



# Happy New Year

As the New Year dawns, may it be filled with new hopes, new aspirations, and new opportunities. Embrace the possibilities and make the most of the fresh start.

**National Management Committee  
and  
Chapter Committees**

## **\* President Speaks \***

Dear TAFI'ites,

***A very Happy New Year to your families and to you!***

A new year brings fresh beginnings, fresh ideas, fresh hopes and desires; it also brings new challenges! ***May 2024 fulfil your dreams and aspirations.***

The travel landscape is changing with increasing rapidity and we, too, must evolve to keep abreast.

2023 was the year of recovery – domestic tourism continues to grow, outbound numbers are set to surpass pre-pandemic numbers, only inbound has yet to recover fully. 2024 promises to be the year of a rapid takeoff.

The successful launch of the Chandrayaan, the resounding success of the G 20 conferences and the robust growth of the economy have placed India squarely in global focus; this is the time for the tourism industry to reap the benefits of this heightened awareness.

Many countries have opened their borders and now offer visa-free travel to Indian tourists, the two major airlines have placed large orders for new aircraft and new airports are being commissioned in the country – all these factors are bound to give a fillip to travel and tourism.

***Your Managing Committee*** has consistently made efforts to provide opportunities and avenues for development through presentations, workshops and through skill courses on our website which are available to all members. Technology is our biggest ally in the rapidly changing scenario and I would urge all of you to proactively engage with the latest developments and learn to use the new technology to enhance your product offers.

Travellers have got used to the instant-pay model, thanks to the LCCs; there is no need to extend long credits or to be shy about charging for services. We have initiated a public awareness program – ***“Without A Travel Agent You're On Your Own.”*** Please share the short video with your clients and suppliers to reinforce this initiative. Travel will only grow in the year ahead and we need to make sure that travellers are made aware of the advantages of dealing with a qualified travel advisor.

On the flip side, the global geopolitical situation and the existential threat of climate change are extremely worrying. Tourism needs peace to grow and the wars in Ukraine and Gaza will have a devastating and lingering effect on our industry. Simultaneously, climate change is threatening the very existence of many island states – popular global destinations, and the frequency of natural calamities have increased exponentially.

***As one of the biggest industries in the world, tourism has a role to play in the future of the Planet. Let us all pledge to act in unison to reduce the carbon footprint of our industry and let us unitedly strive to incorporate the higher paradigm of tourism into our core business practices to transform every tourist into an Ambassador for Peace. How's that for a New Year pledge?***

**AJAY PRAKASH**

**Your President**



**President Ajay Prakash**

## From the desk of your Vice President

Dear TAFI'ates,

**Wishing you a wonderful 2024.....**

**The New year** Brings with it many new opportunities, and challenges as well. We have to evolve and stay ahead of the curve and keep our businesses relevant and remunerative.

While we all are Travel Professionals, each of us has a special niche that keeps us ahead and relevant in this ever changing world.

However, we have recently seen a marked surge in " Promotions by Influencers" , the advent of **"REELS"** and the advent of **Artificial Intelligence ; AI GPT or CHAT GPT.**

Leveraging AI GPT for a travel and tourism business can enhance customer engagement, provide personalised assistance, and improve overall user experience.

We must prioritise Learning and Upskilling. If we learn and imbibe the nuances of the new tools, we can use them to our advantage, and stay ahead of the competition.

Here are some ways to best use AI GPT for your travel and tourism business:

### **1. Customer Support and Assistance:**

- Implement a chatbot on your website or mobile app to provide instant responses to customer queries.
- Offer assistance in booking, cancellations, and itinerary changes.
- Provide information on travel destinations, visa requirements, and travel restrictions.

### **2. Personalised Recommendations:**

- Use AI GPT to understand customer preferences and offer personalised travel recommendations.
- Provide suggestions for hotels, activities, and restaurants based on individual preferences and past behaviours.

### **3. Booking Assistance:**

- Allow users to book flights, hotels, and activities directly through the chatbot.
- Guide customers through the booking process and assist with any issues they may encounter.

### **4. Travel Itinerary Planning:**

- Help users plan their travel itineraries, including sightseeing, transportation, and accommodation.
- Provide day-to-day schedules with recommended activities, dining options, and local attractions.

### **5. Real-time Updates:**

- Offer real-time updates on flight statuses, delays, and cancellations.
- Provide information on weather conditions, traffic, and other relevant updates that may affect travel plans.

### **6. Promotions and Deals:**

- Use AI GPT to inform users about the latest promotions, discounts, and travel deals.
- Personalise promotions based on user preferences and past behaviour.

By implementing these strategies, you can enhance the overall customer experience, streamline processes, and provide valuable assistance to travellers using AI GPT in your travel and tourism business. Upskill and enjoy the fruits of technology.

**Anil Kalsi - Vice President.**



## New Year Message From National Secretary

Dear Tafi'ites,

**"HAPPY NEW YEAR!"**

*I take this opportunity to wish you, your loved ones, and the staff working in your companies, "A HAPPY NEW YEAR".*



**2023**, an election year for TAFI, which saw changes in most of the chapter committees, as well as some of the ex- chairpersons moving to the National Committee.

The **NJC in Muscat, Oman** on 8 December 2023, the fellowship and networking from 7 -10 Dec, has created an atmosphere of collaboration between members of different chapters. A sharing of resources has given members opportunities in the other regions within the country and worldwide.

**2024** will hopefully be the '**proof of concept**' for the new chapter committees, for the Chairpersons to lead their individual chapters, and to create a constructive collaboration with the other chapters, to implement and discuss innovative ideas and processes within TAFI in their regions and in other chapters, PAN India.

**TAFI is coming of age and 2024 will see a cooperation of and between TAFI members PAN INDIA.**

One of the biggest challenges facing the travel tourism and hospitality sector in India, is in the fracture of its stakeholders into different associations and groups, with little or no bargaining power.

Is a consolidation required? Hopefully 2024 will bring answers, which will take us in the correct direction. Will it strengthen the way the travel tourism and hospitality sector projects itself? and emphasise the overall contribution to GDP that the sector brings to our economy?

Progressive states have realised the potential of the Travel and Tourism Sector and moved to award industry status to the sector in their states, paving the way to investment opportunities for the public and private sector. The powers that be, have already recognised the contribution of the Travel, Tourism and Hospitality sector and one hopes that 2024 will bring them to take the much-needed next step to award the Travel, Tourism and Hospitality sector, an Industry status.

As we await 2024, one must not ignore the contributions of the past years, a work in progress, which we must ensure, is handed over to the new generation, who will continue to take TAFI to new heights.

**Once Again, Tafi'ites, Best Wishes for a Healthy and Fulfilling 2024.**

**Abbas Moiz- National General Secretary**

## Treasurer's Message for the New Year

### *Happy New Year!*

Here's to living life to the full in **2024**. As a wise person once said, "**You only live once**, but if you do it right, once is enough!" As 2024 approaches, I realise how lucky I am to count you as my friends. My New Year's resolution is to make more time to catch up with you all, no matter how crazy work and life gets. I know this past year has had its fair share of ups and downs - but good or bad, these experiences have shaped who we are today and who we will be in the future. Onwards and upwards my friends, with no regrets!



May you find the perspective you seek in 2024. As a wise person once said, "**Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass, it's about learning to dance in the rain**". Learn to keep aside our differences and create a sense of harmony through collaboration, not only within ourselves but also with our partners, stakeholders. Each new year brings unique challenges. In our endeavour to face these challenges, we create solutions for those challenges.

**TAFI, as an association**, has always been emulating these ethos, and will continue to do so, in 2024 and the coming years. TAFI's strength lies in its members, who go the extra mile to ensure that TAFI remains the BEST Association.

With the turning of the calendar and the arrival of a New Year, may you find renewed hope, inspiration, and determination to achieve your dreams. I believe in your ability to make this year extraordinary, and I'm here to support you every step of the way. Here's to the dreams we've yet to dream and the adventures we've yet to experience. May the New Year be full of exciting possibilities.

**Happy New Year!**

***Hitank Shah. National Treasurer.***



### Eastern India Chapter held their members meeting at Polo Floatel, Calcutta on 21st Dec '23



**Eastern India Chapter** held their bimonthly at **Polo Floatel**, Calcutta on 21st December '23. The meeting started with the **Chairman Bilalaksha Das's** welcome address. **Mr. Abhijit Dhar, the Secretary**, conducted the meeting as per the agenda. Later renowned **CA Arjun Akruwala** took the floor, enlightening the Travel Fraternity about the intricacies of **GST & TCS** services. The session, divided into three parts, covered airlines, hotels, and tour packages. The interactive nature of the session allowed for crucial decisions, benefiting the entire travel community present. Thereafter **VFS Global Kolkata**, led by **DGM Shakila Josh** took the stage. The team provided valuable updates on visa processes. A proactive proposal emerged from TAFI to organise a workshop with VFS Global before peak season. Later **Mr. Anil Punjabi** highlighted TAFI Meet 2023's objective to furnish valuable insights into the travel industry. The discussions were engaging, covering a spectrum of topics pertinent to the industry's growth and challenges. The event concluded on a festive note with the Chairperson extending a vote of thanks to all participants. This was followed by the **traditional cake mixing ceremony** at the Polo Floatel deck, creating a delightful ambiance. The day wrapped up with a lovely luncheon, allowing members to reflect on the fruitful discussions and collaborations that transpired throughout the event.

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### We hope India will also look at easing its visa regime, we need our fair share of inbound traffic: Ajay Prakash

© December 14, 2023



Sharing his expectations from 2024, Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI, said, "We hope that in the new year, India will also look at liberalizing its visa regime so that foreign tourists will be able to travel to India more freely and with fewer hassles. Travel is increasing and India needs to get a fair share of inbound traffic."

### **“2023 - The year that was “ - GB Srithar Regional Director, India, M. Et, S.Asia & Africa, STB**



**GB Srithar**  
Regional Director, India, Middle East,  
South Asia & Africa, STB

**Year 2023** has seen impressive growth for the travel industry, thanks to the demand from millennials, high spending power and technology providing the right impetus. It takes industry views. As Indian travellers made 2023 a big year for exploring the world, Singapore emerged as a top choice. Throughout the year, Indian visitors flew to Singapore from 17 directly connected cities. Till October-end, we had warmly welcomed 887,314 visitors from India, and we will round off the year with more than one million Indians to the City of Nature. This high number can be attributed to factors like the strong socio-cultural ties between the two nations, Singapore's proximity to India, and the appeal of the city's diverse experiences tailored to the preferences of Indian travellers seeking an extraordinary holiday.

### **Unprecedented demand in 2023**



**Jay Kantawala**  
Chairman, TAFI Western India Chapter &  
Founding Partner, WIYO Travel

**“ It seems like 2022** brought a surge in travel due to various factors like revenge travel, but 2023 saw a return to more stabilised patterns. Some of the achievements include adaptation to changing circumstances and adapting to the changing dynamics of the travel industry, especially with challenges such as fluctuating travel patterns and visa appointment difficulties. Clients are now planning to secure lower fare”.

- **Jay Kantawala Chairman, TAFI Western India Chapter & Founding Partner, WIYO Travel**

**“As we approach the end of 2023,** the pace at which the year has unfolded seems almost surreal. December is upon us, and it prompts us to reflect on the remarkable journey we have experienced in the realm of travel and tourism. The restricted visa access to Schengen, the US, and Canada prompted us to explore newer destinations, offering flexible e-visa options or visa on arrival. India's growing economy prompted higher spending”.

- **Arun Iyer Secretary, TAFI Western India Chapter & MD, My Golf Tour**



**Arun Iyer**  
Secretary, TAFI Western India Chapter &  
MD, My Golf Tours



**Srijit Nair**  
General Manager - EMEA & India  
Rail Europe

**“ Rail Europe in India** has had a fantastic year, and the credit goes to our committed network of GSAs. With over two decades of collaboration, our Indian GSAs form a powerhouse, adeptly utilising our APIs and showcasing exceptional tech-savviness. India stands out as a rare market where B2B transactions dominate our business landscape. India has climbed to second position in global turnover, just behind the US”.

- **Srijit Nair General Manager - EMEA & India Rail Europe.**

**“ We are at around 40 percent** of our pre-COVID mark and counting. The Ministry of Tourism and other policy makers are supporting the cause of tourism and with the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India leading from the front with the G20 Summit and other arsenal, a bright tomorrow awaits us. Some of the tourism niches that will be prevalent in the upcoming years are sustainable tourism, MICE, weddings, and wellness tourism”

- **Rajiv Mehra President IATO.**



**Rajiv Mehra**  
President  
IATO



**Nishant Kashikar**  
Country Manager- India & Gulf  
Tourism Australia

**“ 2023 was a truly rewarding year** for Tourism Australia. India became the first global market to hit preCOVID levels; arrivals from India for the year-ended September 2023 were 386,000, which were at par with 2019 levels. Total trip spent by Indians for the year ended June 2023 was A\$2.2 billion (around `12,000 crore). Australia has established itself as a preferred long-haul destination for Indian travellers with its ranking going up” .

- **Nishant Kashikar Country Manager- India & Gulf Tourism Australia**

**“Year 2023 for Nepal** has been a year of recovery and rebuilding tourism. Our expectation from 2024 is promising. India will always stay as our priority source market and the trend of Indian tourist arrival from 2023 will surge in 2024 for sure. Not only pilgrimage but we will see adventure seekers and nature lovers, including a wellness segment. The lifetime experiences offered in Nepal are expected to benefit all kinds of travellers”

-**Srijana Nepali Officer, South Asia Unit, Tourism Marketing & Promotion Department, NTB**



**Srijana Nepali**  
Officer South Asia Unit, Tourism  
Marketing & Promotion Department, NTB

## **PM Modi to Unveil Ayodhya's New Airport and Railway Station in Grand Roadshow** (reported as on 27 Dec)



PM Modi is set to embark on a roadshow and address a public gathering in Ayodhya on **December 30**, following the inauguration of the town's **new airport** and the unveiling of the redeveloped **railway station**. The events are scheduled to precede the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple, which is slated for **January 22**. The official itinerary outlines a roadshow, spanning from the newly inaugurated airport to the redeveloped railway station. **Ayodhya District Magistrate Nitish Kumar** informed, stating, "The prime minister will inaugurate the Ayodhya airport first and then he will move to the railway station in a roadshow" covering Dharam Path, Lata Mangeshkar Chowk, Ram Path, Tedhi Bazaar, and the Mohabra intersection. At the railway station, Prime Minister Modi is expected to flag off Vande Bharat and Amrit Bharat trains, symbolising a significant step forward in the region's transportation infrastructure. This visit by Prime Minister Modi underscores the strategic importance of Ayodhya, not only as a religious and cultural centre but also as a hub for enhanced connectivity and infrastructure development. The inauguration of the airport and railway station aligns with the government's commitment to bolster transportation networks and boost overall development in Ayodhya.

## **Amnesty for GST Taxpayers:**



1. **The GST Council** recommended granting amnesty to taxpayers who couldn't file an appeal against the demand order, passed on or before March 31, 2023, or whose appeal was rejected due to late filing.
2. Taxpayers can file an appeal in FORM GST APL-01 on the GST portal by January 31, 2024. Payments for the appeal should be made as per **Notification No. 53/2023**.
3. Taxpayers must select the appropriate mode of payment on the GST Portal, and the correctness of the payment will be checked by the Appellate Authority before entertaining the appeal.
4. Taxpayers who have already filed an appeal can be covered by the amnesty scheme by making differential payments against the demand order using the "Payment towards demand" facility.
5. In case of issues while re-filing the appeal, taxpayers can raise a ticket on the Grievance redressal portal, selecting the appropriate categories.
6. If the appeal application was rejected due to being time-barred, taxpayers need to approach the respective Appellate authority office in advance.
7. **Appeals rejected under APL 04** must be forwarded through the State Nodal officer; no direct representations will be entertained by GSTN or the Grievance redressal portal.
8. GSTN will enable the taxpayer to file an appeal after receiving the case from the State nodal officer.
9. **Circular dt. 29.11.2023** was issued by Delhi GST for mentioning of Din or RFN on all communication between Delhi State officers and taxpayers.



## **TBO acquires online business of Jumbo Tours Group of Spain for 25 million Euros**



Sharing a major business update, global travel distribution platform TBO Tek announced that it has signed a deal to acquire the online business of Jumbo Tours Group of Spain, through its wholly owned subsidiary Tek Travels DMCC. The company acquired the business for a consideration of 25 million Euros as per the draft IPO papers. This acquisition will give TBO access to great supply across Europe, the Caribbean and North Africa, amongst other destinations along with Jumbo's extensive client portfolio

across Europe. Jumbonline distributes a range of products for wholesalers and tour operators through an application programming interface (API) solution that gives access to more than 120,000 hotels across Europe, the Caribbean and North Africa. TBO Tek, which has filed its draft IPO papers with SEBI, also announced that Mustafa Korkmaz and Anurag Aggarwal will lead Jumbonline as CEO and chief financial officer, respectively. Founded in 2006 by Co-Founders Ankush Nijhawan and Gaurav Bhatnagar, TBO connects travel suppliers such as hotels, airline, car rental companies and more with buyers such as travel agents and tour operators. Jumbo Tours Group is an international tourism operator offering services and products to tourism operators and travel agencies worldwide. The Jumbo online business distributes products for wholesalers and tour operators under one single platform. The destination management company business of Jumbo Tours Group will remain a part of Alpitour World. This development reflects the growth plans that TBO has set globally as it continues to step up investments by constantly looking at similar partnerships to expand, hire and improve customer experience towards its vision of simplifying and empowering the travel ecosystem.

## **Saudi Arabia launches unified visa platform 'KSA Visa'**

Saudi Arabia announced on 19 Nov the launch of a unified visa platform called '**KSA Visa**' to facilitate visa application procedures. Addressing the **Digital Government Forum (DGF)** in Riyadh. Assistant Minister for Executive Affairs at the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs Abdulhadi Almansouri** said that this platform is linked to more than 30 agencies, ministries, and the private sector, to facilitate procedures for obtaining various types of visas, including the Hajj visa or the visit visa for the purpose of Umrah or tourism as well as work visas. **GOV.SA platform** will contribute to empowering more than 50 government agencies and private sectors through government visas and will automate the most important visa issuance procedures to improve the visitor experience. GOV.SA is a smart search engine that lets visitors know the available visas quickly. The platform also includes an updated personal file for the visitor that facilitates visas and re-application for them later. The Saudi move comes within the framework of its endeavour to increase the number of tourists, especially after launching many new tourist destinations, and raising its tourism target to **150 million visits annually by 2030**. The launch of the new Saudi platform coincides with the efforts of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to launch a unified Gulf tourist visa, after a decision in this regard was approved by the Supreme Council of the GCC countries at the Doha Summit held in November. The summit had authorised the interior ministers of GCC to take the necessary measures to implement this new visa rules. The Kingdom also worked with 56 countries with regard to the visa digitization journey. According to the targets envisaged in the general budget of 2024, Saudi Arabia seeks to increase the volume of tourism spending to **SR 289 billion**, as well as to achieve 88 million visitors, and more employment in the tourism sector. **The Governor of the Digital Government Authority Ahmed Alsuwaiyan** said earlier that in light of the Kingdom's Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia is working to continue the digital transformation journey, by enabling all government agencies to raise the efficiency of digital services that contribute to improving the experience of beneficiaries and the quality of life, apart from increasing competitiveness.

## **ASTA continues public fight with American Airlines**



In a Dec 20th complaint to the DOT that was a reply to America's response to ASTA's original complaint, ASTA said American unfairly removed 40% of its fares from legacy systems that travel advisors have used for decades. ASTA said the move harmed travel agencies and their customers. American had warned travel agencies in October 2022 that they would soon need to book from systems based on New Distribution Capability (NDC) technology in order to receive all of the airline's content. At the time, American said it had reached deals with the major GDSs to make NDC connections available to their travel agency clients. ASTA has been pushing back against American's NDC strategy since then. After American made the NDC move last April 3, ASTA said there were service shortcomings with NDC bookings, and ASTA said those problems persist today. "The fact that the deficiencies remain reveals that very little progress has been made to close the functionality gap," ASTA said. The Society accused Americans of "arrogantly" dismissing the desires of consumers who book with travel agencies. ASTA also pushed back against AA's assertion that agencies were "hostage to old technology" and unwilling to modernise. "Nothing could be further from the truth," ASTA said. "The reality is that AA was the party 'not ready to modernise,' as its solution was (and remains) unready to meet the needs of the industry, yet it forged ahead anyway despite the predicted chaos that ensued." Further, ASTA said making the NDC connection is an expensive proposition. While some companies, like the OTAs, have adopted NDC technology, the Society argues they have the budgets to do so, whereas most small and medium-sized agencies do not. And, ASTA said, OTA clients are largely travelling for leisure, but agencies managing corporate travel must offer a level of duty of care to their clients. The bottom line, said ASTA, is that the legacy GDS is travel agencies' most effective booking method, and they now don't have the lowest American Airlines fares available to them. ASTA wants the DOT to rectify that situation by requiring American to restore the content it took away.

## **Pinching the pocket: Why are domestic airfares skyrocketing by up to 229% on some routes?**

Airfares on certain domestic routes have skyrocketed up to threefold in the current financial year due to reduced competition, leaving only one or two airlines operating on these routes. For example, fares for non-stop flights between **Srinagar and Leh have surged by 229%** between April and November, compared to the average increase of 21% across the country, according to data provided by travel portal Ixigo. The number of flights on the Srinagar-Leh route has also decreased from 469 to 78 during this period. Air India is now the sole carrier on the Srinagar-Leh route after Go First, which operated the majority of flights last year, went bankrupt in May. Similarly, on Jaipur-Goa route, IndiGo is only airline offering non-stop flights, leading to a 135% increase in airfares between April and November. Some routes, like Srinagar-Chandigarh and Dehradun-Mumbai, have also seen fare increases of 113% and 57% respectively. Out of approximately 1,100 air routes in India, nearly 800 are monopolised by a single airline. IndiGo operates around 500 routes, while Air India Group operates around 200. SpiceJet, which previously connected smaller towns, has reduced its capacity due to operational and financial issues. Experts predict that this duopoly will lead to a widespread increase in airfares, which have historically remained low due to intense competition. To address rising airfares, the government has established a Tariff Monitoring Unit under DGCA to regularly monitor airfares on selected routes. The unit aims to keep airfares in check and protect consumer interests. ***The government's efforts to regulate fares have been largely unsuccessful in the past, but with the establishment of the Tariff Monitoring Unit, there may be a shift in the situation.***

## Govt spending INR 1.5 lakh cr to improve connectivity to tourist, religious places: Nitin Gadkari



The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has taken up **321 NHs** projects in a length of about **8,544 km** and amounting to **INR 1,49,758 crore** for improvement of important tourist / religious connectivity. **Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari** said that the Ministry is primarily responsible for development and maintenance of National Highways (NHs). The development of NHs is carried out after network planning on PM Gati Shakti principle with the whole of the government approach. While planning the development, important economic, tourist and religious connections are invariably taken up with special focus on Way Side Amenities (WSAs), adequate signages and road side / median beautifications and more. Thus, there is no requirement of dedicated funding / scheme for development of tourist / religious destinations, the minister stated during his Lok Sabha session. The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has undertaken several projects across various states and union territories aimed at enhancing connectivity to important tourist and religious destinations. In Andaman & Nicobar Islands, 2 projects worth 540 cr are underway, while Andhra Pradesh has 5 projects covering INR 2,588 crore. Arunachal Pradesh sees 7 projects totaling INR 7,648 crore rupees, while Assam has 9 projects for INR 1,861 crore. Ladakh has 8 projects aiming for INR 2,368 crore. Other states include Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand and more.

## Global business travel spending to reach USD 1.8 trillion by 2027



**Arabian Travel Mart (ATM)** has forged a strategic partnership with the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) and the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) for its upcoming event scheduled from **May 6-9, 2024**, at the **Dubai World Trade Centre**. This collaboration designates ICCA and GBTA as 'Knowledge Partners' for the regional trade show, offering profound insights and opportunities for the thriving business events & travel segments. The ICCA statistical forecast revealed that in 2022, there were **10,602** recorded business events globally, with a remarkable **349%** increase in in-person events, reaching **9,009 (85%)** compared to the previous year. The Middle East accounted for the highest percentage of in-person delegates at **94%**, according to

last year's official figures. The business travel industry is also witnessing significant growth, as outlined in the 2023 GBTA Business Travel Index Report. The report indicated a faster-than-expected rebound in the global business travel industry in 2023, with spending rising by **47%** to **USD 1.03 trillion** and an anticipated global growth to nearly **USD 1.8 trillion** by **2027**. **Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director, Arabian Travel Market**, emphasised the importance of the collaboration with ICCA and GBTA, stating that the partnership will elevate ATM's offering, providing enhanced value and innovation to attendees and exhibitors. During ATM 2024, ICCA will conduct seminars covering various MICE industry topics, while GBTA will present prevailing trends in the business travel sector. **Dr Senthil Gopinath, CEO, ICCA**, expressed enthusiasm about the collaboration, stating that it marks an exciting inclusion of business events as a foundational segment in future editions. **Catherine Logan, Regional Senior Vice President EMEA and APAC, GBTA**, highlighted the **MEA** region's potential for growth in business travel and its recovery to **95%** of pre-pandemic spending in 2022. Theme for the 31st edition of ATM is '**Empowering Innovation: Transforming Travel Through Entrepreneurship**,' focusing on exploring how innovators in the travel & tourism space attract greater funding to increase the sector's overall contribution to global GDP. Last year's event welcomed over 40,000 attendees, marking a record number.

## IT Reopening of Case applicable income over Rs 50 Lacs



**Delhi high court** has recently held that the **extended period of ten years**, for re-opening of Income-tax (I-T) assessments should be **applicable only** in cases involving serious tax evasion where evidence of concealing income is above **Rs. 50 lakh**. The Delhi High Court recently made a significant ruling regarding the extended period for re-opening Income-tax (I-T) assessments. *The court determined that the ten-year period for reopening assessments should be applicable only in cases involving serious tax evasion that includes evidence of concealing income of amounts above Rs. 50 lakh.* To provide context, when assessing income tax, the Income Tax Department has the authority to reopen an assessment that was previously completed if they have reason to believe that income has been concealed or there has been tax evasion. Generally, the time limit for reopening assessments is **three years from the end of the relevant assessment year**. However, a longer period of ten years is allowed in certain cases. In this particular ruling, the Delhi High Court clarified that the **extended ten-year period** should only apply in cases where serious tax evasion is involved and **evidence of concealing income of Rs. 50 lakh** or more is present. This means that if the concealed income is below Rs. 50 lakh, the three-year time limit for reopening assessments would apply. By establishing this threshold, the court aims to ensure that the longer period for reopening assessments is reserved for cases involving significant amounts of concealed income, while limiting the reopening period for smaller-scale tax evasion cases. This ruling provides clarity on the criteria for applying the ten-year limit and helps prevent the **misuse or arbitrary** use of the extended period for reopening assessments.

## Thousands Of Tourists Flock Mysuru, Kodagu For Holidays



**The Christmas and New Year season** is attracting thousands of tourists to Mysuru and Kodagu, with visitors streaming in from Bengaluru and other locations since yesterday morning, taking advantage of the extended weekend. Consequently, toll booths along Mysuru-Bengaluru Expressway experienced heavy traffic, particularly 23 Dec afternoon & evening and 24 Dec morning. Despite all gates being FastAG-enabled for swift automatic clearance, the substantial influx of vehicles entering

Mysuru caused considerable delays. 24 Dec morning, all the tourist places in Mysuru and Mandya regions such as Mysore Palace, Mysuru Zoo, Chamundi Hill, Winter Flower Show at Palace, Krishna Raja Sagar Dam, Srirangapatna, Melukote and even areas like Balamuri reported excessive tourists, despite the hot sun. The numbers are expected to swell after 3 pm. The Mysuru and Kodagu regions are witnessing a surge in tourist activity due to the closure of all tourist spots along the Chandra Drona Mountain Range by the Chikkamagaluru District Administration for six days in observance of Datta Jayanti. A total ban has been enforced, prohibiting all tourists from visiting Mullayanagiri, Dattapeetha, Sitalayyanagiri, Chatikere and Manikyadhara, starting from yesterday until Dec. 27. In addition to this, a three-day liquor ban has been implemented in Chikkamagaluru, Mudigere, Sringeri, Koppa and N.R. Pura. According to tourism stakeholders, the situation is anticipated to ease after Dec. 28 when some tourists are expected to divert their plans towards Chikkamagaluru. However, those who have already arrived in Mysuru and Kodagu are likely to remain stationed there. According to C. Narayanagowda, President of the Mysuru Hotel Owners' Association, all 425 hotels, offering a total of 10,500 rooms of various categories in Mysuru city, are currently fully booked from Dec. 23 to Dec. 31. This high occupancy extends not only to hotels but also includes guest houses, resorts on the outskirts, home stays and clubs. Narayanagowda said, "After Dasara, we have been receiving constant enquiries for room bookings, including numerous online inquiries. We have conveyed the message of 100 percent bookings and we anticipate that the rush will extend beyond New Year."



## **Tourism New Zealand reflects on a successful 2023, foresees continued growth in Indian market**



In a recent interaction, **Gregg Wafelbakker**, General Manager **Asia at Tourism New Zealand**, provided a comprehensive overview of the milestones and insights gained in 2023, shedding light on the growth of New Zealand's tourism market and outlining strategies for the Indian market in 2024. Wafelbakker described 2023 as a year marked by milestones, particularly in terms of visitation numbers and brand growth. From **January to September 2023**, the total number of arrivals from India reached an impressive **60,267**, showcasing a remarkable 34% surge compared to the same period in 2019. The robust recovery during this period solidified India's position as a crucial visitor market for New Zealand. Wafelbakker emphasised the crucial learning from the accomplishments in 2023—the need to continue building momentum in India by growing the desire for New Zealand and converting this into bookings. The strategy involves leveraging strong partnerships through trade collaborations, media alliances, and opportunities for advocacy. Looking ahead to 2024, Tourism New Zealand aims to continue converting high-quality Indian visitors. This involves incorporating content that specifically addresses travel obstacles for Indian travellers in campaigns, partnerships, and trade efforts.

## **Cabinet approves international status for Surat Airport**



The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi has approved the proposal to declare Surat Airport as an International Airport. As per the official statement, the Surat Airport will not only become a gateway for international travellers but also facilitate seamless export-import operations for the thriving diamond and textile - industries. Also, this strategic move promises to unlock unprecedented economic potential, making Surat a key player in the international aviation landscape and fostering a new era of prosperity for the region. Surat, a rapidly growing city in India, has demonstrated remarkable economic prowess and industrial development. Elevating Surat Airport to international status is paramount for enhancing economic growth, attracting foreign investment, and bolstering diplomatic ties. With a surge in passenger traffic and cargo operations, the airport's international designation will provide a crucial impetus for regional development.

## **Biometrics for immigration soon: Scindia**



Indian Airports will soon start using biometric-based immigration for international passengers — hopefully making lining up at those counters while flying in and out of the country a thing of the past. Some airports like Delhi and Bengaluru could start pilot projects for the same next year, for which work is learnt to be in progress. "As far as using biometrics for immigration, we have started data collection at international airports. Once the fundamental infrastructure and software are in place, we will start rolling it out. As of now, our focus is more on the domestic side for rolling out Digi Yatra at 25 more airports (which has to be done by the end of next calendar year). Once that exercise is complete, we will also look at this (biometric-based immigration) in parallel. That is work in progress," Union aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Friday. Following complaints of long waiting time at many immigration counters due to staff shortage last winter, the central government has deployed about 1,500 more personnel now.

## **Snippets #**

- **Govt aims for \$800 bn boost from adventure tourism; foresees India in top 10 destinations**
- **Life in Singapore 'normal', travellers told not to panic**

## Mistakes Travel Advisors Should Avoid in 2024



**The new year** is right around the corner. Are you ready to have a successful year? It can be easy to get comfortable and fall into the same routines, which can be great in some cases, but in other situations, change is exactly what we need to discontinue those bad habits and mistakes.

**Here are some mistakes that you should avoid in 2024.**

**Operational** Don't run from efficiency. These days, it is all about automation and working smarter, not harder. Avoid trying to do everything and find ways to use technology and other resources to streamline your operations. Holding on to those outdated methods could be holding you back. Using more technology to increase efficiency will also mean you need more security. Avoid the opinion that digital security isn't necessary. Ensure you have a solid VPN and other tech security measures to protect your clients, assets, and business.

**Financial** Charging fees have been a hot topic and will continue to do so until the entire industry is on one accord. Avoid thinking that you are not worthy of being paid a professional fee. Charging a fee will not only give you an additional income stream but also uplift the perception of travel advisors as a whole and show the industry and the world our true worth. Reviewing income, expenses, and taxes can be burdensome. However, you should avoid only looking at these numbers once a year. Consider doing quarterly reviews of your finances. This will help you prepare for taxes and billing but also help hold you accountable for the financial goals you've set for the year.

**Marketing** Social media has become a major form of marketing for many travel advisors. It can be easy to want to repurpose and reuse old content, which can work for some situations. However, in general, you should avoid using the same old content. Your followers are looking for new, engaging, and authentic content! Avoid the typical sales pitches, and ensure your content has your voice, as this will resonate with your audience. While social media is a great free tool, you should avoid using only social media marketing. Consider other forms of marketing to use so that your reach is diversified. Get creative and think about different ways to reach new and existing clients. If you do not already have one, creating a marketing plan can be a great place to start for discovering new marketing strategies.

**Client Relationship** Work can become very busy, but avoid forgetting about your clients! Make sure that you have a CRM system that allows you to reach out to your clients quickly and regularly. Consider sending out emails periodically and definitely avoid missing milestone celebrations for your clients, as these are great opportunities to book new vacations. Once the client has returned from vacation, it can be easy to close the file and move on to the next client. Avoid moving on too quickly by following up with the client to see how their vacation was. This is also a great opportunity to ask clients for feedback and reviews!

**Personal Development** Regardless of how long you've been in the industry, there is always more to learn. Avoid thinking that you have all the knowledge you need. Create a list of training and professional development goals you wish to accomplish for the year. Remember to also include networking opportunities, as they can also aid in helping you to grow as a professional. Remember that rest is as important as work. Avoid putting yourself on the back burner, and remember to create and maintain a healthy work-life balance. Set dates throughout the year for yourself and practice self-care regularly. Allocate an amount of funds for things that bring you joy. Organise a regimen to keep your body healthy to avoid burnout. **Travel advisors** have access to a myriad of discounts, benefits, and perks. However, we should not let this go to our heads. Avoid the spirit of entitlement and refrain from being rude to our industry partners. We must remember that our actions represent our brand, company, clients, host agencies and much more. Maintain a spirit of gratitude, and watch how your connections will bloom! As we approach 2024, now is the time to set yourself up for a successful year. *By avoiding the mistakes mentioned above, you'll be able to give your business, clients, and yourself the love and attention necessary for growth, development, and prosperity. **The new year is right around the corner, so get ready to shine! Happy Holidays and best wishes for a prosperous 2024!***