

JK CHAPTER held its 2nd Bi-Monthly meeting on 13th Jan'2024:



The Jammu & Kashmir Chapter conducted their 2nd Bi Monthly Meeting on **13th Jan '24** at **Hotel RK SAROVAR Portico, Sonawar, Srinagar**. **Shamim Shah** – Chairman, **Burhan Misgar** – Honorary Secretary and **Sajid Altaf Boktoo** – Honorary Treasurer along-with other members were present in the meeting. New members were also discussed and recommended at Chapter level for final approval from NJC. The floor recommended the Chairman **Shamim Sha** for International and **Burhan Misgar** to represent Domestic in **TAFI Tourism Council**.



North India Chapter held their meeting at Jalandhar on 17 Jan'24:

North India Chapter Meeting was held on 17 Jan in Jalandhar. The meeting was attended by over 40 members and held discussion on various issues of the members in detail. Members were very happy since it was the first North India Chapter to hold their meeting in their town, Jalandhar. The Chairman was very hopeful that soon he will be able to increase their membership to more than 50. One of the major issue raised by members are, that they have to take licence for every travel activity they do and they have to submit entire details of every ticket sold with contact details and cost price and selling price to be maintained etc., was seriously discussed and the committee informed the floor that they will take this issue to the appropriate forum and tried to find a solution for the same. Some snaps taken during the meeting are given below. 📷



TAFI- J & K Organised GST Workshop with J & K State Taxes Dept

TAFI – JKC organised a GST workshop with the following associations in collaboration with J&K State Taxes Department, 1) TAFI – J&K Chapter, 2) TAAI – J&K Chapter, 3) ADTOI – J&K Chapter, 4) IATO – J&K Chapter, 5) Travel Agents Society of Kashmir, 6) Travel Agents Association of Kashmir 7) Jammu & Kashmir Tourism Alliance, 8) Association of Kashmir Tour Operators, 9) Pilgrim & Leisure Tour Operators Forum. Additional Commissioner Sales Tax Department Mr Shakeel Maqbool(ICAS) was the keynote speaker who along with his team of officers provided detailed information to the travel agents and tour operators on GST. The Additional Commissioner while appreciating the organisers for holding the workshop urged the participants to be responsible taxpayers and collaborate with the sales tax department. He said the government doesn't want to be in an enforcement mode and crackdown on tax evaders but handhold the responsible businessmen. On the occasion, senior officials from the Sales Tax Department in a detailed powerpoint presentation explained various ways as to how a travel agent or a tour operator can work while charging GST on services and accordingly file the returns. Later, during the question answer session, the officials also clarified queries of the participants. Shamim Shah – Chairman TAFI – JKC gave the vote of thanks to the J&K State Taxes Department and to Hotel Asian Park, Srinagar for their support



Experience the Spectacle of Makar Sankranti in Jaipur: A Kite Festival Extravaganza! (By Achal Krishna, Management Committee Member & Joint Treasurer)

Celebrate the spirit of Makar Sankranti like never before in the enchanting city of Jaipur, where the sky becomes a canvas for a dazzling display of kites vying for supremacy. On the 14th Jan Currently & Perhaps 15th of January from next year, witness the skies of Jaipur come alive with a kaleidoscope of colours as thousands of kites soar high, each flyer competing to own the vast expanse above.

Kite Battle Royale: Claiming the Sky

As kites gracefully dance through the air, participants engage in friendly yet intense battles, attempting to cut down their rivals' kites. The atmosphere is charged with excitement as competitors skilfully manoeuvre their kites, showcasing their expertise in this traditional sport that has been passed down through generations. (The Sky is filled with thousands of kites)

Magical Evening Lantern Display: A Sky Full of Stars

As the sun sets, Jaipur transforms into a mesmerising spectacle with the lighting of kandils (Diwali lanterns) by households across the city. The sky turns into a parallel universe of moving stars, creating a magical ambiance that is truly breathtaking.

Aatishbaazi: Symphony of Fireworks

Prepare to be amazed as the night sky comes alive with the grand finale - Aatishbaazi, a spectacular two-hour display of fireworks. Witness a symphony of lights and colours as homes across the city contribute to the magnificent display, creating a breathtaking panorama that lights up the entire skyline.

Rooftop Revelry: A Feast for the Senses

For the best view of this extraordinary celebration, gather with families and guests on the rooftops of central Jaipur. Indulge in a culinary feast as each household welcomes you with a spread of delectable delights. From a variety of fritters and tea to the warmth of bajre ki khichdi, the flavours of wok-tossed peas, halwa, and local delicacies, every rooftop serves a feast that reflects the rich culinary heritage of Jaipur.

Unveiling a Hidden Gem: Jaipur's Makar Sankranti Experience

While this magical celebration may be a hidden gem, we invite both local and incoming tourists to discover the enchantment of Makar Sankranti in Jaipur. Immerse yourself in the vibrant traditions, witness the stunning visuals, and savour the delicious cuisine from a vantage point in central Jaipur.

Make Your Makar Sankranti Unforgettable in Jaipur - Where Every Kite Tells a Story! ✨

And the best part because of Topography and wind conditions the sky clears within hours.

TAFI- WI Chapter conducted meeting with US Consulate Officials

TAFI - Travel Agents Federation of India took proactive steps to address the issues faced by its members in the US Visa application process after the transition from Version 1.0 to Version 2.0. The US Consulate team collaborated with TAFI at its behest and efforts put in by the National Committee and Mission Head for Diplomatic Relations , Mr. Sampat Damani were successful, as The US Consulate graciously accepted TAFI's invite to address the Visa concerns . The substantial turnout at the meeting on January 24, 2024, at C. K. Naidu Hall, Cricket Club of India, Mumbai, is a testament to the importance of the matter for TAFI members from Mumbai and Pune. Over 75 attendees demonstrate the significance of finding solutions to the challenges faced during the US Visa application process. TAFI had sought queries from its PAN India Membership. The queries were filtered by Sampat Damani getting great support from Mr Chinmay Shah of Visa Consultancy Services, Mumbai. The Queries received were shared with the US Consulate officials.



The US officials took efforts to answer most of the questions to the satisfaction of most Members. TAFI Expressed their sincere gratitude to the US Consulate team for their participation and efforts in addressing the concerns of TAFI members. It also highlights the collaborative and cooperative spirit between the travel fraternity and the consulate. This positive engagement is crucial for fostering a smoother and more efficient visa application process for all involved parties. Overall, a well-organised and successful initiative to tackle the challenges posed by the transition to Version 2.0 of the US Visa application platform.



TN Chapter was invited for meeting with PCEB in Chennai on 19 Jan:

Penang Convention and Exhibition Bureau (PCEB) delegation led by Honourable YB Hon Wai Wong, Penang State Tourism Minister along with PCEB CEO Mr. Ashwin Gunasekaran, PCEB Director and Manager for incorporate at state Chief Minister Office, Ms. Bharathi, along with Tourism Malaysia Director Mr. Razaidi Abd Rahim met the TAFI Team TAFI Delegates led by Chairman Jahir Hussain, Secretary C.K.Raja, Treasurer PV.Thomas, National Management Committee members Anandaveloo & Sekar Somaskandan on 19 Jan at Accord Metropolitan Hotel in Chennai. 18 Hoteliers & DMC from Penang showcased their respective products during the roadshow. Malaysian Consulate General H.E. Saravanakumar graced the occasion. Presentation on BeLong Penang, Penang Odyssey and couple Places of Interest was showcased in their presentation The MC of the event was Ms. Kavitha, Manager, Tourism Malaysia who conducted in an amusing manner with laughter. There were 15 Prizes were given away to the winners in the Lucky Draw followed by Cocktail & delicious Dinner.



Malaysia Airlines Presented an appreciation memento to TAFI:

Malaysia Airlines held a grand event in Kamal Mahal, ITC Maurya, New Delhi on 18th January 2024, to acknowledge the support the airline has received. Malaysia Airlines Presented an appreciation memento to TAFI which was received by President Ajay Prakash, for the Incredible support extended to Malaysia Airlines by Group Managing Director Datuk Capt. Izham Ismail and Chief Commercial Officer Mr. Dersenish Aresandiran. MH showcased their new aircraft seats. Prominent travel agents & TAFI members were also felicitated for their support.



TN Chapter held their 2nd Members meeting on 28 Jan'24 at Kannur:

On 27 Jan the TN Chapter members left for **Kannur, North Malabar**, Kerala. On arrival at Kannur the members were greeted and accorded warm welcome by KIAL, **Kannur International Airport Ltd.**, a public Private Consortium which owns & operates the Airport and **Kannur Tours and Holidays** who had arranged all ground arrangements with snacks and Tea at the Airport itself. Later proceed to Police Parade Ground where the members were enthralled to watch a Martial Arts performance called "**KALARI-PAYATTU**" which is a 5000 year old by 260 disciples of **Ganesh Gurukul** specially arranged for TAFI. It was an amazing performance by 5 to 65 year old disciples of Ganesh Gurukul. Later checked into **JP Palace Hotel** at the **basement of the Kannur International Airport**.



On 28 Jan, the members were taken for "**Thaiyam**", 3 days temple festival, which happens once in a year at **Muchilottu Bhagavathi Temple** at Valapattinum. which was a colourful devotional ceremony. Later the members enjoyed Kayaking at "**KAYAL Kayaking Through Mangroves**" which was thoroughly enjoyed by members. Had lunch hosted by **Kairali Heritage Resorts** located at the banks of Valapattanam River. After inspection of the resorts the members were taken to another beach Resort called " Mascot Beach Resort" for property inspections. The members meeting was held at **Green Planet** which was very interactive and lively. There was a raffle draw & two **MAA-CMB-MAA**, courtesy, "**FITS AIR**" Air Tickets and goodies offered by **Oman Airways** were given away to the winners.



On 29 Jan: Morning the members had a "**Kettuvallam**" -HouseBoat organised by Royal CruiseTourism was experienced and after lunch there was a Roadshow Organised by "NOMOTO: North Malabar Tourism Organisation and Kannur Tours & Holidays from 2 to 5 pm with Presidential Address by Anil Kumar Secretary NOMOTO. TN Chairman & Secretary spoke about the Cooperation between TAFI and NOMOTO. It was a runaway success roadshow as there were 80-90 Registered Participants for the event who interacted with TAFI Members one to one. Well organised event with Tea & snacks served.



Digi Yatra to be introduced at 14 more airport:



The government plans to roll out Digi Yatra at 14 more airports in the coming months and make the facility available for foreign citizens as well, according to officials. Currently, Digi Yatra, which provides for contactless, seamless movement of passengers at various checkpoints at airports based on Facial Recognition Technology (FRT), is available at 13 airports for domestic passengers. Plans are afoot to introduce Digi Yatra at 14 airports, including Chennai, Bhubaneswar and Coimbatore, by March this year. Other airports are Dabolim, Mopa Goa, Indore, Bagdogra, Chandigarh, Ranchi, Nagpur, Patna, Raipur, Srinagar and Visakhapatnam, the officials said on 30 Jan 24. Further, they said that Digi Yatra will be implemented at 11 more airports in 2025. Among other plans, the government intends to put in place e-passport based enrolment that will also allow foreign citizens to avail Digi Yatra facility, the officials said. Citing available data, they also said there has been a significant growth in the total number of Digi Yatra app users during the period from December 2022 to November 2023. As per an analysis, the app has also helped in reducing the processing time taken for passengers at entry gates and boarding gates, the officials said. Digi Yatra was introduced in December 2022. At present, it is available at 13 airports — Delhi, Bengaluru, Varanasi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Vijayawada, Pune, Mumbai, Cochin, Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Jaipur and Guwahati. The data shared by a passenger for Digi Yatra is stored in an encrypted format. For availing the service, a passenger has to register his or her details on DigiYatra app using Aadhaar-based validation and a self image capture. In the next step, the boarding pass has to be scanned and the credentials are shared with the airport. At the airport e-gate, the passenger has to first scan the bar-coded boarding pass and the facial recognition system installed at the e-gate will validate the passengers identity and travel document. Once this process is done, the passenger can enter the airport through the e-gate.

India International Travel Mart (IITM)

India International Travel Mart (IITM) kicked off at Rajiv Gandhi Indoor Stadium at Cochin. The event that brings together tourism stakeholders like travel agents and others attended from January 21 till 23 January 2024. The travel mart was inaugurated by Paulose K Mathew TAFI national management committee member and jointly by many other leaders from travel Industry. After that a press conference was conducted.



PENANG CONVENTION & EXHIBITION BUREAU (PCEB) ROADSHOW AT COCHIN



YB Hon Wai Wong (State Tourism Minister of Penang) and TAFI Chairman P P Augusty and TAFI National MC member Paulose. K Mathew in discussion to promote Tourism. Ashwin Gunasekaran -CEO of Penang Convention and Exhibition Bureau, Siti Sarah head of sales and marketing . Penang Convention and Exhibition Bureau conducted a road show at Kochi Marriott Hotel Cochin on 22 January 2024 .

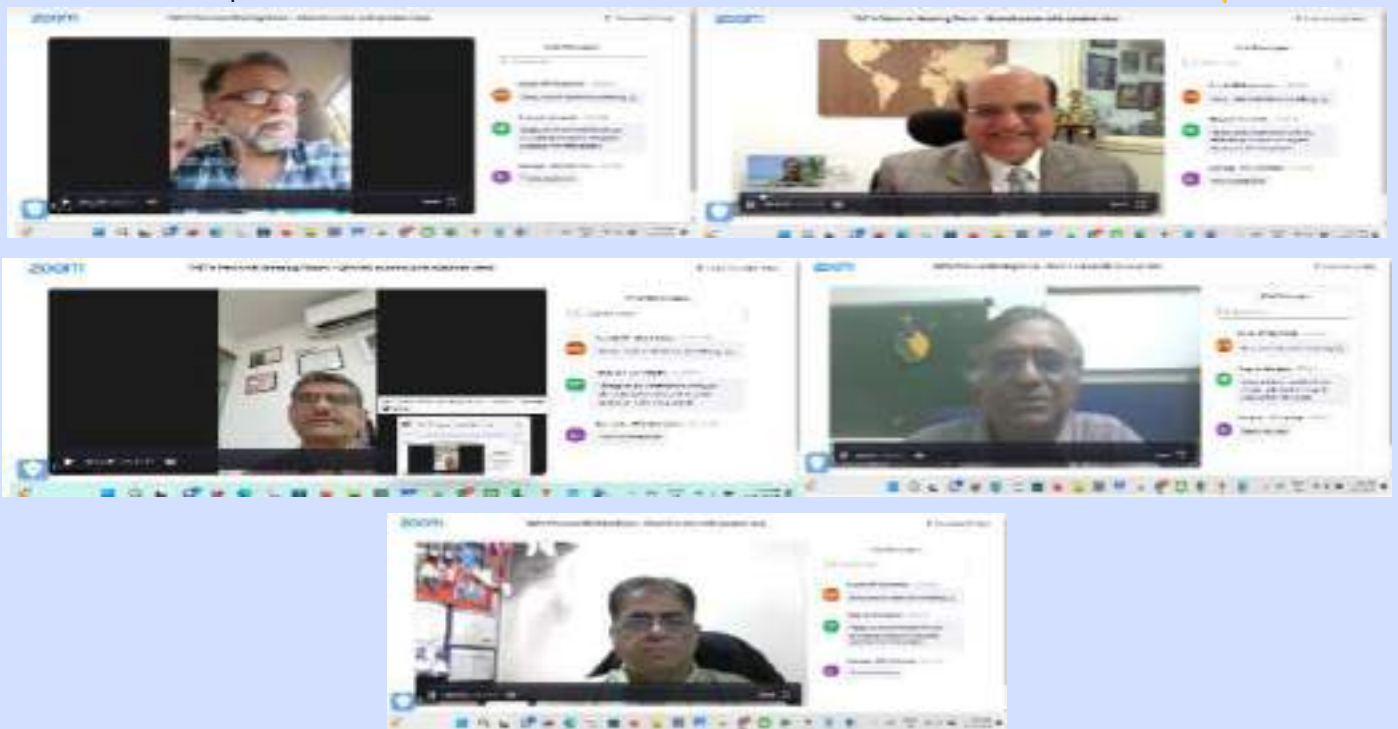
TAFI Karnataka Chapter held their bi-monthly meeting on 25 Jan '24

TAFI Karnataka Chapter had their bi monthly meeting on 25 Jan '24 at Bowring Institute , Bengaluru. The meeting was well attended by members. The meeting was followed by a brief presentation about Lakshadweep by Mr. Mammen Varghese who cis one of the chapter members. After that we had a presentation by Asego Travel Insurance about all their new products. The main highlight of the meeting was a presentation by VFS GLOBAL . They had a good interactive session with the members. The meeting concluded with cocktails and dinner. Some Snaps taken during the meeting 📸



TAFI Tourism Council 1st Meeting over Zoom call on 16 Jan'24

In the First Meeting on “ Destination Spotlight “ a Tourism Council Initiative of TAFI was conducted on 16 Jan 2024 at 1600 hrs. The meeting was well attended by the Coordinators all over India along with Office Bearers and Managing committee Members. Various Opportunities and Initiatives in the Proposal were discussed and it was agreed that this initiative will add great value to the membership. **President Mr Ajay Prakash** gave an inspiring speech and wished the program a grand success. It was decided to have a structured plan to take the initiative forward. Some Screenshots of the Zoom call. 📸



Indonesia halts massive entertainment tax hike after tourism backlash



The Indonesian government has decided to postpone the implementation of sweeping entertainment tax rises after an outcry from tourism industry leaders. Bali's hotel industry had warned the island's economy could potentially collapse if the proposed hike went ahead. There was a proposal to increase it from 15 to at least 40%. It would have impacted venues such as karaoke lounges, nightclubs, bars, and spas. Gusti Agung Ngurah Rai Suryawijaya, chair of the Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association recently said it could spell disaster for the Bali tourism economy. Bali will collapse again because 60% of the people are highly dependent on the tourism sector." "Frankly speaking, nearly 1.2 million of Bali's 4.3 million residents work in the tourism sector and subsectors, so this needs to be decided carefully," Suryawijaya added. Certain venues could have potentially seen the tax rise to 75%. Suryawijaya said it would have priced venues out of the market, likely leading to a drop in tourists. Bali welcomed about 5.28 million tourists in 2023. Now, Coordinating Minister Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan said the government will hold off on imposing the tax rises. It will now be re-evaluated and then go to a judicial review, he said.

Ayodhya's Ram Mandir inauguration spurs tourism surge: OTAs record 70% increase in bookings



Following the inauguration of the **Ram Mandir in Ayodhya**, online travel agencies (OTAs) are riding a wave of optimism as they anticipate a substantial surge in tourism. The preliminary data indicates a remarkable 70% increase in bookings, signifying a potential transformation for Ayodhya's economic landscape. Dhruv Shringi, CEO & Whole-Time Director of Yatra Online, addressed the surge in interest surrounding Ayodhya. He pointed out the current trend of spiritual tourism gaining momentum in India, accentuated by the grand inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. He noted a significant 70% surge in booking queries from December to January for the city, underscoring heightened interest in this historic event. "We have also noticed that the daily searches for Ayodhya have skyrocketed by four times in January as compared to December last year," he said. "The surge in Ayodhya's visitors post the Ram Mandir's opening will truly be remarkable and will bear substantial implications for the city and its surroundings," Shringi further emphasised. The ripple effect is expected to extend beyond the religious context, positively impacting small businesses and contributing to the overall economic growth of the region, he added. Cleartrip also corroborates this trend, reporting a 32% surge in air bookings to Ayodhya on its online travel platform. Prahlad Krishnamurthi, Chief Business Officer at Cleartrip noted a threefold increase in searches for flights, coupled with a twofold spike in hotel searches. "The prices for hotels have spiked by 60 per cent, while flight fares have increased by 10 per cent compared to the first week of Jan 2024," added Krishnamurthi. On the other hand, Cleartrip and Flipkart Travel have observed an overall 1500 per cent increase in searches for Ayodhya across the platform. Also, according to the data shared by MakeMyTrip, searches for Ayodhya have seen a massive surge, of 585% from previous years, with peak searches being recorded on December 30, the day of the Ayodhya Airport inauguration. Further, Yatra has also reported a surge in demand for spiritual destinations, with Varanasi, Puri, Amritsar, Tirupati, and Shirdi experiencing notable increases in bookings, reflecting a broader trend of travellers, notably young, wanting to explore spiritual facets along with their journeys. 500,000 devotees were flock to Ayodhya on January 23, resulting in fully booked hotels with skyrocketing room tariffs.

Bandipur Tiger Reserve witnessed record number of visitors in 2023:



The Bandipur Tiger Reserve in Chamarajanagar district witnessed an unprecedented surge in tourist numbers, attracting a record **1.4 lakh visitors in 2023**. The reserve generated a revenue of **Rs 13.6 crore** through various channels, including wildlife safaris, cottage rentals, entry fees, and other sources. Initiatives such as introducing insurance coverage for tourists on forest vehicle safaris and the **visit of PM Narendra Modi in 2023** have contributed to the boost in eco-tourism in the region. Apart from these, beautification of the cottage and dormitory area (old ticket safari counter) with aesthetic look with pergolas, wooden walkways and sitting areas are all attracting a large number of tourists. The shifting of the safari counter to Melukamanahalli and beautification of forest martyrs' memorial has also attracted visitors. Everyday, about 600 to 700 visitors visit the wildlife park for safari according to forest department officials. The crowd is more during holidays and weekends. Bandipur, which stretches to 1,020 sq km, houses an estimated 191 tigers, 202 leopards, 1,116 elephants, 41,000 deer, 7,500 sambar deers, 5,500 Indian gaurs and other animals that attract tourists for sightseeing throughout the year. **Director of BTR P Rameshkumar** said that the reserve which is ranked second in the **Management Effectiveness Evaluation (MEE)** of protected areas after Satpur among 12 top tiger reserves out of 51 in the country attracts tourists throughout the year. The number of visitors to the wildlife park which took a beating during the pandemic gradually has started attracting visitors since the last two years, he said. As Bandipur is also connected to places of tourist interest, including Ooty and Wayanad, Himavad Gopalswamy hills, and is connected to these places through Mysore it is attracting tourists every year.

Ayodhya: Major hotel brands line up for investing in hospitality sector, 50 hotel projects are underway:



Investors have signed various agreements for big investments in the hospitality sector here, as the upcoming Ram Temple provides immense potential for religious tourism. Famous hotel brands are establishing their branches in Ayodhya, and approximately 50 major hotel construction projects are currently underway in the city, official sources said. With several small hotels, resorts, and homestays investing in the region, Ayodhya is emerging as a new hotspot in the hotel industry. In addition, good highways and roads, wall paintings depicting the life of Lord Ram, facade lighting, and a grand entrance adorned with Victorian lamps add to the attraction of Ayodhya. According to **Divisional Commissioner of Ayodhya Gaurav Dayal**, 102 intent agreements worth about **Rs 18,000 crore** were signed for tourism in Ayodhya during the **Global investment summit**. Currently, there are 126 ready-to-be-implemented projects related to tourism in Ayodhya. Of the 126 projects, 46 have signed MOUs, while 80 are non-MOU related. The total cost of all these 126 projects is around **INR 4,000 crore**. Dayal said that around 50 renowned hotels have invested in Ayodhya for large-scale projects, and the construction of their buildings is underway. These hotels include **Taj, Marriott, Ginger, Oberoi, Trident, and Radisson**, and they will soon be completed and operational. There are plans to develop the '**Raja Ki Building**' as a heritage hotel, with a major hotel chain expressing interest in investing in this project. Apart from these, a significant number of small and large hotels are likely to commence operations in and around the Ayodhya region. Ayodhya is set to witness an investment of approximately INR 420 crore through the four large projects in the hotel industry. The first on the list is **Panche Dreamworld LLP**, which will establish the '**O Rama Hotels and Resorts**' project at a total cost of **Rs 140 crore**.

Indonesia's foreign tourism investment falls short in 2023



Although **international arrivals** to Indonesia in November 2023 exceeded **10.4 million arrivals** – surpassing the target of **8.5 million** – Indonesia's tourism investment is still not up to expectations and remains dominated by domestic direct investment. According to the latest data from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (**MoTCE**), the total tourism investments between January and September 2023 was **US\$1.6 billion** – 12 % lower than in 2022's **US\$1.8 billion** – out of which US\$1.1 billion was

domestic direct investment, while the remaining US\$588 million was foreign direct investment. Addressing delegates at the **Indonesia Tourism Outlook 2024 Forum** in Jakarta, **Sandiaga Uno**, Indonesia's **minister of tourism and creative economy** stated that in order to boost foreign investment, the government will be more active in providing interested parties with investment opportunities. He is optimistic that investment achievements in 2024 will improve since the government has made it easier to invest in the five super priority destinations and areas in the Special Economic Zones. Sandiaga promised that more roadshows and promotions will be conducted this year. During the forum, Check-In Asia's director **Gary Bowerman** opined that despite the global economic situation slowing down investment flows, investors were less interested in injecting funds into Indonesia, as most global investors tend to focus its feasibility studies on the country's inbound market performance. It is up to the government to explain and promote this so as to encourage international investments. To do this, Bowerman pointed out that the government needed to explain its tourism plan, tourism targets, and marketing and branding in order to reassure international investors. He added: "Another key point is connectivity. The government needs to (stimulate) more flights to connect to destinations, both globally or domestically." In addition, **Hariyadi Sukamdani**, **Chairman** of the **Indonesian Tourism Industry Association** (GIPI), said the government needed to maintain the investment climate and encourage the development of local investor businesses by optimising financial institutions, such as the **Financial Services Authority**, and Banking, to develop funding instruments or create investment financing schemes. Local investors must not be forgotten, and given incentives to help grow their businesses, added Hariyadi.

Resorts World One sails to the Philippines



Resorts World Cruises (RWC) kickstarted 2024 with the maiden voyage of **Resorts World One** to the Philippines. As part of her special and inaugural five-night sailing from Hong Kong, Resorts World One arrived at Manila yesterday and is scheduled to arrive in Boracay today. With the Resorts World One homeport in Hong Kong year-round, the cruise ship offers a variety of itineraries to many different destinations for its two-, three- and five-night cruises, which include the Philippines for this

special sailing, complementing current destinations to Sanya, Okinawa (Naha and Miyakojima) in Japan, as well as to Danang and Nha Trang in Vietnam. "The Philippines marks our first new destination in 2024 and we are excited to include both Manila and Boracay as part of this special five-night cruise aboard Resorts World One from Hong Kong," said Michael Goh, president of RWC. "We look forward to exploring future opportunities together to boost the cruise tourism sector for the Philippines and the region."

Snippets

- **Canada sees drastic fall in Indian student visas amidst ongoing diplomatic row.**
- **Kedarnath, Ayodhya take the lead as GenZ's spiritual travel pick for 2024: Hunch poll**
- **Wedding tourism to soar by 21% in 2024; Rishikesh to take the top spot: 'WedMeGood Report'**
- **Saudi Arabia's visitor target till 2030 increases to 150 million.**
- **India needs over 2,500 new aircraft by 2042, says Boeing outlook**

Costa Serena to homeport at Malaysia's Port Klang



Costa Cruises, along with cruise operator **Hwajing Travel & Tours** (Hwajing), has established its first international cruise homeport at **Port Klang in Malaysia**. The strategic decision to anchor Costa Serena at Port Klang aligns with Hwajing's commitment to exploring new markets and offering passengers an unparalleled travel experience. Both companies have also embarked on a journey to explore the vast potential of the **untapped Muslim travel market**, customising its services and offerings to cater to the specific

needs and preferences of Muslim travellers. Costa Serena homeporting at Port Klang will not only redefine luxury cruising in Malaysia, but also acts as a catalyst for sustainable economic growth – as the inaugural international cruise homeport, it will have a spill-over effect, invigorating Malaysia's economy and unlocking opportunities across various sectors. "This Costa Cruises and Hwajing partnership signifies a paradigm shift in travel," said **Francesco Raffa, director** of region and growth markets, **Costa Cruises**. "This collaboration promises a positive and promising trajectory for Malaysia's cruise industry, reflecting a shift towards culturally sensitive and friendly travel experiences." "Even during the pandemic, we maintained a close working rapport with Costa Cruises," said **Kenny Cheong, managing director of Hwajing Travel & Tours**. "The strategic choice of Port Klang as Costa Serena's homeport underscores Malaysia's emergence as a **maritime hub**, poised to cater to a diverse international clientele."

Vietnam Airlines, Sentosa to promote tourism between Vietnam & S'pore:



Vietnam Airlines and **Sentosa Development Corporation** (SDC) have signed a one-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to promote tourism between Vietnam and Singapore. As part of the MoU, Vietnam Airlines and SDC will collaborate and develop tourism products and promotional offerings aimed at cementing Sentosa Island as a destination of choice. Vietnamese passengers travelling on Vietnam Airlines to Singapore can enjoy complimentary admission into Sentosa Island, as well

as a complimentary ticket to either one of the island's top attractions – **Wings of Time, a light and water night show**, or the **Sentosa Island intra-island cable car**. In addition, these travellers will receive exclusive privileges with their Vietnam Airlines boarding passes, including discounts on the **Sentosa Fun Discovery Pass** which provides access to multiple leisure experiences and attractions across Sentosa. Vietnam Airlines currently operates direct flights from **Ho Chi Minh City** and **Hanoi** to **Singapore**, with **28 flights per week**. **Dang Anh Tuan**, executive vice president, Vietnam Airlines, said: "The collaboration (aims) to not only bring exceptional benefits to travellers between Vietnam and Singapore but also to enhance the role of the national airline contributing to fostering economic, commercial, and cultural exchanges between the two countries." **Chin Sak Hin**, assistant chief executive and chief financial officer, SDC, added: "Given the growth potential of the country, this MoU offers tourists on Vietnam Airlines a host of privileges... with our newest day-to-night attraction Sentosa Sensoryscape set to soft launch in March, there will be even more new adventures and experiences to be discovered and we welcome our friends from Vietnam to Sentosa's shores."

Turkish Airlines to fly from Istanbul to Melbourne via Singapore



Turkish Airlines will launch Istanbul-Australia services via Singapore from March 15. The thrice-weekly flights will include a 1.5-hour stopover at Changi Airport without the need to change aircraft. The flights will be operated on the 300-seat Boeing 787-9 passenger jets, before switching to 329-seat Airbus

A350-900 planes from April. As the only European airline to operate flights to Melbourne Airport, Turkish Airlines has plans to make this a daily service in the future. Turkish Airlines will become the sixth carrier to fly between Singapore and Melbourne, joining Singapore Airlines, Scoot, Qantas and Jetstar.

UNWTO rebrands to “UN Tourism”:



The **World Tourism Organization** (UNWTO) now has a new name and brand: “**UN Tourism**”. With this new brand, the Organization reaffirms its status as the United Nations specialised agency for tourism and the global leader of tourism for development, driving social and economic change to ensure that “**people and planet**” are always centre stage, stated UN Tourism in its recent official statement. To achieve this goal, UN Tourism engaged the services of Interbrand, the leading global branding agency. Interbrand successfully translated the Organisation’s renewed vision for tourism into a new visual identity and “brand narrative. This involved renaming the Organisation, transitioning from **UNWTO to UN Tourism**. At the same time, a new brand narrative was crafted, one that seamlessly aligns with UN Tourism’s central mission and priorities. UN Tourism adopts a stance and capitalises on its strengths: the “UN”, signifying authority, and tourism, a simple and relatable concept for all. With 160 Member States and hundreds of private sector affiliates, UN Tourism has its **headquarters in Madrid, Spain**, and Regional Offices in **Nara (Japan)** covering Asia & Pacific, **Riyadh** (Saudi Arabia) for the Middle East, as well as forthcoming Regional Offices for the Americas (**Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**) and Africa (**Morocco**). Its priorities centre on promoting tourism for sustainable development in line with the **UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Global Goals**. The organisation takes on the role of driving a sustainable force that is now central to many economies,” said **Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General of UN Tourism**.

India's longest sea bridge to drive investments for resort homes in Alibaug



A recent survey indicates a growing interest among individuals, with 29 % expressing a desire to invest in popular second-home destinations in Maharashtra. The recently inaugurated **Mumbai Trans Harbour Link (MTHL)** also called '**Atal Setu**', which is also **India's longest sea bridge**, is poised to play a pivotal role in reshaping the investment landscape for resort homes in Alibaug. The **22 km-long sea bridge** is anticipated to significantly reduce

travel time between Mumbai and Alibaug to approximately 45 minutes, making Alibaug an increasingly attractive investment destination. Several factors contribute to Alibaug's surging appeal for resort home investments. Firstly, the improved connectivity facilitated by the MTHL, coupled with enhanced ferry services, is a major attraction. This accessibility is expected to elevate Alibaug's status as a prime investment location. Secondly, the Maharashtra government's substantial investments in Alibaug's infrastructure, as part of the **Alibaug Smart City project**, including public transportation, water supply, and waste management, are anticipated to enhance the area's standard of living and stimulate growth in the real estate market. An earlier survey conducted by Savills India revealed that 29% of respondents expressed a desire to invest in popular second-home destinations in Maharashtra, with as many as 70 % interested in second homes priced at INR 2 crore or less within the next two years. **Dr Sachin Chopda, Managing Director, Pushpam Group**, commented on the investment perspective, stating, “We have recently commenced construction of our new resort home, **Balibaug**, in Alibaug. The response has been commendable, with increased demand attributed to the **MTHL** and other ongoing infrastructure projects in the **Mumbai Metropolitan Region** (MMR). Second-home markets near Mumbai, such as Alibaug and Karjat, are poised to become primary home destinations within the next seven to ten years due to the transformative impact of these infrastructure projects.

Snippets

- ***New destinations, Heli & adventure tourism projects in Kerala’s 2024 roadmap: Kerala Tourism Director**
- ***Akasa Air secures historic order for 150 Boeing 737 MAX aircraft at Wings India 2024**
- ***Navi Mumbai airport to start commercial flight operations by March 31, 2025.**
- ***Ram temple tourism: Hospitality, travel industries create up to 20,000 jobs in Ayodhya**

Saudi Tourism launches new global campaign with Lionel Messi as Ambassador



The **Saudi Tourism Authority (STA)** has announced that the country's national tourism brand, "**Saudi Welcome To Arabia**," has unveiled its latest global marketing campaign, featuring football legend **Lionel Messi** as the **Saudi Tourism Ambassador**. The "**Go Beyond What You Think**" campaign, launched across key markets in **Europe, India, and China**, aims to dispel common misconceptions about the destination and invites audiences to

explore the vibrant cultural transformation happening across Saudi Arabia. Using the hashtags **#ShareYourSaudi#** visitors and locals are encouraged to share positive experiences on social media platforms. This multi-channel campaign, spanning TV, social media, digital platforms, and online travel agencies, is part of Saudi Tourism's efforts to promote cultural understanding and bridge cultures through tourism. Building on the UN Tourism initiative "**Tourism Opens Minds**," which encourages travellers to broaden their horizons, Messi, who has pledged his support to this initiative, features prominently in the campaign. Addressing misconceptions head-on, Messi's hero video challenges outdated stereotypes about Saudi Arabia, showcasing its diverse landscapes, activities, and attractions. From the pristine waters of the Red Sea to the snow-covered mountains of Tabuk, the campaign highlights Saudi's rich cultural heritage and modern attractions, including the **Diriyah E-Prix**, **Riyadh Season**, and **AlUla's** hot air balloon flights. It also celebrates Saudi women who are trailblazers in various fields, symbolising the country's cultural transformation. For travellers, visiting Saudi Arabia has never been easier, thanks to various visa initiatives, including the eVisa program, GCC residents visa, and the free 96-hour Stopover Visa, which includes a complimentary one-night hotel stay when booked with **SAUDIA**, the national carrier.

Star Air expands its network with new flights from Ajmer to Lucknow



Star Air, India's largest privately held **regional airline**, has announced the launch of its new destination, Lucknow. New flights from **Ajmer (Kishangarh) to Lucknow** commence on **February 16, 2024**. This strategic expansion aims to enhance connectivity and convenience for travellers, opening up new possibilities for business and leisure alike. Passengers flying with Star Air can explore the

architectural wonders of Lucknow, including the Bara Imambara and the Chota Imambara. The new route promises a seamless and enjoyable travel experience with state-of-the-art aircraft and exceptional in-flight services. "We are excited to introduce our 19th Destination, Lucknow. This expansion aligns with our commitment to providing convenient and efficient air travel options to our passengers. We look forward to facilitating seamless journeys and contributing to the growth of connectivity in India," said **Capt. Simran Singh Tiwana, CEO, Star Air**. The flights between Ajmer and Lucknow will operate on Monday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday offering flexible schedules to accommodate the diverse needs of travellers. Star Air encourages passengers to book their tickets early to get the best fares. Star Air is a regional airline in India, operating on 18 destinations.

US Tourist visa appointment wait times down by 75%,

The United States has processed **1.4 million visas for Indians in 2023**, marking an all-time high and significantly slashing visitor visa appointment wait times by 75 %.. Indians now constitute one-tenth of all US visa applicants globally, with demand skyrocketing across all visa categories, witnessing a remarkable 60 % surge compared to the previous year in a statement by the US Embassy and Consulates in India. Visitor visas (B1/B2) experienced a notable resurgence, representing the second-highest number of applications in the history of the US Mission, surpassing **700,000**. The statement from the US Embassy and Consulates emphasised the continued priority on 'employment visas.' A strategic consolidation of petition-based visa processing in Chennai and Hyderabad contributed to the efficient processing of over 380,000 employment visas for Indians and their family members in 2023. This initiative also played a pivotal role in maintaining minimal appointment wait times.



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Travel surge drives 50 percent rise in hospitality jobs in India: Report



Driven by a surge in travel, there has been a 50 % surge in hiring for tourism and hospitality jobs between December 2022 and 2023 in India, according to a report on 24 Jan. The report by Indeed, a global hiring and matching platform, also revealed that blue-collar hiring in the tourism and hospitality industry witnessed an overall 8 % increase. The rise not only signals a noteworthy post-pandemic recovery but also reflects a promising future for

the industry while underscoring the job market's adaptability and resilience in the face of evolving global trends. The **World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC)**'s **Economic Impact Research** predicted India to become the third most influential market in the Travel and Tourism industry globally. As per Indeed's data, hiring in the tourism industry peaked in October 2023 with a 61 % rise as compared to December 2022. This can be attributed to multiple reasons such as October being a popular time for tourism owing to weather changes propagating hill station visits, festive season and more. Top cities leading the upsurge in hiring include Delhi NCR (23 %) Mumbai (5.19 %), Bengaluru (6.78%). Overall, these cities take the lead in a variety of tourism-related industries by leveraging their distinct commercial, technological, and cultural advantages. Other cities, including Pune (2.33 %) and Kochi (2.41 %), also contributed significantly to the increase. "As we approach **National Tourism Day**, we must recognise the favourable employment outlook and honour the vibrant spirit of exploration, cross-cultural exchange, and economic advancement owing to the increased hiring prospects," said **Sashi Kumar, Head of Sales at Indeed**, in a statement.

Quote for Thoughts

- "Best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of Others".
- "Service to Mankind is the first promise one has to make before god."
- "A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way."
- "There are three essentials to leadership: humility, clarity and courage."
- "People forget how fast you did a job-but they remember how well you did it"
- "Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of intelligent efforts".
- "Professionalism means consistency of quality"