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Travel Trade Eco System

WELLNESS | TRADE SHOWS ANALYSES | HOSPITALITY REVIEWS

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Travel Links

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Dear Readers,

At **Travel Links**, every issue is shaped by movement—of people, of ideas, of destinations and of an industry that never stands still. This edition arrives at a particularly dynamic moment for global tourism, when the travel trade is recalibrating priorities, rethinking partnerships and redefining what meaningful travel truly looks like.

Our cover story this month is rooted in rigorous research and on-ground reporting. We explore the evolving world of travel trade events—platforms such as OTM, SATTE and ITB Berlin that increasingly determine how destinations are marketed, collaborations are forged and innovations are unveiled. These gatherings have grown far beyond transactional marketplaces. They are now idea laboratories, trend barometers and strategic forums where the future of travel is actively being negotiated.

For us at **Travel Links**, these events are also deeply personal. Being part of OTM and SATTE in India and representing the magazine on international stages like ITB Berlin allows our editorial team to engage directly with tourism boards, hotel groups, cruise lines and tour operators. It is in these conversations—sometimes brief, sometimes transformative—that we capture the pulse of the industry and bring back insights that go beyond headlines.

At the heart of this issue is our enduring focus on **wellness and conscious, sustainable luxury**. What began as a niche editorial direction has become a defining global movement. Travellers today are not merely seeking indulgence; they are seeking intention. They want experiences that heal, properties that respect their surroundings, and journeys that create positive impact for communities. From holistic retreats and nature-led resorts to hotels championing low-impact design and responsible sourcing, this philosophy now sits at the centre of luxury travel—and at the centre of our magazine.


It is this commitment that has helped **Travel Links** emerge as one of the most sought-after and respected voices within the travel trade. Our hospitality reviews are immersive and honest, our interviews probing and forward-looking, and our destination features grounded in sustainability as much as aspiration. We believe luxury is no longer defined solely by thread counts or private pools—it is defined by authenticity, environmental stewardship and cultural sensitivity.

Alongside our trade-focused analysis and wellness narratives, this issue brings you a curated mix of hospitality reviews and conversations with industry leaders who are shaping tomorrow's tourism. Together, these pages reflect what **Travel Links** stands for: **research-driven journalism, responsible storytelling and a global outlook rooted in Indian perspective**.

As always, thank you for travelling with us—across continents, across conventions and across ideas. We remain committed to chronicling not just where the world is going, but how thoughtfully it chooses to get there.

Editor

Payal Sahni

 **travellinkslive.com**

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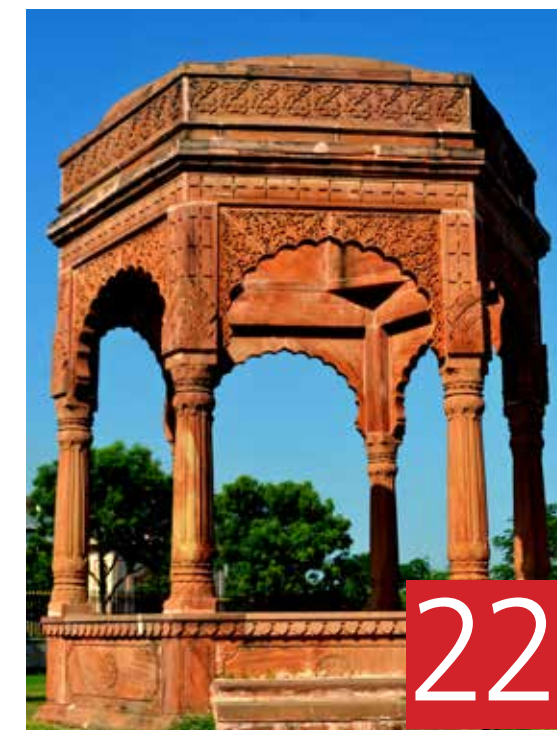
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INDIA AS THE EPICENTER OF THE GLOBAL
WELLNESS JOURNEY

HOSPITALITY REVIEW

Sariska Lodge: Where Luxury Listens to the Jungle

By Payal Sahni

There are luxury retreats that impress you, and then there are places that gently disarm you. Sariska Lodge belongs firmly to the latter.

Just three to four hours from Delhi—almost bang on the main road—this high-end jungle hideaway feels worlds away from the city, yet remains incredibly convenient to reach. Thanks to the Mumbai–Jaipur Expressway, the drive is smooth, scenic and stress-free, making Sariska Lodge an ideal long-weekend escape for those who value time as much as tranquillity. There are no detours, no last-mile confusion—just a seamless journey that sets the tone for what lies ahead.

As the cityscape dissolves into open roads and the Aravalli hills begin to rise subtly in the distance, something shifts. The air grows quieter. The trees grow denser. And by the time you arrive, you realise this is not a conventional luxury resort—it is a private jungle home that happens to welcome a few fortunate guests.

An Address on the Edge of the Wild

What truly sets Sariska Lodge apart is its location—barely 50–100 meters approx. from the Sariska Tiger Reserve. This is not marketing exaggeration; it is a rare geographical privilege. The jungle is not “nearby”—it is right there,

breathing, rustling, watching.

Yet the lodge is a private property, discreetly designed to retain the natural landscape rather than dominate it. There are no towering structures, no artificial landscaping, no attempt to tame the jungle. Instead, the wilderness is respectfully preserved, protected and allowed to exist on its own terms. The boundary between built space and forest feels intentionally blurred, creating a sense of coexistence

As the cityscape dissolves into open roads and the Aravalli hills begin to rise subtly in the distance, something shifts. The air grows quieter. The trees grow denser.

rather than control.

From the very first moment, it becomes clear that Sariska Lodge is built on an unconventional philosophy: luxury without intrusion.

No Reception Desk, No Timings, No Rules

There is no formal reception here. No check-in counter. No scripted welcome speech. Instead, you are received like a guest at a private estate—warmly,

Sustainability That Is Lived, Not Advertised

Sariska Lodge does not shout about sustainability—it practices it. Throughout our stay, we did not encounter a single plastic bottle. The property operates its own RO water plant, ensuring safe, refillable drinking water without waste. The architecture respects the terrain, the jungle is retained rather than reshaped, and daily operations minimise interference with local wildlife.

Food sourcing is thoughtful, waste is controlled, and energy use is conscious. Sustainability here is not a trend—it is a responsibility seamlessly woven into luxury.

Luxury That Does Not Compete with Nature

What impressed me most was how Sariska Lodge refuses to go against nature.

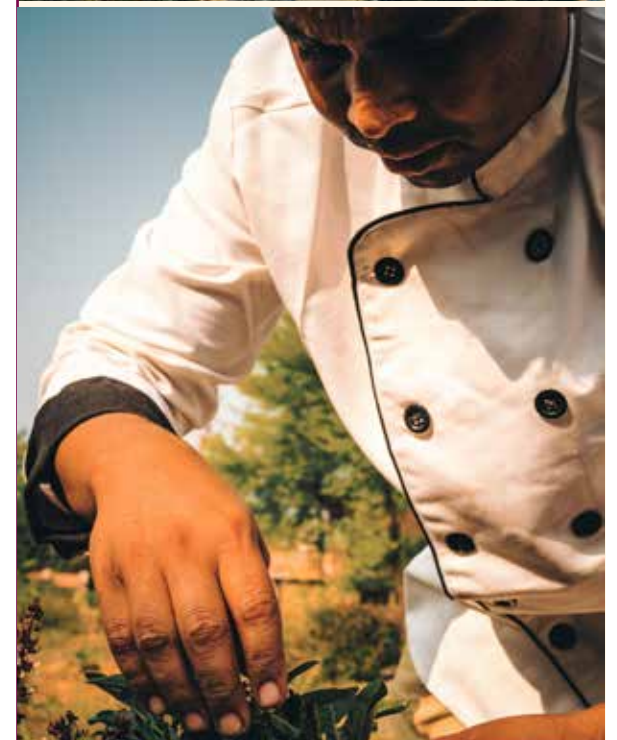
There is no artificial drama, no excessive lighting, no unnecessary noise. The jungle is allowed to lead, and luxury simply follows. This philosophy resonates deeply with today’s conscious luxury traveller—those who seek exclusivity, yes, but also meaning.

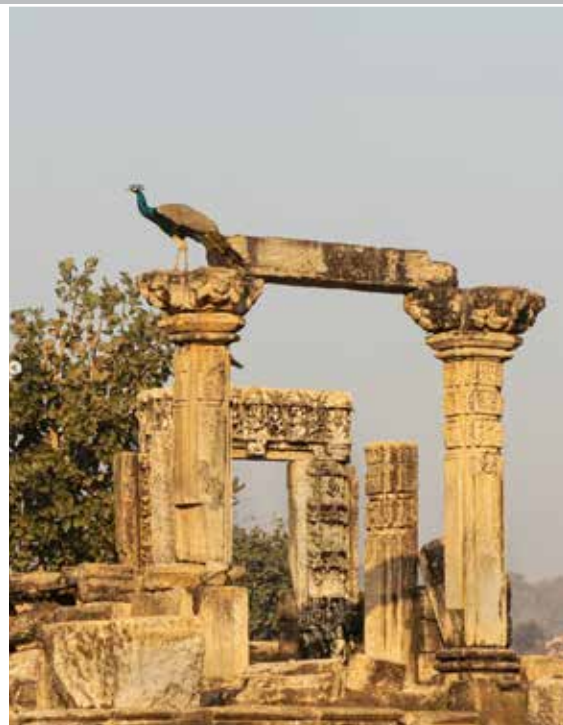
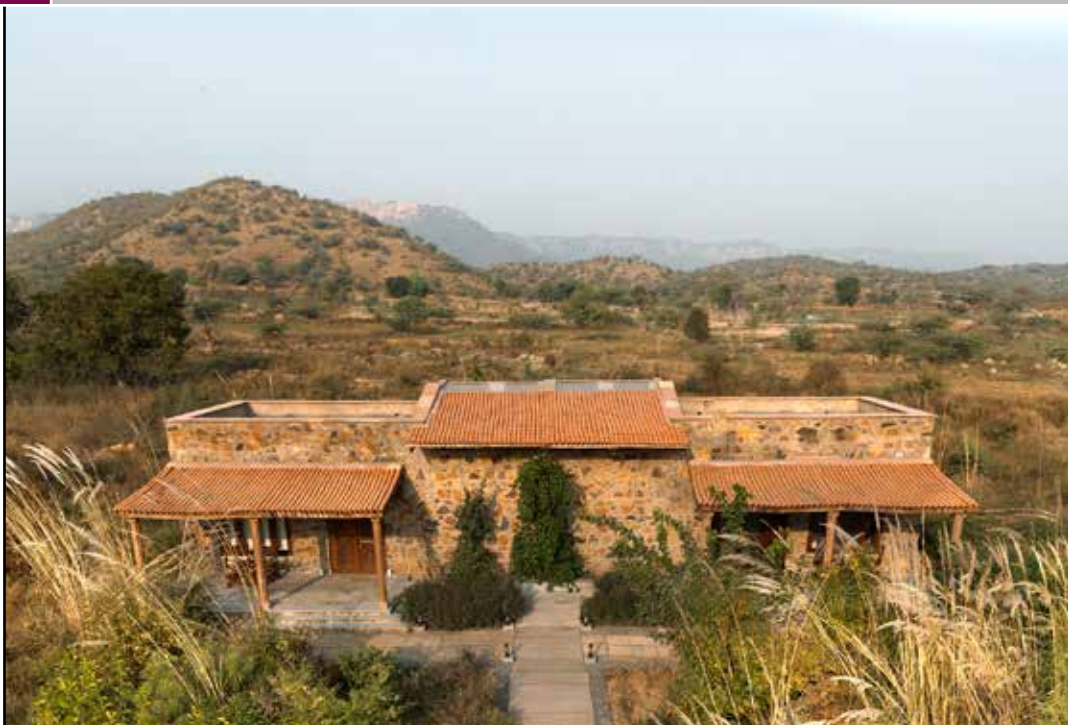
personal and Nigel (the pet dog who is adorable). Your room is ready when you are. Your preferences are noted intuitively. Time, here, does not run on clocks.

There are no breakfast timings, no lunch slots, no dinner deadlines. You eat when you feel hungry. You sleep when you feel tired.

You wake up when the jungle wakes you. In an industry obsessed with schedules and systems, Sariska Lodge quietly rebels—and in doing so, redefines what luxury truly means.

Private Butlers & Personalised





Living

Every guest is assigned a private butler, but not in the traditional, overly formal sense. This is intuitive service—present when needed, invisible when not.

Whether it is a mid-morning coffee request, an impromptu jungle seating arrangement, a surprise sundowner, or a late-night craving, the response is always effortless. There is no menu-restriction conversation, no hesitation. If it is possible, it is done.

This deeply personalised approach makes the experience feel less like a resort stay and more like living inside a carefully curated jungle home—one where your comfort is anticipated rather than managed.

Whether it is a mid-morning coffee request, an impromptu jungle seating arrangement, a surprise sundowner, or a late-night craving, the response is always effortless. There is no menu-restriction conversation, no hesitation. If it is possible, it is done.

Dining That Respects Nature

Perhaps one of the most refreshing aspects of Sariska Lodge is its rejection of buffets.

There are no counters overflowing with excess food. No heat lamps. No waste. No plastic-wrapped indulgence. Everything here is à la carte, freshly prepared and thoughtfully served.

One evening, we found ourselves seated within the jungle itself; “Bush Dinner”, as angithi-style cooking unfolded right in front of us. Fresh ingredients met glowing coal fires, slow-cooked Rajasthani flavours took shape organically, and dishes were served straight from flame to plate. This was not a just a dinner—it was authenticity in its purest form. The cuisine is earthy, soulful and deeply rooted in tradition, yet elevated through freshness and presentation. Every meal feels intentional, never performative.

Breakfasts without Boundaries

Breakfast at Sariska Lodge deserves special mention.

There is no fixed menu—only possibilities.

Whether you want a traditional Indian spread, a continental comfort breakfast, something light and detox-focused, or a personalised request not even listed—everything is prepared fresh, exactly when you want it. Meals can be served indoors, outdoors, under a tree, or overlooking the quiet edges of the forest.

The absence of buffets is not merely a lux-



ury decision—it is a sustainability statement, one that resonates deeply with the ethos of conscious travel.

Leopard Trails & Curated Wilderness

Among the lodge’s most immersive offerings is the Leopard Trail, thoughtfully curated by the Sariska

Lodge team. This is not a rushed safari experience driven by checklists and sightings. It is slow, observant and deeply immersive.

The trail encourages you to read the forest—its sounds, its silences, its subtle movements. Wildlife sightings become a bonus rather than the objective. The experience itself is the reward.

Evenings often culminate around a bonfire, where conversations flow easily—about travel, conservation, culture and the luxury of stillness. With a glass of wine in hand and the forest as your backdrop, time stretches generously.

A Healing Pause Experience

The property features a dedicated “Ku Nye Wellness Centre” with treatment rooms and an open rooftop that ideal for sunrise or sunset yoga and guided meditation sessions under the Aravalli sky. The centre includes treatment rooms offering Ayurvedic therapies, Tibetan healing rituals, and other holistic treatments



tailored to individual needs. Guests can also relax in the steam and sauna facilities, designed to ease tension and restore balance.

Equally memorable was the lodge's spa experience, which felt less like a spa appointment and more like a healing ritual rooted in ancient wisdom. The therapists were exceptionally well trained, with a quiet confidence that immediately put us at ease.

After days of travel and city living, we carried the familiar signs of urban fatigue—mild backaches, bodily heaviness and the unspoken impact of pollution and stress. The treatments were customised and intuitive, focusing on circulation, pressure points and balance rather than indulgence alone. As warm oils worked into tired muscles and the rhythms of the jungle replaced city noise, the body gradually reset.

Post-treatment, there was a noticeable lightness—reduced stiffness, improved digestion and a sense of genuine renewal. It was one of those rare spa experiences where wellness felt real, not cosmetic, leaving us refreshed, grounded and deeply aligned with our surroundings.

Travel Links Verdict

At Travel Links Magazine, we seek destinations that tell stories—of place, purpose and perspective. Sariska Lodge does exactly that.



It reminds us that luxury does not need to be loud. That comfort does not need excess. And that when travel respects nature, the experience becomes infinitely richer.

Sariska Lodge is not just a stay—it is a state of mind. [Read more](#)

2026: A NEW CHAPTER FOR OA GLOBE DMC

An Editorial
Conversation with
Vishal Somaiya
(Director) Rahim
Aslam and
(Founder)



“Destinations don’t create memories. People do. And our job in this industry is to design the stage for those memories to happen.”

It’s a thought that both Vishal Somaiya and Rahim Aslam strongly believe in — though they approach it from different ends of the business.

For OA Globe DMC, 2026 is not just another year of expansion. It marks a shift in mind-set: from being a strong destination operator to becoming a long-term experience partner for the global travel trade.

Vishal, who leads operations and destination strategy as Director, explains that the role of a DMC has changed significantly in the last few years.

“Today, agents don’t just want confirmations and vouchers. They

want reliability, fast thinking, and someone who understands their client’s emotions as much as their logistics. A DMC has to be commercially sharp, operationally strong, and emotionally intelligent — all at the same time.”

Rahim adds that this change is largely driven by Indian outbound travellers.

“They are informed, value-conscious, and very clear about what they want. They don’t want standardised trips anymore. They want journeys that feel personal, well-paced, and thoughtfully designed. If it feels generic, they disconnect.”

This evolving traveller mind-set is at the core of OA Globe DMC’s strategy for 2026.

Instead of building every itinerary from scratch, the company is

moving towards structured experience design — a system that allows creativity to exist within a strong operational framework.

“Personalisation without structure becomes chaos,” Rahim says. “But when you support it with the right processes, it becomes sustainable — for us and for our partners.”

Vishal elaborates on how this works practically.

“We are developing experience frameworks across leisure travel, family holidays, celebrations, weddings, MICE, and experiential journeys. These are flexible building blocks. They help agents get faster responses, help clients understand what they’re buying, and help us maintain consistent quality across destinations.”

Another major focus area for 2026 is specialisation.

Dedicated internal teams are being built for weddings, MICE, and experiential travel — a move Vishal considers essential for execution quality.

“A corporate incentive group cannot be handled the same way as a honeymoon or a family holiday. Each segment has different expectations, suppliers, risks, and timelines. Specialisation improves delivery — and delivery is what clients ultimately remember.”

Technology is also becoming a stronger

“Expansion only makes sense when service quality remains stable,” Vishal points out. “Otherwise scale becomes a weakness.”

Looking at the broader industry, both believe 2026 will be shaped more by emotion than movement.

“People won’t remember how many cities they visited,” Rahim says. “They will remember how a place made them feel.”

Vishal highlights another strong trend — celebration-led travel.



pillar of OA Globe DMC’s growth story.

With the launch of ALLDMC.com, the company aims to give agents faster access to destinations, structured product information, and smoother communication across markets.

But both leaders are clear that technology is only an enabler.

“Systems make us faster,” Vishal says, “but people save trips.”

Rahim agrees. “Local teams, cultural understanding, and real-time decision-making are what truly matter when something changes on the ground. Technology supports the journey — it doesn’t replace human judgement.”

On the expansion front, OA Globe DMC has already launched operations in South America and the CIS countries, with more destinations in the pipeline. The company is targeting a presence in 50 DMC markets by the end of 2026.

Yet, neither sees growth as the headline.

“Weddings, anniversaries, milestone birthdays, and corporate incentive journeys are growing fast. These are not just holidays. These are emotional milestones. Expectations are high, and margins for error are low.”

Despite new platforms, new markets, and changing travel behaviour, the company’s philosophy remains grounded.

“We don’t aim to be the biggest DMC,” Rahim says. “We aim to be the most dependable one.”

Vishal sums it up simply: “Reliable for agents. Reassuring for clients. Consistent across destinations.”

As OA Globe DMC steps into 2026, the tone is not aggressive or flashy. It is deliberate. Operationally strong. Strategically focused.

Because in the end, destinations may inspire —

but it is people who create the stories travellers carry home.

INTERVIEW

TRAVEL AGENTS FEDERATION OF INDIA (TAFI'S) PRESIDENT MR. ABBAS MOIZ TALKS TO TRAVEL LINKS

He quotes, "I am a Travel advisor, since 1989, started with obtaining the essential IATA qualifications. This foundation enabled me to establish a company composed of skilled travel professionals. Over the years, I have built expertise, over every facet of the travel and tourism sector. My primary strengths lie in execution as well as travel agency operations, skills that have been refined through hands-on experience and commitment to the industry. Since 2010, I have been very active within our association- Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI), and have progressed steadily, serving in different roles within the association. Currently, I serve as the President, with a leadership style that emphasizes transparency, teamwork, and adaptability—qualities that have helped me navigate the evolving landscape of travel and tourism. My commitment to excellence and service continues to inspire both my colleagues and the next generation of travel professionals".

By Payal Sahni

Q. What is your core vision for TAFI over the next two years?

For many years, the travel and hospitality sector has remained highly fragmented. This fragmentation is largely due to the absence of a comprehensive, integrated policy emphasizing collaboration among various components—including policymakers, principals, and distribution channels. The development of constructive, actionable solutions is essential.

Such solutions should ensure the establishment of a robust travel ecosystem, advocate for the interests of travelers, and implement effective communication and remuneration mechanisms for its efficient functioning.

Over the next two years, TAFI will actively pursue all possible avenues to achieve this objective.

Q. How do you plan to ensure inclusive growth across regions?

Following the pandemic, TAFI has intentionally moved toward decentralization, TAFI's national committee encourages its thirteen regional chapters to operate more independently while offering comprehensive support to help them implement innovative programs that emphasize inclusivity and unity among TAFI members.

An initiative of at least two national committee members mentoring a chapter,

“The concept of “online” is temporary and somewhat misleading, especially during challenging periods when it is essential to tweak and apply well-established principles of travel and tourism.”



fostering collaboration among chapter chairpersons and committees to facilitate information sharing and support for all TAFI members.

TAFI chapters retain their individual identities and culture of their region, while being a part of a national push to protect the interest of the genuine travel advisor.

Q. What policy-level challenges are you prioritising?

One of the primary challenges confronting the travel and tourism sector is the limited operational understanding demonstrated by policymakers regarding its mechanisms. Existing policies often lack comprehensive insight and do not adequately address the broader context.

In recent months, TAFI has provided thorough evaluations of prevailing policies, emphasizing the necessity for targeted reforms to ensure alignment with both domestic and international components of the travel ecosystem. Another significant shortcoming is the absence of a robust consumer protection policy, accompanied by stringent compliance protocols.

Q. How is TAFI preparing members for AI and digital disruption?

While most chapters have hosted presentations by experts on AI and digital disruption, these talks have often been insightful but somewhat unclear regarding their practical applications for everyday business operations. Only a small number of members currently use AI apps or programs, mainly for creating promotional materials, and there is no organization-wide strategy for implementing AI.

Although stakeholders report using AI in operations, I have yet to encounter a reliable and cost-effective example of authentic AI deployment.

Q. What steps is TAFI taking towards sustainable tourism?

Sustainable and responsible

tourism has once again emerged as key priorities in the wake of substantial growth in travel following the COVID-19 pandemic. Our upcoming convention in Vietnam, in January 2025, addressed these critical topics.

As an organization, we actively promote the reduction of single-use plastics, the minimization of resource waste, and the decreased use of paper through the implementation of secure electronic communication. We have transitioned our membership process to a fully electronic format, which will be further optimized this year.

The TAFI newsletter features an explanation of a United Nations Sustainable Development Goal in each edition, with the aim of enhancing our members' understanding of sustainability and responsible tourism.

Q. How will TAFI address skill development and youth engagement?

Sadly, we have not been able to go back to the levels of skill which was prevalent in this sector pre pandemic.

TAFI chapters are jointly working with institutions to provide internship and on the job learning, however there is no clear data, of its implementation.

A lot more needs to be done in the area. Apart from developing skills and engaging the youth, year-round employment for the skill must be created.

The concept of “online” is temporary and somewhat misleading, especially during challenging periods when it is essential to tweak and apply well-established principles of travel and tourism.

Q. How do you plan to strengthen international collaborations?

TAFI maintains bilateral partnerships with numerous international tourism boards and associations and is a member of the World Travel Agents Association Alliance (WTAAA). This straightforward and

transparent initiative aims to recognise and commend the practices of international partners. Through travel advisor conventions, unique international destinations are highlighted, generating a multiplier effect that increases visitor numbers to partner countries.

Q. What role does trade media play in shaping the industry?

Today's travel advisors depend on media sources to obtain industry-related news. The trade media, in my view, has significant potential for further contribution.

There are important and controversial topics within the sector that receive insufficient attention from the trade media.

Current reporting often demonstrates a lack of operational understanding regarding the dynamics of travel and hospitality.

It is essential for the media to fulfil its responsibility by providing impartial coverage on matters such as policy, infrastructure, logistics, service standards, airline policies, and sustainability.

Q. How do you see an alliance with Travel Links supporting TAFI?

We collaborate with various events and organisations to deliver value to our members through their services.

I would see an alliance between Travel Links and TAFI as a mutual arrangement to understand and critique policies, affecting the traveler and the travel advisor, and where appropriate look for solutions to common issues faced by the travel and hospitality sector.

Q. What is your message to Indian travel agents today?

Stop calling yourselves “Agents”! Call yourselves “Advisors.” Collaborate, do not confront! Change focus! From problems to solutions. Ask questions! Learn from the answers. Provide accurate, fact-based advice, and assess a service fee with confidence and transparency. ■

IRIS Reps in 2026: The Road Ahead

Alefiya Singh on strengthening brands, building trade trust, and driving meaningful growth

R

Representation is not about visibility alone. It's about responsibility — to the brand, to the travel trade, and to the traveller."

Alefiya Singh speaks with the calm assurance of someone who has spent years building brands quietly and consistently in the Indian market. As the Founder of IRIS Reps, her focus for 2026 is clear: deepen relevance, strengthen partner confidence, and create meaningful growth for every product under the company's portfolio.

"For us, growth is not about adding logos to a presentation," she says. "It's about building understanding. When agents truly understand a product, they sell it better, position it better, and trust it more."

Indian travel agents today, Alefiya believes, are sharper than ever. They ask better questions, expect quicker responses, and look for partners who bring clarity, not confusion. "The market is competitive. Information is everywhere. What agents' value now is honesty, consistency, and strong on-ground support."

This belief is shaping how IRIS Reps approaches 2026 — with sharper storytelling, stronger trade engagement, and focused brand building for each destination and DMC it represents.

The company's hospitality portfolio continues to grow steadily, led by

names such as Barceló Nasandhura, Malé; Makunudu Island, Maldives; NOOE Maldives – Kunaavashi; Barceló Coconut Island, Phuket; Ninety Six Collection Hotels, Mauritius; and Beachcomber Resorts & Hotels, Mauritius.

"Each of these products serves a different traveller mind-set," Alefiya explains. "One size never fits all in travel. Our role is to help agents match the right product to the right client."

For us, growth is not about adding logos to a presentation," she says. "It's about building understanding. When agents truly understand a product, they sell it better, position it better, and trust it more.

On the destination management side, IRIS Reps works closely with some of the most trusted names across regions — Paradise Vietnam, Authentic Asia (Vietnam), Rickshaw Travels (Kenya, Rwanda & Tanzania), Pacific Pearl Holidays (Australia & New Zealand), and Tour Managers Fiji.



"These are not just suppliers. They are specialists in their regions," she says. "Our job is to translate their strengths into clear, sellable stories for the Indian market."

For 2026, IRIS Reps is sharpening its focus across three main areas.

First is product clarity and positioning. "Agents don't have time to decode complicated offerings. We are simplifying how each product is presented — what it stands for, who it is for, and why it is different." This includes cleaner sales tools, sharper presentations, and more structured training sessions for the trade.

Second is deeper engagement with travel partners. Alefiya is keen on moving beyond transactional interactions. "We want more meaningful conversations —

through roadshows, workshops, market visits, and one-on-one sessions. Relationships build confidence, and confidence drives sales." Third is consistent brand building. From digital content to trade communication, IRIS Reps is investing in long-term visibility for its partners. "Short-term noise doesn't build brands. Consistency does."

She also sees 2026 as a year where niche travel segments will gain further momentum — experiential holidays, celebration travel, destination weddings, and small-group journeys. "These segments require more explanation, more hand-holding, and more trust. That's where representation becomes truly valuable."

Despite managing a diverse global portfolio, Alefiya remains clear about what ties everything

together. "Every product we represent must be reliable. Service quality, communication, and on-ground delivery matter more than brochures."

Looking ahead, her vision for IRIS Reps is steady rather than aggressive. "We want to be known as a company that agents can depend on. Not just for good products, but for honest guidance, quick support, and long-term partnerships."

As 2026 approaches, IRIS Reps continues to strengthen its role as a bridge between international travel brands and the Indian market — quietly shaping how destinations are understood, trusted, and sold.

Because in a market full of options, Alefiya believes, credibility is the strongest currency of all. ■

Travel Trade Ecosystem: Five Years of Change, Growth and Challenges (2019–2025)

Over the past five years, the global travel industry has undergone a dramatic transformation. From pre-pandemic growth in 2019 to the unprecedented collapse in 2020–21, followed by a strong recovery phase from 2022 onward, the sector has demonstrated remarkable resilience. Travel trade events such as OTM, SATTE, ITB Berlin, ITB Asia, WTM London and Arabian Travel Market (ATM) have played a pivotal role in rebuilding business confidence, facilitating partnerships and driving tourism growth. This report-style feature examines the evolution of major travel trade events, their impact on stakeholders, comparative performance over five years, benefits, drawbacks, and the future outlook of this dynamic ecosystem.

1. INTRODUCTION

Travel trade exhibitions serve as the backbone of the global tourism business. These events create a structured platform where destinations, hotels, airlines, tour operators, technology companies, and media interact directly with buyers and decision-makers. Unlike virtual meetings, trade shows offer face-to-face engagement, cultural exchange and real-time negotiations that accelerate business outcomes.

In India and globally, trade fairs such as Outbound Travel Mart (OTM), South Asia Travel and Tourism Exchange (SATTE), ITB Berlin, ITB Asia, World Travel Market (WTM) London and Arabian Travel Market (ATM) are regarded as strategic marketplaces for tourism growth.

2. GLOBAL TOURISM INDUSTRY: FIVE-YEAR COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

2019 – Pre-Pandemic Benchmark

- International tourist arrivals crossed 1.5 billion globally.
- Travel & Tourism contributed nearly 10.4% to global GDP.
- Trade shows witnessed record participation and business volumes.
- Events such as ITB Berlin and WTM London saw maximum exhibitor participation.

2020–2021 – Pandemic Disruption

- Global tourism declined by nearly 70–75%.
- Borders closed, flights grounded, and events went virtual.
- Major exhibitions were cancelled or shifted to online formats.
- Business generation reduced drastically.
- Industry confidence weakened.

2022 – Recovery Phase

- Gradual reopening of borders.
- Hybrid trade shows emerged.
- Pent-up demand increased leisure and VFR travel.
- OTM and SATTE returned in physical formats with moderate footfall.

2023 – Acceleration Phase

- Tourism reached nearly 88% of pre-pandemic levels.
- Corporate travel rebounded strongly.
- Trade shows recorded 20–30% growth in attendance.
- Middle East and Asian markets emerged as leaders.

2024–2025 – Growth & Expansion

- Global tourism recovery reached 95% of 2019 levels.
- Travel spending exceeded pre-pandemic





- records.
- OTM, ATM and WTM witnessed record buyer participation.
 - Focus shifted towards luxury, sustainable and experiential tourism.

3. MAJOR TRAVEL TRADE EVENTS – OVERVIEW & PERFORMANCE

3.1 Outbound Travel Mart (OTM) – India

OTM Mumbai is recognized as India's leading travel trade show and Asia's largest outbound travel exhibition.

Key Statistics:

- 2,000+ exhibitors from 60+ countries
- 50,000+ trade visitors
- 1,000+ hosted buyers
- 90% satisfaction rate among exhibitors

Growth Trends (2019–2025):

- 2019: Strong participation from Europe & Asia
- 2020–21: Virtual editions
- 2022: Physical comeback with 60% scale
- 2023–25: 35% YoY growth in exhibitors

Benefits:

- Strong B2B matchmaking
- Premium hosted buyer program
- Excellent ROI for destinations and

- hotels
- High media presence

Challenges:

- High participation cost
- Limited space for SMEs
- Overcrowding during peak hours

3.2 SATTE – New Delhi

SATTE is South Asia's oldest travel trade exhibition with 30+ years of legacy.

Key Highlights:

- 1,000+ exhibitors
- Strong domestic tourism focus
- Government tourism boards participation

Growth Pattern:

- Pre-pandemic leadership in South Asia
- Post-pandemic regained momentum in 2023

Benefits:

- Policy-level networking
- Strong India outbound & inbound focus
- Educational sessions

Limitations:

- Limited global exposure compared to ITB/WTM
- Competition from regional shows

3.3 ITB Berlin – Germany

ITB Berlin is the world's largest travel trade fair.

Key Metrics:

- 160,000+ attendees
- 10,000 exhibitors
- 180+ countries represented

Growth:

- 2019 – Record edition
- 2020 – Cancelled
- 2023 – Strong comeback
- 2024 – Largest post-pandemic edition

Benefits:

- Global exposure
- Trend forecasting sessions
- High media visibility

Challenges:

- Very high cost
- Overwhelming scale
- Difficult for SMEs to stand out

3.4 ITB Asia – Singapore

ITB Asia focuses on Asia-Pacific markets.

Strengths:

- MICE & corporate travel segment
- Technology integration
- Strong ASEAN participation

Benefits:

- Gateway to APAC markets
- Business-focused networking

Challenges:

- Smaller scale than ITB Berlin
- Higher booth cost

3.5 World Travel Market (WTM) – London

WTM London is one of the most influential global travel events.

Performance:

- 5,000+ exhibitors
- 40,000+ trade visitors
- 180+ countries

Growth:

- 2024 saw 11% growth in buyers
- Record business meetings

Benefits:

- Global decision-makers
- Strong press coverage
- Strategic partnerships

Drawbacks:

- Expensive participation
- Short meeting windows

3.6 Arabian Travel Market (ATM) – Dubai

ATM serves as Middle East's biggest travel trade platform.

Statistics:

- 46,000+ attendees (2024)
- 2,800 exhibitors

Growth:

- 15% YoY growth post-pandemic

Benefits:

- Luxury & MICE focus
- GCC market access
- Strong hospitality representation

Limitations:

- Regional concentration
- Limited budget travel focus

4. STAKEHOLDER BENEFITS

4.1 Travel Agencies & Tour Operators

- Direct supplier connections
- Exclusive contract negotiations
- Access to new destinations
- Lead generation

4.2 Hotels & Resorts

- Brand visibility
- Bulk contract signing
- Market trend understanding

4.3 Tourism Boards

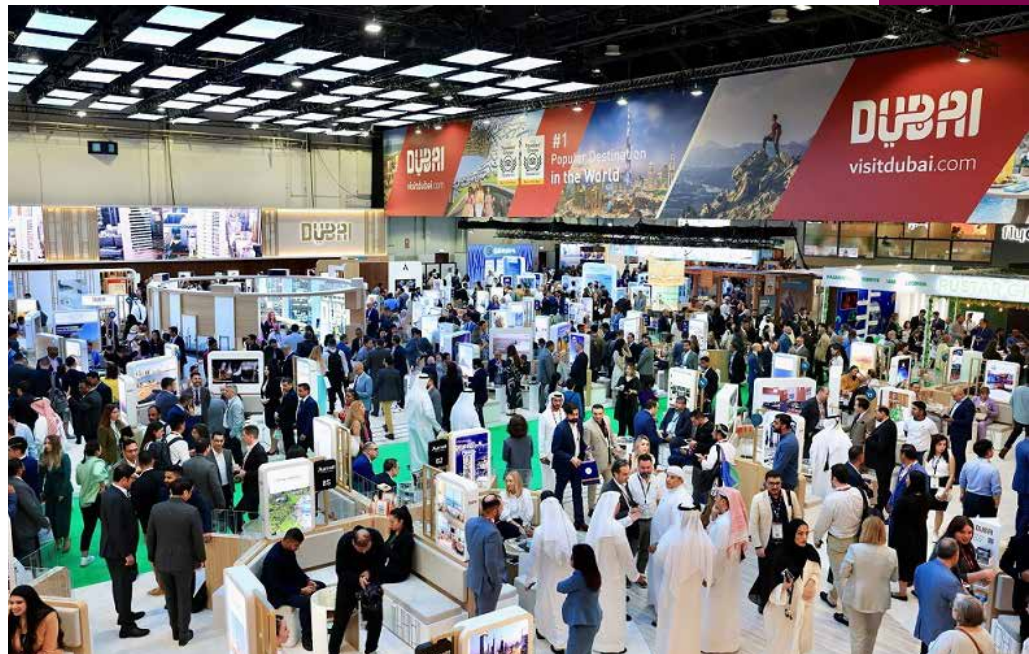
- Destination promotion
- Policy advocacy
- Market intelligence

4.4 Media & Content Creators

- Exclusive story leads
- Trend forecasting
- Industry interviews

4.5 Travelers (Indirect)

- Better packages
- Improved service standards



- Competitive pricing

5. KEY CHALLENGES & DRAWBACKS

- Rising participation cost
- Saturation of events
- Time-intensive commitments
- Environmental impact
- ROI uncertainty for small players
- Visa and travel restrictions
- Economic fluctuations impacting participation

6. INDUSTRY GROWTH – FIVE-YEAR COMPARATIVE SNAPSHOT

2019:

- Stable growth
- High physical participation

2020–21:

- Event cancellations
- Virtual fatigue

2022:

- Hybrid models
- Gradual return

2023:

- Increased corporate travel
- Higher exhibitor confidence

2024–25:

- Expansion of hosted buyer programs
- Focus on luxury & sustainability
- New event launches (ITB Americas planned)

7. FUTURE OUTLOOK (2026–2030)

- AI-driven matchmaking
- Sustainable event formats
- Carbon-neutral exhibitions
- Hybrid networking platforms
- Expansion into emerging markets
- Personalized B2B meetings
- Strong focus on experiential tourism

8. CONCLUSION

Travel trade exhibitions remain the cornerstone of global tourism development. Despite digital disruption, face-to-face interaction continues to generate trust, partnerships and long-term business relationships.

The past five years have proven that the industry is resilient, adaptable and future-ready. Events like OTM, SATTE, ITB, WTM and ATM will continue to evolve with technology, sustainability and consumer demand shaping their format.

For stakeholders, strategic participation rather than volume-driven attendance will define success. Choosing the right platform, preparing in advance and following up effectively will determine ROI.

As the travel industry enters a new era of conscious tourism, luxury travel and digital innovation, trade events will remain the heartbeat of global tourism business. 🌐

Kota Travel Mart 2026: Where Rajasthan's Best-Kept Secret Unfolds

Kota steps into the tourism spotlight with its first-ever travel mart, redefining perceptions beyond classrooms and coaching centres.

By Payal Sahni

T

he inaugural edition of Kota Travel Mart 2026 marked a historic moment for the Hadoti region, positioning Kota as an emerging tourism destination on Rajasthan's travel map. The event brought together travel trade professionals, hoteliers, destination marketers, government officials, and media from across India, fostering meaningful B2B interactions and destination promotion.

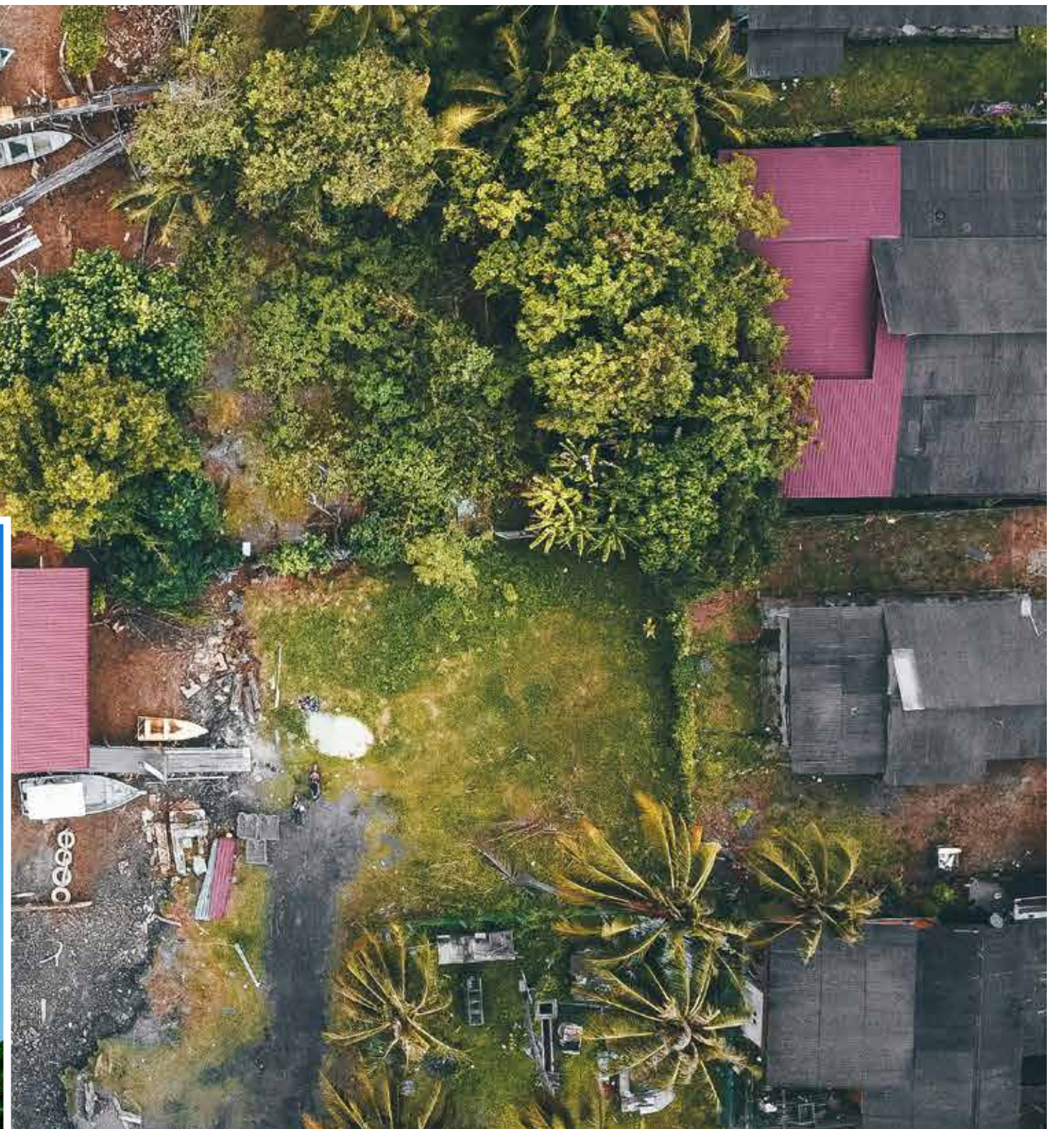
Travel Links proudly attended this milestone event, witnessing first-hand how Kota is ready to welcome leisure travellers, culture enthusiasts, and nature lovers alike.

Breaking the Journey: A Road Trip from Delhi to Kota

Our journey began from Delhi, covering a distance of approximately 470 km. We thoughtfully planned a break in Jaipur, turning the drive into a mini road trip adventure. The smooth highways, scenic rural stretches, and changing landscapes of Rajasthan made the journey comfortable and picturesque.

After Jaipur, the road to Kota opened into peaceful countryside views, dotted with fields, small towns, and authentic Rajasthani life – a reminder that travel is as much about the journey as the destination.

Kota Travel Mart 2026: Key Highlights



ing escape – perfect for slow travel enthusiasts.

A City without Red Lights

One of the most impressive aspects of Kota is its traffic system – the city operates without red-light zones, ensuring smooth movement and disciplined driving. This unique urban planning makes Kota one of the most hassle-free cities to drive in.

Leisure & Green Escapes in Kota
Kota offers several well-planned leisure spaces:

Seven Wonders Park

Featuring replicas of world-famous monuments, this park is ideal for evening strolls and family outings. The illuminated monuments create a beautiful ambience at night.



Oxygen Park

True to its name, Oxygen Park is a green retreat with walking trails, open spaces, and fresh air – perfect for morning walks and peaceful relaxation.

Other attractions include:


- Kishore Sagar Lake
 - Jagmandir Palace
 - Chambal Garden
 - Local food streets & markets
- Why Kota Deserves Your Travel Bucket List

Kota Travel Mart 2026 successfully shattered stereotypes and showcased Kota as:

- A heritage destination
- A river tourism hub
- A green & planned city
- A weekend getaway from Delhi, Jaipur & Udaipur

The Road Ahead

With its first travel mart, Kota has taken a confident step towards tourism revival. The city blends royal history, modern infrastructure, eco parks, and peaceful riverscapes – making it ideal for slow travel, short getaways, and experiential tourism.

Travel Links applauds this initiative and looks forward to seeing Kota emerge as one of Rajasthan's most sought-after destinations. 



From The Trade, For The Trade: How Dev Karvat Is Empowering India's Travel Community

For over two decades, Dev Karvat, Founder & CEO of Asego, has been a name that resonates with trust, innovation, and transformation across India's travel fraternity. His story, however, goes far beyond entrepreneurial success — it's one of vision, resilience, and a deep-rooted commitment to the travel community that shaped his journey.



From Humble Beginnings to a Purposeful Vision

Born into a family with deep roots in the insurance business, Dev was inspired early on by his father, Late Shri Ashok-bhai Karvat, whose integrity and work ethic left a lasting impression. Growing up, he imbibed not just the

principles of insurance, but also the values of service and protection that would one day define his life's work.

By the age of sixteen, Dev had already set his sights on entrepreneurship — combining his passion for travel with his understanding of protection to create something new for Indian travellers. What began as

a small venture with ten people and a single office soon grew into a nationwide movement to make travel safer, simpler, and more secure. "I've always believed that protection should be a part of the journey, not an afterthought," Dev reflects. "That belief has guided every step of my career."

A Pioneering Path: Building the Foundations of Travel Assistance in India

In the early 2000s, Dev's first entrepreneurial chapter began with the creation of TrawellTag, India's pioneering travel assistance brand. Under his leadership, the company introduced breakthrough innovations such as India's first metallic luggage tracking tag, emergency medical assistance abroad, and concierge and family protection services — redefining how Indian travellers experienced safety and care. From a modest team of ten to over 450 employees across 47 offices nationwide, Dev's relentless pursuit of service excellence transformed TrawellTag into a trusted name among travel agents, corporates, and travellers alike.

Global Exposure: Learning, Leading, and Expanding Horizons

Dev's entrepreneurial journey soon went global. In 2012, he partnered with Cover-More Group, Australia, giving Indian travellers access to international expertise, best practices, and world-class service standards. When Zurich Insurance acquired Cover-More in 2017, it marked a

new era of growth — and a pivotal learning experience for Dev.

These global collaborations not only expanded his understanding of technology and operational excellence but also planted the seed for a new vision — to build an Indian-born, world-class travel protection ecosystem that would empower both travellers and the travel trade.

Asego: The New Chapter of Innovation and Empowerment

When Cover-More exited the Indian market in 2020, Dev saw not a setback, but a defining opportunity — a moment to reclaim his vision and rebuild the business on his own terms. He regained full ownership of the travel assistance enterprise and reimagined it under a bold new identity — Asego. With a renewed focus on innovation, digital-first solutions, and partner empowerment, Asego swiftly evolved into a leader in global assistance and travel insurance, setting new benchmarks for reliability, service excellence, and customer experience.

Today, the organisation stands tall with over 510 dedicated assistance experts operating from 60+ offices across India, serving millions of travellers worldwide. Asego works with more than 22,000 travel agents, empowering them with cutting-edge protection products, global assistance solutions, and technology-driven services that enhance traveller confidence, strengthen customer relationships, and unlock new revenue opportunities.

But Dev's vision for Asego extends far beyond insurance. His mission is to build a comprehensive travel protection ecosystem — one that integrates innovation, empathy, and collaboration to make every journey safer, smarter, and more seamless. Through its pioneering approach, Asego continues to transform travel protection from a transactional necessity into an experience of trust, assurance, and empowerment. "Asego was born out of a vision to serve the travel trade with solutions that create real value — for travellers and for our partners," Dev shares. "Our growth has always been deeply intertwined with theirs."

Travel Business Protect: Safeguarding the Trade's Backbone



Understanding the growing accountability of travel businesses — from client data and vendor reliability to operational integrity — Asego introduced Travel Business Protect, India's first comprehensive liability cover designed exclusively for travel agencies.

The product offers protection against legal expenses, third-party liabilities, professional errors, and operational risks, ensuring agencies can focus on what matters most — building relationships and growing their business. "Travel professionals are custodians of trust," says Dev. "Travel Business Protect was designed to secure not just their work, but their reputation and confidence."

Empowering the Frontline: Knowledge that Creates Growth

True to Dev's belief that empowerment begins with education, Asego has launched a nationwide train-

ing initiative focused on upskilling frontline travel professionals across Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. Through interactive workshops, real-world case studies, and skill-building sessions, travel agents learn how to position protection and assistance as value-added offerings — improving both customer satisfaction and ancillary revenue streams. This initiative has already empowered hundreds of travel professionals, giving them the tools to thrive in a competitive market.

Dolphin: Technology that Works for the Trade

Asego's innovation extends into technology through its proprietary platform, Dolphin, built to make travel protection fast, seamless, and accessible.

From policy issuance to extensions, endorsements, and claims, Dolphin automates every process in under

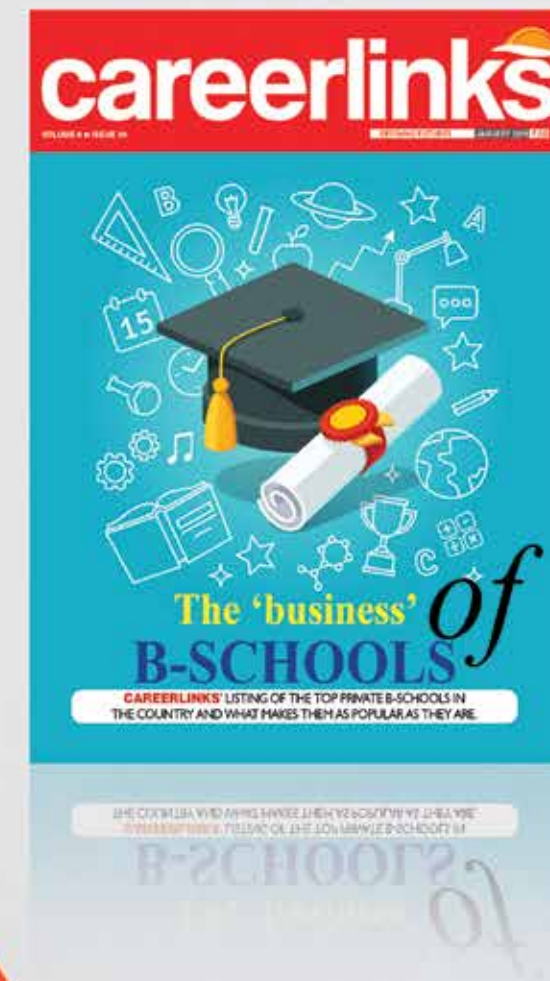


two minutes, whether on desktop or mobile. With intelligent features such as OCR scanning, automatic trip analysis, real-time dashboards, and built-in claims support, it helps agents serve clients efficiently and grow their business confidently. “Dolphin is more than a digital tool — it’s a growth partner,” Dev explains. “It gives our partners the speed and accuracy they need, while they focus on what they do best — delivering great travel experiences.”

A Greater Vision: Leading the Future of Travel Protection

For Dev Karvat, Asego isn’t just a company — it’s a continuation of a lifelong purpose. From his father’s lessons on integrity to his own journey across continents, every milestone has shaped his mission to create an ecosystem where travel protection, technology, and empowerment go hand in hand. With Asego, he envisions a future where travel protection becomes

second nature to every Indian traveller — whether they’re exploring the world for leisure, business, education, or faith. And equally, where every travel agent has the means to enhance their business with innovative, tech-enabled, and revenue-generating solutions. “The travel trade is the foundation of my journey,” Dev concludes. “Asego was created for them — to help this community grow stronger, smarter, and more secure together.” 



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Cruise Horizons 2026: India's Ocean Romance

By Travel Links Magazine

Luxury travel in 2026 no longer whispers—it sails boldly across oceans, promising time, privacy, and transformative discovery. Cruising has evolved from a niche indulgence to a lifestyle statement, and for India the romance with the sea is only beginning. With policy tailwinds, rising disposable incomes, and global cruise giants recalibrating itineraries, the Indian Ocean has become one of the world's most closely watched maritime frontiers.

This editorial deep-dives into the emotional pull of sea travel, India's emerging cruise corridors, global liners focusing on the Indian market, and the challenges shaping the sector—crafted for cruise professionals, tourism boards, and OTM participants charting future collaborations.

GLOBAL CRUISING IN 2026: THE BIGGER WAKE

The worldwide cruise industry has returned to robust health, carrying more than 30 million passengers annually and adding record numbers of next-generation vessels focused on sustainability, entertainment, and destination immersion. Industry analysts project mid-to-high single-digit CAGR through 2030, powered by Asia-Pacific demand and younger first-time cruisers.

Europe and North America remain dominant source markets, but India, Southeast Asia, and the Gulf are rewriting deployment strategies. Ships once confined to Caribbean loops now reposition seasonally into the Arabian Sea, Southeast Asia, and extended

Indian Ocean arcs.

INDIA'S CRUISE MOMENT

India's 7,500-kilometre coastline and historic port cities—Mumbai, Kochi, Goa, Chennai, Visakhapatnam—give it natural cruise DNA. Government-backed initiatives such as the Cruise Bharat Mission aim to multiply passenger numbers several-fold by 2047, supported by port modernisation, simplified

River cruising is the second engine. The success of luxury voyages along the Ganga and Brahmaputra rivers has re-introduced Indians to slow, immersive travel—sailing past temples, ghats, wildlife sanctuaries, and colonial trading towns.

immigration processes, and incentives for foreign flag vessels. River cruising is the second engine. The success of luxury voyages along the Ganga and Brahmaputra rivers has re-introduced Indians to slow, immersive travel—sailing past temples, ghats, wildlife sanctuaries, and colonial trading towns.

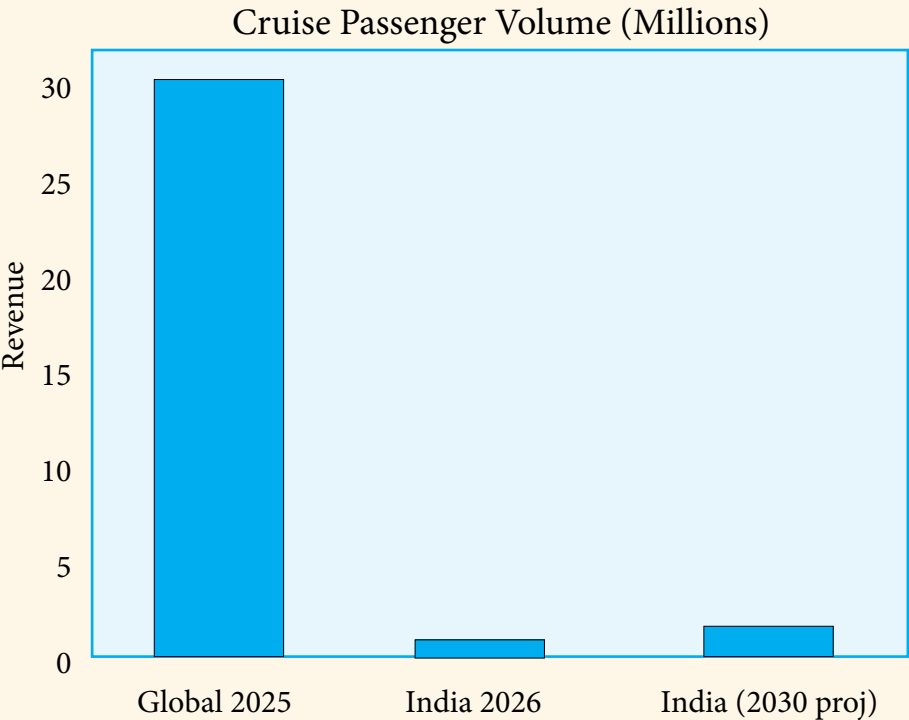


Figure 1: Comparative Passenger Volumes – Global vs India

THE EMOTIONAL DRAW: WHY INDIA IS FALLING FOR SEA TRAVEL

Cruising's appeal lies in rhythm. Sunrise yoga on deck, spice-scented coastal winds, floating resorts carrying travellers effortlessly between cultures—this is travel without logistical fatigue. Indian families embrace cruises for safety and convenience; millennials for social energy and curated experiences; corporates for MICE voyages and incentive charters.

Short two-to-four-night sailings serve as entry points, while repeat cruisers upgrade into longer international itineraries linking the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Dubai, Singapore, and Mediterranean gateways.



KEY ROUTES SHAPING 2026

Domestic loops from Mumbai to Goa and Lakshadweep anchor India’s coastal cruising, while Chennai-based sailings toward Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia gain traction. Dubai continues to function as India’s global cruise springboard, feeding Mediterranean and Northern European seasons.

River corridors through Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, and West Bengal are being mapped with boutique terminals, heritage excursions, and eco-sensitive operations—opening inland India to international cruise aficionados.

WHO IS BETTING ON INDIA?

Homegrown operator Cordelia Cruises remains the face of domestic ocean cruising, expanding fleets and themed voyages. International giants—Royal Caribbean, MSC Cruises, Norwegian, Carnival, Costa, Celebrity—court Indian travellers through sales offices, charter partnerships, and fly-cruise programmes.

Luxury river brands and expedition specialists quietly explore eastern India and the Andaman Sea, sensing demand for culturally deep itineraries rather than mass-market loops.

CHALLENGES: THE WAVES BELOW THE SURFACE

Infrastructure remains uneven; only a handful of Indian ports can seamlessly handle mega-ships. Regulatory complexity, taxation, and customs procedures raise operating costs. Environmental mandates push fleets toward LNG, shore-power connectivity, and low-sulphur fuels, requiring heavy capital expenditure.

Destination readiness is another hurdle—smaller ports need excursion ecosystems, trained guides, transport logistics, and international marketing to transform brief calls into memorable showcases.

OPPORTUNITY FOR TRADE & OTM STAKEHOLDERS


For cruise lines and tour opera-

tors, India is not simply a source market but an itinerary shaper. Curated shore experiences—heritage walks, culinary trails, wildlife safaris, wellness retreats—will define competitive differentiation.

OTM participants exploring cruise partnerships in 2026 encounter an ecosystem ripe for port collaborations, charter programmes, luxury shore handling, and experiential product design.

FINAL WORD FROM TRAVEL LINKS

India stands at the edge of a blue-water renaissance. The numbers are persuasive, but the narrative is emotional: a civilisation rediscovering its oceans, rivers, and maritime heritage through contemporary luxury vessels. For the cruise industry, 2026 is not merely another season—it is the opening chapter of India’s long maritime love story.

The horizon is wide. The tide is turning. And the world’s cruise map is being redrawn—with India firmly in ink. 

India Cruise Revenue Forecast (USD Millions)

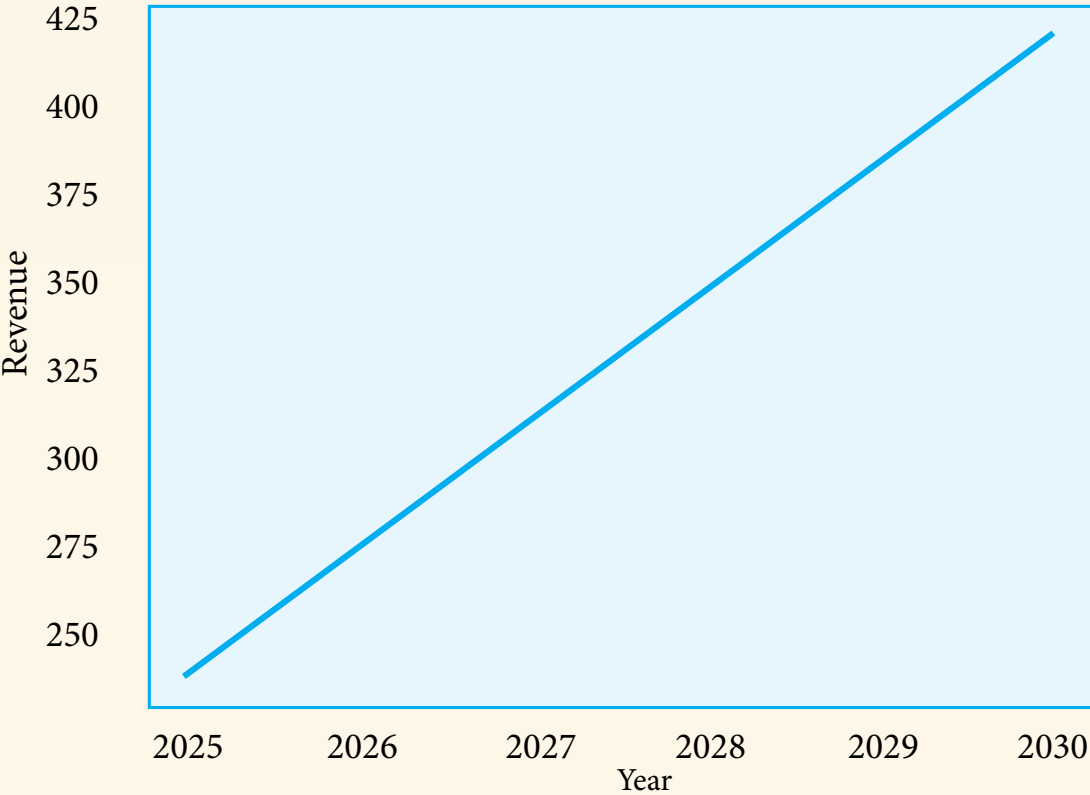


Figure 2: India Cruise Revenue Growth Forecast

The New Luxury Playbook

Travel Links Editorial Team

L

uxury travel in 2026 no longer whispers wealth—it speaks of time well spent, privacy well protected, purpose well chosen, and experiences that linger long after check-out. Across continents, the high-end traveller has evolved from collector of destinations to curator of moments. It is no longer about ticking boxes; it is about depth, design, discretion and discernment.

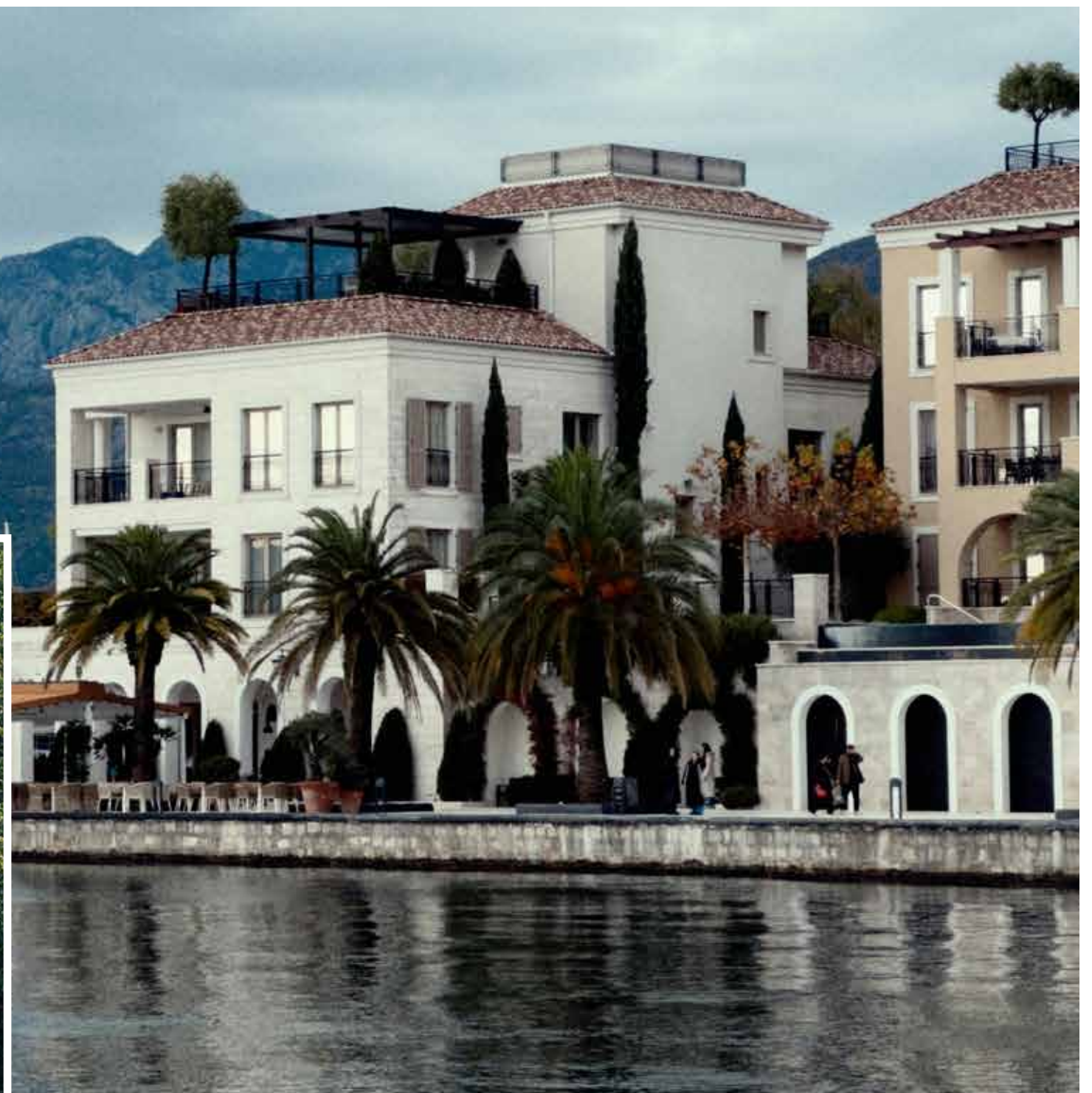
From regenerative resorts tucked into pristine landscapes to ultra-private villas accessible only by heli-copter, from yacht charters redefining ocean exploration to wellness journeys that recalibrate mind and metabolism, the luxury sector is re-writing its own rules.

At Travel Links, we track this transformation closely. Conversations with hoteliers, tourism boards, DMCs and luxury travel designers across Europe, Asia, Africa and the Middle East reveal a single truth: the new luxury playbook is being shaped by five powerful forces—conscious travel, slow itineraries, radical privacy, immersive gastronomy and experiential safaris.

Here is how high-end travel is evolving—and why 2026 may well mark its most thoughtful chapter yet.

CONSCIOUS LUXURY: WHEN SUSTAINABILITY BECOMES STATUS

For today's affluent traveller, sustain-



ability is no longer an optional add-on—it is a marker of sophistication.

Luxury resorts are moving beyond token eco-certifications toward regenerative tourism—properties that restore ecosystems, empower communities and protect heritage. In Bhutan, Costa Rica, Rwanda and parts of Scandinavia, high-end lodges are investing in forest restoration, marine conservation and wildlife corridors. In India, luxury camps in Ladakh and Rajasthan are showcasing solar-powered operations and heritage revival

programmes that employ local artisans and revive fading crafts.

What distinguishes conscious luxury in 2026 is subtlety. Solar panels are hidden behind vernacular architecture. Organic farms double as culinary gardens. Water recycling systems operate invisibly, while guest-facing experiences focus on connection rather than instruction—guided mangrove walks with marine biologists, village suppers prepared by community cooks and textile workshops hosted by master weavers.

Sabah— Where Rainforests, Reefs and Remote Luxury Meet



By Payal Sahni

Malaysia rarely reveals itself in a single glance. It unfolds—slowly, sensually, layer by shimmering layer. From futuristic skylines softened by palm-lined boulevards to rainforests that predate human memory, the country rewards travellers who move beyond the obvious.

Our recent Travel Links journey across Malaysia reaffirmed this truth. Kuala Lumpur dazzled us with polish and poise from the refined comfort of Shangri-La Kuala Lumpur. Lexis Hibiscus seduced with overwater villas and private infinity pools suspended above the Malacca Strait. Sarawak deepened the narrative with living cultures, riverfront rhythms and forest traditions that speak of centuries past.

Yet amid these varied encounters, one name echoed persistently—Sabah.

Perched on the northern edge of Borneo, Sabah is Malaysia's untamed heartland: a destination of soaring granite peaks, coral kingdoms, wildlife-rich rivers and communities whose festivals still dictate the rhythm of the year. Sabah is not simply another Malaysian stop—it is a revelation.

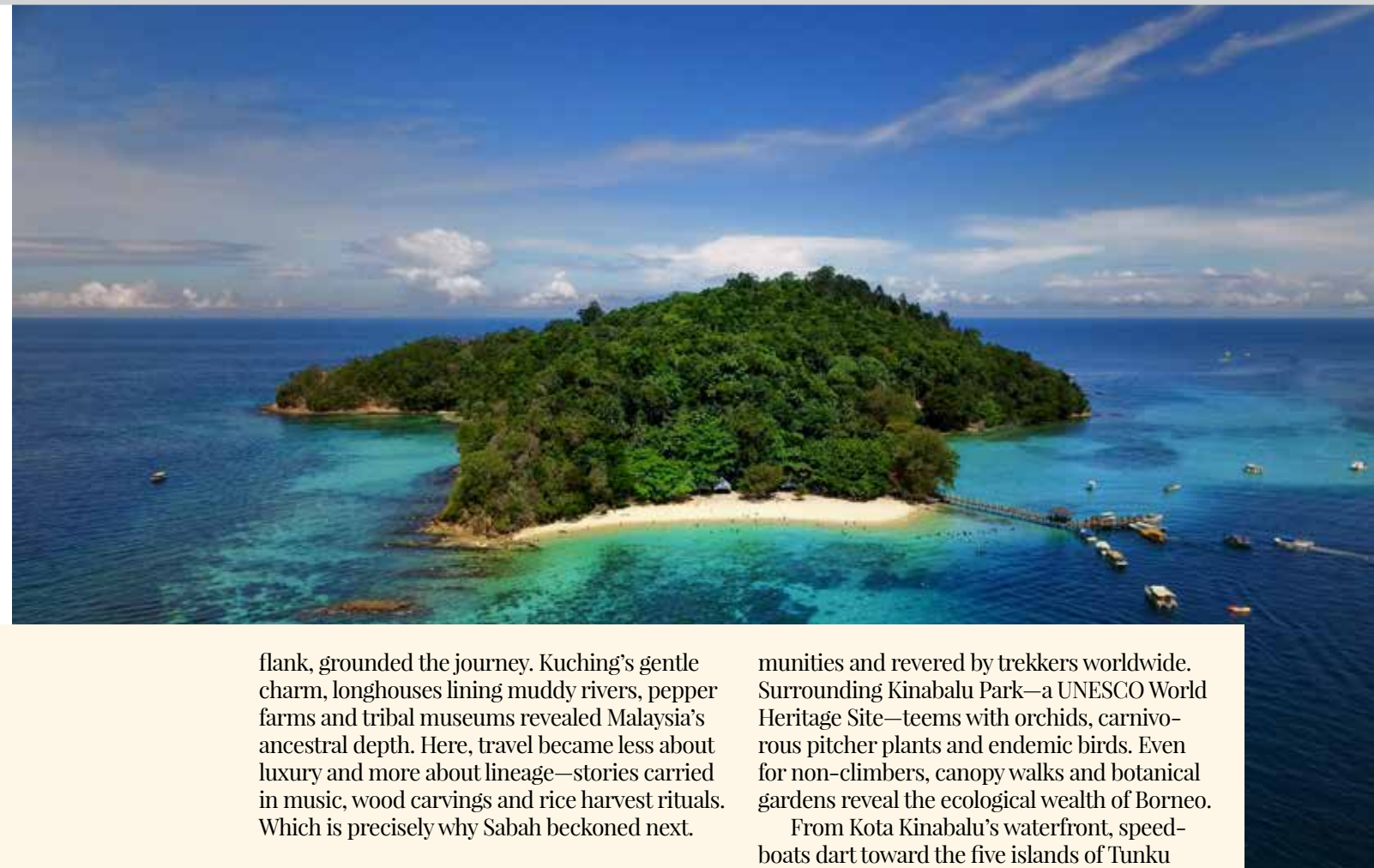
THE PRELUDE: OUR MALAYSIAN JOURNEY

Shangri-La Kuala Lumpur proved the perfect urban anchor. Its tranquil gardens and graceful interiors softened the capital's pace, while impeccable service transformed busy days into serene evenings. From here, Kuala Lumpur's icons—the Petronas Towers at sunset, Jalan Alor's culinary theatre, heritage quarters like Kampung Baru—felt effortlessly within reach.

Lexis Hibiscus Port Dickson shifted the mood entirely. Villas shaped like flower petals extended over open water, each offering complete privacy and cinematic sunsets. Time slowed to the rhythm of waves lapping below timber decks, seafood dinners beneath star-speckled skies, and mornings where the sea replaced alarm clocks.

Sarawak, on Malaysian Borneo's western

Our recent Travel Links journey across Malaysia reaffirmed this truth. Kuala Lumpur dazzled us with polish and poise from the refined comfort of Shangri-La Kuala Lumpur. Lexis Hibiscus seduced with overwater villas and private infinity pools suspended above the Malacca Strait. Sarawak deepened the narrative with living cultures, riverfront rhythms and forest traditions that speak of centuries past.



flank, grounded the journey. Kuching's gentle charm, longhouses lining muddy rivers, pepper farms and tribal museums revealed Malaysia's ancestral depth. Here, travel became less about luxury and more about lineage—stories carried in music, wood carvings and rice harvest rituals. Which is precisely why Sabah beckoned next.

SABAH: A DIFFERENT MALAYSIA

If Kuala Lumpur is Malaysia's intellect and Sarawak its memory, Sabah is its lungs. This is where forests breathe thick and green, where clouds snag on mountain ridges and fishermen read tides as their ancestors once did.

Sabah feels remote, yet remarkably accessible. Flights connect Kota Kinabalu with major Asian hubs, while discreet luxury resorts emerge along coastlines still fringed with coconut palms. What differentiates Sabah is the sheer scale of its nature—primeval jungles, Asia's highest peak between the Himalayas and New Guinea, world-renowned dive sites, and rivers alive with endangered species.

Sabah is not for hurried tourism. It is for travellers who pause. In this window, travellers can comfortably base themselves in Kota Kinabalu, explore nearby islands in Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park, venture into rainforest interiors or mangrove-lined rivers, experience indigenous villages, and indulge in one spectacular beachfront or jungle lodge stay.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF SABAH

Mount Kinabalu and Kinabalu Park dominate Sabah's skyline. Rising dramatically above cloud lines, the granite giant is sacred to local com-

munities and revered by trekkers worldwide. Surrounding Kinabalu Park—a UNESCO World Heritage Site—teems with orchids, carnivorous pitcher plants and endemic birds. Even for non-climbers, canopy walks and botanical gardens reveal the ecological wealth of Borneo.

From Kota Kinabalu's waterfront, speedboats dart toward the five islands of Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park—Manukan, Sapi, Mamutik, Gaya and Sulug. These tropical jewels deliver powder-white beaches, coral gardens visible from the surface and barbecue lunches framed by turquoise horizons. It is island perfection without the crowds of more commercialised archipelagos.

Along the Kinabatangan River, wildlife reigns. Dawn cruises unveil proboscis monkeys leaping between branches, hornbills gliding overhead and pygmy elephants emerging from the mist. After dark, crocodile eyes glimmer near the banks. Eco-lodges—rustic yet refined—offer front-row seats to one of Southeast Asia's richest ecosystems, an experience closer to African safari territory than many expect from Malaysia.

For divers, Sabah is sacred ground. Sipadan Island consistently ranks among the world's finest dive destinations, famed for its vertical walls, swirling barracuda tornadoes, green turtles drifting through blue depths and reef sharks patrolling coral gardens. Nearby Mabul and Kapalai attract underwater photographers and macro enthusiasts, with stilted resorts floating above crystalline shallows.

Sabah's cultural tapestry is equally compelling. More than thirty ethnic communi-

ties—from the Kadazan-Dusun to the Bajau sea nomads—shape the region's identity. Cultural villages near Kota Kinabalu offer immersive introductions: cooking over open fires, blowpipe demonstrations, rice wine tastings and folktales echoing forest lore. Visiting during the Kaamatan Harvest Festival transforms the state into a carnival of music, costumes and ritual.

WHY SABAH FEELS DIFFERENT

Beyond landscapes, Sabah's defining quality is its tempo. Life here follows tides and treelines rather than traffic lights. Luxury whispers rather than shouts. Resorts blend into environments—timber villas peeking from jungle edges, infinity pools dissolving into sea horizons, spas perfumed with frangipani and rain.

Where mainland Malaysia impresses with polish, Sabah captivates with authenticity. It invites travellers to listen: to cicadas at dusk, rain drumming on giant leaves, elders recounting



creation myths beside cooking fires.

WHERE TO STAY

Sabah's accommodation spectrum is impressively broad—luxury beachfront icons near Kota Kinabalu, private-island retreats on Gaya Island, eco-lodges along jungle rivers, boutique mountain hideaways near Kinabalu Park and dive-focused resorts on the east coast. Sus-

Sabah is not merely a destination to add to a Malaysian holiday—it is the reason to return. Four or five nights are enough to snorkel coral gardens, encounter wild orangutans, sip coconut water on deserted beaches and watch clouds roll across sacred peaks.

tainability threads through many properties, with solar energy, conservation partnerships and community employment shaping modern hospitality.

SABAH AS THE PERFECT FINALE

After Kuala Lumpur's sophistication, Lexis Hibiscus's romance and Sarawak's cultural gravi-

tas, Sabah emerged as Malaysia's crescendo. It completed the narrative. Where cities delivered glamour, Sabah delivered wonder. Where resorts provided comfort, Sabah provided awe.

For Indian travellers in particular, Sabah offers rare discovery—Southeast Asia without overtourism, nature without filters, luxury without excess. It is a place where mornings begin with jungle calls and evenings end beneath stars mirrored on silent seas.

THE TRAVEL LINKS VERDICT

Sabah is not merely a destination to add to a Malaysian holiday—it is the reason to return. Four or five nights are enough to snorkel

coral gardens, encounter wild orangutans, sip coconut water on deserted beaches and watch clouds roll across sacred peaks.

They are rarely enough to satisfy. Because Sabah possesses that most dangerous quality in travel. It stays with you. Long after the flight home.

uxury travel in 2026 no longer whispers wealth—it speaks of time well spent, privacy well protected, purpose well chosen, and experiences that linger long after check-out. Across continents, the high-end traveller has evolved from collector of destinations to curator of moments. It is no longer about ticking boxes; it is about depth, design, discretion and discern-



ment.

From regenerative resorts tucked into pristine landscapes to ultra-private villas accessible only by helicopter, from yacht charters redefining ocean exploration to wellness journeys that recalibrate mind and metabolism, the luxury sector is rewriting its own rules.

At Travel Links, we track this transformation closely. Conversations with hoteliers, tourism boards, DMCs and luxury travel designers across Europe, Asia, Africa and the Middle East reveal a single truth: the new luxury playbook is being shaped by five powerful forces—conscious travel, slow itineraries, radical privacy, immersive gastronomy and experiential safaris.

Here is how high-end travel is evolving—and why 2026 may well mark its most thoughtful chapter yet.

CONSCIOUS LUXURY: WHEN SUSTAINABILITY BECOMES STATUS

For today's affluent traveller, sustainability is no longer an optional add-on—it is a marker of sophistication.

Luxury resorts are moving beyond token eco-certifications toward regenerative tourism—properties that restore ecosystems, empower communities and protect heritage. In Bhutan, Costa Rica, Rwanda and parts of Scandinavia, high-end lodges are investing in forest restoration, marine conservation and wildlife corridors. In India, luxury camps in Ladakh and Rajasthan are showcasing solar-powered operations and heritage revival programmes that employ local artisans and revive fading crafts.

What distinguishes conscious luxury in 2026 is subtlety. Solar panels are hidden behind vernacular architecture. Organic farms double as culinary gardens. Water recycling systems operate invisibly, while guest-facing experiences focus on connection rather than instruction—guided mangrove walks with marine biologists, village suppers prepared by community cooks and textile workshops hosted by master weavers.

Tourism boards are reframing sustainability not as sacrifice but as exclusive access to protected landscapes and conservation-led stays.

SLOW TRAVEL: THE RETURN OF TIME AS THE ULTIMATE

INDULGENCE

High-net-worth travellers are rejecting whirlwind itineraries in favour of deeper engagement. Two weeks in Sicily rather than three capitals. A fortnight drifting through Kerala instead of a rushed circuit. A month in rural Japan rather than five frenetic days.

Hotels are responding with long-stay programmes, vineyard harvests, cherry blossom workshops and desert astronomy sessions. Luxury rail journeys and boutique river cruises are central to this revival, creating narrative-rich itineraries.

ULTRA-PRIVATE VILLAS AND YACHT CHARTERS

Privacy is the new currency. Private islands, cliff estates, desert lodges and staffed villas dominate wish lists. Yachts now explore polar fringes, fjords and the Kimberley Coast with helipads, submersibles and wellness decks. Luxury today is defined by space, silence, service, story and sovereignty.

WELLNESS JOURNEYS: TRAVEL AS TRANSFORMATION

Luxury travellers now plan trips around longevity clinics, Ayurveda retreats and desert mindfulness camps. Nature-integrated therapy, circadian lighting and nutrition-led cuisine redefine hospitality.

CULINARY IMMERSION: DINING AS DESTINATION

Foraging in Lapland, truffle hunts in Umbria, palace kitchens in Rajasthan and fishing with island communities shape menus. Hotels champion provenance and heritage recipes—luxury is what can only be eaten there.

EXPERIENTIAL SAFARIS: THE WILD REIMAGINED

From Ladakh to Namibia, safaris now involve conservation participation and scientific tracking. Glass lodges, mobile camps and solar treehouses redefine wilderness living.

THE TRAVEL LINKS VIEW

Luxury in 2026 is driven by intention, not indulgence. For global showcases from OTM to ITB Berlin, the message is clear: travellers seek philosophies, not just destinations. The new luxury is not about excess. It is about essence. [TL](#)



INTERVIEW

MR. ANAND SHEKHAWAT: FOUNDER OF SARISKA LODGE

Anand Shekhawat is a veteran hotelier and sustainability-driven entrepreneur. He has spent 20+ years in the hospitality industry working with globally-reputed luxury hotel chains such as Aman Resorts, and Oberoi Hotels & Resorts. In his last role, he served as Regional Director – India, Bhutan & Sri Lanka and also the Global Head of Sustainability at Aman Resorts.

In conversation with “Payal Sahni, the editor of Travel Links”.

Anand's vision for Sariska Lodge is derived from a deep personal connection with the region and its people. His commitment towards authentically showcasing the destination's rich natural and cultural heritage – reflects seamlessly in each of the thoughtfully curated guest experiences in and around the property. Sariska Lodge has been distinctly designed to offer glimpses of the local architecture across its interiors and outdoor spaces, weaved together with Anand's human-centric approach – wherein people from nearby areas have been purposefully trained into an insightful in-house team that provides heartfelt hospitality and perceptive service that forms the core of a truly transformative experience at the property.

Q. You have spent over 20 years in the hospitality industry across different formats. How has your past experience as an hotelier shaped your vision while conceptualising and running Sariska Lodge?

My experience of over 20 years with globally reputed luxury hospitality groups such as Aman Resorts and Oberoi Hotels & Resorts, including leadership roles in management and sustainability, has shaped the core philosophy behind Sariska Lodge. The property reflects my beliefs that true luxury lies in authenticity, thoughtful design, perceptive service, and deep respect for the environment rather than excess. My last role at Aman Resorts as Regional Director for India, Bhutan & Sri Lanka, as well as Global Head of Sustainability – also strengthened my conviction that

sustainability must be embedded meaningfully into operations rather than positioned as a narrative, and this philosophy is deeply reflected at Sariska Lodge.

The founding team's outlook also aligned naturally with Sariska's powerful conservation story. My family's long-standing association with the region, particularly my father, Mr. R.S. Shekhawat's pioneering role in India's first successful tiger relocation project is a testament to our commitment to the region. Sariska Lodge has therefore been envisioned as an intimate, sustainability-led retreat – one that blends global hospitality standards with a strong sense of purpose, emotional connection, and responsibility toward the land and community. The property has been thoughtfully developed over 2.5 years on land

initially envisioned for afforestation, and today it supports a thriving micro-ecosystem with over 50,000 native plants that help regenerate the landscape and strengthen biodiversity.

I have a deep personal connection with the region and its people. And, our teams consistently strive to showcase the destination's rich natural and cultural heritage – that reflects seamlessly in each curated guest experience in and around the property.

Q. Sariska is not just a destination but an ecosystem. What drew you personally to Sariska, and why did you feel it was the right place to create a lodge rooted in nature and authenticity?

For me, Sariska has always been more than a destination – it rep-

resents legacy, responsibility, and a deep emotional connection with the wild. My father dedicated a significant part of his life to wildlife conservation and played a pivotal role in Sariska's historic tiger relocation project. Through his work, I developed a profound respect for this landscape, its thriving ecosystem, and its extraordinary conservation and reintroduction journey.

Our other founder at Sariska Lodge is Mr. Puneet Jain, whose journey is just as emotionally rooted in Sariska. Puneet has spent years closely connected with the region, he has been deeply engaged with conservation efforts, supporting communities, and contributing to initiatives that helped strengthen the ecosystem and local livelihoods. His father, Mr. Anil Kumar Jain, served as an Honorary Wildlife Warden here in Sariska for over 15 years, and their family's long-standing involvement with the forest and community has been instrumental in shaping the ethos of Sariska Lodge.

So together, when we envisioned creating an experiential lodge offering exceptional personalised hospitality, Sariska felt like the only place where it truly belonged. This region isn't just visually stunning; it carries a powerful narrative of resilience, biodiversity, heritage, and community. It demanded a project that would honour its sensitivity rather than impose on it – something rooted in responsibility, authenticity, and purpose.

The land on which Sariska Lodge stands was originally acquired with the intent of restoring it and building a green buffer that could support the surrounding ecosystem. Continuing the vision, we built the property thoughtfully, allowing nature to lead every aspect – from design and sustainability to the guest experience.

Sariska Lodge is, in many ways, a tribute to this landscape and its local communities. It represents our belief that luxury can coexist with conservation, and that travel can deepen our relationship with

nature. My hope is that every guest who comes here connects with Sariska the way we do – with respect, curiosity, and a sense of belonging.

Q. Sariska Lodge feels intimate, understated and experiential. What was the core philosophy behind the property, and how is it deliberately different from conventional wildlife or luxury resorts?

Sariska Lodge was envisioned as intimate, experiential luxury retreat that redefines sustainable slow living and responsible luxury, a place where nature and responsibility come together in a meaningful way.

The core philosophy was to create a place that allows guests to slow down, reconnect with the land, and experience Sariska beyond safaris – through thoughtful hospitality, perceptive service, intentional design and immersive experiences. Spread across 15 acres with just 11 private suites, the lodge is deliberately designed to feel personal, tranquil and deeply connected to nature. Built with a low-impact, sustainability-first approach, every element – from architecture and materials, to food philosophy and guest experiences – has been shaped to remain respectful of the environment while celebrating Sariska's wildlife, heritage and soul.

Q. In a landscape that is seeing increasing hospitality development, what truly sets Sariska Lodge apart – be it in design, guest experience, service ethos or connection with the forest?

What truly sets Sariska Lodge apart is its strong sense of place. Sariska Lodge has been distinctly designed to offer glimpses of the local architecture across its interiors and outdoor spaces, weaved together with a human-centric approach – wherein people from nearby areas have been purposefully trained into an insightful in-house team that provides heartfelt hospitality and perceptive service that forms

the core of a truly transformative experience at the property.

The design draws inspiration from British-era forest rest houses and Rajasthani hunting lodges, using local stone, reclaimed wood, carved jaalis and an earthy palette that mirrors the Aravallis. Experiences are curated to be immersive rather than tourist-led from guided heritage trails and boulder drives to horseback riding, picnics at secluded spots, and slow dining rooted in seasonal produce. The atmosphere is intentionally quiet, understated and soulful, allowing guests to feel part of the landscape. Complemented by perceptive hospitality and meaningful engagement with Sariska's biodiversity and cultural history, the property embodies conscious luxury rather than excess, offering depth, intimacy and authenticity that set it apart in today's hospitality landscape

Q. Sustainability today is often discussed, but not always implemented meaningfully. How do you interpret responsible tourism at Sariska Lodge, and what conscious practices have you incorporated on ground?

At Sariska Lodge, slow living and sustainability – is built into the foundation of the lodge. The retreat was developed over 2.5 years, restoring a formerly barren stretch of land into an afforested sanctuary with over 50,000 plants over 3 years, trees and native grasses, strengthening soil health and creating a thriving micro-ecosystem. Architecture follows a low-impact blueprint, using locally sourced materials and passive design elements. Food follows the rhythm of the land with a farm-to-table approach, using seasonal ingredients and produce from the lodge's organic garden and natural honey from apiculture (beehives at the lodge). Experiences are consciously designed to be non-intrusive, respectful of wildlife, and in respect of the destination and its people. Sariska's powerful conservation story of being India's first



66 When magazines like Travel Links highlight these aspects, it has the potential to truly resonate with travellers and help them make more mindful travel choices, thereby consciously supporting destinations like Sariska in the right way with awareness that extends from telling the story about the hotel and its vision to deeper explorations of the destination and its people. That's when media and hospitality truly work together with purpose 99

successful tiger relocation site further shapes the lodge's commitment to responsible tourism and environmental harmony.

Q. How important is local community involvement to your hospitality model, and in what ways does Sariska Lodge support local livelihoods, traditions and skills?

Local community involvement forms the heart of Sariska Lodge's ethos. A significant part of the team is drawn from surrounding villages, many of whom began as construction workers and were trained into specialised hospitality roles. The lodge also champions women empowerment – with a sizeable proportion of the workforce comprising women from nearby communities.

Sariska Lodge also helps preserve regional heritage by engaging local artisans, encouraging cultural interactions and ensuring tourism directly benefits the region. This commitment is deeply influenced by our long-standing association with Sariska's conservation story and their belief in hospitality that uplifts both nature and the people.

Q. Have you noticed a shift in traveller expectations – towards slow travel, mindful stays and nature-led experiences – and how does Sariska Lodge cater to this evolving mind-set?

Yes, there is a clear shift in traveller's mind-set – guests today are increasingly seeking mindful, nature-led, purpose-driven travel experiences, and Sariska Lodge has been consciously created to resonate with that evolution. The retreat encourages guests to slow down rather than rush through itineraries. Experiences are intentionally unhurried – safaris, birding, forest walks, heritage explorations, wellness rituals at the Wellness Centre, stargazing evenings and reflective bonfire conversations.

The lodge also enables guests to connect deeply with Sariska's thriving biodiversity, rich history and resilient spirit, while reminding them that true luxury lies in space, silence, time and meaningful connection with nature and heritage. In a world chasing ex-

cess, Sariska Lodge serves as a quiet reminder that the most enriching journeys are those that respect the land and move at its rhythm.


Q. As a hotelier, what value do you see in print media today—especially curated travel magazines—in telling deeper, more nuanced stories of properties like Sariska Lodge?

I still believe print has a very prestigious place in hospitality storytelling. Curated travel magazines take the time to understand a property, its intent and spirit, which can further be supplemented by digital media content rather than replacing it print media. For Sariska Lodge, where our story is centred around responsible luxury, and championing the local communities as well as slow, mindful travel – the print medium allows space for context, detail and precision required to bring all these essential aspects to life.

Thoughtful publications help readers discover not just where to travel, but why a place matters. If feel, that depth builds real connection and credibility.

Q. How can niche, experience-led properties and print platforms like Travel Links Magazine collaborate more meaningfully to promote responsible tourism and destination storytelling beyond just visibility?

Partnerships with reputed media platforms work best when they go beyond just visibility. For niche, experience-led properties like ours, showcasing an authentic experience, sharing real stories about responsible tourism, sustainability, community engagement and what slow, conscious travel can truly look like.

When magazines like Travel Links highlight these aspects, it has the potential to truly resonate with travellers and help them make more mindful travel choices, thereby consciously supporting destinations like Sariska in the right way with awareness that extends from telling the story about the hotel and its vision to deeper explorations of the destination and its people. That's when media and hospitality truly work together with purpose. 

FOUR ISSUES AT THE COST OF 3



Travel Links

Need some unforgettable travel stories?

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**I**

Travel Links Editorial Team

In an age defined by unprecedented technological progress, constant connectivity, and accelerated lifestyles, humanity finds itself paradoxically exhausted, overstimulated, and searching for meaning. The world's most profound contemporary aspiration is no longer limited to luxury, status, or accumulation—it is wellness. Wellness today transcends the absence of disease; it is an active, conscious pursuit of vitality, emotional resilience, mental clarity, spiritual depth, and sustainable living.

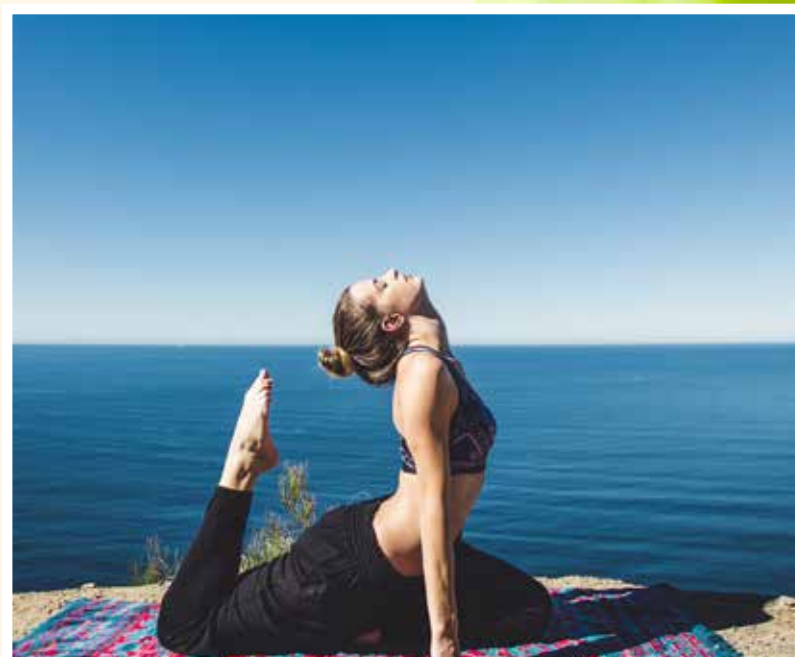
From Himalayan monasteries to tropical Ayurvedic sanctuaries, from silent meditation forests to cutting-edge integrative clinics, India is rapidly emerging as the global epicenter of this movement. Wellness travel is reshaping tourism, redefining hospitality, and creating journeys that heal not just bodies, but lives.

This long-format Travel Links feature explores what wellness truly means in today's world, why it has become indispensable, why India stands uniquely positioned to lead the global healing economy, and how holistic

approaches—embracing mind, body, and soul—are transforming the way travellers explore the planet.

THE EVOLUTION OF WELLNESS: FROM MEDICAL CARE TO LIFE PHILOSOPHY

Historically, health was measured by survival—freedom from illness, lon-



INDIA AS THE EPICENTER OF THE GLOBAL WELLNESS JOURNEY

gevity, physical strength. In the twenty-first century, however, wellbeing is increasingly understood as a dynamic balance between physical fitness, emotional intelligence, mental stability, spiritual awareness, environmental harmony, and social connection.

The modern wellness paradigm includes:

- Physical optimisation through nutrition, sleep, movement, immunity, and longevity science.
- Mental wellbeing through mindfulness, therapy, digital detox, and cognitive resilience.

- Emotional health through connection, compassion, and psychological safety.
- Spiritual nourishment through purpose, introspection, and transcendence.
- Environmental and social wellness through sustainability, nature immersion, and community living.

Wellness is no longer reactive medicine—it is proactive living. It is about preventing disease, extending quality of life, regulating stress, cultivating



This long-format Travel Links feature explores what wellness truly means in today's world, why it has become indispensable, why India stands uniquely positioned to lead the global healing economy, and how holistic approaches—embracing mind, body, and soul—are transforming the way travellers explore the planet.

awareness, and living intentionally.

WHY WELLNESS MATTERS MORE THAN EVER

Several global forces have elevated wellness from aspiration to necessity.

First, the explosion of lifestyle disorders—diabetes, cardiovascular disease, autoimmune conditions, chronic inflammation, anxiety, depression, burnout—has underscored the limits of pharmaceutical-only

solutions. Stress-driven modernity has become humanity's silent epidemic.

Second, the digital era has fragmented attention spans and blurred boundaries between work and rest. Sleep disorders, screen fatigue, and emotional exhaustion are now commonplace. Wellness retreats have become sanctuaries of slowness—spaces where individuals relearn how to breathe, rest, move, and listen inward.

Third, younger generations increasingly prioritise

purpose-driven experiences over material possessions. Travel is no longer about ticking destinations off a list—it is about transformation. Silent meditation weeks, detox programs, forest bathing expeditions, and yoga immersions now compete with beach holidays and shopping sprees.

Wellness has also become inclusive, extending beyond elite spas into community health initiatives, corporate wellbeing programs, urban green spaces, school mindfulness curricula, and digital therapeutic

platforms.

INDIA: THE WORLD'S MOST POTENT WELLNESS MARKET

If any country embodies wellness as both heritage and future, it is India.

For over five millennia, the subcontinent has nurtured holistic health systems that treat the human being as an integrated organism of body, breath, mind, and consciousness.



Ayurveda—the “science of life”—focuses on personalised medicine, preventive care, herbal pharmacology, detoxification, nutrition, and lifestyle regulation. Yoga and meditation, now practised globally, originated as spiritual-physical disciplines for self-realisation. Philosophical schools such as Vedanta explored consciousness long before neuroscience existed. Buddhist and Jain traditions developed contemplative systems that refined awareness and compassion.

What makes India unique is not simply history—it is continuity. These traditions remain living practices, embedded in daily culture and increasingly validated

by modern research institutions.

Geography further strengthens India’s wellness appeal. Snow-clad mountains, dense jungles, sacred rivers, tropical coasts, arid deserts, and fertile plains offer diverse healing environments.

Over the last decade, India has witnessed a renaissance of wellness infrastructure—luxury integrative resorts, authentic Ayurvedic hospitals, meditation ashrams, holistic clinics, boutique eco-retreats, and spiritual sanctuaries now welcome travellers from Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and North America.

THE HOLISTIC FRAMEWORK: MIND, BODY, SOUL

True wellness cannot be fragmented. Physical health without mental calm is incomplete; spiritual exploration without bodily vitality lacks grounding. India’s systems emphasise integration.

MIND: THE ART OF AWARENESS

Mental wellness focuses on cultivating clarity, emotional regulation, and resilience. Chronic anxiety, overstimulation, and cognitive fatigue plague contemporary society.

Indian practices addressing mental balance include meditation, mindfulness, pranayama, mantra chanting, contemplative silence, journaling, sensory fasting, and guided introspection.

Retreats often structure days around breathwork at dawn, mindfulness walks, silent meals, group dialogues, and evening reflection rituals—resetting neural pathways worn thin by urban chaos.

BODY: VITALITY AND ALIGNMENT

Physical wellness in the Indian tradition focuses not merely on aesthetics but on internal harmo-

Wellness has also become inclusive, extending beyond elite spas into community health initiatives, corporate wellbeing programs, urban green spaces, school mindfulness curricula, and digital therapeutic platforms.



ny—digestive health, immune strength, hormonal balance, joint mobility, cardiovascular resilience, and detoxification.

Ayurvedic Panchakarma programs cleanse metabolic toxins through oil therapies, steam treatments, herbal formulations, diet correction, and lifestyle realignment. Yoga therapy rehabilitates posture, respiration, circulation, and musculoskeletal alignment. Nutrition programs prioritise seasonal, plant-forward, sattvic meals tailored to individual constitutions.

SOUL: PURPOSE AND TRANSCENDENCE

Spiritual wellbeing addresses humanity's deepest needs—meaning, connection, gratitude, transcendence, and belonging.

Pilgrimage towns like Rishikesh, Varanasi, Bodh Gaya, and Tiruvannamalai offer seekers encounters with sacred landscapes, ritual rhythms, devotional music, and philosophical discourse.

Soul-centred retreats integrate philosophy classes, community service, creative arts, sound healing, sacred geometry, nature immersion, and storytelling.

THE RISE OF MODERN WELLNESS CENTRES

Globally, wellness tourism has evolved into a multi-trillion-dollar industry. Today's travellers expect more than massages and mineral pools—they seek structured healing journeys with measurable outcomes.

A contemporary wellness centre integrates diagnostics, integrative medicine, mental coaching, movement arts, nutrition science, sleep optimisation, and environmental therapies.

India's new generation of centres combine heritage wisdom with clinical protocols, international hospitality standards, eco-design, and sustainability commitments. Travellers increasingly demand specialised programs including burnout recovery, metabolic optimisation, longevity protocols, immunity strengthening, digital detox, and hormonal health.

WHY INDIA IS POISED TO LEAD GLOBAL WELLNESS TOURISM

India's advantage lies in convergence—authentic traditions, affordability, scientific research, cultural hospitality, and policy support promoting AYUSH systems.

CONCLUSION

In a world of relentless acceleration, wellness is not indulgence—it is survival with consciousness. India offers not merely destinations—but destinies. [\[1\]](#)

VIEW POINT

The Human Premium: Why 2026 Is The Year of 'Smart Challenges' In Travel

By **Ms. Simeron Ghei**, Associate Director, TRAC Representations Pvt. Ltd



For the better part of a decade, the global travel industry has been highly focused on a single, clinical word: Seamless. We have spent billions on technology designed to streamline the complexities of the travel experience, aiming for a world where the journey feels increasingly effortless. By early 2026, many of these ambitions have been realized.

Today, AI agents—our digital twins—predict our flight preferences before a conscious thought even forms. Biometric sensors whisk us through international borders without a moment's pause, and hyper-predictive algorithms

curate “perfect” itineraries that mirror our past behaviours with precision. But as we stand in 2026, a curious and profound paradox has emerged in the luxury sector. In optimizing for a frictionless world, we risk softening the “spark” of travel itself. This year, the most experienced travellers aren't looking for a journey that is perfectly automated; they are seeking the Human Premium.

The Limits of Perfection

When an algorithm plans your journey, it gives you exactly what you think you want based on your historical data. It is a mirror, not a window. It eliminates risk, yes, but it can also

significantly reduce moments of serendipity. In 2026, we are witnessing a wave of digital saturation among highly experienced luxury travellers. They are increasingly finding that a vacation where everything goes exactly to plan can feel somewhat incomplete. It lacks the texture of reality.

At TRAC Representations, we have observed a pivot toward what we call “Smart Challenges.” This is the magic that occurs when the “perfect” plan goes slightly off-course in favour of a human moment. It's the local guide who ignores the digital itinerary because the afternoon light is hitting a hidden, unlisted valley just

right. It's the boutique hotel owner who personally recommends a family-run bistro that hasn't bothered to list itself on a search engine. These moments cannot be coded, synthesized, or predicted; they can only be lived. Thoughtful disruption is where the memories are made.

Destination Representation in the Age of AI

As a destination representation company, our role has undergone a radical transformation. Before the widespread adoption of AI, our role was largely focused on messaging and marketing. In 2026, our role has evolved to focus more on the human side of travel.

AI can tell you the statistically best time to visit any destination and avoid peak crowds. It can even generate a high-definition preview of a hotel suite. But what AI cannot do is convey the spirit of a destination. It cannot build the intricate, trust-based relationships between a luxury brand and the local artisans, historians, and characters who give a place its soul.

Our mandate now is to protect the Human Infrastructure of the regions we represent. This involves three key shifts:

1. **The New Influence:** It is no longer just about the influencer being in the frame; it is about the influencer using their lens to introduce the world to the soul of the destination. This synergy between digital reach and local depth is where the most compelling travel narratives now live.
2. **The Luxury of “White Space”:** We are actively encouraging destinations and partners to leave gaps in their programming. These are intentional “voids” in the digital schedule that aren't filled by a booking engine, but by the spontaneity of human interaction.
3. **Emotional Intelligence (EQ) over Artificial Intelligence**

“When an algorithm plans your journey, it gives you exactly what you think you want based on your historical data. It is a mirror, not a window. It eliminates risk, yes, but it can also significantly reduce moments of serendipity. In 2026, we are witnessing a wave of digital saturation among highly experienced luxury travellers.”

(AI): While AI handles the “What” and the “When,” we focus on the “Why” and the “How.” A machine can book a table; only a human can understand the emotional nuance of why that specific table matters for a particular traveller at a particular moment.

Luxury as a Human Handshake

It is important to ensure that technological efficiency does not reduce travel to a purely transactional experience. If every luxury hotel starts to feel like a high-tech simulation—predictable, sanitized, and automated—the intrinsic value of the physical journey begins to diminish. If you know exactly what will happen on a trip, what motivates travel at all?

The Human Premium is the realization that the greatest luxury in a hyper-automated 2026 is uninterrupted human attention. When a destination representative works to bring a region to life, they are using intuition, cultural nuance, and deep-seated empathy. These are qualities that remain uniquely human and cannot be fully replicated by technology.

A digital agent can find you a room with a view, but a human agent finds you a place where you feel you belong.

The Road Ahead: Balancing the Digital and the Human

As we look forward, the winners in the travel space will not be the companies with the fastest apps or the most data points. The victors will be those who use technology discreetly to manage essential operational logistics—the flight delays, the dinner reservations, the digital check-ins—so that humans are freed up to do what they do best: connect.

The future of tourism isn't just about where we go; it's about the “Smart Challenges” that change our perspective and the human hands that guide us there. In a world of digital precision, a defining marker of true luxury is a human touch. Let us ensure that as we build the future of travel, we don't lose the essence of the journey itself. [\[a\]](#)

The Power Shift in Travel Trade: How Industry Associations and State Tourism Bodies Are Redefining Indian Tourism

Travel Links Editorial Desk

Over the past decade, the Indian travel industry has witnessed a visible transformation. While major trade fairs such as OTM, SATTE, ITB Berlin and WTM London continue to dominate the global travel business landscape, a parallel ecosystem of industry associations and regional tourism bodies has emerged with renewed force. Organisations like IATO, TAFI, TAI, OTOAI, ADTI, along with regional platforms such as Kerala Travel Mart (KTM), Gujarat Travel Mart, Bengal Travel Mart and Odisha Travel Bazaar, are reshaping how tourism is marketed, regulated and promoted.

Five years ago, these bodies existed largely as professional networking forums. Today, they operate as policy influencers, training academies, business accelerators and destination promoters. Their growth signals a major power shift in how tourism functions in India.

So why this surge? Are these bodies truly delivering value or simply multiplying memberships? And what do they mean for media professionals, travel journalists, influencers and editorial platforms?

This research-driven feature decodes the evolution, impact, opportunities, limitations and future relevance of India's travel associations and state tourism marts.

FROM NETWORKING CLUBS TO INDUSTRY DRIVERS

Earlier, travel associations were perceived mainly as annual convention hosts, closed-door clubs and advocacy groups. Their activities revolved around meetings, election cycles and limited government representation.

Over time, the industry demanded more. The modern travel ecosystem now requires skill development, global networking, digital transformation, policy engagement and media visibility. As a result, associations reinvented themselves. Today, they function as business matchmakers, knowledge hubs, destination marketing partners and industry watchdogs.

KEY INDUSTRY BODIES SHAPING TOURISM

IATO – Indian Association of Tour Operators Founded in 1982, IATO remains India's most influential inbound tourism body. Its focus lies on promoting inbound tourism, policy advocacy, international roadshows and structured industry training.

IATO conventions now attract ministers, tourism secretaries, ambassadors and global buyers. Their annual conventions rotate across Indian destinations, doubling up as destination branding platforms.

Strengths include strong government connect, international credibility and policy lobbying power. Challenges include dominance of large operators, higher membership fees and limited representation for micro players.

TAFI – Travel Agents Federation of India

TAFI represents retail travel agents across the country. Once seen as a ticketing-focused body, today TAFI functions as a national networking platform, training authority and domestic tourism promoter.

TAFI's regional conventions now resemble mini trade shows, attracting state tourism boards, airlines and hospitality brands.

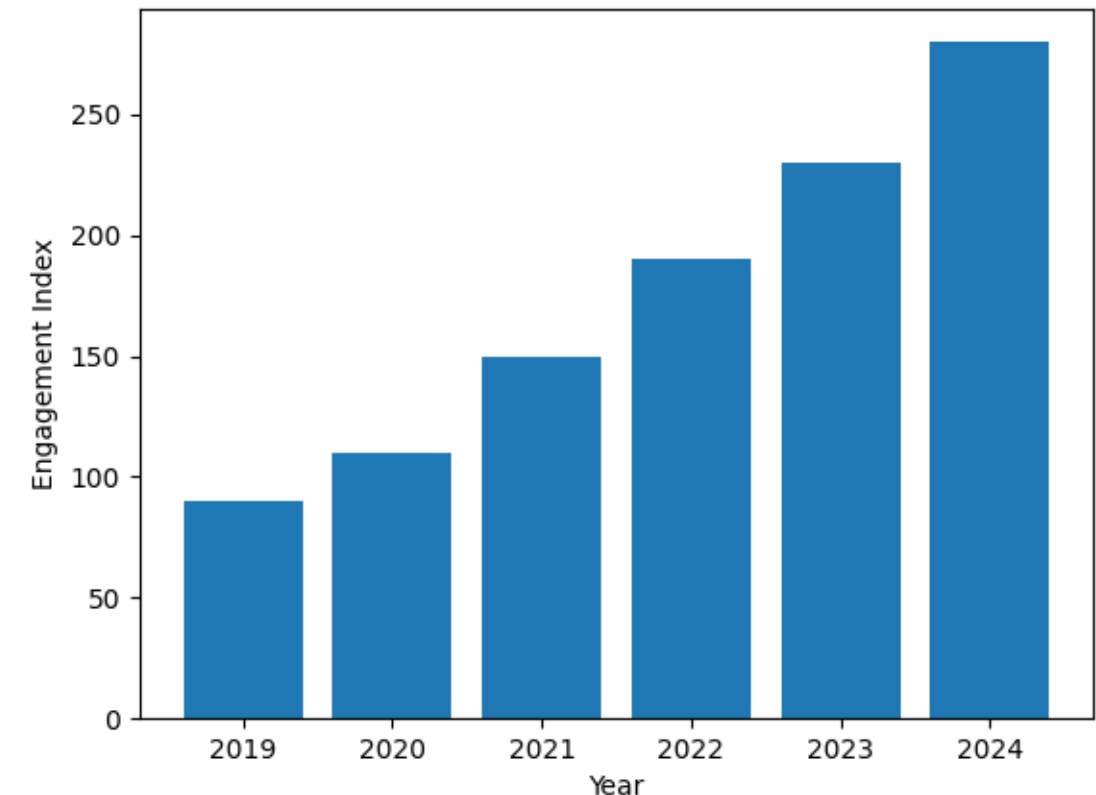
Strengths include pan-India reach and grassroots network. Limitations include lower global exposure and regional fragmentation.

TAAI – Travel Agents Association of India

TAAI is one of India's oldest associations but has repositioned itself successfully. It now focuses on youth engagement, digital transformation and airline partnerships. Student chapters and mentorship programs are creating future-ready travel professionals.

OTOAI – Outbound Tour Operators Association of India

Rise in Media Engagement at Travel Trade Events



OTOAI has emerged as one of the fastest-growing bodies. With Indians travelling more to Europe, Central Asia, Vietnam, Japan and the Middle East, OTOAI has become the voice of outbound tourism.

Benefits include tourism board tie-ups, cruise partnerships and destination workshops. Concerns include heavy sponsorship dependence and high participation costs for smaller operators.

ADTOI – Adventure & Domestic Tourism Industry

With India's push on eco tourism, rural tourism and experiential travel, bodies like ADTOI are playing a crucial role. They promote trekking, wildlife tourism and sustainable tourism, aligning with new-age traveller preferences.

STATE TOURISM MARTS: REGIONAL POWERHOUSES Kerala Travel Mart (KTM)

Launched in 2000, KTM remains India's most successful state tourism mart. It offers structured

B2B meetings, international buyer participation and strong government backing.

KTM positioned Kerala as a wellness hub and responsible tourism leader.

Media benefits include destination access, interviews and story-rich experiences.

Gujarat Travel Mart

Showcases Statue of Unity, heritage tourism and spiritual circuits. Plays a key role in repositioning Gujarat beyond business tourism.

Bengal Travel Mart

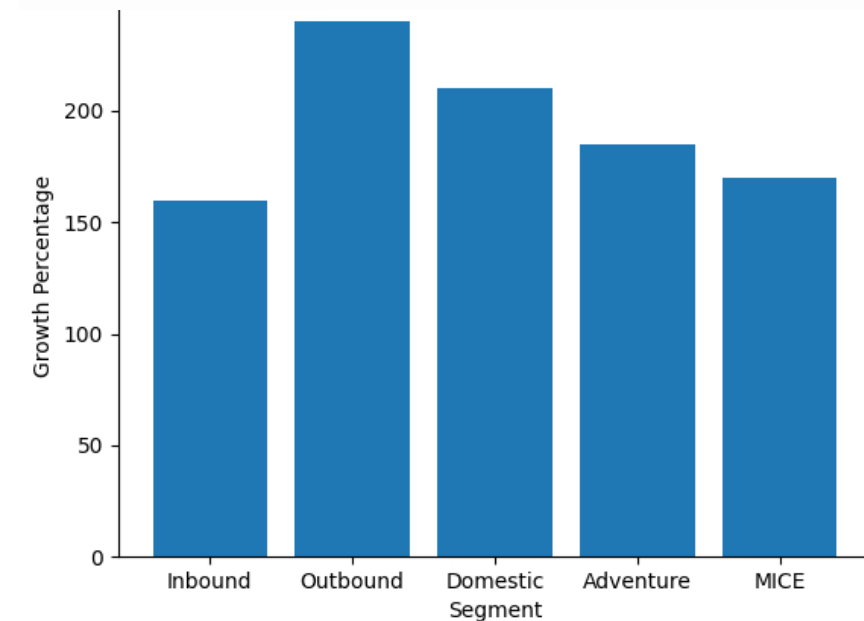
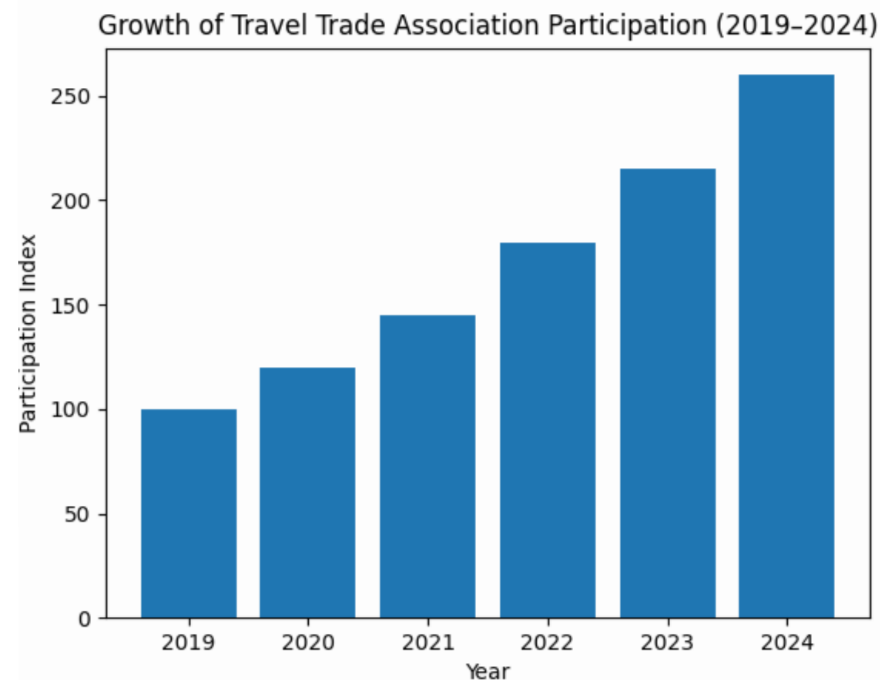
Highlights tea tourism, cultural heritage, Darjeeling and Sundarbans. Revives interest in slow travel and culture-led tourism.

Odisha Travel Bazaar

Focuses on temple tourism, tribal culture and eco tourism, rebranding Odisha as a culturally rich destination.

WHY SO MANY ASSOCIATIONS TODAY?

OTOAI has emerged as one of the fastest-growing bodies. With Indians travelling more to Europe, Central Asia, Vietnam, Japan and the Middle East, OTOAI has become the voice of outbound tourism.



The industry now has inbound, outbound, domestic, adventure, cruise, MICE and women entrepreneur bodies. This growth is due to tourism segmentation, niche demand, regional destination focus, government support and digital networking.

BENEFITS FOR TRAVEL AGENCIES

Membership offers collective bargaining, training, destination partnerships, business leads and international exposure. Small agencies benefit from direct tourism board access and B2B matchmaking.

WHAT DO THESE BODIES MEAN FOR MEDIA?

Earlier, only top publications were invited. Today bloggers, digital platforms and influencers are welcomed. Media is now central to destination marketing.

Associations offer hosted trips, interviews, event access and brand collaborations. For Travel Links, this means first-hand content, hotel access and exclusives.

DRAWBACKS AND CRITICISM

Despite growth, challenges remain. Oversaturation of associations, rising membership fees,

Attendance at conventions has grown steadily. Buyer-seller meetings have doubled. Sponsorship revenues increased. Digital presence expanded. Regional tourism boards gained visibility.

commercialisation of events, lack of transparency and repetition of content remain concerns.

Smaller agencies feel overshadowed. Media partnerships sometimes lack editorial independence.

COMPARATIVE GROWTH: LAST FIVE YEARS


Attendance at conventions has grown steadily. Buyer-seller meetings have doubled. Sponsorship revenues increased. Digital presence expanded. Regional tourism boards gained visibility.

Industry data shows outbound travel doubled while domestic experiential tourism grew rapidly.

CONCLUSION

Industry bodies and state tourism marts are no longer optional. They are essential pillars shaping tourism's future. While challenges exist, their role in networking, advocacy and destination marketing cannot be ignored.

For media, these platforms open doors to authentic storytelling and exclusive access. The future lies in collaboration, transparency and meaningful engagement.

Travel Links will continue to track, evaluate and participate in this evolving ecosystem. 


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