the guest's permission, an assistant can use their booking details and preferences to arrange an early arrival, remember a room type or reply in their own language. An upgrade works when it solves a real need, and it can pay off too. Kabannas in the UK paired HiJiffy's AI messaging with Oaky's upselling platform and recorded 125 upsell sales in May 2024 through automated webchat and WhatsApp campaigns.

Connected agents can go further. "Please send towels and arrange an airport transfer" becomes assigned tasks, a confirmed price and progress updates. That only works when the agent is linked to the hotel's operational systems. Service recovery matters just as much. If a guest reports a faulty air conditioner, an agent can alert the duty manager and find an alternative room. But a person should own the apology. Guests don't notice personalisation. They notice that the hotel remembered and followed through.

In what ways can AI help businesses improve operational efficiency, manage costs and make better decisions?

Some of AI's most significant benefits lie in routine tasks that consume staff time and gradually erode margins. In housekeeping, AI can help prioritise room cleaning based on arrivals, departures and guest requests, while flagging rooms that may not be ready in time for check-in. In group sales, it can extract requirements from enquiries and prepare proposals using live inventory and approved pricing. Revenue teams can use AI to identify weak booking trends and recommend rate adjustments for human review, while distribution teams can detect inconsistencies in room descriptions and occupancy limits across sales channels. In accounts, AI can match reservations, invoices and payments, highlighting discrepancies that require attention.

There is already evidence of these efficiencies. HiJiffy's case study for Entourage sur-le-Lac in Canada reports 94% enquiry automation and an estimated 440 staff hours saved. Hilton's 2023 Green Breakfast pilot also reduced breakfast food waste by 62% across 13 hotels in the UAE, combining AI-based measurement with staff coaching and operational improvements. The larger lesson is that AI delivers value when it improves an actual workflow. Hotels should measure the hours saved, errors prevented and additional revenue generated, rather than focusing solely on the number of conversations handled by an AI assistant.

As AI becomes more widely used, how can the industry balance technology-driven services with the human touch that is essential to hospitality?

The goal should be to let AI handle routine tasks so that people have more time to focus on what matters most: the guest. Kabannas reported automating 92% of guest queries, allowing its team to devote more time to guests who valued personal interaction. This is the right way to approach AI adoption. Technology creates additional capacity, while people determine how best to use it.

Routine tasks such as booking confirmations, standard enquiries and status updates can be automated efficiently. However, sensitive situations involving complaints, compensation or unusual requests should retain human oversight. Equally important is ensuring that guests can reach a staff member easily and do not have to repeat their concerns when a conversation is transferred from an AI assistant. An AI agent can identify a complaint, alert the relevant team and initiate the response process. The duty manager, however, should remain responsible for the apology and the resolution. Hospitality ultimately comes down to how people feel they have been treated. The most effective use of AI is to give employees the time, information and resources they need to deliver thoughtful, consistent service.

What are the key challenges in adopting AI, and how do you see it shaping the future of travel, tourism and hospitality over the next five years?

The challenges are as much operational as technical. Fragmented data makes answers unreliable. Disconnected systems stop agents from finishing tasks. Guest privacy needs clear rules on what's collected, who sees it and how long it's kept. Independent hotels also need tools they can afford and manage themselves. And as agents start to act, hotels must decide what an agent can approve on its own, what needs a human's sign-off and who steps in when something goes wrong.

My advice is to start with one measurable workflow. After-hours enquiries on WhatsApp are a sensible first step. Track accuracy, booking conversion, staff time saved and guest satisfaction before moving on to pre-arrival or revenue tasks. Over the next five years, more AI assistants will search, compare and book for travellers. Hotels with accurate, well-structured content and reliable booking connectivity will be in the conversation. Those without may simply not be shown.

The time to get ready is now, while it's still a head start rather than a catch-up.

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ICPB Announces New Governing Board For 2026-28



MP BUREAU

The India Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB), the country's apex body dedicated to promoting India as a preferred destination for MICE, has announced its newly elected Office Bearers and Governing Board for the 2026-28 term, following the successful conclusion of its Annual General Meeting and election process in New Delhi.

Amaresh Tiwari has been elected unopposed as Vice Chairman, while Sudeep Sarcar has been elected Honorary Secretary and Ashish Jagota as Treasurer.

The newly constituted 15-member Governing Board members

Position	Name	Organisation
Vice Chairman	Amaresh Tiwari	A T Seasons & Vacations Travel Pvt. Ltd.
Honorary Secretary	Sudeep Sarcar	India Exposition Mart Ltd
Honorary Treasurer	Ashish Jagota	Concept Conferences Pvt. Ltd.
PCO	Naveen Rizvi	ICE-Incentive Conference & Event Management Pvt. Ltd.
PCO	Vibha Bhatia	MMACTIV Sci Tech Communication Pvt. Ltd
DMC	Tushar Kesharwani	Vacation Experts Pvt. Ltd.
DMC	Riyaz U.C.	Spiceland Holidays Pvt Ltd
DMC	Omesh Raina	GIG Hospitality Pvt. Ltd.
DMC	Dharmendra	Geanis World & MICE
VENUE	Vikas Sood	Jaipur Exhibition & Convention Centre (Novotel JaipurConvention Centre)
Hotel	Randhir Gupta	MAYFAIR Hotels & Resorts Limited
Hotel	Mohammad Ali	AAPC India Hotel Mgt. Pvt. Ltd. (Accor Hotels)
PEO	Sanjeev Pasricha	CS Direkt Events & Exhibitions Pvt. Ltd
ALLIED	Deepika Chowdhary	Candid India
ALLIED	Raghav Khosla	Exhibition Showcase

The new Governing Board assumes office at a significant juncture for India's MICE industry, as the country continues to expand its convention infrastructure, enhance international connectivity and strengthen its capabilities to host large-scale global conferences, exhibitions and corporate events. The Board will focus on reinforcing ICPB's role as a catalyst for the growth of India's business events ecosystem through greater industry collaboration, international engagement, destination promotion, capacity building and closer coordination with government bodies and key stakeholders.

Commenting on his election, Amaresh Tiwari, Vice Chairman, ICPB, said, "Our focus will be on strengthening government-industry collaboration, enhancing India's visibility in international markets, promoting emerging MICE destinations and creating greater business opportunities for our members. Together with the newly elected Governing Board, we are committed to taking ICPB's vision forward and ensuring that India secures its rightful place on the global MICE map."

Sudeep Sarcar, Secretary. ICPB, said, "We must support one another in attracting international events and delivering experiences that bring organisers and delegates back to India. I would like ICPB to offer more opportunities for members to connect, share knowledge and develop business. I look forward to working with the newly elected team to strengthen our industry and help ICPB grow through the active participation of its members."

Ashish Jagota, Treasurer, ICPB, added, "Sound financial governance today, global leadership tomorrow. My vision is an ICPB that is transparent, sustainable and taking India's convention story to every corner of the world."

With a renewed mandate and a shared vision, ICPB remains committed to advancing India's position as a preferred international MICE destination while contributing to the sustainable growth of the country's tourism and hospitality sectors.

Shaping the Future of Business Travel: India's Growing Global Influence

By Jyothi Varma, Country Manager, India at GBTA





India's business travel sector is entering a defining period of growth and influence.

According to the GBTA's recently published 2026 Business Travel Index (BTI) report, India is projected to reach $46.9 billion in total business travel spending in 2026, an 8.7% increase on last year. India is the world's eighth-largest business travel market and the third largest in Asia Pacific (APAC), behind China and South Korea.

Yet the economic significance of business travel extends well beyond spending figures. Business travel is a vital engine of national and regional economic growth, directly supporting demand for sectors like hospitality, aviation, accommodation, meetings and events, and ground transportation. Every business trip generates demand across a broad ecosystem of suppliers and service providers, creating jobs and thereby supporting regions, cities and towns across India.

Business travel enables face-to-face connections that continue to underpin commercial success. Whether it is building client relationships, negotiating or closing business deals, delivering training programmes or reinforcing client relationships, in-person engagement remains a pivotal catalyst for business growth.

In an increasingly digital world, the value of human connection has not diminished. If anything, it has become even more important.

The strong performance of India's business travel sector reflects broader economic trends that continue to support growth across the region. While GBTA's 2026 BTI Report shows that India's economic expansion is moderating from exceptionally strong levels seen in 2025, it continues to outperform many major economies globally. Alongside several Southeast Asian markets, India is benefiting from expanding manufacturing investment, supply chain diversification and increasing levels of foreign direct investment. These trends are creating new opportunities for business travel as companies seek to build relationships, explore new markets and support increasingly complex regional operations.

The wider APAC region continues to demonstrate remarkable strength. Today, APAC is the world's largest business travel market, accounting for more than 40% of global business travel spending in 2025, equivalent to approximately $643.8 billion. Traveller confidence also remains robust, with more than 80% of APAC business travellers reporting that they travelled as much as, or more than, they did in 2024.

However, alongside these opportunities come significant challenges. Organisations across the region are navigating persistent cost pressures, geopolitical uncertainty, evolving traveller expectations, sustainability commitments, duty of care responsibilities and the rapid advancement of transformative technologies such as artificial intelligence.

These forces are reshaping how travel programmes are designed, managed and measured. Travel managers are increasingly being asked to do more with less, while balancing business objectives with employee wellbeing and environmental goals. Suppliers are adapting to changing customer expectations, while travel managers are looking for greater visibility, efficiency and value across their travel ecosystems.

In this environment, collaboration has never been more important. No single organisation, supplier or travel manager can address these challenges alone. The future success of business travel will depend on the industry's ability to come together, share knowledge, exchange best practices and collectively identify solutions to the opportunities and risks ahead. This is where the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) plays a critical role.

As the premier voice of the global business travel industry, GBTA is supporting the continued growth and success of business travel here in India and across the wider APAC region. By bringing together travel managers, suppliers and industry stakeholders, GBTA provides a platform for education, advocacy, networking and professional development.

Building on the momentum of our highly successful APAC Conference earlier this year, which welcomed more than 1,100 delegates from across the region, GBTA is expanding its support for business travel professionals throughout APAC. A key focus is our growing education programme, designed to help industry professionals build expertise across critical topics including traveller experience, risk management, duty of care, sustainability, procurement strategy and emerging technologies.

Additionally, early next year GBTA will host its largest-ever conference in India, taking place in Mumbai. The event will provide an important forum for industry leaders to explore some of the most pressing issues facing the sector today, from geopolitical developments and rising travel costs to sustainability challenges and the transformative impact of AI.

The success of GBTA's face-to-face events to date across India highlights the continued value that business travel professionals place on in-person learning and networking opportunities. Over the past year, we have expanded our programme of regional events, hosting gatherings in cities across India, including, most recently, our hugely successful Business Travel Forum in Pune. These events enable local travel managers, suppliers and wider industry stakeholders to participate and engage with the growing GBTA community. By bringing events closer to where professionals live and work, we are not only strengthening local connections but also increasing awareness of the broader range of education, research, advocacy and professional development resources that GBTA offers. This approach is helping us grow a more connected, informed and engaged business travel community across India.

India's growing momentum as a global business travel powerhouse presents tremendous opportunities for businesses, travellers and the wider economy. To fully realise that potential, our industry must continue working together to address shared challenges, embrace innovation and build a more resilient and sustainable future.

God's Own Country Welcomes the World at Kerala Travel Mart 2026

By Caroline Radhakrishnan, Travel Writer at Currylines.com



The drums erupt in a thunderous rhythm, the beats matching the electrifying atmosphere, while the clarion call of the Kombu (trumpet) fills the air, heralding the grand celebrations of the evening.

The Kathakali dancer flutters his eyes, beckoning with a tantalizing come-hither gaze. Beside him, the Theyyam artiste is no less hypnotic. His face, painted in blazing reds and intricate patterns, seems to summon the ancient spirits of Kerala itself, while a gentler looking King Maveli welcomes onlookers with a benevolent smile and open arms, embodying the warm hospitality of Kerala.

Every two years, the lure of Kerala brings together travel and tourism professionals, media personalities and passionate travellers from across the globe to Kerala Travel Mart, the biennial extravaganza held in Kochi, Kerala, India.

And that is the timeless magic of travel, with its ability to make strangers less strange, make borders feel quite seamless and to remind us that despite all our differences, it is still possible to coexist in peace and harmony.

The 13th edition followed the pattern of earlier marts with a five-day pre-mart media familiarisation tour, which ended in time for the formal inaugural session and grand dinner on September 24 at the Lulu Bolgatty International Convention Centre, adjoining the Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty.

The grand opening ceremony commenced with a majestic showcasing of the cultural essence of Kerala through a vibrantly curated tapestry of local art forms. Featuring Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, Mappila Kolkali, Theyyam, Pulikali, Kalaripayattu and other cultural displays, over 160 artistes performed on stage, celebrating the traditions and communities of Kerala.

The evening was attended by Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan, Tourism, Culture and Cinema Minister P. C. Vishnunadh, Cooperation and Excise Minister M. Liju, Director of Kerala Tourism M. Anjana, Kerala Tourism Secretary K. Biju, Union Tourism Ministry Joint Secretary S. Harikishore, KTM Society President Jose Pradeep and other industry representatives.

Minister P. C. Vishnunadh highlighted the need to showcase lesser-known destinations, with plans to develop infrastructure across 100 new destinations. He also spoke about promoting experiential tourism through the initiative 'Be a Malayali for a Day', planned around the next Onam festival, allowing visitors to participate in local traditions and enjoy the Sadya, Kerala's traditional culinary feast.

Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan, who described himself as a travel enthusiast and avid trekker, outlined a vision for Kerala's tourism industry. His proposed initiatives included new cruise terminals, river cruises, an oceanarium and a maritime museum, among other developments aimed at transforming the state's tourism landscape.

Minister M. Liju spoke about making excise policies more favourable to tourism while maintaining safety and social responsibility. K. Biju's address was accompanied by an audio-visual presentation showcasing Kerala's diverse landscapes and tourism products.

Delivering the keynote address, S. Harikishore appreciated KTM's efforts and suggested creating a one-stop online platform featuring an annual calendar of tourism-related events and products, enabling visitors to plan and book trips in advance. He also recommended organising smaller editions of KTM throughout the year, focusing on destination weddings, MICE, festivals and other tourism segments.

The travel mart officially opened on September 25 at the Samudrika and Sagara Convention Centre on Willingdon Island. The three-day event brought together domestic and international buyers and sellers through exhibitions, seminars and business meetings.

With over 3,000 delegates, including around 800 international buyers from 60 countries and approximately 2,250 domestic buyers, KTM 2026 recorded an unprecedented 58,000 business meetings. The exhibition featured 383 private seller stalls and 25 government-sponsored stalls showcasing resorts, hotels, wellness retreats, homestays and regional tour operators.

The key focus this year was the application of artificial intelligence in tourism, alongside responsible and inclusive tourism. The event also marked a comprehensive digital transformation, with registrations, seminars and B2B meeting schedules managed through dedicated software and a specialised mobile application.

The mart concluded on September 27, followed by post-event tours that gave hosted buyers first-hand experience of tourism products across 12 regions of Kerala.

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Full House, Half Returns? Rethinking Event ROI

ROHIT HANGAL



As someone said, purely with his tongue-in-cheek intact, "If the only ROI you measure is Return on Instagram, you may have missed the point of the event!'

In a world of intangible event experiences, how does the industry assess ROI on concluded meeting activities? KPMG, in its Events and Experiences Economy report, values "India's events and experiences economy spans multiple large and distinct ecosystems, including INR ~46,739 crore of organised MICE activity, INR ~13,600 crore in organised live events, INR ~18,864 crore in the commercial sports economy, and approximately INR 6.5 lakh crore of wedding-linked household expenditure (as per 2025 estimates). The Indian Association of Exhibition Industry adds, "The exhibition industry's contribution to the Indian economy is Rs. 50,000 crores. Business generated through exhibitions is Rs. 300,000 crores."

One of the key takeaways in any organisation's boardrooms while creating budgets for events is a set of words every accountant loves: "What is the ROI?' As an event organiser, the objectives for the event and for the client in most cases are interestingly variable. Can the success of the event be measured by the value it brings in, the delegates or the visitor registration that attends, or, in some cases, does it enhance the brand image or, for that matter, does it increase bottom lines through sponsorship and ticketed entries? Why the success of an event should be measured by the value it creates, not just the number of delegates it attracts. Broadly classifying events into corporate meetings and conferences, exhibitions and trade fairs, weddings and



social events, live events, etc., all come with different and unique Return on Investment barometers. KPMG's 2026 report estimates that each 1 of direct event-related expenditure generates approximately 1.46– 2.03 in total economic activity across the event categories it assessed. MICE recorded the highest multiplier, at 2.03x. In the case of associations, whether academic or professional, conferences and symposiums are platforms for knowledge sessions and exchange, member engagement, business networking and advocacy. The ROI is therefore assessed through tangible and clear-cut outcomes such as new business leads generated, partnerships established, and members finding value in the investment, thus raising the threshold for continued member retention, learning outcomes and the value delivered to sponsors.

Social events are primarily more structured around families and friends and find value in the enhanced camaraderie, bringing in a unique ROI valuation on renewed memories or creating new ones. The broader events economy includes all these categories, but weddings and live entertainment should be kept separate when sizing the MICE segment itself. For corporate meetings, return on investment may be reflected in improved team performance, strategic alignment, sales opportunities or the successful launch of a new initiative. Similarly, incentive programmes are driven towards employee engagement and motivation rather than simply the quality of the destination or experience.

In a world of exceedingly difficult propositions for pitching for sponsorship in a brutally competitive world, where a third party invests in your idea perceiving value to his brand or generating leads. Sponsors and exhibitors demand greater accountability. Visibility and branding are no longer sufficient on their own. They increasingly need qualified leads, meaningful interactions with their target audience, measurable conversions and opportunities to build lasting customer relationships. A sponsor's logo on every wall is visibility. A sponsor's name on a purchase order is ROI!

Tracking engagements before, during the event and after the event would add value to the efforts of the organisers and to the sponsorship the event brings in. Do not just measure the cost per delegate. Measure the value per connection!

The wider economic impact also deserves much attention. Conferences generate business for hotels, convention centres, airlines, restaurants, Ground transport providers and local event vendors. They can promote destinations, support employment and create opportunities for future events. For India, demonstrating this broader value could strengthen the case for greater investment in convention infrastructure and destination marketing.

Finally, in a world where success matters and in a business transaction, where the takeaways are intangible, the most successful events are those that bring the customers back the next year. For governments that spend on sponsoring or exhibiting at various events, it would be prudent to check their increase in tax collections coming in via the travel, tourism and hospitality segments. Attendance may fill the ballroom, but outcomes determine whether an event truly succeeds. Ultimately, the success of the event cannot be measured by how many delegates walked through the doors or how many business cards were exchanged, how lavish the dinner was, or how many photographs flooded LinkedIn the next morning. The test is what happened after the guests went back home. Did business happen? Were relationships strengthened? Did sponsors find value? Did members leave with ideas worth implementing?

The event industry has mastered the art of bringing people and brands together and has worked tirelessly; it is now time to master the art of proving what those meetings achieve. Because a standing ovation may warm the heart, but a measurable return keeps the CFO happy — and ensures there is a budget for the next event!

The future of the events lies in measuring not just who came, but what changed thereafter. Found this line online, which actually sums it up. "ROI: Return on Investment, Not Regret Over Investment."

IITM Mumbai 2026 Opens New Avenues for Tourism and Wedding Travel



MP BUREAU

The India International Travel Mart (IITM) Mumbai 2026 opened at the Bombay Exhibition Centre, bringing together over 150 exhibitors from India and international markets to showcase destinations, travel experiences, hospitality products, and tourism services. Organised by Sphere Travelmedia & Exhibitions Pvt. Ltd., the two-day exhibition, held on 30 and 31 October at NESCO, Goregaon, provided a business platform connecting tourism boards, destination management companies, hotels, resorts, airlines, tour operators and travel agents.

Gujarat Tourism was the Partner State, while Telangana Tourism and Jammu & Kashmir Tourism were the Feature States for this edition. Their participation highlights India's diverse tourism offerings, spanning cultural heritage, spiritual journeys, nature, adventure and immersive travel experiences. Prominent industry representatives attended the inauguration, including Deepak Chaudhary, President, Event Management Association of India (EMAA); Rajesh Poddar, Chairman, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI); Burjis Mehta, President, SKAL International Bombay; and Waseem Raja and Vevaik Puri, representing Jammu & Kashmir Tourism.

A key highlight of the exhibition is the IITM Wedding Collective, presented under the theme "The Wedding Collective – Where Destinations Become Forever." The initiative aimed to connect wedding planners, event managers and destination wedding specialists with hotels, resorts, convention centres and distinctive wedding venues. It encouraged the exploration of destinations beyond traditional wedding hubs, creating opportunities for regional tourism development and hospitality businesses.

Rohit Hangal, Director, Sphere Travelmedia & Exhibitions Pvt. Ltd., said: *"IITM has consistently worked towards bringing the travel trade together and creating meaningful business opportunities for the tourism and hospitality industry. Mumbai is a significant feeder market for destinations across India and overseas, making it an important meeting point for tourism boards, hotels, resorts and travel professionals. With over 150 exhibitors participating, this edition provided an opportunity to strengthen business relationships, discover new products and encourage greater engagement between destinations and the travel trade. The inclusion of the Wedding Collective is a natural extension of this vision, addressing the growing convergence of travel, hospitality, weddings and experiential celebrations."*

Sanjay Hakhu, Director, Sphere Travelmedia & Exhibitions Pvt. Ltd., added: "Our objective with IITM is to create a platform where destinations and travel businesses can interact directly with the marketplace, build partnerships and explore new avenues for growth. Gujarat Tourism, along with our Feature States Telangana and Jammu & Kashmir, brings a diverse range of experiences to the exhibition. We are also excited about the Wedding Collective, which opened a dedicated avenue for wedding planners and event managers to connect with destinations, hotels, resorts and other specialised suppliers. We believe that combining destination promotion with focused business networking will help generate fresh opportunities for the participating stakeholders."

The Mumbai edition forms part of IITM's multi-city exhibition series. Upcoming editions will take place in Pune (26–28 November 2026), Hyderabad (3–5 December 2026), Cochin (7–9 January 2027), Kolkata (19–20 February 2027) and Ahmedabad (12–13 March 2027).








India International Travel Mart









VIPIN KHATTAR

Chief Commercial Officer, South Asia - Accor



Accor has announced the appointment of Vipin Khattar as Chief Commercial Officer, South Asia. In this role, he will lead the Group's commercial strategy across the region, overseeing sales, revenue management, marketing, digital distribution, loyalty, partnerships, and transformation initiatives.

Commenting on his new role, Vipin Khattar said: *"I am excited to join Accor at such a dynamic phase of its growth journey in South Asia. The region presents tremendous opportunities, and I look forward to collaborating closely with our teams, hotel owners, and partners to strengthen commercial performance, elevate our brands, and drive sustainable growth across the market."*

ENA ROY

General Manager - Courtyard By Marriott Bengaluru Hebbal



Courtyard by Marriott Bengaluru Hebbal has appointed Ena Roy as its new General Manager. In her new role, Ena will provide commercial, strategic and operational leadership across the hotel, with a focus on excellence, business performance, team development and guest experience.

Ena's leadership will also focus on fostering a culture that encourages curiosity, collaboration and connection, while ensuring the hotel continues to evolve with the changing needs of next-generation travellers. Her approach aligns with Courtyard's forward-thinking spirit, combining thoughtful hospitality with an understanding of emerging trends and evolving guest expectations.

NEERAJ SETH

Assistant Vice President - Atmosphere Core



Atmosphere Core has appointed Neeraj Seth as Assistant Vice President – Communication. Neeraj will lead strategic communication initiatives across the company's Maldives and Sri Lanka operations, focusing on media relations, corporate communications and brand storytelling.

Commenting on his appointment, Neeraj Seth said: *"I am delighted to join Atmosphere Core at an exciting stage of its growth. Our distinctive brands and experiences offer a wealth of compelling stories, and I look forward to bringing more nuanced, market-relevant storytelling to different audiences, while strengthening our communications, deepening media relationships and building the group's international profile."*

MANISH DEOLEKAR

General Manager - The Fern Hotels & Resorts, Series by Marriott



The Fern Hotels & Resorts, Series by Marriott has appointed Manish Deolekar as General Manager – Business Development. In his new role, Manish Deolekar will spearhead the brand's business development mandate, with a focus on driving expansion across India, identifying new markets, strengthening relationships with hotel owners, developers and evaluating opportunities through robust feasibility assessments.

Commenting on his new role, Manish Deolekar said, *"Having spent over a decade with the brand from unit-level operations to regional oversight, I bring both an owner's-eye view of what makes a hotel succeed and an operator's discipline in execution. As we scale nationally, I remain committed to the same principle that has guided my career: a passion for excellence in every market we enter."*

PROJJWAL GHOSH

Area Champion – Sales & Marketing at InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort



InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort has announced the appointment of Projjwal Ghosh as Area Champion – Sales & Marketing, Southwest Asia, IHG Hotels & Resorts and Director of Sales & Marketing, InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort. In this role, Projjwal will drive revenue growth, commercial strategy, market positioning and performance across the portfolio, while identifying new business opportunities, strengthening key accounts and driving MICE, social and cross-property synergies.

Commenting on the appointment, Anand Nair, General Manager, InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort, said, *"We look forward to working with him as he continues to strengthen our commercial efforts and build meaningful relationships with our partners and stakeholders."*

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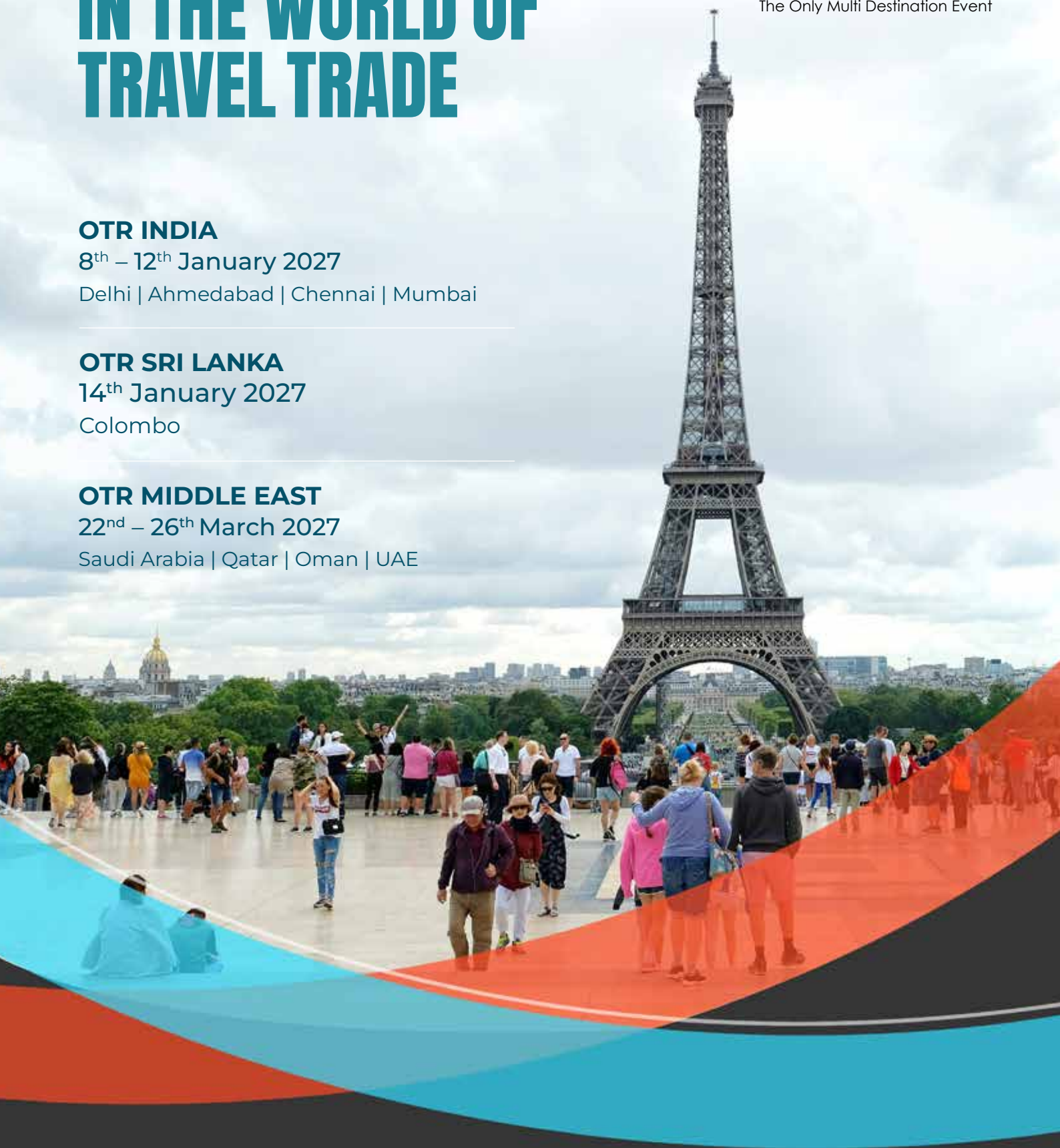
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