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# Foreword



**JYOTHI VARMA**  
CONSULTING EDITOR

## AI as catalyst for event growth

Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping the service industry. A balanced approach to its adoption can be transformative — enabling organisations to deliver greater speed, better quality, and more efficiency in service delivery.

The MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Events) industry is evolving. Hotels, convention centres, and event organisers are leveraging AI to enhance attendee engagement, streamline logistics, and maximise RoI.

AI is a strategic enabler that is turning the industry into a more data-driven, personalised, and efficient ecosystem.

day work? How can organisations scale up their teams and train them on these programmes?

Technology adoption across the industry is still a long-term goal because of implementation costs, a lack of proper tools, limited learn-as-you-use modules, and the absence of sandbox environments for evaluation and learning.

GDS can play a major role in embedding AI into the backbone of the industry, creating a better experience for end-user MICE operators. Adding relevant insurance products using past data analytics would be an added advantage. Simplified payment solutions can also positively

“

**Ensuring the right mix  
of human touch and AI in the MICE  
industry is important.**

”

Some examples include:

- AI chatbots and virtual assistants
- Facial recognition and smart check-in
- AI platforms integrated into event management software, such as Cvent and Hubilo, use machine learning to forecast attendance, optimise schedules, and recommend networking matches
- AI dashboards track attendee engagement, sponsor RoI, and lead conversion in real time. Indian organisers are increasingly relying on these insights to attract international delegates and sponsors

While we talk about AI revolutionising MICE, are we also training our resources to accept and adapt to it in their day-to-

support MICE tourism. Organisations such as VISA are participating in MICE discussions to develop better payment solutions alongside issuing banks like Bank of Baroda, which is also positioning itself as a supportive bank for sustainable travel programmes.

Ensuring the right mix of human touch and AI in the MICE industry is important. AI can be a great support in identifying and detailing the agenda. However, what an organisation wants to achieve may still require deeper human intervention to create a truly meaningful experience.

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# Talent crisis haunts India's MICE boom



India's MICE sector is growing rapidly, but skilling gaps and AI adoption could determine how competitive the industry becomes.

By Janice Alyosius

While India's MICE industry continues to expand, the focus is slowly shifting from infrastructure and venue capacity to a more pressing issue — whether the industry has the skilled workforce needed to support this growth. While convention centres and large event venues are being developed across the country, the challenge of preparing professionals who can manage technology-driven events

is becoming increasingly important. **Rajan Bahadur**, CEO, Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council (THSC), believes the sector's long-term growth will depend on how quickly the industry can address its skill gap, particularly in technology and AI.

### DEMAND FOR SKILLED PROS

India's meetings, incentives, conferences and events industry is currently valued at about \$2.5 billion and continues to grow as more global and domestic events are hosted across the country. This



**RAJAN BAHADUR**  
CEO, TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY  
SKILL COUNCIL

growth is creating increasing demand for trained professionals across tourism and hospitality. Bahadur pointed out that the scale of workforce demand over the next few years will be substantial. "As the sector scales, the broader tourism and hospitality industry will require over three million additional skilled professionals by 2028 to meet rising demand," he said.

Despite the rising opportunities, formal skill training remains limited. According to Bahadur, India has a large number of people interested in entering tourism and hospitality careers, but only a small fraction have received structured training. "India has a 5.8 million strong trainable workforce interested in tourism and hospitality careers. However, only about one per cent has undergone formal training so far," he said, highlighting the scale of the opportunity for organised skilling initiatives.

### PREP FOR AI-DRIVEN EVENTS

With digital tools becoming integral to events, the industry is witnessing a shift

**India's MICE sector, valued at \$2.5 billion, will require over 3 million additional skilled professionals by 2028**

towards technology-driven planning and execution.

To address this, the Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council has begun integrating digital and artificial intelligence capabilities into its training frameworks.

Rather than building separate learning tracks for emerging technologies, the council is embedding these competencies within existing roles across the tourism and hospitality ecosystem.

"We are focusing on future-proofing existing roles rather than creating parallel frameworks. We are embedding digital and AI competencies into our current 72 Qualification Packs so that AI readiness becomes part of different job roles across the industry," Bahadur explained.

Several AI enabled models are now being integrated into training modules to support key areas of event operations. "These include tools that support individualised customer engagement and personalisation, group-based brand and attendee interactions, data driven planning and operational efficiency, as well as marketing automation, and content optimisation," he noted.

### EXPANDING INFRA

India's position in the regional MICE landscape has strengthened over the past few years. The country currently ranks among the top ten MICE destinations in Asia, with cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Chennai hosting a growing number of international conferences and events. At the same time, large scale infrastructure projects are further boosting the country's ability to host global events. "Infrastructure expansion, including developments such as the India International Convention and Expo Centre in Dwarka, is progressing rapidly," Bahadur said.

However, he believes that workforce readiness has not always kept pace with these developments. "While infrastructure growth is proactive, workforce upskilling is still partly reactive, especially among mid-sized operators and the unorganised segments," he observed.

### BUILDING CAREER PATHWAYS

To strengthen skill development in the sector, THSC has introduced specialised training frameworks that align with the needs of the MICE ecosystem. These



**Around 5.8 million people are interested in tourism careers, yet only one per cent have received formal training**



programmes focus on roles that are critical to event delivery, including meeting and event management, front office operations and food and beverage services that support large scale conferences and events. “All our programmes are aligned with the National Skills Qualification Framework and lead to industry recognised certification,” Bahadur said. The council is also encouraging professionals already working in the sector to formalise their skills through structured certification programmes. “Through Recognition of Prior Learning and industry aligned certifications, we are pushing the ecosystem towards structured and forward looking skill development,” he added.

**TALENT BEYOND THE METROS**

As MICE activity spreads beyond traditional business hubs, the availability of skilled professionals in emerging destinations has become increasingly important. Cities such as Jaipur, Kochi, and Goa are witnessing growing demand for meetings,

incentives, conferences, and events, while culturally rich states such as West Bengal are also seeing increasing interest from organisers. Bahadur said this shift highlights the need for a decentralised approach to skill development. “MICE already accounts for about 15 to 20 per cent of India’s inbound tourism, which makes decentralised workforce readiness extremely important,” he noted.

To support this expansion, THSC has been working to strengthen training infrastructure across the country through multiple initiatives. “We are ensuring skilled talent availability through ‘Recognition of Prior Learning’ for the informal workforce, ‘Training of Trainers’ programmes, and a network of more than 1000 training centres. At the same time, AI competencies are being integrated across all 72 job roles to ensure uniform national standards,” Bahadur said.

**TECH ADOPTION LAGGING**

Despite the availability of manpower, the industry still faces a shortage

of professionals who can effectively use technology in event planning and management.

According to Bahadur, the biggest challenge lies in building capabilities around data analysis, AI tools, and sustainability integration in event execution.

He believes the industry can address foundational digital skill gaps relatively quickly if structured training programmes are widely adopted. “Foundational digital and AI related gaps can realistically be addressed within 12 to 18 months through structured certification, micro credentials, and scaled training partnerships,” Bahadur said.

However, building leadership level expertise in technology driven event strategy will take longer. “Developing high level strategic and technology integrated MICE leadership talent will require sustained focus over the next three to five years,” he added.

**POTENTIAL INTO EXPERTISE**

For Bahadur, India’s long term MICE opportunity will depend less on venues and more on how effectively the country prepares its workforce. “India’s MICE opportunity is not limited by infrastructure. It is defined by how quickly we can convert our 5.8 million trainable youth pool into certified and AI ready professionals,” he said.

With demand expanding rapidly and a large talent pool available, the focus now is on building a structured skilling ecosystem that can support the next phase of growth in India’s meetings and events industry. **MT**



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# Event planning enters AI-ASSISTED ERA

As event timelines shrink and data volumes grow, AI is becoming an increasingly important planning tool for corporates, venues, and planners across India's evolving MICE ecosystem.

By Janice Alysius

Artificial intelligence is moving quickly from experimental technology to a working tool across India's MICE ecosystem. From corporate event teams to convention centres and travel management companies, AI is beginning to influence how decisions are made, how venues are shortlisted, and how operations are managed.

What is becoming clear across the industry, however, is that AI is not replacing planners. Instead, it is helping them process information faster, analyse data more effectively, and reduce planning timelines.

Industry leaders say the technology is already reshaping research, sourcing, and forecasting functions, while the creative and strategic aspects of events continue to rely heavily on human judgement.

For MICE professionals, the shift is not about automation replacing

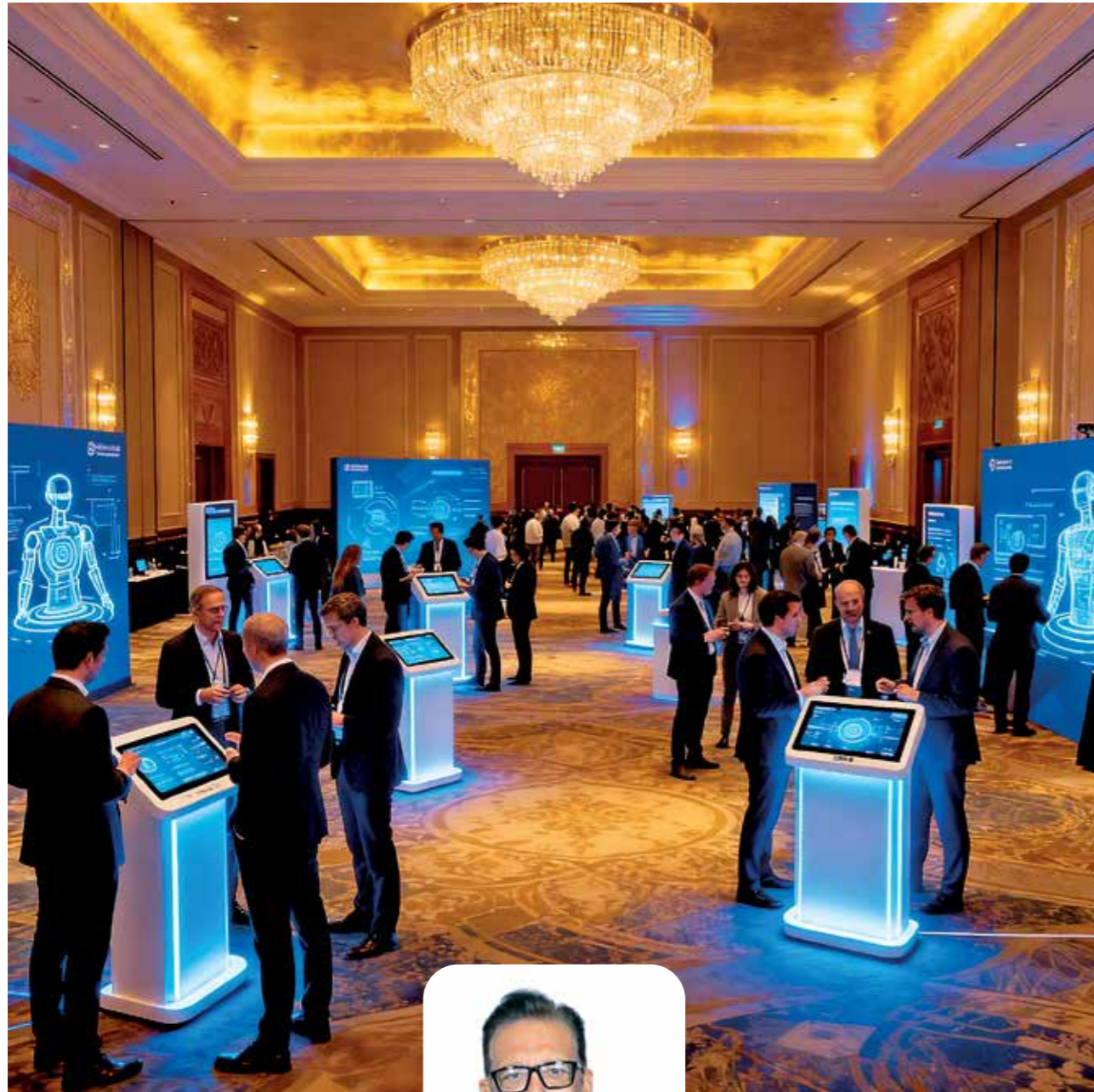
expertise but about combining both to improve efficiency and outcomes.

## AI ENTERS EVENT STRATEGY

Corporate event teams are increasingly using AI as a support tool during the early stages of event planning, particularly when evaluating venues, budgets, and programme structures.

**Rajdev Bhattacharya**, Global Head – Travel & Expense, Wipro, notes that the growing complexity of events is one of the key drivers behind AI adoption. “The global MICE market has crossed USD 1.2 trillion and is expanding rapidly, but complexity is growing faster than team capacity. AI is becoming critical not because it replaces planners, but because it helps manage this scale more effectively,” he says.

**Bindu Dominic**, Corporate Expert, believes AI's potential in event decision-making is significant but still evolving. “AI has real and growing potential to support decision making in meetings and events, particularly in areas like



**RAJDEV BHATTACHARYA**  
GLOBAL HEAD – TRAVEL & EXPENSE  
WIPRO

venue sourcing and analytics, where it can reduce what has traditionally been a manual and time-intensive process,” she says.

**Bharti Sabharwal**, Director, Grant Thornton Bharat LLP, says AI has become a useful tool for exploring different options when planning corporate events. “AI can be very effective, as it provides multiple options and ideas when planning events. It helps us explore different possibilities and approaches, making the decision-making process more efficient,” she says.

At Grant Thornton Bharat, AI is primarily used for research-driven tasks that traditionally required extensive manual effort. These include identifying potential venues, comparing costs,

and exploring event formats. “We use it mainly for research and searches — such as identifying potential venues, exploring event options, reviewing menu possibilities, and comparing costs,” Sabharwal explains.

However, she notes that AI outputs are always verified before any final decision is made. “AI gives us a starting point,

but we review the suggestions carefully to assess how relevant they are before making decisions.” According to Sabharwal, AI insights are helpful but not always completely accurate. “In most cases, the results are about 70–80 per cent accurate. We still evaluate the outputs and compare them with other sources.”

One of the biggest advantages for corporate planners is the speed with which AI can generate comparisons and recommendations. “AI definitely helps speed up certain aspects of planning. But human expertise remains essential when interpreting information and making the final decisions.”

Sabharwal cites a recent India PartnerNetwork Conference organised by the firm where AI-supported analysis



**BINDU DOMINIC**  
CORPORATE EXPERT

helped planners explore multiple approaches before finalising the event strategy. “During the planning phase, we used AI to compare different options and explore ways to improve the event. It helped generate useful ideas that we were able to implement successfully.”

She also believes AI will become a stronger support tool for corporate event teams but cannot replace human judgement. “The future of AI is very promising if it is used as a support tool. But it cannot replace human intervention. Human judgement will always remain important.” She also points to a growing skills gap within the industry. “Many people are still not fully aware of how to use AI tools effectively. Training and awareness will be important going forward.”

Bhattacharya breaks this down into three distinct layers of impact. “At an operational level, AI compresses tasks like venue sourcing, supplier benchmarking, and cost modelling — what used to take days can now be done in hours. The second layer is predictive, where AI helps forecast registration curves, no-show rates and peak traffic windows. The third is strategic — using historical data to shape programme design and measure RoI beyond the event itself,” he explains. He adds that while AI strengthens decision-making, it does not replace experience. “AI does not replace the planner. It gives the planner better instruments — and more time to use them.”

Dominic points to how AI is already reshaping sourcing workflows. “Platforms today are using machine learning to match event requirements — capacity, location, accessibility, sustainability credentials and delegate travel patterns — against venue availability and pricing, ranking options based on overall fit rather

“  
**AI-driven tools now model carbon footprint and enable sustainability-led decisions at the design stage.**  
— Bindu Dominic  
”

than just responding to an RFP,” she explains. She adds that one of the most impactful applications is sustainability planning. “AI tools can now model the projected carbon footprint of an event in advance, factoring in delegate origin points, travel routes and venue energy profiles. This allows planners to make more informed trade-offs at the design stage rather than treating sustainability as a post-event exercise.”

**AUTOMATION IN EVENT FLOW**  
Beyond research and planning, AI is beginning to influence the entire lifecycle of corporate meetings and events. **Varghese Chettupuzha**, Corporate Expert, says organisations are gradually integrating AI modules to improve process efficiency, cost control, and governance across event programmes. “AI is being increasingly used across the corporate meetings and events lifecycle to support key decisions,” he explains.

One of the first stages where AI is making a difference is the event request

and qualification process. Traditionally, planners would manually submit meeting requests and define event scope. AI agents can now extract relevant information directly from emails, meeting notes, or conversations and populate event request systems automatically.

During the qualification stage, AI tools can review event scope against company policies and compliance requirements, enabling faster approval decisions. “AI can assist in quickly reviewing the scope against policy and performing compliance checks,” Chettupuzha says. Budget and feasibility evaluation is another area where AI adds value. By benchmarking proposed budgets against market data and historical event information, AI can help planners assess feasibility more efficiently.

Risk scoring and approval routing can also be automated. “AI helps determine the right approver and triages requests based on predefined criteria. By automatically filtering out low-risk cases, it accelerates cycle times while





maintaining governance standards,” he explains. Sourcing is another stage where AI-driven tools are changing workflows. Instead of manually building RFPs, AI can convert event briefs into structured RFP documents and recommend venues based on multiple parameters including cost, sustainability, and compliance.

“Based on the defined event scope, AI intelligently shortlists venues across experience, cost, preferred supplier status, sustainability and risk criteria,” Chettupuzha says. The impact of such automation can be significant. According to Chettupuzha, organisations using AI-supported workflows are seeing early-stage planning timelines reduced by 30–50 per cent. These systems also help standardise processes and reduce dependency on individual expertise. “AI enables a scalable and repeatable model that can be operated by teams with limited industry experience,” he adds.

Echoing this, Bhattacharya says AI is most effective in reducing time spent on low-value tasks. “AI reduces time on the tasks that should never have consumed so much human attention in the first place. It doesn’t reduce the time needed for judgement, negotiation or relationship management — but it gives planners their attention back,” he says.



**BHARTI SABHARWAL**  
DIRECTOR  
GRANT THORNTON BHARAT LLP

**Automation is improving proposal speed, accuracy, and forecasting for large scale events**

He also points out that adoption is still uneven. “Most organisations are still using AI for content and marketing rather than embedding it into core planning workflows. That’s a missed opportunity — the tools are ready, but workflows haven’t caught up.”

However, Dominic notes that adoption varies depending on organisational scale. “We are not currently using dedicated AI tools for event decision-making. As a relatively lean in-house team, the scale and data volume required for these tools to deliver maximum value is not quite there,” she says. She adds that AI is still being used more peripherally within her team. “We use general-purpose tools to draft delegate communications and summarise supplier contracts, which does save time. But programme design, sourcing decisions and on-site delivery remain very much people-led.”

**DATA-LED EVENT STRATEGY**

AI is also helping corporate teams design more data-driven event programmes. **Anjali Chugh**, Assistant Vice President – Marketing (Events), Nuvama Group, says the technology is transforming how planners evaluate destinations, structure agendas, and manage budgets. “AI has



rapidly evolved from a support tool into a strategic decision-making engine for events,” she says.

One of the most valuable applications is demand forecasting and venue strategy. By analysing historical attendance patterns, market trends, and delegate profiles, AI systems can recommend cities, venues, and event dates. “What once took teams days of research is now delivered in seconds, with structured comparisons and clear decision pathways,” Chugh explains.

AI is also simplifying venue shortlisting by aggregating supplier information, layouts, travel times, and cost structures into a single interface. “Instead of manually searching across platforms, planners can review structured comparisons and move faster towards internal approvals,” she says.

Budget optimisation is another area where predictive analytics are helping planners. “Predictive models estimate potential RoI, flag overspend risks, and compare supplier pricing with market benchmarks.” At Nuvama, AI is also used to analyse audience behaviour and engagement patterns. By reviewing feedback, session ratings and social media engagement, planners can identify themes and formats that resonate with audiences.

However, Chugh emphasises that technology works best when combined with human experience. “AI has significantly accelerated planning cycles and improved operational accuracy, but it works best as a force multiplier for human expertise.” For a recent leadership summit, AI helped create a predictive attendee-flow model and logistics plan. “AI generated an optimised logistics

plan and event checklist. However, the final programme format and experience design were shaped by the team.”

In another example, AI-supported analytics improved crowd management during an investor summit. “It reduced registration time by nearly 30 per cent and eliminated congestion between sessions.”

AI-driven forecasts have also helped optimise manpower and catering planning. “Footfall and consumption forecasts helped us reduce manpower costs by around 10–12 per cent while aligning catering more closely with actual demand.”

In one experimental initiative, the company even deployed a fully AI-generated host for a conference. “At a recent conference, we used an AI-powered emcee with a video avatar that hosted the event for two full days,” Chugh says.

Bhattacharya believes the biggest untapped opportunity lies in connecting event data to long-term business outcomes. “Post-event analytics can feed directly into CRM systems, allowing organisations to track RoI months after



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**VARGHESE CHETTUPUZZHA**  
CORPORATE EXPERT

“**AI reduces planning timelines by up to 50 per cent, but human judgement remains critical for final decisions.**”  
— Varghese Chettupuzha



the event. That's where the real strategic value of AI sits — and where many teams are not yet fully leveraging it," he notes.

Dominic highlights that AI is already closing gaps in reporting and visibility across the industry. "Post-event reporting has traditionally been fragmented and slow, but AI-driven platforms are now consolidating spend, attendance, feedback and carbon data in near real-time, flagging anomalies and surfacing insights automatically," she explains.

She believes sustainability is where AI is making the most immediate impact. "AI tools can calculate scope 3 emissions from delegate travel and generate compliance-ready ESG reports in hours rather than weeks. That's

a meaningful shift as expectations around sustainability continue to rise." Drawing from industry observations, Dominic points to emerging use cases across delegate behaviour, sourcing and sustainability.

"Predictive analytics is helping planners understand booking patterns and improve planning accuracy, while AI-assisted sourcing tools can cross-reference delegate needs with venue options in minutes — something that previously took days," she says.

She also highlights sustainability-led decision-making. "In one widely referenced case, modelling different conference locations against delegate origin data showed that



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“**AI remains underutilised in core workflows despite strong adoption in content and marketing functions.**”

— Rajdev Bhattacharya

selecting a more central destination reduced projected flight emissions by around 25 per cent without increasing costs.”

**SPEEDING EVENT PLANNING**

For travel management companies, AI is proving particularly valuable as event planning timelines shrink. According to **Jude Dsouza**, Leader – FCM Meeting & Events, India, recent industry trends show that one-third of venue bookings are now made within three months of the event date, reflecting the growing pace of event planning. “With planning cycles becoming shorter, AI can analyse past data and recommend destinations or venues quickly, giving planners a head start,” Dsouza says.

AI tools can analyse historical booking patterns and client preferences

to recommend suitable venues or destinations. Technology is also helping planners overcome one of the biggest challenges in venue sourcing — the inability to physically inspect properties before making decisions. “Tech-led sourcing and AI tools can enable online site visits and virtual venue assessments,” Dsouza explains.

AI is also helping companies manage budgets more effectively by predicting actual attendance patterns. “This allows planners to adjust F&B and room blocks early, preventing the wastage that often occurs in unmanaged programmes.”

FCM has developed its own AI-supported sourcing platform called Venue Finder, which helps planners shortlist venues faster. The company’s reporting dashboard also provides planners with real-time financial visibility.



**CHANDER MANSHARAMANI**  
VICE CHAIRMAN  
INDIA CONVENTION  
PROMOTION BUREAU

“Our analytics dashboard provides a single source of truth, allowing planners to see every line item in real time,” Dsouza says. During events, AI tools are also enhancing attendee experience. Chatbots can answer attendee queries instantly, while sentiment analysis tools help organisers monitor engagement levels. “These tools allow organisers to adjust the event experience while it is still underway.”

**UPSKILLING IS CRITICAL**

While AI adoption is accelerating, industry leaders say the workforce must quickly develop new skills to keep pace



with technological change. **Chander Mansharamani**, Vice Chairman, India Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB), says the MICE sector will need structured training programmes to prepare professionals for AI-enabled operations. “To prepare the MICE workforce for AI adoption, we need a comprehensive skill development strategy covering digital, analytical, and operational competencies,” he says.

Industry surveys suggest 80 per cent of MICE professionals believe continuous upskilling is essential for future success, while 48 per cent want more training specifically on AI tools. Training programmes should include AI awareness, generative AI tools and prompt engineering.

“Basic AI awareness programmes and training on generative AI tools will be critical for professionals across the industry.” Data analytics will also become increasingly important



**AKSHAY GUPTA**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
TIVOLI HOSPITALITY GROUP

as AI systems generate more insights about attendee behaviour and event performance. “Skills in event data analysis, predictive analytics and RoI measurement will become increasingly important,” he adds. Public-private partnerships could also play a major role in accelerating AI adoption. Government

agencies, technology companies, and industry bodies could collaborate to create innovation platforms and national training programmes.

“Public-private partnerships can combine government scale, industry expertise and technology capability to accelerate AI adoption across India’s MICE ecosystem,” Mansharamani explains. He also suggests establishing a National Centre of Excellence for AI in MICE to drive research and pilot projects.

**IMPROVING VENUE OPS**

Hotels and convention centres are also integrating AI and automation tools to improve lead qualification, forecasting and proposal management. **Prithvi Anand**, Director – Sales and Marketing, Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre and Hyderabad International Convention Centre, says automation has already improved RFP response



processes. "AI-assisted tools now pull live inventory, rate thresholds and historical event data directly into proposals," he explains.

As a result, the property has reduced RFP turnaround time by nearly 30 per cent, particularly for repeat conventions. Automated validation systems have also improved proposal accuracy. "Pricing and room block accuracy have improved significantly, reducing clarification cycles by around 20 per cent." Technology is also helping the property forecast demand more effectively.

Using Accor's revenue systems and analytics platforms, the hotel can analyse booking patterns, citywide demand signals, and seasonal trends. "These systems have improved forward visibility into large conventions by nearly 20 per cent," Anand says. Despite these technological advancements, he emphasises that large-scale MICE operations remain people-driven. "Large-format MICE events require skilled teams and hands-on coordination. Technology supports operations, but it does not replace people."

Another hospitality expert, **Akshay Gupta**, Executive Director, Tivoli Hospitality Group, says AI-powered CRM systems are increasingly being used to prioritise MICE enquiries. "These systems analyse historical booking

**AI assisted tools have reduced RFP TAT by nearly 30%, clarification cycle by 20%, and forward visibility by 20%**

behaviour, company profile and event size to estimate the probability that an enquiry will convert into a booking," he explains.

Hotels using such systems typically see 15–30 per cent improvements in enquiry-to-conversion ratios, he says. Automation has also significantly accelerated proposal turnaround times. "With AI-assisted proposal systems integrated with CRM and property systems, turnaround times have dropped from 24–48 hours to roughly 4–8 hours." AI-driven forecasting tools are also improving operational efficiency. Forecast accuracy for event demand has improved from around 65 per cent to nearly 85 per cent,

allowing venues to optimise staffing and pricing decisions.

Technology-driven engagement tools are also creating new revenue opportunities. Event apps and analytics platforms often achieve 60–80 per cent adoption among attendees — increasing participation and on-site spending. "Data-driven engagement tools can lead to a 10–18 per cent increase in on-site spending," Giliota says.

**AI AS A SUPPORT SYSTEM**

Across corporates, venues and event agencies, the consensus is clear: AI is becoming an essential planning tool, but it works best when combined with human experience. The technology is helping planners analyse data faster, automate repetitive tasks, and improve forecasting accuracy. But creativity, relationship management and on-ground execution remain firmly human skills.

As Sabharwal puts it, the future of event planning will not be driven by AI alone. "Even with advanced technology and search tools, human judgement and intervention will always remain important."

For India's MICE industry, the next phase will likely be about learning how to integrate AI into everyday workflows while ensuring professionals develop the skills required to use it effectively. **MT**



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# India's **FUTURE** as a competitive **GLOBAL MICE HUB**

India's MICE ecosystem is shifting toward tech-driven, experiential growth, supported by infrastructure upgrades, digital transformation, and sectoral demand from manufacturing, healthcare, and high-growth Indian startups.

By **Deepa Sethi**

India's MICE and destination wedding sectors are moving into a more mature and competitive phase, where growth is increasingly being measured not just by demand, but by delivery.

Over the past three years, the market has expanded steadily, but so have client expectations. Today, planners are assessing destinations through a far sharper lens — from pricing volatility, air connectivity, and hotel rates to visa ease, contracting flexibility, digital readiness, infrastructure, service quality, and last-mile execution. For OTAs and organisers alike, these variables play a critical role in shaping demand, conversion and repeat business, while also influencing how India compares with competing destinations across the region.

**Primly Borgohain**, Executive Vice President and Country Head – MICE & Events, Yatra Online, shares her perspective on what is driving momentum — and what still needs to evolve.

## **MICE IN TRANSITION** Shifting sectors, trends, and client expectations

Over the past three years, India's MICE ecosystem has transitioned from recovery to sustained, structural growth. Demand is being driven by sectors such as manufacturing, IT, BFSI, automotive, healthcare, renewables, and startups, all of which are increasingly viewing MICE as a strategic business enabler rather than a discretionary expense.

Three clear shifts stand out. The first is deeper technology integration, with AI-led engagement tools, hybrid event formats, data analytics, and immersive digital experiences becoming standard. The second is a growing preference for experiential formats, including destination-led storytelling, cultural immersion, and highly themed productions. The third is the steady rise of incentive travel, which has grown by approximately 12–15 per cent, reflecting a sharper focus on employee engagement, retention, and leadership alignment.

Client expectations have matured significantly, with greater emphasis on measurable RoI, sustainability compliance, wellness integration, and structured post-event reporting. This





**PRIMLY BORGHAIN**  
EVP & COUNTRY HEAD – MICE & EVENTS  
YATRA ONLINE

evolution is driving stronger repeat business and long-term partnerships. With India's MICE market currently valued at around USD 5.4 billion and projected to exceed USD 9 billion by 2033, we expect this momentum to accelerate further.

**WINNING CORPORATE BIZ**  
The real challenges behind MICE conversion

From an OTA perspective, engagement with corporate clients is inherently consultative and data-driven. At Yatra Online, we work closely with procurement teams, HR leaders, marketing heads, and CXOs to understand business objectives before proposing integrated solutions that combine flights, hotels, venues, logistics,

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**Incentive travel rises 12–15%, reflecting corporates prioritising employee engagement, retention, and leadership alignment.**  
”

and production. Site inspections, pilot concepts, and post-event analytics play a critical role in building confidence and ensuring accountability.

The biggest challenges in conversion stem from short planning lead times against volatile air inventory, multi-layered corporate approval structures, budget-versus-expectation gaps, and seasonal pricing fluctuations. Conversion improves significantly when clients plan early, pre-block inventory, and operate through a single-point program manager who ensures end-to-end ownership and execution clarity.

**SELLING INDIA**  
Regional comparisons in pricing, conversion, and experience

India's key advantage lies in its value-to-experience proposition, cultural depth, and scalability. We recently executed a leadership summit in Udaipur that combined robotic butler bot, an AI-led emcee, and personalised digital twin

welcome experiences, delivered at a cost significantly lower than comparable executions in Singapore or Thailand.

While destinations such as Singapore and Thailand offer strong infrastructure and ease of inbound travel, the United Arab Emirates stands out for connectivity and global positioning, and Turkey and Indonesia serve as competitive regional alternatives.

India, however, uniquely blends innovation with heritage, hospitality, and affordability, making it particularly compelling for large domestic and regional leadership programs.

**PERCEPTION GAP**  
Why India feels complex until it delivers

Some global planners do continue to perceive India as complex, particularly for first-time programs. This perception is largely driven by concerns around visas and documentation, infrastructure inconsistency across cities, traffic and



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**ANIL PARASHAR**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
INTERGLOBE TECHNOLOGY QUOTIENT

### GDS group bookings explained

Group bookings have been managed through the Global Distribution System (GDS) since airline bookings first moved to the GDS. IATA has set clear guidelines for processing individual (1–9 pax) and group (10–99 pax) bookings. Groups can certainly be processed via the GDS, and we have successfully supported this process for several airlines, including Air France, KLM, British Airways, China Eastern Airlines, Finnair, Emirates, Etihad Airways, Malaysia Airlines, and the Lufthansa Group. To ensure fair outcomes, travel agents work closely with airlines and groups to confirm space and fares, with pricing controlled by the airline’s yield management team. Once finalised, the booking flows seamlessly through the GDS — from PNR creation and ancillary selection to ticketing and settlement through the BSP.

transfer unpredictability, and limited mega convention capacity outside key hubs. However, once planners experience India’s upgraded airports, expanding luxury hotel inventory, advanced production capabilities, and service-driven hospitality, confidence increases rapidly. In most cases, the perception gap narrows significantly after the first successful execution, leading to repeat business.

### COST EQUATION How pricing and policy shape MICE decisions

India remains highly competitive from a pricing standpoint, but unpredictability often introduces hesitation. Fluctuating airfares, seasonal hotel pricing volatility, high GST on hospitality and events, rigid cancellation clauses, and inconsistent timelines for large-group visa approvals can extend decision cycles and increase perceived risk. This often makes budgeting more difficult for planners. For long-lead MICE programs and destination weddings, greater pricing transparency and more flexible contracting structures would

significantly improve confidence and accelerate conversions.

### EXECUTION TEST Infrastructure, service, and large-event delivery

India’s major hubs, Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Kochi, offer strong integrated infrastructure, combining international connectivity, luxury accommodation, and modern convention facilities. Tier II and III cities are improving rapidly, although challenges remain around single-site mega capacities, peak-season inventory constraints, and last-mile logistics. Service quality in branded hotels is globally competitive, and India’s core strengths lie in hospitality warmth and creative production capabilities. Large-scale execution, however, requires experienced on-ground coordination to manage

permits, logistics, and multi-vendor alignment. With early planning and the right partners, India is well equipped to host complex MICE events and destination weddings.

### BOOKING BOTTLENECK Digital readiness and BSP challenges in MICE

India’s digital readiness for group and event travel remains mixed. While individual inventory is highly digitised, group hotel blocks, banquet inventory, airline group fares, and event vendor ecosystems are still largely manual or offline. The Billing and Settlement Plan (BSP) restriction of allowing only nine passengers per PNR adds operational hurdles for large groups, leading to booking splits, higher change risks, and slower fare protection. To unlock scale, the ecosystem needs live airline group APIs, venue and banquet inventory systems, standardised contracts with transparent terms, predictable visa SLAs for large delegations, and data-backed post-event dashboards. Digitisation of group workflows would be transformational for inbound MICE and wedding business. **MT**



# Travel assistance becomes an essential requirement

In today’s volatile travel landscape, disruptions are now expected. As quality lags behind demand, travellers increasingly require real-time support over simple post-incident financial reimbursement.

The gap between traveller needs and reality is widening. While traditional insurance compensates for loss, it fails to assist when a bag vanishes or a connection is missed. Recognising this, ASEGO has launched ASEGO BOLT+ — a premium assistance bundle combining three pivotal services: real-time baggage tracking, lounge access during delays, and global e-SIM connectivity.

BOLT+ delivers rapid, on-ground protection through:

- Enables global, real-time baggage tracking across all airlines and routes, with guaranteed compensation of up to ₹6,000 per checked-in bag (up to two bags) if the luggage isn’t recovered within 96 hours
- Automatically activates premium lounge access if a flight is delayed by more than 60 minutes — offering travellers comfort instead of frustration. Coverage extends across up to four flight segments in a single trip and includes access to over 1,300 lounges across more than 100 countries
- A global connectivity solution providing instant international e-SIM activation. This eliminates the hassle of searching for local SIM cards, unreliable Wi-Fi, or expensive roaming charges — enabling travellers to access maps, airline updates, emergency support, and stay connected with loved ones without interruption

This isn’t just a service upgrade — it’s a mindset shift. Travel assistance is no longer an add-on; it’s becoming a



**DEV KARVAT**  
FOUNDER, ASEGO

baseline expectation. As a travel advisor or booking partner, offering BOLT+ is more than an upsell — it’s about being proactive, customer-centric, and aligned with what modern travellers truly value: peace of mind and dependable support.

ASEGO BOLT+ empowers travel agents to move beyond selling destinations and start offering dependable journeys. It’s time to think beyond insurance and give your customers a protection layer that actually travels with them. Whether it’s a family vacation, a corporate itinerary, or a solo international trip, assistance like this transforms stress into trust. **MT**

Disclaimer: The information provided is for general awareness and promotional purposes only. ASEGO BOLT+ and its services, including TrackMate, WaitMate & ChatMate, are value-added offerings subject to specific terms, conditions, and eligibility. Services are delivered via third-party providers and may be governed by their respective terms. This is not an insurance product or legal advice. Travellers should review full-service details before purchase. ASEGO reserves the right to modify or discontinue services without prior notice.



# Visa wows with corporate payments across vendors

Visa is introducing digital corporate payment tools aimed at helping MICE organisers streamline vendor payments, improve spending oversight, and simplify reconciliation for large events.



**SHRUTI GUPTA**  
HEAD – COMMERCIAL & MONEY  
MOVEMENT SOLUTIONS – INDIA AND  
SOUTH ASIA, VISA

By MT Bureau

As India's meetings, incentives, conferences, and events (MICE) sector scales up, the complexity behind organising large events is growing just as rapidly. Beyond venues and programming, organisers are often managing dozens of vendor payments — ranging from hotels and transport providers to production teams and local service partners. Efficient financial management is increasingly becoming a critical part of event execution.

Global payments company Visa is now positioning its corporate payment solutions to address this challenge. By introducing digital payment tools such as virtual accounts and embedded payment infrastructure, the company aims to help corporates and MICE organisers manage vendor payments more efficiently while improving financial oversight and reconciliation processes.

## MULTI-VENDOR PAY FLOW

Large conferences and incentive programmes typically involve a complex supplier network. Payments may be made to multiple partners across accommodation, logistics, technology, and event production — often within tight timelines.

Visa's Virtual Payment Account is designed to simplify these payment flows by enabling organisations to generate unique virtual accounts for specific vendors or transactions. This allows companies to track spending more clearly while maintaining tighter control over payment authorisations.



**Shruti Gupta**, Head – Commercial and Money Movement Solutions, India and South Asia, Visa, says the solution addresses a common operational challenge for corporate event organisers.

“Visa Virtual Payment Account is live in India and designed to simplify and further secure B2B and corporate payments through virtual cards with built-in controls and automation. For Indian MICE organisers and corporate travel buyers, this addresses a very real challenge of managing payments across dozens of vendors under tight timelines while maintaining clear financial oversight,” she explains. The system also reduces reliance on manual bank transfers and cheque-based payments, which still exist in parts of the events supply chain.

## FLEXIBLE MODEL FOR CORP

Another key element of Visa's approach is its open and unbundled payment model. Many large Indian companies operate with multiple banking partners for treasury management, lending, and working capital requirements.

Visa's system allows corporates to continue working with their preferred banking partners while integrating Visa's payment network and infrastructure

into their financial systems. Gupta highlights why this flexibility is important for enterprise clients. “Visa's newer open and unbundled model gives Indian corporates greater flexibility by allowing them to work with their preferred banking partner while still leveraging Visa's network, security, and commercial payment capabilities. This is particularly important for organisations that already have established treasury relationships but want to modernise how payments integrate with their financial and procurement systems,” she says. For companies organising events across multiple destinations, the ability to integrate payments without disrupting existing financial frameworks can help finance teams streamline processes.

## DIGITISING EXPENSES

Corporate travel programmes and MICE events also generate significant operational expenses — from hotel accommodation and ground transport to production services and local logistics.

Managing these costs through manual reimbursements often leads to fragmented reporting and delays in reconciliation. Visa's commercial payment tools aim to digitise these

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Managing payments across dozens of vendors under tight timelines is a real challenge for MICE organisers.  
”



processes by embedding payments directly within travel booking and procurement workflows. This enables organisations to issue payments tied to specific vendors, timeframes, or services.

Gupta notes that structured payment data is one of the key advantages of this approach. “For event organisers, virtual payment mechanisms allow payments to be issued for specific vendors, purposes or timeframes. Each transaction generates structured data which enables faster reconciliation, clearer reporting, and stronger financial control while reducing the need for cash advances or manual reimbursements,” she says. For corporate travellers attending events, integrated payment systems can also minimise out-of-pocket expenses and simplify expense reporting.

**ALLIANCES FUEL GROWTH**

Visa is also collaborating with travel management companies, technology providers and fintech platforms to build a more integrated payment ecosystem for the travel and events industry. Through application programming interfaces (APIs) and modular payment infrastructure, these partners can integrate virtual payment accounts and

**Visa’s digital payment tools are simplifying vendor payments and improving financial control in MICE**

automated reconciliation into booking platforms, ERP systems, and event management tools.

Gupta says such partnerships are essential in India’s diverse supplier landscape. “Visa actively works with travel management companies, technology platforms, and fintech partners to embed payment capabilities directly into systems used by Indian corporates and MICE organisers. Through modular APIs and payment infrastructure, partners can integrate virtual accounts, virtual cards, and automated reconciliation into booking tools, ERP platforms, and event management systems,” she explains.

This integration is particularly important in India, where the event ecosystem includes both global hospitality brands and regional service providers operating at different levels of digital maturity.

**PAYMENTS WITH PURPOSE**

As India positions itself as a growing hub for global conferences, incentive travel programmes and corporate events, the financial infrastructure supporting these events is also evolving.

According to Gupta, payment systems are gradually shifting from a backend administrative function to a strategic enabler for the industry.

“India’s MICE industry is at an inflection point driven by economic growth, global events and the country’s leadership in digital payments. Payments are no longer just a backend function. They are becoming a strategic enabler of efficiency, transparency, and trust for organisations managing large and complex events,” she says.

For event organisers and corporate travel buyers, adopting digitised payment infrastructure could therefore become a key step in managing large-scale programmes more efficiently as India’s MICE market continues to expand. **MT**



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# Event mobility a planning priority

Ground transportation is emerging as a strategic layer in MICE. Uber for Business highlights that mobility is no longer a backend function but a strategic tool helping organisers.

By MT Bureau

Mobility is increasingly shaping how delegates experience events, how organisers measure sustainability, and how effectively large gatherings operate. As MICE programmes grow in scale and complexity, ground transportation is moving beyond logistics to become a strategic layer that influences attendance, engagement, and long-term event RoI.

### THE FIRST TOUCHDOWN

**Rituraj Chaturmohta**, Sr Country Manager – India and South Asia, Uber for Business, believes mobility plays a defining role in how events are perceived. “Mobility is quite often the first and last real touchpoint of an event. A positive or negative experience at this stage can dramatically influence the entire perception of the event. This part of events is frequently overlooked, yet it impacts attendee energy, word of mouth, and overall brand sentiment,” he says.

When mobility works well it is invisible — but when it does not, it becomes the only thing people talk about. He notes that reliable and centrally managed ground-transport for airport transfers, venue shuttles, and on-demand rides helps reduce operational unpredictability.

For example, he says a recent 1,200-person event in London faced disruption due to public transport strikes; but switching to vouchers helped secure around 800 attendees who might otherwise have been no-shows.

“With centralised ride management, whether through on-demand bookings, reservations, or vouchers, organisers can reduce leakages such as ad hoc vendor costs, inefficient routing, and last-minute logistical issues. Mobility therefore shifts from being a line-item expense to

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Our sustainability dashboard provides transparent and audit-ready CO<sub>2</sub> data, allowing organisers to report Scope 3 emissions and shape travel behaviour.”  
”



**RITURAJ CHATURMOHTA**  
SR COUNTRY MANAGER – INDIA & SOUTH ASIA, UBER FOR BUSINESS

maintaining delegate convenience and experience,” he adds.

### UNIFIED TRAVEL SCALE

India’s MICE growth beyond major metros is creating new opportunities but also fragmented logistical challenges.

Chaturmohta says Uber’s scale allows organisers to maintain consistency without managing multiple transport partners. “We are active in more than 125 cities across India with a network of over one million drivers. For a MICE organizer, this translates into one contract across multiple destinations. It allows them to provide a consistent and premium experience in tier II cities without needing to vet local vendors, negotiate different service agreements, or worry about variations in vehicle quality,” he says.

He adds that different movement needs can be addressed through varied product formats. “Whether delegates require a car for the entire day through rentals or need to travel between destination clusters using intercity options, they continue to use a familiar interface. Delegates do not have to learn a new system or negotiate fares. They rely on the same app they trust, which helps deliver a metro grade experience regardless of the destination size,” he explains.

### DATA DRIVES LOGISTICS

Mobility insights are increasingly influencing how organisers design event flow and logistics.

“Data is the silent architect of a well-run event. The platform provides organisers with detailed trip level insights that were previously inaccessible. This includes frequent routes, peak travel

becoming a strategic lever that supports higher attendance, better engagement, and stronger outcomes for future events and sponsorships,” he explains.

### TRACKING SUSTAINABILITY

As sustainability reporting becomes more rigorous, organisers are paying closer attention to ground transport, particularly Scope 3 emissions.

“The old management adage holds true: you cannot control or reduce what you cannot measure. For a long time, ground transportation existed as a black box in sustainability reporting, which made it difficult for planners to understand its real impact,” Chaturmohta says.

He explains that access to trip-level emissions data is changing this. “Our sustainability dashboard provides transparent and audit ready data on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for every trip associated with an event. This allows organisers to report accurately on Scope 3 emissions, which are traditionally among the most difficult to track. Beyond reporting, planners can also influence behaviour by prioritising options such as electric rides, which encourages attendees to choose lower emission travel,” he says.

According to him, these insights gradually shape broader corporate travel policies. “Over time, the data does not simply sit in a report — it becomes the foundation for future travel policies that prioritise sustainability while still



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**When mobility works well it is invisible,  
 but when it does not, it becomes  
 the only thing people remember  
 about an event experience.**  
 ”

times and high demand pickup points such as airport terminals or specific hotel clusters,” Chaturmohta says.

He explains that this information enables more informed planning. “When organisers understand exactly when arrival surges will occur or which satellite hotels are causing transport delays, they can make smarter decisions around budgeting, scheduling, venue selection and overall event design. By converting movement patterns into actionable intelligence, planners can move away from guesswork and towards data driven logistics,” he says.



**NEXT STEP, EVENT MOBILITY**

Looking ahead, Chaturmohta believes event mobility will be shaped by technology integration and sustainability priorities.

“The mobility ecosystem is evolving towards a combination of electric

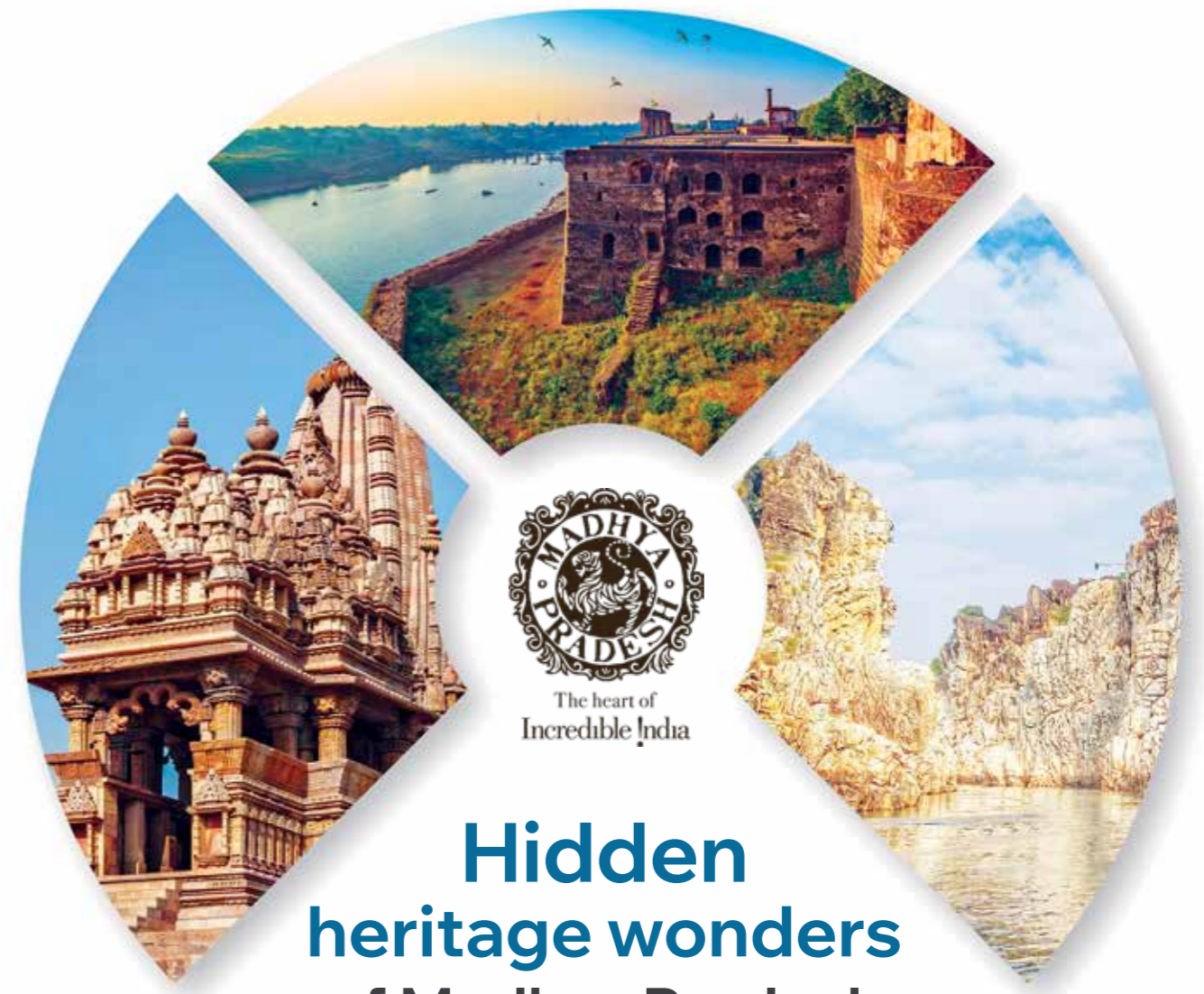


vehicles, shuttle formats and group transportation solutions that are better aligned with event requirements.

Over the next three years, automation, artificial intelligence driven routing, large language model capabilities and deeper software integrations will become standard expectations from organisers,” he says.

Sustainability goals will accelerate this shift. He adds, “Electric vehicles will increasingly become the preferred choice for premium and corporate travel.”

He concludes saying, “As organisations strengthen their ESG commitments, green transportation will move from being a nice addition to becoming a core requirement in event planning.” **MT**



**Hidden  
 heritage wonders  
 of Madhya Pradesh**

Madhya Pradesh offers a living journey through time, inviting history buffs to explore obscure shrines, ancient carvings, and majestic forts beyond the region’s famed landmarks.

Over centuries, Madhya Pradesh has enshrined the ambitions of rulers and merchants within stunning architectural wonders. Here, heritage is not a relic, but a living rhythm — found in the rustle of peepal leaves and river songs echoing beneath ancient carvings.

**BATESHWAR TEMPLES**

In Morena’s badlands, the Bateshwar Temples — a group of 200 ancient structures once reduced to rubble — stand restored as a testament to early design.

Rediscovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these thousand-year-old shrines leave visitors stunned by their antiquity and resilience.

**VARAHA ICONS**

Dating back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century, magnificent icons at Eran and Udayagiri depicts Lord Vishnu’s Varaha incarnation. The Eran site features a gigantic zoomorphic boar, while Udayagiri houses a majestic anthropomorphic carving. Historically, metallurgical studies suggest Delhi’s non-rusting Iron Pillar like originated from this very hill.

**ANCIENT ROCK & ZERO**

Antiquity peaks at Chaturbhujnath Nala, home to 5 kilometres of prehistoric rock art, and the 8<sup>th</sup> century subterranean Dharmarajeshwar Temple. The journey concludes at Gwalior’s Chaturbhuj Temple, where a 9<sup>th</sup>-century inscription bears the world’s second-oldest recorded ‘zero’.

**GYARASPUR & AJAIGARH**

Gyaraspur serves as a veritable open-air museum featuring Maladevi Temple,

Hindola Toranas, and the Athkhamba and Bajramath shrines. They represent an acme in temple architecture. Even more elaborately carved iconography is seen on the gateway of mighty Ajaigarh Fort, built a thousand years ago by the Chandelas and witness to many a battle.

**BHEDAGHAT & BURHANPUR**

At Bhedaghat, the unique circular Chaunsath Yogini Temple once hosted the medieval warrior queen, Durgawati. Meanwhile, Burhanpur features a riverside fortress containing rare Mughal-era painting and the site of Mumtaz Mahal’s first temporary abode for her remains while the Taj Mahal was being built.

**NEW HERITAGE FRONTIERS**

At the edge of Madhya Pradesh’s heritage journey lie four new serial nominations: the Ashokan Edict Sites, Chaunsath Yogini Temples, Gupta Period Temples, and Bundela Palace-Fortresses. These wonders remind us that Madhya Pradesh is not just a land of history, but a living journey through time. **MT**

An exploration of ageism in the workplace urged leaders to confront unconscious bias, rethink everyday language, and build environments where contribution and capability matter more than age.



# Challenging ageism in corporate India



go through the day not realising how what we've said has affected someone," she noted. Because it is unconscious, it becomes harder to challenge, and easier to normalise.

In the corporate world, this plays out in predictable ways. Older employees are often assumed to be less comfortable with technology or new digital tools, while younger professionals are passed over for leadership roles because experience is equated strictly with years. "Not because of what they bring to the table," she said, "but because of age." What needs to change, she argued, is not one policy or one programme, but culture itself. This includes inclusive hiring that looks beyond age brackets, learning opportunities that recognise growth never stops, and respectful language that treats everyone as a professional first. "Words have a power that we don't realise," she said. "They can make a person feel great, or they can also make a person feel really lousy."

One of the most striking examples she shared involved intergenerational mentoring initiative. This programme reversed traditional roles — with younger employees mentoring senior leaders — on workplace expectations, motivation, and evolving values. "It was a two-way conversation," she said. "We learned while they also learned." The result was not just insight, but empathy. Her call to action was deliberately simple: start talking — in

leadership meetings, in HR discussions, and in everyday interactions. "Only if you start talking about it will anything actually change." That message resonated strongly as the session drew to a close. Introduced as a conversation starter rather than a finished playbook, it left

the room with reflection instead of mere resolution. It was fitting, then, that this discussion on age diversity found its platform at the GBTA India Summit, where industry leaders gathered not just to talk business, but to rethink the culture shaping it. **MT**



**BINDU DOMINIC**  
CORPORATE EXPERT

By **MT Bureau**

Age rarely announces itself at work. It shows up quietly in assumptions, offhand remarks, and decisions that feel routine rather than discriminatory. Yet, those small moments shape careers, confidence, and culture far more than most organisations realise.

That was the underlying thread running through the session led by **Bindu Dominic**, Corporate Expert. Instead of beginning with definitions or frameworks, she started with something deeply relatable: "I told my parents, 'Do you know when I actually start feeling

old? It's only when you bring it up. I don't feel my age, so don't make me feel like I am.'" The point landed instantly: Age is often imposed, not felt.

She encouraged the audience to examine how quickly the mind categorises people. Phrases such as 'young leader', 'retirement age', 'fresh graduate', 'senior employee', 'generation gap', and 'too old to grasp' were placed before the room. The reactions were instinctive and revealing. "What were the first thoughts when you heard these words?" she asked. Almost all of them were age-based. "That's exactly what ageism is," she explained. "It's a quick, automatic detachment."

In India, this bias often hides behind familiarity and cultural habits. Calling a young colleague *bachhi* (child) or referring to an older professional as *didi* (older sister) may sound affectionate, but it subtly shifts how capability is perceived. "These are the silent biases within our industry, and also in the community," Dominic said. They are rarely intended to offend, yet they quietly limit opportunity. She reminded the audience that ageism is not about villains and victims — it is about awareness. "We

“Words have a power that we don't realise — they can make a person feel great or really lousy.”



# India now offers smart AI-led expo venues

India Expo Centre and Mart is strengthening its digital backbone with AI, cloud systems, and smart platforms to manage visitor flows and improve exhibition experiences.

By MT Bureau

As exhibitions become larger and more technology-led, venue operators are under increasing pressure to manage massive visitor volumes while delivering seamless digital experiences for organisers and exhibitors. Infrastructure today extends beyond halls and logistics to include integrated command centres, cloud platforms, and data-driven tools. India Expo Centre and Mart (IEM) in Greater Noida is investing in a technology-first approach to support this

shift, deploying AI, cloud infrastructure, and smart access systems to manage operations at scale.

**Tushar Gupta**, Group Head – Business Solution & Enterprise ICT, India Exposition Mart Limited, says the venue has transitioned from manual monitoring to integrated digital systems to manage large footfalls. “We have shifted from traditional manual monitoring to a tech-first approach. Our Integrated Command & Control Center centralises monitoring of CCTV networks along with the Network Operations Centre and Security



**TUSHAR GUPTA**  
GROUP HEAD – BUSINESS SOLUTION  
& ENTERPRISE ICT  
INDIA EXPOSITION MART LIMITED

Operations Centre to provide real-time operational alerts,” Gupta says.

To manage visitor entry efficiently during large exhibitions, the venue has implemented advanced access control and security technologies. “We have deployed HHMD, DFMD, and X-ray scanning systems optimised for high-throughput environments. For large-scale events we also enable RFID and barcode-based turnstile entry systems that help prevent congestion and eliminate fraudulent entries,” he explains.

A significant driver of this evolution is IEM’s dedicated in-house team of over 100 digital business professionals. This robust ICT unit manages the entire infrastructure, ensuring all technological touchpoints are optimised specifically for the unique scale of the MICE industry. All digital operations

are now hosted on an AWS cloud-native infrastructure, providing the elastic scalability required to handle massive traffic spikes during major shows without performance degradation.

The venue has also introduced a mobile application with an offline wayfinding feature designed to help visitors navigate the large exhibition complex even when network congestion occurs during peak events.

Beyond visitor management, IEM has been expanding its digital services for organisers. Gupta says the venue has developed an in-house marketing technology stack and CRM platform tailored specifically for exhibitions. “We have moved away from generic third-party tools to a fully in-house managed Martech stack. This enables organisers to track exhibitor journeys, engagement metrics and lead conversions more effectively,” he notes.

Artificial intelligence is also being explored to improve operational planning. According to Gupta, predictive analytics tools are being tested to analyse registration data and real-time entry logs to forecast peak visitor density.

Looking ahead, the venue plans to introduce a digital twin of the facility to help organisers simulate layouts and crowd movement before events are built. “We are creating a 3D digital twin of the entire facility. This will allow organisers to plan layouts and simulate crowd safety in a virtual environment before physical construction begins,” Gupta says. **MT**

**Predictive analytics and digital twin technologies are emerging as key tools, enabling organisers to forecast crowd density, optimise layouts, and improve planning efficiency**





# 70% firms shift to tech-driven travel

Indian companies are preparing for a busier travel year, as rising business activity, smarter travel policies, and digital tools reshape how corporates manage travel.

By MT Bureau

**B**usiness travel is showing renewed confidence. The Business Travel Report 2026, by Thomas Cook (India) and SOTC Travel, finds that 65 per cent of corporates expect travel volumes to grow in the next 12 months. Another 30 per cent expect activity to stay steady. This means most companies see travel continuing as an essential part of business operations. Client meetings, sales visits, and internal coordination remain the biggest reasons for corporate travel.

Companies are also changing how they manage travel. More than 70 per cent are now using digital tools for bookings, approvals, and expense tracking. These systems give companies better visibility and stronger policy control. At the same

time, travel decisions are becoming more balanced. About 62 per cent of corporates say they now focus on value rather than just cost — weighing safety, reliability, and employee comfort when planning trips.

### KEY OBSERVATIONS:

- **Business travel demand remains resilient:** Nearly 65 per cent of corporates expect their business travel volumes to increase over the next 12 months, while 30 per cent expect it to remain stable. Only 5 per cent anticipate a decline. This translates to 95 per cent of respondents projecting stable-to-growth spend, underlining travel's continued role in driving growth, client engagement and business continuity.
- **Technology and data-led decision-making on the rise:** More than 70 per

cent of corporates are increasing their reliance on digital tools for booking, approvals, expense management, and MIS reporting — enabling improved visibility, policy compliance, and data-backed decision-making across business travel programmes.

- **Shift towards value-driven travel management:** While cost optimisation remains critical, over 62 per cent of respondents highlighted a move towards value-led travel decisions — balancing cost efficiency with safety, reliability, compliance and traveller well-being. This has elevated the role of managed travel programs and strategic travel partners.

- **Traveller experience, flexibility, and duty of care gain prominence:** Alongside business objectives, over 56 per cent of respondents acknowledged the growing importance of traveller experience, flexibility and duty of care —

particularly for frequent flyers and senior leadership. The findings point to a clear trade-off between traveller convenience and policy compliance, underscoring the need for smarter, more flexible travel policies supported by technology and data-led controls to reduce friction while maintaining governance.

- **Policy tightening and supplier renegotiations gain momentum:** Close to 60 per cent of corporates indicated that they have tightened or are in the process of revisiting their travel policies. Renegotiation of airline and hotel contracts, rationalization of preferred suppliers and stricter approval workflows have emerged as key levers to offset rising costs and tax-related pressures.

- **Bleisure travel on the rise:** 68 per cent of corporates report that employees are increasingly extending business trips to include personal leisure time — blending

work and downtime. This growing shift is prompting organizations to reassess travel policies, clarify cost-sharing norms and offer greater flexibility to support work-plus-leisure travel.

- **Domestic hubs dominate, with growth in international business travel:** 72 per cent of corporate travel continues to be domestic, led by key business hubs such as Mumbai, Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad and Pune. These cities remain critical for client meetings, internal reviews and project-based travel. On the international front, Singapore, Thailand, Hong-Kong, Maldives, Dubai-Abu Dhabi, UK, Italy, Netherlands, USA, South Africa and Australia remain preferred destinations for leadership meetings, supplier engagements and strategic business expansion — with China and Japan emerging strongly on the radar.

- **Rising airfares and costs driving sharper controls:** A sharp 80 per cent of respondents reported an increase in Average Ticket Prices (ATP) over the past year — with over 36 per cent witnessing a significant rise of more than 15 per cent, and 45 per cent reporting a moderate increase of 5–15 per cent, highlighting tighter controls, advance booking mandates and closer monitoring of travel spends.

- **GST and input tax credit challenges add pressure to travel budgets:** Over 55 per cent of respondents highlighted challenges around GST applicability, compliance and input tax credit (ITC) optimization — particularly for air travel and hotel stays. This has led corporates to increasingly seek structured invoicing, compliant supplier ecosystems, and expert support to minimise leakage. **MT**





# MyTripleE scheme drives Malaysia's Indian MICE growth

Malaysia's MyTripleE scheme and visa-free access aim to attract Indian corporates beyond Kuala Lumpur to Sabah and Sarawak, targeting 47 per cent market share for Visit Malaysia 2026.

By Hazel Jain

Tourism Malaysia, alongside Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB) and its various regional tourism boards, recently engaged with key corporate stakeholders in Mumbai and New Delhi.

The objective was two-fold: to showcase diverse offerings and new infrastructure for the MICE sector, and to share the lucrative incentives currently available. These engagements included more than 76 exhibitors from Sabah, Sarawak, and Malacca, as well as other parts of Malaysia.

According to **Nuwal Fadhillah Ku Azmi**, Director – International Promotion, Asia & Africa, Tourism Malaysia, in 2025, the destination received about 1.5 million Indian visitors, which is about 14.6% more than 2024 numbers.

"This shows that Indian visitors are very, very important to Malaysia. Pre-pandemic, the numbers were below 1 million, so the jump in Indian visitors is quite huge. This is partly due to the visa-free policy that was offered by Malaysia to India and vice versa. Furthermore, we anticipate that the upcoming visit by India's Prime Minister to Malaysia will bolster these numbers and further



**HUMPHREY GINIBUN**  
DEPUTY CEO  
SABAH TOURISM

cement the strong relationship between the two nations." She adds.

Looking at the Visit Malaysia 2026, Malaysia is targeting an even bigger number from India, which is about 2.1 million Indian visitors. If India hits the 2.1 million visitor mark, it will definitely put India in the top 5, even in top 3 list for Malaysia," she revealed.

### SELLERS EYE INDIAN MICE

Sabah is actively courting Indian incentive groups. **Humphrey Ginibun**, Deputy CEO, Sabah Tourism, hopes more corporate companies will consider Sabah for incentive trips and meetings.

"While our primary market remains China and South Korea, we view India as an emerging market that

shows immense potential for growth. In 2024, we were hosting around 500-600 pax per month from India. In 2025, we increased that to an average of 1,000 pax per month, and our target for this year is a staggering 14,500 visitors!" he said.

To support this growth, the new Sabah International Convention Center (SICC) in Kota Kinabalu city offers convenience for corporates. Recently, the Chennai Cycling Association enjoyed a six-day tour cycling to Mount Kinabalu.

"We are offering many incentives to corporates that come to Sabah. We shall sit and discuss in more detail with the company, depending on the size of the group. The more you bring, the more we give," Ginibun adds.

Regarding Indian geography, he noted that Southern India has contributed significantly to their numbers. "We're looking at Chennai,



**NUWAL FADHILLAH KU AZMI**  
DIRECTOR – INTERNATIONAL PROMOTION,  
ASIA & AFRICA  
TOURISM MALAYSIA

Bengaluru, and Tamil Nadu, as well as Mumbai, because air accessibility is also very important. From Mumbai, we're looking at AirAsia and Malaysian Airlines."

Sarawak Tourism Board has also been active. **Dylan Redas Noel**, Director – Marketing (North Asia

“The jump in Indian arrivals is quite substantial, partly due to the visa-free policy that was offered by Malaysia to India and vice versa.”



**DYLAN REDAS NOEL**  
DIRECTOR – MARKETING  
(NORTH ASIA & NEW MARKETS)  
SARAWAK TOURISM BOARD

& New Markets), Sarawak Tourism Board, observed that the India market has grown exponentially over the last few years.

“Last year we had more than 45,000 Indian visitor arrivals, which surpassed our target. This year, we are aiming at a for double-digit growth. We want to ensure sustainable expansion and we will continue to attract Indian visitors — whether for leisure or MICE — into Sarawak,” he stated.

Noel emphasised that MICE is very important because, while they may not bring in as many visitors, the

value they bring is much more than leisure tourists. “To attract more MICE, our state government, the government of Sarawak, has instituted the Sarawak Business Events Fund (SBF). This funding assists MICE groups in hosting their events in Sarawak — covering association business, association conferences, corporate meetings, and incentives. Currently, Business Events Sarawak is working very hard to capture more of the Indian corporate market.”

The convention centre in Sarawak has recently been expanded to provide increased capacity and bespoke services.

“Last year we welcomed a new Sheraton in Sarawak, whilst other properties have just undergone refurbishment. I assure you that if you bring your group here, you will have world-class venues. Furthermore, our leisure offerings include culture, adventure, nature, food and festival elements, perfectly complementing your meetings and events,” Noel adds.

Established by the Malaysian Ministry of Tourism, MyCEB’s role is to position Malaysia as the preferred global destination for MICE.

Its signature incentive programme, the popular MyTripleE campaign, has been a



**NURUL NADIAH BASIRAN,**  
SENIOR EXECUTIVE – CORPORATES,  
MEETINGS & INCENTIVES  
MYCEB

hit with the corporates. **Nurul Nadiah Basiran**, Senior Executive – Corporates, Meetings & Incentives, MyCEB, explained, “The MyTripleE campaign is designed to provide tangible support for corporate meetings and incentive groups. With this, the Enliven component is tailored specifically for this. Supports include souvenir items, partial support on F&B, Malaysia cultural performance, airport hospitality desk, and a photo booth. All the support is scaled, based on the number of delegates.” This campaign specifically caters to smaller groups up to 500 pax, larger groups are encouraged

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**SBS PRADEEP KUMAR**  
DIRECTOR  
ASIAN FAMOUS TOURS & TRAVEL

“  
Based on our 2025 data, India leads the corporate meetings and incentives sector, accounting for 47% of the total market.  
”

to approach MyCEB directly. “We can tailor-make packages to your request, subject to the management’s approval. Based on 2025 data, India leads the corporate meetings and incentives sector, accounting for 47% of the total market. The insurance and pharmaceutical sectors remain our most prolific contributors. In 2026, we are targeting growth from across all regions of India, from Kolkata to New Delhi.”

**BUYERS SEE POTENTIAL**  
SBS Pradeep Kumar, Director – Asian Famous Tours & Travel, a specialist

Destination Management Company (DMC) based in Malaysia since 2007 — emphasised that Malaysia stands out as a premier MICE destination.

“Malaysia offers extensive opportunities for a plethora of corporate events including annual meetings, budget meetings, project discussions, and product launches. Over the years, multinational corporations like Pepsi, Microsoft, and Nvidia, as well as various pharmaceutical companies, have chosen Malaysia for everything from drug updates to incentive programmes for dealer groups,” he explains.

This broad appeal attracts MICE visitors from sectors such as IT, pharmaceuticals, and insurance. Kumar

noted that whilst Kuala Lumpur has long been the hub, there is a refreshing shift toward exploring new territories.

“In West Malaysia, locations such as Langkawi, Penang Island, Ipoh — an emerging hotspot — and the Desaru Coast offers superb accessibility. Meanwhile, the vibrant states of Sarawak and Sabah in Borneo are gaining momentum as premier offbeat destinations.”

Kumar further concluded saying, “We have witnessed a surge in requests for these areas, and the feedback has been consistently positive, with clients praising the unique and unforgettable experiences found only in the heart of Borneo.” **MT**



# Private sector push to expand MICE



Rising demand for conferences and corporate meetings is prompting travel service providers to expand beyond government assignments and target private sector MICE opportunities.

By **MT Bureau**

As competition intensifies in India’s travel and MICE ecosystem, companies with strong government portfolios are increasingly turning to private sector opportunities to sustain growth. Balmer Lawrie & Co. Ltd., a public sector enterprise with a long-standing presence in travel management and event services, is now sharpening its focus on private corporate clients while investing in digital transformation.

The company is witnessing strong growth in its service businesses — particularly ticketing and meetings-

related activities — and sees technology-driven solutions as the next step in scaling operations. According to **RS Louis**, Director (Service Businesses), Balmer Lawrie & Co. Ltd., the organisation is looking to diversify beyond traditional government clients and tap the large corporate MICE opportunity. “We are really growing very high in service, and this year has been very good for us. We have grown strongly in the ticketing segment and also on the buyers’ side; we are doing extremely well,” Louis said.

While government business remains a core strength, the company is increasingly focusing on private sector engagements to expand volumes. “We want to get into the private businesses and that is our new target — getting more volumes from the private sector,” he added.

MICE continues to be a major opportunity for the company. Louis noted that Balmer Lawrie already manages several large conferences and meetings, particularly for government organisations, where it handles end-to-end arrangements including hotels, transportation and ticketing. “MICE is a huge opportunity with enormous potential and we are already doing good business in this segment, but we want



**RS LOUIS**  
DIRECTOR (SERVICE BUSINESSES)  
BALMER LAWRIE & CO LTD

to grow even more in MICE by offering complete solutions,” he said.

Technology will play a key role in this expansion. The company is currently developing a fully digital platform that will allow customers to book tickets, hotels, and cabs online through an integrated system. “We are coming up with entirely new software where everything can be done online. There will be AI integration, and customers will be able to book services directly on our platform,” Louis said, adding that the system is expected to be rolled out by the end of the year. **MT**



## India retains edge in destination weddings

India continues to attract international wedding celebrations despite rising hotel prices and global competition, with planners highlighting heritage venues, infrastructure upgrades, and cultural depth as key advantages.

By Janice Alyosius

Even as Sri Lanka, Thailand, and parts of Europe aggressively market themselves as wedding destinations, India continues to hold strong appeal for international couples. Industry insiders say the country's blend of heritage venues, large-scale hospitality infrastructure, and culturally immersive celebrations keeps it firmly on the global wedding map.

While rising hotel tariffs and operational complexities have sparked debate within the industry, planners maintain that India's ability to host

multi-day celebrations at scale — from palace weddings in Rajasthan to coastal events in Goa — remains unmatched. They add that government initiatives, improved connectivity, and expanding venue options are further strengthening the country's positioning as a premium destination for large celebrations.

Across the industry, planners agree that India's destination wedding market is not shrinking — it is evolving.

High-net-worth families and culturally connected NRIs continue to choose India for its spectacle and heritage, even as some mid-budget weddings explore alternative



**KANIKA SETHI**  
FOUNDER & CEO  
KANIKA SETHI WEDDINGS & EVENTS

destinations offering simpler logistics and more predictable pricing.

### HERITAGE VENUES COMPETE

Wedding planners say the biggest reason international couples continue to choose India is the sheer diversity of venues and experiences available. **Kanika Sethi**, Founder and CEO, Kanika Sethi Weddings & Events, believes India is currently witnessing renewed global interest as accessibility and venue options expand.

According to Sethi, state tourism boards and governments have played an important role by opening up historic

venues and improving connectivity to lesser-known locations.

"The platter of venue options is so large now in India that it's encouraging people to come back. We can do weddings at places that were not even considered earlier — palaces, forts, monuments, or heritage venues that are now being showcased."

She pointed to Rajasthan as a key example where tourism authorities are actively promoting newer destinations beyond the traditional wedding hotspots. "It's not just Jaipur or Udaipur anymore. We've done weddings at Rajnivas Palace in Dholpur and Lakshmi Nivas Palace in Bharatpur. Bikaner has also become a major destination." These developments are expanding the wedding map of India beyond established luxury cities and creating new opportunities for planners.

### INDIA'S CULTURAL DEPTH

For many international couples, India offers something few destinations can replicate — a culturally immersive wedding experience that unfolds over several days. **Vikramjeet Sharma**, Managing Director, Le Florence Weddings, said global couples often choose India precisely for its cultural depth. "India continues to remain incredibly

attractive for international couples who want a culturally rich and immersive wedding experience.

While destinations like Sri Lanka and Thailand offer logistical ease and competitive pricing, India offers something far deeper — heritage venues, diverse traditions, and the ability to host truly grand multi-day celebrations," he said. Sharma added that many

“  
**India offers heritage venues, diverse traditions, and the ability to host truly grand multi-day celebrations.**

— **Vikramjeet Sharma**





**VIKRAMJEET SHARMA**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR  
LE FLORENCE WEDDINGS

international clients view weddings in India as a once-in-a-lifetime experience for their guests. “Many international clients choose India because they want their wedding to feel like a cultural journey for their guests, not just a beautiful event.”

**Nittin T Dubey**, Founder, Seven Wonders Vacations, said India’s diversity of venues and traditions continues to attract global weddings.

“Foreign couples are absolutely still choosing India, especially those looking for grandeur, heritage venues, royal palaces, and culturally immersive experiences. India offers unmatched diversity — forts in Rajasthan, beaches in Goa, backwaters in Kerala, and luxury city hotels,” he explained. He added that the scale and theatrical nature of Indian weddings provide a major competitive advantage. “The ability to host multi-day celebrations with cultural depth gives India a competitive edge. Thailand or Sri Lanka may offer simpler packages, but India delivers spectacle and customisation that few destinations can match.”

**Varun Vig**, Director, CAAIR Travels and Creative Director at CEED Weddings, echoed a similar view, noting that India continues to dominate the ultra-luxury wedding segment. “India wins on scale, cultural depth, production value, and heritage venues. No other country can deliver a 500-

“**Couples with 80–150 guests and no cultural requirements look at Thailand, Vietnam, or Italy because logistics are simpler, and pricing is more structured.**”  
— Varun Vig

guest palace wedding with multi-day rituals, entertainment, and large-scale hospitality in one narrative arc,” he said. However, Vig added that competition is

growing in smaller wedding segments. “Couples with 80–150 guests and no cultural requirements increasingly look at Thailand, Vietnam, or Italy because logistics are simpler, and hospitality pricing is more structured.”

**RISING TARIFF CONCERNS**

While India’s destination wedding appeal remains strong, rising hotel prices are becoming a major discussion point within the industry.

Sethi acknowledged that luxury hotel tariffs have increased significantly in recent years. “Our hotel prices have gone off the charts. There’s no end to it. Some properties that may not necessarily offer a comparable experience are also charging high rates because demand is so strong,” she said.

However, she noted that despite higher prices, demand continues to remain robust. “The cities are booked out. You don’t get rooms. International and NRI clients understand the importance of booking venues early.”

**Ruchika Arora Bansal**, Co-founder, Plush Weddings, believes India has always been a premium wedding destination. “India hasn’t suddenly become expensive. It has always been expensive when it comes to deliverables. What we offer in hospitality and experience is very different from other destinations,” she said.

She added that even when couples consider international locations, India’s hospitality culture remains a major differentiator. “In India, hospitality is the long and short of things. That warmth

“**India has always been a premium wedding destination. What we offer is very different from other destinations.**”  
— Ruchika Arora Bansal

and service are something international destinations cannot always match.”

Sharma also noted that India has increasingly positioned itself in the premium luxury segment, particularly through palace hotels and luxury resorts. “India has certainly moved into the premium luxury segment over the past few years. However, the value lies in the scale and personalisation couples receive — from bespoke décor to exceptional hospitality and diverse culinary offerings.”



**NITTIN T DUBEY**  
FOUNDER  
SEVEN WONDERS VACATIONS

**PRICE & PLANNING**

Despite continued demand, planners say fluctuating hotel rates are creating budgeting challenges for international clients. Dubey noted that peak-season pricing and limited availability can complicate planning cycles.

“Five-star palace properties and heritage venues are now priced at par with global luxury destinations. Rate volatility during peak seasons can create uncertainty for international planners,” he said.

Vig highlighted that dynamic pricing models used by hotels are also affecting long-term planning. “Wedding groups often contract venues 12–18 months in advance. But fluctuating rates make budgeting unpredictable. Luxury families absorb it, but mid-luxury inbound weddings feel the impact,” he explained.

Sharma acknowledged that demand at iconic properties has made planning more complex. “Hotel rate fluctuations have made planning slightly more complex in recent years, particularly with luxury properties experiencing high demand. However, experienced



Picture Credit: Plush Weddings



Picture Credit: Plush Weddings



**VARUN VIG**  
DIRECTOR, CAAIR TRAVELS &  
CREATIVE DIRECTOR, CEED

planners adapt by securing venues early and working closely with hospitality partners,” he said. Industry experts say more stable pricing frameworks and longer contracting cycles could strengthen India’s competitiveness against global destinations.

**WEDDING MAP EXPANDS**

Another factor contributing to India’s wedding growth is improving infrastructure and connectivity. Sethi highlighted how new highways and better road connectivity are enabling planners to organise extravagant multi-city wedding celebrations.

“We recently did a wedding where one function was in Agra, another in Dholpur, another in Bharatpur, and the reception was in Prayagraj. Travel between these locations is now possible through highways. Earlier this would have taken much longer,” she said.

She also cited improved connectivity to smaller heritage destinations. “For example, Alsisar Mahal in Jhunjhunu used to take much longer to reach. Now it’s about four hours. Ranthambore was eight hours earlier, now it’s closer to four.” According to planners, such developments are opening new wedding circuits across northern and central India.

**HASSLE-FREE PROCESSES**

Visa access and immigration experiences have also improved significantly in recent years, according to planners.

Dubey said the introduction of e-visas has simplified entry for most wedding guests. “The e-visa facility has significantly improved accessibility for most nationalities. Tourist visas generally suffice for wedding attendance,” he said.

Sethi also pointed to airport hospitality services that help manage large group arrivals. “We have services like the

“**Foreign couples can legally register their marriage in India, but the process involves documentation and timelines.**”  
— Kanika Sethi

Pranaam service at airports, similar to the Marhaba service in the UAE. These provide fast, efficient, and warm arrival experiences for large wedding groups,” she explained.

Sharma added that careful planning helps ensure smooth guest arrivals. “Immigration processes are generally smooth, although large groups arriving



**RUCHIKA ARORA BANSAL**  
CO-FOUNDER  
PLUSH WEDDINGS

heritage spaces has created more variety and creativity in wedding experiences,” she said. Improved infrastructure development across states is another positive step. “The push given to state tourism boards to develop connectivity and infrastructure has made travel between wedding locations much easier.”

However, industry stakeholders believe additional policy support could further strengthen the sector.

Dubey suggested measures such as group visa facilitation, clearer event permission frameworks, and international marketing collaborations.

Vig added that operational ease will be key to the success of the initiative. “India already has the product. What we now need is structural ease—streamlined permissions, stable contracting frameworks, and better coordination.”

**PREMIUM STORYTELLING**

Overall, planners agree that India remains one of the world’s most aspirational wedding destinations, particularly for large celebrations rooted in cultural traditions.

While price sensitivity may push some smaller weddings towards other destinations, India’s ability to deliver grandeur, heritage settings, and immersive experiences continues to attract international couples.

As infrastructure improves and policy support evolves, industry leaders believe India could further strengthen its position as a global destination wedding powerhouse.

As Sharma summed up, “Destination weddings today are no longer just about beautiful venues — they are about immersive storytelling, and India offers an unmatched canvas for that.” **MT**

on the same flight may experience queues depending on airport traffic. With staggered arrivals and airport assistance services, the experience can be managed seamlessly,” he said.

However, planners noted that visa experiences can still vary depending on nationality and documentation requirements. Bansal said her team has rarely encountered major issues. “We’ve never had a situation where a large number of guests couldn’t attend because they didn’t get visas,” she said.

**COMPLEX LEGAL PROCESSES**

While ceremonial weddings in India are common, legal registration remains a more complicated process for foreign couples.

Dubey explained that under India’s Special Marriage Act, couples must meet several documentation requirements. “These include valid passports, visa status, address proof, and a 30-day public notice period,” he said. Because of these requirements, many couples prefer to register their

marriages in their home countries and hold ceremonial celebrations in India. Sharma noted a similar trend among international couples.

“Foreign couples can legally register their marriage in India, but the process involves documentation and timelines. In practice, many couples choose to legally register the marriage in their home country and hold their ceremonial celebrations in India,” he said.

Sethi added that marriages can be registered in India if at least one partner is Indian. “If both are foreign nationals, they usually register the marriage back home and celebrate here.”

**‘WED IN INDIA’ INITIATIVE**

Industry leaders also see early impact from the government’s “Wed in India” campaign aimed at positioning the country as a global wedding destination.

Sethi said easier permissions to use heritage venues and off-site locations have expanded possibilities for planners. “The fact that we can take permissions to use locations like forts, parks, or

# Incentive planners now prioritise sustainability

Tourism Australia highlights sustainability, seamless visas, and immersive experiences as key drivers for India's growing business events market.

By Devika

India is emerging as one of the most strategically important markets for Australia's business events industry — with sustainability, distinctive experiences, and seamless travel processes shaping the destination's appeal for meetings, incentives, conferences, and events. According to **Robin Mack**, Managing Director, Tourism Australia, the country is positioning itself as a destination where world class event infrastructure is combined with experiences that leave a lasting impact on delegates.

"Australia is the perfect mix of business excellence and truly memorable experiences," Mack said. "We offer world

class infrastructure and a competitive Bid Fund; however, what truly tips the scale are our 'only in Australia' moments — from First Nations cultural immersions to our stunning natural landscapes and wildlife encounters."

These distinctive elements have become increasingly relevant as organisations look for destinations capable of delivering both professional impact and meaningful delegate engagement. Experiences rooted in nature, culture, and local communities are increasingly becoming central to incentive programmes and association gatherings.

Ease of travel is another factor shaping Australia's appeal for business events from India. Mack pointed to the country's digital visa process as an important facilitator for corporate groups and delegates travelling for conferences and incentives. "Our visa process is 100 per cent digital, requires no biometrics, or physical passports," he said. "It's about removing the friction, so the focus stays on designing an unforgettable incentive programme."

Sustainability, however, is emerging as one of the most decisive considerations influencing destination selection for



**ROBIN MACK**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR  
TOURISM AUSTRALIA

business events. As companies integrate environmental, social, and governance (ESG) goals into their corporate strategies, event organisers are under growing pressure to align their programmes with responsible practices. Mack noted that Australia's business events sector has invested significantly in sustainability frameworks, with convention centres and venues achieving globally recognised environmental certifications. "Sustainability is no longer just a 'nice to have' — it's a key destination driver," he said. "Our research reinforces this, with three out of four incentive decision



“Our goal isn't just more arrivals. It's driving yield — encouraging visitors to stay longer, spend more, and explore further.”

makers ranking sustainability as a key factor when choosing a destination.”

The country's business events industry is increasingly working with organisers to design programmes that go beyond reducing environmental impact, incorporating meaningful community engagement and cultural exchange.

"We aren't just measuring impact," Mack added. "We're working with planners to create events that are both world leading in sustainability and deeply meaningful for delegates."

Tourism Australia's strategy in India is also built around strong collaboration across the tourism ecosystem. Airlines, state tourism organisations, and convention bureaus work together to strengthen connectivity and present a unified destination proposition.

"It's all about integrated collaboration," Mack explained. "We work hand in hand with airlines to boost capacity and with trade partners to convert interest into bookings through joint campaigns and a 'Team Australia' approach." This coordinated approach brings together Tourism Australia, state and territory partners, and the Australian Convention Bureau to promote the country's capabilities across global

trade platforms. Beyond major gateway cities, the strategy also emphasises geographic dispersal, encouraging visitors to experience Australia's regional destinations as part of business events programmes. "Our goal isn't just more arrivals," Mack said. "It's driving yield — encouraging visitors to stay longer, spend more, and explore further into our regional communities."

With India continuing to expand as one of the fastest growing outbound markets globally, Australia sees sustained opportunity in both leisure travel and business events, particularly as companies look for destinations capable of delivering experiences that combine purpose, impact, and inspiration. **MT**



# A meeting-driven model designed for results

AIME is rapidly emerging as Asia Pacific's leading business events platform, offering guaranteed pre-matched meetings while sharpening its focus on India.

By Devika

The Asia Pacific Incentives and Meetings Event (AIME) has emerged as one of the most dynamic platforms for the global business events industry, connecting suppliers, destinations, and buyers across the region.

With robust post-pandemic growth and a unique meeting-driven format, the show is increasingly positioning itself as the primary hub for business events across the Asia Pacific. **Silke Calder**, Event Director, AIME, believes the event's reflects both industry recovery and a fundamental shift towards more meaningful, outcome-driven meetings. "When my team took over in 2022, we started with a show that only had 225 exhibitors. Today, we are standing here with 766 exhibitors," Calder remarked. "That alone speaks to how much it has grown and its importance for the region."

According to Calder, the objective of AIME is not simply to host another

trade exhibition but to serve as a central platform for the entire business events industry. "I do believe that what we put on here is the platform for the whole business events industry in Asia Pacific," she explained. "When you walk the floor, every single state of Australia is represented, and most countries from the Asia Pacific are here as well."

One of the defining differentiators for AIME is its structured meeting system, designed to guarantee tangible business outcomes. Rather than simply selling exhibition space, organisers sell what Calder describes as a "diary of meetings". "We don't sell the exhibitor just the space on the show floor," she explained. "We sell them a diary. That diary guarantees 32 meetings over two days." Each meeting lasts 15 minutes, with a short transition period before the next appointment. The system leverages a combination of detailed profiling and AI-assisted matchmaking to connect the right buyers and suppliers. "Both buyers and exhibitors complete detailed profiles,



“We don't sell the exhibitor just space on the show floor, we sell them a diary that guarantees 32 meetings over two days.”

telling us what type of events they organise, what destinations they seek, and what size meetings they handle." Calder said.

These profiles are then matched through a system that identifies compatible business needs — essentially a sophisticated meeting matching system supported by AI. "The more information people provide, the more accurate the meetings become."

This structure ensures exhibitors arrive knowing their schedules in advance. "If an exhibitor arrives in the morning, they already know they have 16 guaranteed meetings that day," Calder noted. Beyond these, additional networking opportunities arise through visitor buyers who independently request meetings via the event platform. Consequently, some exhibitors conduct significantly more meetings than planned — sometimes reaching up to 60 meetings over the two-day period.

Buyer participation remains central to the show's success. This year, the event hosted 700 hosted buyers and more than 1,000 pre-registered visitor buyers. Of the

hosted buyers, 500 hailed from Australia, while 200 represented international markets. However, the real measure of success is the revenue generated. "Last year around \$400 million of business was written on the show floor," Calder revealed. "That's the kind of outcome we want to continue building."

Sustainability has also become a visible pillar of the show's design. Working closely with the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre — one of the world's most environmentally advanced venues — the event focuses on food choices, waste reduction, and green operations. Exhibitors are encouraged to adopt sustainable stand design, with many experimenting with innovative materials.

"My goal is that every Asia Pacific country is represented on the show floor," she said. "If people think business events in this region, I want them to think of AIME." For Calder, the vision is clear: maintaining a platform where the global community gathers to connect, learn, and create high-value business relationships. **MT**



# MOVEMENTS



**ANAND SRINIVASAN**  
Chief Commercial Officer  
Akasa Air

Akasa Air has appointed Co-founder Anand Srinivasan as its new Chief Commercial Officer, following the departure of Praveen Iyer. Srinivasan, a key architect of the airline's revenue management platform, brings over 25 years of experience in aviation technology and commercial strategy. His new role focuses on merging commercial strategy with a technology-first mindset to drive sustained growth, enhance customer value, and maintain long-term competitiveness as the airline scales.



**CHARANJIT SINGH**  
Vice President – Engineering  
Royal Orchid & Regenta  
Hotels

ROHL has appointed Charanjit Singh as Vice President – Engineering. Singh brings over 25 years of technical and operational leadership from ITC Hotels, The Leela, and IHG. Having spearheaded corporate engineering ops and National Building Code compliance, he will now lead the company's engineering and infrastructure strategy. His focus will remain on sustainable practices, energy-efficient technologies, and operational reliability across the group's expanding portfolio of 5-star and 4-star properties.



**MAYANK MITTAL**  
General Manager  
Pilibhit House – IHCL  
SeleQtions, Haridwar

Mayank Mittal has been appointed General Manager of Pilibhit House – IHCL SeleQtions, Haridwar. A seasoned professional with 15 years at IHCL, Mittal has held leadership roles at Taj Exotica resorts in the Maldives and Goa, and most recently served as GM at Taj Kumarakom. In his new capacity, he will oversee operations at both Pilibhit House and Hari Ganga Niwas, focusing on operational excellence, guest experiences, and the hotel's unique culinary narrative.



**NIKHIL MALHOTRA**  
Commercial Director  
DoubleTree by Hilton  
Gurugram Baani Square

DoubleTree by Hilton Gurugram Baani Square has appointed Nikhil Malhotra as Commercial Director. With over 15 years of experience across brands such as Accor and Hyatt, Malhotra will spearhead the hotel's commercial strategy in sales, marketing, and revenue optimisation. His role is pivotal in sharpening the property's positioning and MICE segments, while building strategic partnerships to drive sustained growth and market share within Gurugram's dynamic hospitality landscape.



**RAJINIKANTH RAMADASS**  
Director – Sales & Marketing  
Novotel Jaipur Convention  
Centre & JECC

Rajinikanth Ramadass joins Novotel Jaipur Convention Centre and JECC as Director – Sales and Marketing. With 15 years of experience at Hyatt and Westin, Ramadass has a proven track record in revenue growth and market repositioning. He will spearhead the sales and revenue strategy for the integrated hotel and convention ecosystem, strengthening its position as a premier destination for MICE, exhibitions, and large-scale events in Rajasthan.



**FLAVIUS CHETTIAR**  
Director – Operations  
Bengaluru Marriott Hotel  
Whitefield

Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield has appointed Flavius Chettiar as its new Director – Operations. An alumnus of OCLD with 15 years of experience, Chettiar previously served as Director of F&B at The Westin Mumbai Garden City. In his new role, he will oversee hotel operations, ensuring seamless coordination across departments and strengthening service excellence benchmarks. He will focus on driving strategic growth initiatives in alignment with Marriott International's global standards.



**AMRUTA DESHPANDE**  
Cluster Manager – Revenue  
Fortune Hotels

Fortune Hotels, a member of the ITC Hotels Group, has appointed Amruta Deshpande as Cluster Manager – Revenue at its corporate headquarters. Bringing 15 years of analytical expertise from IHG and Radisson, Deshpande will oversee cluster revenue performance across the portfolio. Her mandate includes optimising pricing strategies, maximising profitability, and strengthening commercial outcomes. Her proven track record in portfolio revenue management makes her a vital addition.



**RIDHIMA BARHA**  
EAM – Rooms  
The Leela Mumbai

The Leela Mumbai has announced the appointment of Ridhima Barha as Executive Assistant Manager – Rooms. With over 16 years of hospitality experience at Marriott International, Trident, and Shangri-La, Barha is recognised for her structured, people-centric leadership. Returning to the property in a senior capacity, she will lead the Rooms Division to blend personalised, intuitive service with strategic revenue excellence, further strengthening the hotel's legacy of refined luxury and operational distinction.

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