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Foreword



JYOTHI VARMA
CONSULTING EDITOR

India brings scale & character to MICE

India's role in the global MICE landscape has shifted to an influential player. Over the past decade, the country has moved beyond simply hosting events to actively shaping how business gatherings are imagined, executed, and experienced. With world-class convention infrastructure, rapidly expanding aviation networks, and a hospitality sector known for its precision and warmth, India is increasingly positioned as a destination where global ideas can find both scale and substance.

India's diverse event landscape sets it apart, offering technology-driven metros, heritage-rich cities, and emerging tier II hubs. This breadth allows planners to create globally competitive events while incorporating distinctive cultural experiences and local identity, strengthening India's appeal for business tourism.

From sustainability frameworks and digital innovation to new experiential formats, Indian industry leaders are contributing to evolving practices across the sector. As international organisers increasingly seek destinations that combine capability with character, India has an opportunity to position itself as a strategic partner for global business events. However, significant challenges remain. Despite its diversity, scale, and cultural depth, India's inbound MICE growth continues to face barriers, including visa friction, inconsistencies in infrastructure and service standards, and perception gaps. Competing destinations such as Singapore, Australia, Thailand, and Malaysia have built their propositions around predictability, ease of access, and unified destination branding.

Over the next five years, India's corporate MICE segment is expected to grow strongly, driven by recovering corporate travel, new convention infrastructure, government initiatives, and demand for experiential and hybrid events. Corporates are likely to fuel this expansion through higher spending, increased event frequency, and stronger preference for domestic destinations.

> **"Corporate MICE segment is driven by infrastructure, investment, experiential demand, and travel recovery."**

Corporate MICE priorities are evolving, with greater focus on personalisation, hybrid participation, wellness, sustainability, AI-driven planning, budget optimisation, and measurable outcomes. The trend is towards smaller, smarter, and more experiential events, shifting the emphasis from scale alone to the quality, purpose, and business impact of each gathering.

Happy Reading!

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India's MICE opportunity
Learning from global leaders



Unlocking India's MICE potential requires sustained marketing, coordinated governance, financial support, destination branding, and strong international industry partnerships.

By **Deepa Sethi**

India's MICE industry stands at an inflection point. The country has world-class convention infrastructure, diverse destinations, competitive pricing, and a strong hospitality sector. Despite this, India continues to underperform in the global MICE and incentive travel market compared with destinations such as Singapore, Australia, Japan, the UAE, Oman, the UK, Germany, and France.



The issue is one of positioning, destination branding, international sales, industry coordination, incentive design, and, most importantly, sustained global marketing. While competing nations treat MICE as a strategic export industry backed by dedicated budgets, overseas representation, and unified national campaigns, India's approach remains fragmented and largely domestic.

For decades, India's tourism promotion has revolved around leisure travel, culture, heritage, spirituality, and medical tourism. MICE has often been treated as an extension of tourism rather than a distinct economic sector. Today's global buyers look for destinations that provide easy access, convention infrastructure, incentives, sustainability credentials, destination support, strong branding, simplified permissions, connectivity, international bidding support, and secure airport-to-airport services. Many competing countries have institutionalised these elements. India is still progressing along this journey.

WHERE DOES INDIA FALL SHORT

Absence of a strong global brand

Countries such as Singapore and Australia have built internationally recognised MICE brands over decades. Campaigns promoting 'Incredible India' remain largely tourism-centric rather than focused on business events. International event planners rarely associate India first with conferences or incentive travel.

Small international sales presence

Leading MICE destinations maintain sales offices or representation in major source markets, including the US, UK, Germany, France, Australia, and China, among others. Their teams actively bid for conventions, meet association executives, engage corporate buyers, participate in trade fairs, organise roadshows, and conduct familiarisation visits. India's overseas MICE representation remains comparatively limited.

Weak convention bidding

Major international congresses are won years before they take place. Countries invest heavily in bid preparation, financial support, political backing, convention ambassador programmes, and destination presentations. India has secured notable international events but lacks the consistency to be seen as a mature MICE destination.

One strategy, many stakeholders

Multiple stakeholders — the Ministry of Tourism, state tourism boards, convention promotion bureaux, convention centres, hotel chains, airlines, and industry associations — operate independently. Unlike Singapore or Dubai, India lacks a single empowered national body exclusively driving its MICE strategy.



Incentive travel is underdeveloped

Corporate incentive travel is among the fastest-growing segments globally. Competing destinations offer reward experiences, VIP treatment, customised itineraries, government support, and destination grants. India possesses extraordinary experiential diversity but has not packaged it aggressively for global incentive buyers.

Visa and EoB perception

Although India has significantly expanded e-visa facilities, corporate buyers continue to perceive visa procedures, customs processes, and event permissions as more complex than those of many competing destinations. Perception often influences destination selection as much as reality.

Safer experiences for women

While millions of women travel safely in India, concerns around harassment, personal security, mobility after dark, and public spaces can influence destination choices. For international planners, this perception can be particularly important when recommending India for women travellers or incentive groups. India needs to address this through visible safety measures, reliable transport and guide services, trained hospitality staff, clear support systems, and stronger communication with international buyers. Making women feel safe, confident, and welcome should be integral to India's global MICE proposition.

Limited marketing budgets

Many competing countries invest continuously in global destination marketing. India's MICE promotion tends to be event-driven rather than sustained, reducing visibility among international planners.

Global buyers seek destinations with seamless access, strong infrastructure, sustainability, branding, connectivity, simplified permissions, and more

INTERNATIONAL PRACTICES

Leading MICE destinations treat business events as a strategic economic development tool.

Despite their different positioning, they share common practices, including strong government–industry collaboration, dedicated convention bureaux, financial support for bidding and event hosting, international destination marketing, partnerships with industry and academic institutions, sustainability initiatives, sector-focused event attraction, ambassador and hosted buyer programmes, and promotion of their distinctive destination strengths. They have invested for years in building globally recognised business-events



India's advantage lies in scale, diversity, cost competitiveness, and intellectual capital

ecosystems. Their success is the result of deliberate policy, continuous promotion, and long-term engagement with international buyers.

What India can learn

India does not need to replicate another country's model. Its advantage lies in scale, diversity, cost competitiveness, and intellectual capital. However, it can adopt several proven strategies:

1. Create a dedicated national MICE brand that complements, but is distinct from, leisure tourism campaigns, with representation from central and state governments, convention centres, airlines, hotels, and industry associations

2. Expand international sales representation in priority source markets and maintain year-round engagement with planners and associations

3. Launch a competitive convention bidding fund which will offer financial and logistical support for international events

4. Develop a structured incentive travel programme packaging India's luxury trains, wellness retreats, wildlife, adventure, gastronomy, and cultural experiences for corporate travel

5. Empower city convention bureaux in Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Jaipur, Kochi, Ahmedabad, and Goa to market globally

6. Strengthen sustainability credentials by encouraging green-certified venues, carbon-conscious event planning, and measurable environmental reporting across India's event sector

7. Build an ambassador programme that mobilises Indian scientists, business leaders, and academics to attract more international congresses.

8. Use data-driven marketing to identify high-growth sectors and source markets, enabling targeted campaigns rather than broad promotional efforts

9. Align with national economic priorities such as technology, pharmaceuticals, renewable energy, space, fintech, manufacturing, healthcare, and the start-up ecosystem. **MT**



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From sun-kissed shores to cool mountain air, Malaysia brings together romance, luxury, and unforgettable experiences in one extraordinary destination. For couples planning a destination wedding, the country offers spectacular venues that can transform every celebration into a story worth remembering.

LEXIS HIBISCUS PORT DICKSON

Set beside the turquoise waters of the Straits of Malacca, Lexis Hibiscus Port Dickson pairs a dramatic beachfront setting with iconic overwater villas, elegant ballrooms, and intimate outdoor spaces. The resort is designed for couples who dream of exchanging vows with the sea as their backdrop, while giving guests the opportunity to experience a distinctive coastal escape. Its combination of accommodation, event spaces, and waterfront surroundings allows the wedding celebration and holiday experience to come together within one destination.

SHANGRI-LA TANJUNG ARU

For a classic celebration with refined luxury, Shangri-La Tanjung Aru, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, offers beautifully designed wedding spaces, polished service, and a sense of occasion. From intimate ceremonies to grand receptions, every detail is crafted to make the day feel truly exceptional. Its setting also gives couples and their guests an opportunity to combine the wedding with a memorable stay, making the celebration part of a wider Malaysian holiday.

WYNDHAM ION MAJESTIC

For couples seeking something distinctive, the mountains offer cool weather, panoramic rainforest surroundings, and an elevated celebration. Wyndham Ion Majestic brings contemporary luxury to Genting Highlands, with sophisticated event spaces suited to weddings and large celebrations. The highland setting provides a striking contrast to Malaysia's tropical shores, demonstrating the variety of settings available to couples looking to create a celebration with its own character.

WHY MALAYSIA?

Malaysia's appeal lies in its ability to bring different elements of a destination wedding together. Wedding celebrations can be paired with a memorable holiday, allowing couples, families, and guests to experience more of the destination before and after the main event. Beaches, rainforests, vibrant cities, luxury hospitality, and rich cultural experiences create opportunities for itineraries that extend well beyond the ceremony itself. This diversity also gives couples the freedom to shape celebrations around their preferred setting and style — from beachfront vows and elegant ballroom receptions to highland gatherings surrounded by rainforest landscapes.

Rather than treating the wedding as an isolated occasion, Malaysia offers the possibility of turning it into a complete journey shared with family and friends. Whether the celebration unfolds beside the sea, amid the cool mountain air, or within a luxury resort, the destination brings together distinctive settings, hospitality, and experiences. For couples and their guests, Malaysia offers more than a place to say "I do" — it creates the setting for a celebration, honeymoon, and family holiday to become part of one memorable experience. For wedding parties travelling together, that range can help create a programme with time for relaxation, dining, sightseeing, and shared experiences.

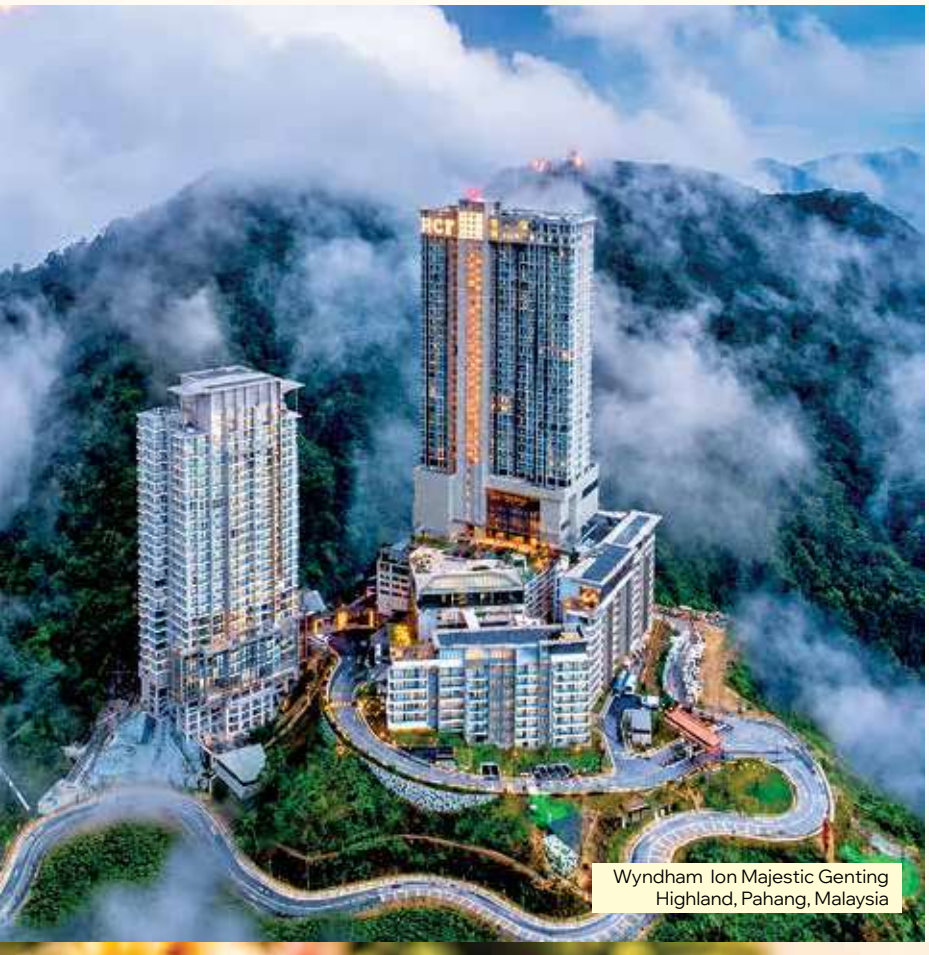
The result is a destination wedding that can feel both celebratory and immersive, giving guests reasons to remember not only the ceremony, but the journey surrounding it.

ADVERTORIAL





Lexis Hibiscus Port Dickson,
Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia



Wyndham Ion Majestic Genting
Highland, Pahang, Malaysia



Shangri-La Tanjung Aru,
Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia





(L-R) Dr Neeraj Kharwal, Harikishore S, Chander Mansharamani at FAITH Conclave 2026

State MICE bureaus for Incredible India 3.0

India's MICE ambitions are gaining fresh momentum as MoT, ICPB, and ITPO plan city bureaus, stronger collaboration, global marketing, and an Incredible India 3.0 campaign.

By **Nisha Verma**

While the industry stakeholders at the FAITH Conclave 2026 pressed for greater policy priority and more aggressive international promotion, the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) and India Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO) maintained that the focus has already shifted towards creating the institutional framework needed for India to compete globally.

City-level MICE bureaus

Responding to concerns that MICE has not received the attention it deserves despite its high economic value, **Harikishore S**, Joint Secretary, MoT, and Chairman, India Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB), said the Ministry is encouraging states to take ownership of the segment.

"Firstly, all the state governments should slowly and steadily recognise it. They should take ownership," he said. "We requested all states to have city-level MICE promotion bureaus in their states. My hope is that, by the end of this year, at least five city-level MICE promotion bureaus will come up. That will motivate other states as well."

The Ministry's strategy rests on two pillars — building an institutional structure through city-level bureaus while simultaneously extending policy support, facilitating participation in international trade fairs, and providing assistance for convention bidding.

> **"By the end of this year, at least five city-level MICE promotion bureaus will come up."**
>
> **— Harikishore S**

Bharat MICE Forum in the works

Dr Neeraj Kharwal, Managing Director, ITPO, revealed that ITPO and MoT have begun working jointly to build a national MICE ecosystem rather than focusing solely on Bharat Mandapam. "Our leadership decided that both ITPO

and MoT have to work together to take India to a position of leadership in the global MICE sector. So, we have already started working on those lines," he said. Kharwal announced that ITPO is working towards establishing the Greater Delhi NCR MICE Promotion Bureau, bringing together Bharat Mandapam, Yashobhoomi, and the India Expo Centre in Greater Noida under a collaborative platform.

He also confirmed that the long-awaited Bharat MICE Forum, postponed earlier this year, will now be organised in the coming months.



(L-R) Dr Neeraj Kharwal, Rajiv Mehra, Harikishore S, Chander Mansharamani

Government as catalyst, not driver

While discussions focused on incentives and policy support, Kharwal stressed that the industry's future would depend on collaboration rather than government intervention alone. He disclosed that ITPO has agreed to provide seed funding of ₹1 crore for the Greater Delhi NCR MICE Promotion Bureau, while broader policy decisions remain under deliberation. Highlighting the industry's maturity, Kharwal added, "This sector is quite vibrant and self-sustained. We are there as a catalyst and just to give a little nudge to those people who are still lagging behind."

> **"This sector is quite vibrant and self-sustained. We are there as catalysts to support it."**
>
> **— Dr Neeraj Kharwal**

G20 legacy offers a blueprint

Harikishore pointed to recent global events hosted across India as evidence that the country has already laid the foundation for sustained MICE growth. "When you think of the whole-of-government approach, G20 meetings were held in 60 cities. That promoted MICE a lot and created a lot of MICE infrastructure," he said. He added that BRICS meetings are now being distributed across multiple Indian cities, continuing the momentum generated by G20. On city-level bureaus, Harikishore cited Hyderabad as a model for other destinations.

Representatives from Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka are visiting the Hyderabad Convention Visitors Bureau to understand its structure. Hyderabad has successfully secured 40 international ICCA-standard conferences over the past decade after bidding for 120 events — demonstrating the value of organised destination promotion and coordinated bidding.



Funding and branding

Addressing industry concerns over financial support, Harikishore explained that government funding follows five-year Finance Commission cycles. "In that proposal, there is a lot of support for industry, including MICE, as well as a bidding fund," he said.

On branding, the strategy is still evolving, with MoT in the process of selecting a new brand agency. "We are thinking of a new Incredible India 3.0 campaign. Parallelly, we also need to have campaigns for niche tourism products. There is a question of promoting MICE tourism through Meet in India. We will finalise the strategy once our agency comes," he said.

Stronger global marketing needed

Moderating the discussion, **Chander Mansharamani**, Vice Chairman, ICPB, argued that MICE deserves greater visibility and investment, pointing to its contribution to global travel and significantly higher visitor spending.

He urged the government to move beyond infrastructure creation and focus on sustained international marketing. "We need to get into more aggressive marketing. We have done 60 events during G20. Now we have to encash on that and promote MICE in India."

The discussion concluded with Kharwal reiterating that government agencies remain open to industry participation as India works towards building a more coordinated, competitive, and globally visible MICE ecosystem. **MT**



India outpaces China in business travel growth

India is growing faster than China in business travel, but the bigger MICE opportunity lies in what is driving that growth.

By **Janice Alyosius**

What happens when the market that is not the biggest starts growing faster than the one that is? That is the story emerging from APAC's business travel landscape. India's business travel spending is expected to grow by 12.5 per cent in 2026, compared with 9.3 per cent for China, putting India among the region's fastest-growing markets. For MICE, the significance lies beyond the headline number: India's growth is being powered by domestic demand, investment, and services, potentially creating a broader base of demand for meetings and events.

The opportunity sits within an APAC business travel market expected to reach US$ 700.9 billion in 2026. China, Japan, South Korea, India, and Australia together are expected to account for more than US$ 620 billion, or over 40 per cent of global business travel spend. For the MICE industry, the question is how this





ELLE NG-DARMAWAN
SENIOR DIRECTOR (APAC)
GBTA

growing corporate movement converts into meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions.

India picks up the pace

Elle Ng-Darmawan, Senior Director (APAC), GBTA, said, "India has firmly established itself as a leading business travel market in APAC. While still smaller than China in absolute terms, India stands out for its exceptional growth — anticipated in 2026 to be around 12.5 per cent year-on-year, outpacing China's more modest 9.3 per cent growth."

India's position becomes particularly significant alongside other regional markets. Japan is forecast to grow by 15.3 per cent in 2026, South Korea by 13.3 per cent, Indonesia by 12.6 per cent, Australia by 9.7 per cent, and Singapore by 9 per cent. Southeast Asian markets, including Vietnam and Thailand, are also recording rapid growth. However, Ng-Darmawan points to a different foundation for India's expansion. "In India, growth is being fuelled by robust private consumption, public investment and strong services exports, reinforcing its momentum as one of the region's fastest-growing markets."

For MICE, the composition of this growth is important. A business travel market supported by domestic economic activity can generate demand across cities, sectors, and business networks, rather than depending predominantly on international corporate travel.



Buyer pool gets bigger

The sectors generating business travel also offer clues to the next sources of MICE demand. Manufacturing accounts for around 31 per cent of total business travel spend, followed by administrative and support services at 14 per cent. Construction, real estate,



and infrastructure are also significant contributors, supported by investment and project-led travel.

For suppliers, this expands the addressable market beyond conventional multinational clients. Infrastructure projects, manufacturing supply chains, real estate development, and services companies require meetings, site visits, partner engagement, conferences, and internal gatherings.

India's 12.5 per cent business travel growth is outpacing China, with domestic demand, investment, and services creating a wider opportunity

Digital shift accelerates

Technology is simultaneously reshaping the corporate travel journey. Across APAC, 78 per cent of business travellers are comfortable using AI-powered booking tools, while 72 per cent use mobile wallets, and 79 per cent have access to corporate cards.

"AI, automation and digital tools will play a central role in shaping the future of corporate travel management across APAC — a region already leading the way," Ng-Darmawan said. "Technologies such as agentic AI are already driving a more efficient and innovative sector."

She said AI is increasingly enabling more data-driven travel programmes, from reporting and forecasting to pricing insights and policy compliance. For operators, the implication could extend to more personalised attendee journeys and more efficient management of complex programmes.

Resilience enters agenda

The growth story is unfolding against a more uncertain operating environment. APAC industry confidence fell from 56 per cent in January to 46 per cent in April, while global optimism dropped from 59 per cent to 41 per cent.

"Geopolitical tensions and economic pressures are nevertheless key challenges that could impact sector growth across the region in the coming years. Their knock-on effects — from rising fuel costs to flight disruptions — are already impacting industry confidence," Ng-Darmawan said. Companies are responding with more itinerary changes, rerouting and the relocation or cancellation of meetings. At the same time, sustainability and traveller wellbeing are becoming more important, with organisations looking at lower-carbon options and stronger duty-of-care systems.

For India's MICE industry, the opportunity in the second half of 2026 is therefore not simply that business travel is growing. The more important shift is the changing composition of that demand — domestic, investment-led and increasingly technology-enabled — giving MICE players an opportunity to move beyond traditional corporate buyers and build more relevant, flexible, and experience-led programmes. **MT**

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States battle for MICE

Dedicated MICE bureaus, new convention facilities, and investment incentives are reshaping how Indian states prepare to compete for international business events and incentive programmes.

By **Janice Alyosius**

India's MICE ambitions are moving into a more structured phase. The Ministry of Tourism has circulated guidelines to States and Union Territories for setting up City MICE Promotion Bureaus and has framed a National Strategy and Roadmap around six priorities — institutional support, ecosystem development, competitiveness, ease of doing business, international marketing, and skills. The Centre has also introduced 'Meet in India' under the Incredible India campaign and developed a Digital MICE Catalogue covering infrastructure and facilities across more than 60 cities that hosted G20 meetings.



The timing is significant. India has spent the past few years adding large convention and exhibition capacity, but the global MICE market demands more than impressive venues. Cities need room inventory, connectivity, destination marketing, bid support, trained manpower, and a mechanism that can bring government and private stakeholders together. States are now responding with their own models — from Maharashtra's convention bureau and Chennai's proposed MICE promotion bureau to Telangana's policy-led incentives and Odisha's decision to make MICE a mission-mode tourism product.

Building destination muscle

Maharashtra has perhaps one of the clearest institutional models. Announced at IMEX Frankfurt in May 2025, the Maharashtra Convention Bureau brings government and industry together,



SANJAY KHANDARE
ADDITIONAL CHIEF SECRETARY (TOURISM)
GOVERNMENT OF MAHARASHTRA

City MICE bureaus are taking shape as India builds institutional muscle beyond convention infrastructure alone

with an initial focus on the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, Pune, Nashik, Nagpur, and Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar. Its mandate covers coordination with international and domestic organisers, event facilitation, ease of doing business, destination promotion, and skill development. **Sanjay Khandare**, Additional Chief Secretary (Tourism), Government of Maharashtra, said, "Maharashtra is committed to creating a world-class ecosystem for meetings, conferences, conventions, and exhibitions. Through the Maharashtra Convention Bureau, we are providing organisers with a single point of facilitation and a collaborative platform that makes planning and hosting events easier."

The state is also broadening its physical MICE footprint. **Tanuja Pandey**, Advisor and Senior Consultant, Maharashtra Tourism and Convention Bureau, said demand is coming from tourism and hospitality, fintech, manufacturing, technology, healthcare, energy, infrastructure, and other services. She also pointed to WAVES, the World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit, held in Mumbai every alternate year.

Mumbai already has Jio World Convention Centre in BKC, NESCO in Goregaon, DOME in Worli, and CIDCO in Navi Mumbai. Pandey said the city also has conference facilities in five-star hotels that can host events ranging from 50 to 1,000 guests, while Maharashtra has hotel inventory across price segments in key cities.

The next phase is not limited to Mumbai. "In the pipeline, we also have modern exhibition and convention facilities of global scale coming up in Pune, Kolhapur, Nashik, and Nagpur that will further strengthen the MICE ecosystem," Pandey said. The state is also moving ahead with a proposed MICE project at Hatani and Valti in Buldhana district. In August, Shambhuraj Desai, Minister of Tourism, Government of Maharashtra, reviewed the project and directed officials to transfer the required land to the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation and prepare the master plan, architectural design, DPR, and cost estimates.

Infrastructure meets incentives

Telangana is approaching MICE through its five-year Tourism Policy 2025–2030, which identifies MICE as one of the state's priority tourism frameworks. The policy describes Hyderabad as an established business tourism and MICE destination, supported by HICC, HITEX, and a world-class airport, and sets out the objective of consolidating Hyderabad as a premier global MICE destination.

The policy's MICE strategy is built around four clear moves. New MICE infrastructure is to be developed





TANUJA PANDEY
ADVISOR AND SENIOR CONSULTANT
MAHARASHTRA TOURISM AND CONVENTION BUREAU

through private-sector participation, with appropriate incentives. Telangana plans to promote the state aggressively for global events, particularly during lean tourism seasons. New MICE and destination-wedding locations are to be identified at proposed Special Tourism Areas, including Vikarabad, Nagarjuna Sagar, and Yadagirigutta, with world-class event venues and accommodation. The Hyderabad Convention Visitors Bureau is also to be strengthened for marketing and promotion.

The policy links this MICE expansion with a wider accommodation push. It proposes at least 5,000 additional rooms in Special Tourism Areas and another 10,000 rooms in the Telangana Core Urban Region.Importantly for investors, the policy establishes incentives based on project size and location. Projects are categorised from micro and small enterprises to iconic projects, with iconic projects defined as those involving investment above ₹500 crore, more than 2,000 direct jobs, or strategic importance. The policy provides incentives including capital investment subsidies for specified eligible tourism projects, 50 per cent reimbursement of net State GST for five years, special incentives for Special Tourism Areas and iconic projects, and reimbursement of 50 per cent of eligible land conversion and registration charges, subject to the policy's conditions and caps.

Telangana is also linking infrastructure with destination marketing. Its policy proposes professional marketing agencies, a comprehensive Telangana Tourism portal, participation in international tourism forums and travel marts, and stronger outreach to international markets and the Telugu diaspora. That makes Telangana's approach broader than simply adding convention space — it combines MICE infrastructure, investment incentives, hotel capacity, destination development, and international promotion.

Cities sharpen focus

Tamil Nadu is taking the city-level route recommended by the national MICE strategy. **S Rajesh Kumar**, Tourism Minister, Government of Tamil Nadu, announced the establishment of a Chennai MICE Promotion Bureau while presenting the Tourism Department's demands for grants.

The proposed bureau is intended to give Chennai a dedicated mechanism to promote meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions, and bring hotels, convention venues, PCOs, DMCs, airlines, and transport operators into a more coordinated destination proposition. The initiative sits within a wider tourism infrastructure programme. Tamil Nadu has proposed ₹2 crore for technical feasibility

Telangana combines MICE infra with investment incentives, new hotel capacity, destination development, and global marketing



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S RAJESH KUMAR
TOURISM MINISTER
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studies for cruise and ferry routes, ₹48 crore for tourism development across Kanniyakumari, Tiruppur, Krishnagiri, and Erode, and another ₹30 crore for tourism infrastructure. ₹1 crore has also been earmarked for tourism-related training covering guides, hotel workers, tourism entrepreneurs, travel agents, and lifeguards.

The state recorded 30.80 crore domestic tourist arrivals in 2024, rising to 36.47 crore in 2025, according to the Tourism Minister. For Chennai, the dedicated bureau provides a mechanism to convert the city's existing corporate and industrial base into a more coordinated business-events proposition for global markets.

Odisha is taking a different but complementary route by embedding MICE within its overall tourism product strategy. The Odisha Tourism Policy 2022, as amended in 2026, lists MICE tourism among the products to be promoted in mission mode, alongside beach, eco, Buddhist, heritage, religious, caravan, health and wellness, cruise, sand art, and adventure tourism.

The policy's ambition is wider than event numbers. Odisha is targeting five crore domestic tourist arrivals and seven lakh foreign tourist arrivals annually by 2047, while seeking to increase the average length of stay from three to five days for domestic tourists and from nine to 12 days for foreign tourists. It also aims to expand star-category accommodation to 15,000 rooms by 2036 and 25,000 by 2047.

For MICE, that matters because the state is effectively linking business events with the larger tourism ecosystem

International bidding is driving greater coordination between venues, hotels, and promotional bodies through unified pitches







BARUN GUPTA
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
INDEVA HOTELS AND RESORTS

— accommodation, experiences, and infrastructure — rather than treating conferences as an isolated product. Bhubaneswar already has experience in hosting large events, including the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention in January 2025, while Odisha's wider tourism programme is increasingly focused on destination branding and global positioning.

Winning global bids

The infrastructure question is only one part of the equation. Hotels increasingly find themselves involved in a destination's international bidding proposition and strategy. **Barun Gupta**, Chief Operating Officer, Indeva Hotels and Resorts (A Unit of India Exposition Mart Limited — IEML), described India's convention infrastructure expansion as a "transitional phase". "India has recently launched several magnificent, world-class mega-venues that have significantly elevated our global standing. Concurrently, the hospitality sector is pacing itself to support these massive capacities. Rather than an imbalance, I view it as a staggered development cycle," Gupta said.

He identified the National Capital Region and emerging mega-venue locations as areas where additional contiguous hotel inventory will be particularly important. Large international conventions can otherwise require delegates to be distributed across several properties, creating challenges around transport, security, pricing, and service consistency. In Greater Noida, ExpoInn Suites & Convention, Indeva's flagship MICE property adjacent to India Expo Centre & Mart, has 136 rooms and event spaces of up to 135,000 sq ft.

Gupta said its business is largely domestic at present, driven by corporates, associations, exhibitions, government, and institutional groups, but international exhibitors and delegates are becoming an increasingly important opportunity. The wider Indeva portfolio includes ExpoInn Suites & Convention, Plume Hotels, The Mor Stays, IRISE Hotels, and Śāraṅga Retreats. Gupta said the portfolio is expected to reach 11 signed hotels by the end of 2026. The nature of MICE demand is also changing. "The MICE segment is increasingly shifting from simply generating room nights to creating complete event experiences," Gupta said, pointing to wellness programmes, culinary experiences, spiritual conventions, sporting events, exhibitions, and large celebrations.

International bidding is where coordination becomes critical. Gupta said he has seen a stronger "Team India" approach emerging among venue operators, hotels, and promotional bodies working with the India Convention Promotion Bureau. "Venue operators, hoteliers, and promotional bodies are increasingly presenting unified pitches to global associations," he said.

He believes a more comprehensive financial subvention framework and integrated digital bidding platforms could further strengthen India's proposition by allowing international organisers to assess a destination's city-wide capabilities more easily. That requirement aligns with the Centre's own six-pillar strategy.

The Ministry's 'Meet in India' sub-brand positions India around connectivity, infrastructure, knowledge and tourism attractions, while the Digital MICE Catalogue gives planners a consolidated view of more than 60 cities that hosted G20 meetings. India's MICE ecosystem is moving beyond convention infrastructure towards coordinated destination strategies, with stronger promotion, connectivity, incentives, hotels and experiences.

The next test is converting this support into international bids, confirmed events and wider travel trade business globally. **MT**

Corporate travel enters tougher terrain



Getting employees from A to B is no longer straightforward, with corporate travel leaders flagging higher costs, fewer choices, disrupted routes, and safety concerns.

By **Janice Alyosius**

The corporate travel conversation is shifting from convenience to resilience, as companies contend with weaker flight options, rising airfares, connectivity gaps and growing uncertainty around employee travel. For travel managers, the challenge is no longer simply getting employees from one city to another — it is ensuring that travel remains practical, predictable, and safe. That pressure is particularly visible in international travel, where geopolitical disruptions are reducing routing options and airline choices.



JOYSON PINTO
LEADER – FACILITIES AND ADMINISTRATION, **ALTIMETRIK**

NDC needs consistent content and integration across booking systems to deliver genuine transparency for corporates

At the same time, technology is changing how companies buy air travel, with NDC offering greater content and flexibility but leaving corporates to navigate fragmented systems and incomplete visibility. The three corporate travel leaders point to a market where cost, connectivity, technology, and duty of care are increasingly interconnected.



SUMIT MALHOTRA
SENIOR DIRECTOR – GLOBAL TRAVEL
COFORGE



Connectivity remains critical

For companies managing frequent business travel, flight schedules can be as important as airfare. Limited frequency on key routes can force employees to choose between sacrificing sleep for an early flight or losing a working day by travelling later.

Joyson Pinto, Leader – Facilities and Administration, Altimetrik, said connectivity remains a practical challenge across cities. "The first thing that you face is the frequency of the flights to that particular city from the metro it is coming from. Either you have to take early morning flights, or you have to take late evening flights," he said.

The issue extends beyond domestic connectivity. International travel is becoming more difficult when geopolitical developments affect established routes and airline networks.

Limited flight options and rising airfares are making advance planning increasingly important for business travellers



Pinto noted that reduced options can leave corporate travellers dependent on a smaller group of carriers, particularly when some traditional routes or hubs become difficult to use.

"The first impact that has happened is the cost. Everybody's costs have drastically gone up because options are fewer, and airlines know that at any cost you'll come to them," Pinto said. He added that reduced frequency is another concern, making advance planning increasingly important for employees travelling regularly.

For companies, this means travel policies may need to account for more than the lowest available fare. Flight timing, routing, and the employee's ability to arrive rested and ready to work are becoming part of the overall cost equation.

NDC faces integration test

Technology is another area where corporate travel is undergoing a significant transition. NDC is intended to give airlines greater control over how fares, ancillary services, and other content are distributed, but corporate buyers are still dealing with fragmented availability across booking channels.

Sumit Malhotra, Senior Director – Global Travel, Coforge, said NDC has an important role to play in improving cost-effectiveness, but adoption remains at an early stage. "NDC plays a very important role these days. It is still a new thing, I would say, still a long way to go. But yes, it will be a very important and crucial factor in terms of cost-effectiveness," he said.





SHESHA SIMHAN
SENIOR MANAGER – ADMINISTRATION
TITAN COMPANY

Coforge has already contracted with Singapore Airlines to access NDC fares, but Malhotra pointed to a larger industry gap: content needs to be available consistently across the systems corporates already use. "It is actually fragmented right now and, as I said, it is too early. Airlines are sharing very selective content. Full content should be available through NDC. Then it will make more sense, and it should be available on the centralised reservation systems and the centralised booking tools as well, which is not available right now," he said.

That lack of integration has implications for transparency. A corporate traveller may see one set of fares through a traditional booking environment and another through an airline's NDC channel, making it harder for travel managers to establish whether their programme is delivering the best available option.

Servicing cannot lag

The NDC transition also raises a less visible but important question: what happens after the ticket is booked? For corporate travellers, changes, cancellations, refunds, and reissues are routine requirements, particularly when schedules change or business plans shift at short notice.

Malhotra stressed that the technology needs to mature beyond fare distribution. "The transparency is still missing where everything can be booked together," he said, underlining the need for a more integrated booking environment.

The challenge is particularly relevant for large corporate programmes, where travel managers need consistency between booking, policy controls, and post-booking servicing. If different channels provide different levels of functionality, the efficiency gains promised by NDC can quickly become operational complications.

The industry is therefore moving towards a model in which airlines, TMCs, online booking tools, and technology providers need to work together rather than treating distribution as a standalone airline function.

Duty of care grows

For **Shesha Simhan**, Senior Manager – Administration, Titan Company, the biggest shift is taking place around travel risk. As geopolitical tensions, climate events, and other disruptions become more difficult to predict, travel advisories are becoming an essential part of corporate decision-making. "Travel advisory will become a part and parcel now with each person travelling," Shesha said. "It has become now a very necessary thing."

For corporate travel teams, the advisory is not simply about whether a destination is safe. It can influence routing, flight availability, employee movement, and whether a journey should take place at all.

Shesha added that the advisories can help companies understand developments at a destination, including geopolitical issues and climate-related risks. The financial impact can also be significant. "Definitely there is an impact in terms of cost and time — both for them and for an employee," he said.

Aircraft may have to avoid regular routes, resulting in diversions, higher fuel consumption, and longer travel times. That can translate into higher fares, as well as more productive hours lost in transit.

For corporate travel managers, the result is a more complex decision matrix. Price remains important, but it now sits alongside connectivity, route resilience, technology integration, and employee safety. As these pressures converge, the corporate travel programme is increasingly becoming a business continuity tool rather than simply a mechanism for booking trips. **MT**

Travel advisories are becoming essential as geopolitical and climate disruptions reshape corporate travel decision-making

Travel assistance becomes essential for every journey

As travel disruptions become increasingly common, travellers are looking beyond financial reimbursement towards immediate assistance that offers reassurance, convenience, and support throughout their journey.



Travel disruptions are no longer exceptional. Delayed flights, mishandled baggage, missed connections, and long waits have increasingly become part of the travel experience. According to a recent Global Airline Performance Report, more than 25 million bags were reported mishandled globally, while over 35 per cent of flights faced delays exceeding 60 minutes.

While travel demand has rebounded strongly post-pandemic, travellers increasingly expect support that goes beyond financial reimbursement. Insurance may compensate for a loss, but it does not necessarily provide immediate assistance when luggage goes missing or a traveller is left waiting at an airport following a prolonged delay.

Recognising this shift, ASEGO has introduced ASEGO BOLT, a travel assistance bundle combining real-time baggage tracking with lounge access during flight delays. The proposition is designed to provide travellers with practical support at two common points of disruption — baggage mishandling and flight delays. The baggage assistance feature enables global, real-time tracking across airlines and routes. If checked-in luggage is not recovered within 96 hours, travellers are eligible for guaranteed compensation of up to ₹66,000 per bag, covering up to two checked-in bags.

For flight disruptions, BOLT automatically activates premium lounge access when a flight is delayed by more than 60 minutes. Coverage extends across up to four flight segments during a single trip, with access to more than 1,300 lounges across over 100 countries.

ASEGO BOLT is designed to provide travellers with practical support in case of baggage mishandling and flight delays

For travel advisors and booking partners, such services also signal a broader change in how travel protection is being positioned. Assistance is increasingly moving from an optional add-on towards becoming part of the overall travel experience — particularly as customers seek greater certainty, convenience, and support throughout their journeys. This creates an opportunity for travel agents to move beyond selling flights, hotels, and destinations to addressing potential disruption across the travel cycle. Real-time assistance can help agents offer a more comprehensive proposition.

Whether for a family holiday, corporate itinerary, or solo international journey, solutions such as BOLT reflect a wider industry shift — from simply insuring a trip to supporting travellers while they are actually travelling. **MT**

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Japan tempts corporates beyond the usual destinations

For years, traditional markets have dominated India's outbound MICE business. Today, however, Japan is steadily rewriting that playbook as Indian corporates increasingly favour experience-led incentive programmes.

By **Shreya Bansal**

The shift reflects a broader change in corporate travel priorities. Rather than choosing destinations solely on cost, companies are investing in experiences that strengthen employee engagement, reward top performers and create lasting brand value.

From value to experience

Industry stakeholders say the trend has accelerated over the past three years, supported by improved air connectivity, the favourable Japanese yen, growing destination awareness and demand for differentiated corporate experiences. The **Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO), New Delhi** said, "Indian MICE groups typically comprise 100-200 delegates, stay for around five nights and spend nearly ₹2.5 lakh per traveller."

Sandeep Bhardwaj, Managing Director, Aeronet Holidays, believes Japan's appeal extends far beyond currency advantages. "Today's corporate travellers are looking for destinations that inspire, motivate and leave a lasting impression. Japan offers exactly that, making it one of the fastest-growing choices for high-value incentive travel," he says.

Bhardwaj notes that Indian corporates have shifted from prioritising affordability to seeking exclusivity, cultural immersion, seamless execution and meaningful employee recognition. While the weaker yen has improved value for money, he adds that Japan's world-





SANDEEP BHARDWAJ
MANAGING DIRECTOR
AERONET HOLIDAYS

Indian corporates have shifted from prioritising affordability to seeking cultural immersion, seamless execution, and meaningful employee recognition.

class infrastructure, safety, hospitality and premium experiences are the real drivers sustaining demand.

Beyond Tokyo and Osaka

The evolution is also changing how itineraries are designed. JNTO observes that Indian groups are no longer satisfied with traditional sightseeing. Instead, they increasingly seek hands-on cultural engagements such as tea ceremonies, Noh theatre performances, karate workshops, sushi-making sessions, and exclusive venue buyouts that combine authentic Japanese heritage with modern event infrastructure.

Travellers are also venturing beyond Tokyo and Osaka to destinations including Hokkaido, Hiroshima and the Alpine Route, encouraged by Japan's efficient transport network, extensive hotel options, and the availability of more than 5,000 Indian restaurants across the country. For tour operators, this signals a growing demand for customised programmes that blend meetings with memorable local experiences. The country's extensive Shinkansen network further enables multi-city incentive programmes without sacrificing efficiency, allowing planners to combine business events with diverse regional experiences.

Incentives get more immersive

Gajesh Giridhar, Chairman, Network of Indian MICE Agents (NIMA), says enquiries for Japan have risen significantly as corporates look beyond familiar destinations. "Earlier, companies mostly preferred Thailand, Dubai, or Singapore. Now they are looking for something new, and Japan has become one of the top choices," he says, attributing the rise to improved connectivity and stronger destination awareness.

Giridhar adds that today's incentive groups expect far more than meetings. They increasingly request bullet train journeys, traditional Japanese attire, tea ceremonies, sushi-making workshops, visits to Mt Fuji, gala dinners and team-building activities rooted in local culture, experiences that create stronger emotional connections among employees.

Japan is usually seen by Indians as a non-conventional, safe, and a hospitable destination, says **Neha Rai**,



GAJESH GIRIDHAR
CHAIRMAN, **NETWORK OF INDIAN MICE AGENTS (NIMA)**

Today's incentive groups seek immersive cultural experiences, from bullet train journeys and tea ceremonies to Mount Fuji visits and gala dinners.



NEHA RAI
DIRECTOR, **LOTUS TRANS TRAVEL PVT LTD**

The corporates come with a budget of up to ₹1.7 lakh per person with limited activities. This number may go up if some more activities get added.

Director, Lotus Trans Travel Pvt Ltd She highlighted that tourists have now started seeking popular activities featured on Instagram during their Japan tour. "Most corporate stays are six to eight days long, which includes their meeting duration, combined with leisure. The corporates come with a budget up to ₹1.7 lakh per person with limited activities. This number may go up if some more activities get added." While there are no direct government incentives, Rai noted that they are able to get about 1 per cent off for every 15 pax.

A premium play for Indian MICE

As India's outbound MICE market matures, Japan's positioning is evolving from an aspirational destination to a strategic incentive choice. For travel trade partners, the opportunity now lies not in competing on price but in designing high-value, experience-rich programmes that deliver measurable engagement for corporate clients. In an increasingly competitive MICE landscape, Japan appears well placed to become the benchmark for premium incentive travel from India. **MT**

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Consumer AI is changing business travel behaviour



As technology reshapes business travel, employees are increasingly turning to consumer tools when approved systems create friction. Brett Wheeldon, VP – Solution Advisory – APAC, SAP Concur, examines the risks — and what this behaviour reveals about employee experience.

Shadow IT is not a new challenge, but its impact is becoming harder to ignore. It can expose organisations to security, financial, and regulatory risks. The growth of consumer AI adds another dimension: WalkMe reports that 78 per cent of employees admit to using unapproved AI systems at work. For leaders, the important question is not only how to stop this behaviour, but what the behaviour tells us about the employee experience.

Friction drives behaviour

In my experience, employees rarely bypass approved tools simply to break policy. They do it when the approved path feels slower, less intuitive, or less useful than the alternatives available to them. Friction can appear anywhere in the journey. Hotel content may load

Employees bypass approved tools when alternatives feel faster, simpler, more intuitive, or more useful for their needs



BRETT WHEELDON
VP – SOLUTION ADVISORY – APAC
SAP CONCUR

slowly. A traveller may be unable to save preferred properties, use a familiar payment method, or retain loyalty benefits. Others may believe that consumer sites offer lower fares or a broader range of options. Every additional point of friction increases the likelihood that an employee will abandon the authorised process.

Hidden costs of going off

When bookings and expenses move outside approved systems, the organisation loses more than transaction visibility. These four areas deserve particular attention:

- **Direct fraud and reimbursement leakage:** Fake receipts, duplicate claims, and inflated expenses are harder to identify when activity is scattered across disconnected channels.
- **Rogue suppliers and illegitimate bookings:** Employees may unknowingly use fraudulent sites or unverified vendors, increasing the risk of financial loss and chargebacks.
- **Missed commercial value:** Off-channel bookings can prevent organisations from using negotiated rates, preferred suppliers, and corporate discounts.
- **Administrative complexity:** Manual processing, fragmented data, and reconciliation across platforms add effort for finance and travel teams.

Shadow AI raises the stakes

Consumer AI can make travel planning faster, but convenience can obscure risk. Information may be outdated. Recommendations may steer employees away from preferred suppliers and policy-compliant options. Company information or travel itineraries enter unmanaged services.

Receipt scanning shows this. Consumer apps may upload receipt images to third-party cloud storage. Receipts can contain personal details, transaction data, and travel patterns. A shortcut can create data-governance and traveller-safety concerns. Shadow IT should be treated as both a risk and a diagnostic signal. It shows where governance is weak, but it also reveals where the employee experience is not keeping pace with expectations. **MT**

(The views expressed in the article are those of the contributor in his personal capacity.)





(L-R) Chander Mansharmani, Senthil Gopinath, Kapil Mishra, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Jawed Ashraf, Neeraj Kharwal, Suneel Anchipaka, and Neeraj Dhawan

Connecting the dots beyond convention halls

With world-class venues now in place, India's next MICE challenge is building connected city ecosystems that combine bidding, data, technology, marketing, and experiences globally.

By **Shreya Bansal**

India's MICE ambitions are now entering a new phase. With convention infrastructure expanding, connectivity improving, and international business events gaining prominence, the focus is shifting from simply creating capacity to building an ecosystem capable of consistently attracting and delivering major global conferences, congresses, incentives, and exhibitions.

The challenge is to connect cities, governments, hotels, professional conference organisers (PCOs), convention centres, airports, and destination stakeholders into coordinated networks. **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, Union Minister for Culture and Tourism, has called for precisely this shift — arguing that India must move beyond infrastructure creation and develop complete, professionally driven ecosystems to compete globally.



GAJENDRA SINGH SHEKHAWAT
UNION MINISTER FOR CULTURE AND TOURISM



Speaking at the 15th Conventions India Conclave, Shekhawat noted that India's opportunity extends well beyond convention centres. For him, the sector represents a convergence of the country's knowledge, innovation, experience, and



(L-R) Rohit Khosla, KB Kachru, Subhash Goyal, and Runeep Sangla

India ranks 26th globally despite hosting more than 3,300 international meetings across five decades already

creative economies. "That is why the time has come to let MICE be seen as a segment of tourism, as an economic opportunity," Shekhawat said.

He described India's convention infrastructure as a symbol of the country's growing confidence and global ambition, pointing to the development of airports, highways, expressways, railways, metro systems, waterways, and world-class convention centres. Bharat Mandapam, NMACC Mumbai, and other venues, he said, have collectively transformed India's proposition before the global market.

But the Minister's larger message was that infrastructure can only provide the foundation. "Therefore, the next step of India's MICE journey is not infrastructure creation. We have to move forward from infrastructure towards a complete ecosystem," Shekhawat said.







Capacity to competition

For Shekhawat, India's priority is developing professionally driven ecosystems at the city level. He cited Hyderabad as a model, where the



(L-R) Anju Gomez, Premjit Lal, Suneel Anchipaka, Arun Srivastava, and Dr Yudhbir Singh



SENTHIL GOPINATH
CEO, **INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS AND CONVENTION ASSOCIATION (ICCA)**



(L-R) Subhash Goyal, Yudhbir Singh, and KB Kachru

City convention bureaus could become marketing engines, bringing venues, hotels, airports, governments, and PCOs together

government, convention centres, hotels, hospitality players, the airport, PCOs, and other stakeholders have worked together through a convention bureau to build the destination's international profile. He believes this approach can be replicated across the country, extending the business-events map beyond established centres. Mumbai, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, Udaipur, and Jaipur, alongside tier-II destinations from Kochi to Srinagar, could potentially develop organised ecosystems.

"Every city needs to be set up with a professionally empowered, industry-driven city convention bureau," Shekhawat said. "It should become the marketing engine of the city," he said, adding that it should function as 'the MICE war room of the city'.



(L-R) Chander Mansharmani, Kapil Mishra, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, and Suneel Anchipaka

For planners and operators, this could eventually create a much wider destination portfolio, with cities developing specialised propositions around conferences, incentives, international weddings, exhibitions, and corporate events.

The global opportunity

The need for such an ecosystem was reinforced by **Senthil Gopinath**, CEO, International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), who placed India's opportunity against the scale of the global business-events industry.

Gopinath highlighted the sector's economic contribution, citing US$ 2.8 trillion in global business sales, 27.5 million jobs, and a US$ 1.6 trillion contribution to global GDP. Business events, he noted, account for 25 per cent of global tourism — underlining why governments and destinations increasingly view the sector as an economic driver rather than simply another tourism segment.

"What business events truly represent are catalysts for knowledge transfer, collaboration, and measurable impact," Gopinath said. India, according to Gopinath, already has a substantial base on which to build.

He highlighted 1,446 international association meetings with India relevance and an estimated US$ 1.2 billion economic impact. Despite having hosted more than 3,300 meetings over five decades, India currently ranks 26th globally — leaving considerable room for growth.

One area he believes could



immediately strengthen India's position is data. "The calculation is all based on data collection. Imagine if India collects data in a centralised format — coming to number one won't take much longer," Gopinath said. He urged the India Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB), tourism boards, Delhi Tourism, and the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) to share data to better demonstrate India's existing business-events activity to the international market.

Technology meets people

Gopinath also brought technology into the conversation, particularly artificial intelligence (AI). With 94 per cent of business leaders seeing AI as a driver of change and 50 per cent already using generative AI for agenda building and related tasks, he argued that technology should enhance rather than replace the human side of meetings.

"AI doesn't replace planners; it enhances human connection, helping us create high-value, memorable meetings while making our jobs a little easier and less chaotic," he said.

He pointed to applications including multilingual AI delegate assistance, AI-powered delegate and exhibitor matching, digital twins of venues, immersive and hybrid participation, and sustainability and carbon-accounting technologies. Technology, however, cannot substitute for the relationships underpinning international association meetings. "No algorithm builds trust between medical association boards and a destination it has never worked with before," Gopinath said, reinforcing the continuing importance of face-to-face engagement.

Taking the pitch global

The institutional roadmap was further outlined by **Jawed Ashraf**, Chairman, India Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO), who emphasised that India's competitive proposition lies not only inside its convention venues, but also in the destination experience surrounding



(L-R) Anil Kalsi, KB Kachru, Runeep Sangha, Rohit Khosla

ITPO plans international roadshows, eight overseas trade-fair initiatives, and around 20 offices across global markets





JAWED ASHRAF
CHAIRMAN, **INDIA TRADE PROMOTION ORGANISATION (ITPO)**

Centralised event data could strengthen India's global ranking and demonstrate its true business-events potential internationally

them. "When it comes to MICE destinations, it isn't what you do inside convention centres, but what you experience outside them that matters just as much," Ashraf said.

He pointed to India's combination of organisational efficiency, hospitality, heritage, and culture as a major advantage when competing for international events.

Drawing on his experience in France and Singapore, Ashraf stressed the importance of coordination among city governments, the wider industry, and destination-promotion bodies. "There is extraordinary centralised coordination between the city, government, and the entire industry. There is no substitute for that," he said. ITPO is now looking to support this approach through targeted promotion.

Ashraf said the organisation had concluded an MoU with MoT to invest in and support eight overseas trade fairs, taking the lead on space booking, branding, and value-added services. ITPO also plans roadshows across international markets. Meanwhile, ITPO is expanding its presence.

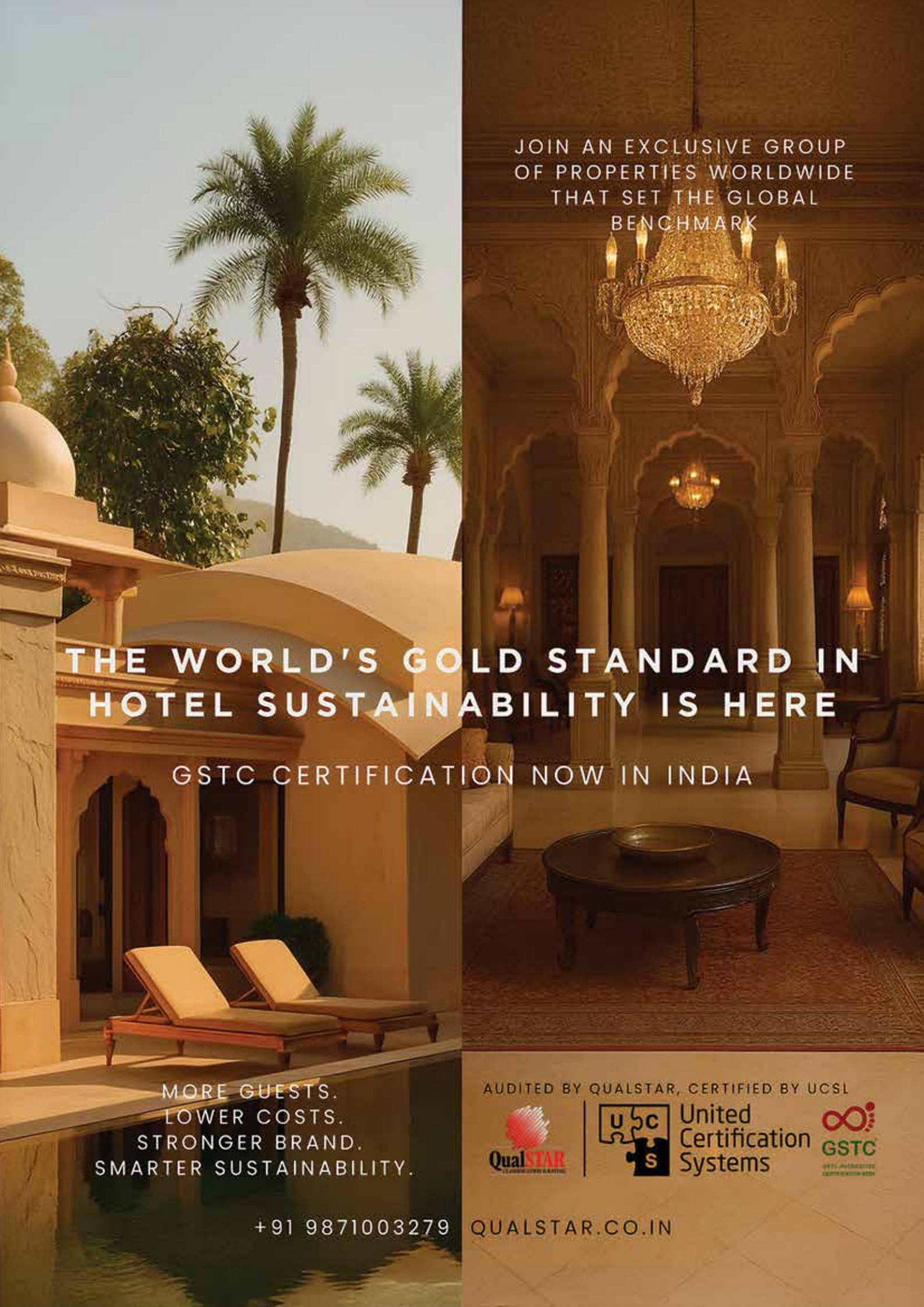
Plans include a second phase of development at Bharat Mandapam, additional convention facilities, hotels, and food outlets, alongside developments in Bengaluru and Chennai. It is also exploring infrastructure and schemes in other cities and plans to establish around 20 overseas offices to support trade and tourism-related business. For Delhi–NCR, Ashraf outlined the possibility of a city-centric convention promotion bureau bringing airlines, hotels, transporters, venues, government agencies, and the wider industry together.

Experience is the edge

Taken together, the three perspectives point towards a common direction: India's opportunity is no longer primarily about just adding venues. It is now about connecting infrastructure, data, technology, destination marketing, convention bureaus, global bidding, and hospitality into one competitive proposition.

For travel agents, tour operators, PCOs, and MICE specialists, this could mean a broader and more sophisticated Indian product to sell — one where the convention is only the starting point and the destination itself becomes an integral part of the programme. Shekhawat believes India's greatest advantage ultimately lies in that experience. "If someone comes to India for a conference or convention, it is not only because of the greatness or grandeur of these convention centres. When someone comes to India for a convention, they come for an experience of India."

The task ahead, therefore, is to make that experience easier to discover, bid for, package, promote, and deliver. Building the systems required to do so will be the key to moving from having the capacity to host global events to possessing the competitiveness required to lead. **MT**



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Melbourne tailors MICE experiences for Indian groups

With India now Melbourne's second-largest incentive market, the city is tailoring venues, experiences, cuisine, and regional itineraries to attract more Indian MICE groups.

By **Hazel Jain**

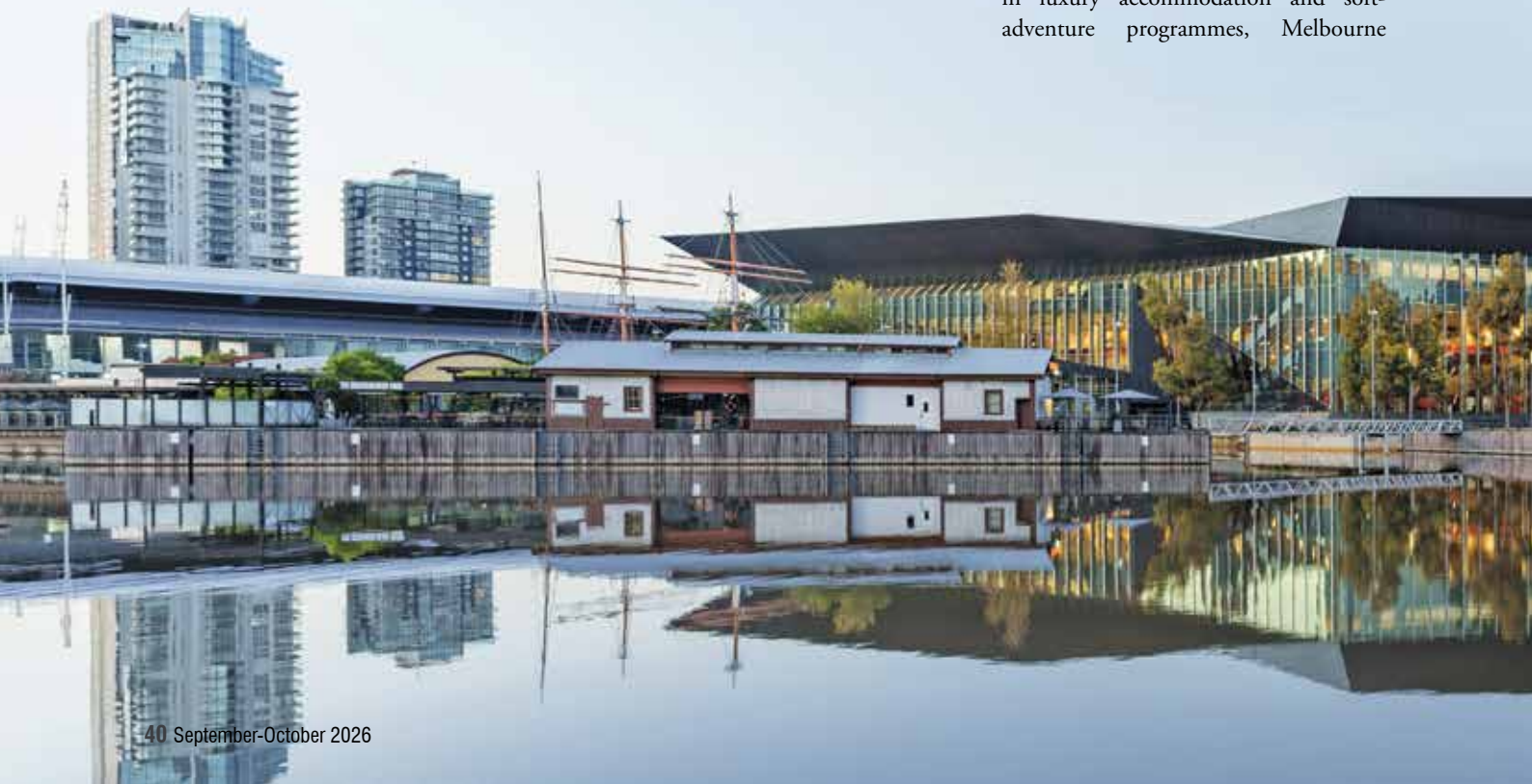
The Melbourne Convention Bureau (MCB) renewed its commitment to the Indian market with another sales mission across Delhi and Mumbai. The initiative comes at a time when Indian groups are increasingly seeking experiential itineraries that combine world-class venues, such as the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC), with distinctive regional adventures along the Great Ocean Road, wildlife encounters at Phillip Island's Penguin Parade, and exclusive VIP experiences. MCEC has hosted major Indian incentive groups, including Amway India, with approximately 4,000 delegates, and Herbalife India, with more than 3,000 delegates.



JOANNA GARRIE
DIRECTOR – CORPORATE MEETINGS & INCENTIVES, **MELBOURNE CONVENTION BUREAU**



With reduced funding thresholds — 150 delegates through MCB and 400 delegates through Business Events Australia — customised Indian culinary menus, and growing interest in luxury accommodation and soft-adventure programmes, Melbourne







SANDRA LADY
HEAD OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
MCEC

India has become Melbourne's second-largest incentive market, with the city welcoming at least 20 groups annually

is positioning itself as a compelling destination for Indian incentive groups seeking memorable, culturally inclusive business events. **Joanna Garrie**, Director, Corporate Meetings & Incentives, Melbourne Convention Bureau (MCB), says, "India is now our number two market for incentive groups to Melbourne. We had about one Indian incentive group five or six years ago, and now we're getting at least 20 a year. We see them come from everywhere, not just major cities in India, but pan-India. That is why we might look at visiting Bengaluru or Kolkata next year."

Melbourne is also seeing more requests for soft adventure, with groups keen to venture beyond the city and explore regional Victoria. There is also a greater willingness to try Australian-style food. The Yarra Valley, one of Victoria's key wine regions, is a popular choice, while Healesville Sanctuary offers opportunities to encounter native Australian wildlife. Phillip Island and its famous Penguin Parade are also high on





MELLISSA DE BAIZE
DIRECTOR OF SALES
CROWN MELBOURNE

MCG combines cricket heritage with gala dinners, private tours, curated dining, and cricketer meet-and-greets for groups



BEN-ARI COLLINS
MELBOURNE CRICKET GROUND EVENTS

group itineraries. Meanwhile, Business Events Australia has revised its incentive programme, reducing the qualifying threshold to 400 delegates, while MCB's threshold remains at 150 delegates.

MCEC and Nyaal Banyul

As Australia's largest events venue, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre is positioned to host major international events at scale under one roof. Complementing it is the new Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre, located on the waterfront in Geelong, Victoria's second-largest city.

Sandra Lady, Head of Business Development, MCEC, says, "We've recently opened this second venue. It offers 3,700 sq m of flexible event space, including a 1,000-seat theatre, a 2,000 sq m event space, multiple meeting rooms, and an integrated 200-room Crowne Plaza hotel. Nyaal Banyul can host anything from three-day conferences and exhibitions to gala dinners, community events, and even live music concerts. With close proximity to the Great Ocean Road and stunning natural landscapes, visitors can easily extend their stay."

She adds that the largest MICE event hosted at MCEC was Amway India in 2012, which brought together approximately 4,000 delegates over six days. The venue also hosted more than 3,000 delegates for the Herbalife India 2023 incentive programme.

"We are seeing several emerging trends among Indian MICE groups travelling to Australia. Firstly, there is growing interest in aligning incentive programmes with major sporting and cultural events, particularly cricket matches involving the Indian national team. Secondly, there is increasing demand for experiential and destination-led itineraries. Rather than focusing solely on metropolitan centres, delegates are seeking opportunities to explore regional Victoria and broader Australia through immersive experiences, food and wine tourism, wildlife encounters, and nature-based activities," Lady adds.

Luxury stays and experiences

Mellissa De Baize, Director of Sales, Crown Melbourne, is equally keen on the Indian market and says the property receives numerous MICE groups.

"The India market actually sits in our top five international markets. It's a market we're really happy with. There are a lot of intricacies within the India market, little quirks. Our Indian guests stay for an average of two to three nights. We also get leisure travellers who stay four nights or more," she says.

Crown Melbourne has three hotels within its complex, offering a total of 1,600 keys. The complex also features 32 restaurants, arcades, a casino, ten-pin bowling, miniature golf, a cinema, and shopping. In terms of MICE facilities, it offers 28 banquet rooms, accommodating groups ranging from five to 2,300 people.

"Our Indian guests spend a lot on retail and F&B. Crown Towers is our five-star luxury hotel, Metropol is our five-star hotel, and Promenade is our four-and-a-half-star hotel. I would say Indian travellers love our five-star product, which is Metropol. That is the largest hotel we have in Australia and, for some reason, that is their absolute favourite," De Baize says.

Cricket adds to the appeal

And, of course, it is difficult to speak about Melbourne without mentioning the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG). **Ben-Ari Collins**, Melbourne Cricket Ground Events, says Indian visitors are particularly enthusiastic about visiting





MCB's 150-delegate funding threshold makes Melbourne accessible for mid-sized Indian corporates

the iconic venue and taking an MCG tour. "The enthusiasm is infectious. We are very grateful to have a MICE group coming in for a gala dinner. The highlight of the tour is undoubtedly getting access to the ground. The biggest trend we notice among Indian visitors is the MCG tour. We also see real enthusiasm for the players' changing rooms and our shrine to Test cricket. Recently, in our Australian Sports Museum, we launched the Shane Warne: Treasures of a Legend exhibition, which has also seen a really good response from the Indian market," he says.



MCG Events also has a partnership with a talent acquisition company that has a large roster of former Australian cricketers and can work with Indian MICE groups to arrange meet-and-greets. Dining packages are also available, curated by its Indian executive sous-chef, Chef Naman. **MT**



Airlines give business events a flying start



Beyond connectivity, airlines are becoming business-events partners, combining corporate programmes, group fares, airport support, and destination partnerships to deliver seamless travel experiences.

By **Hazel Jain**

In the competitive landscape of business events and corporate travel, connectivity is king, but the role of airlines extends far beyond moving passengers from A to B. As hubs such as Colombo and major Indian metros cement their status as key business destinations, carriers such as SriLankan Airlines, IndiGo, and Air India are emerging as strategic partners in the MICE sector.



DIMUTHU TENNAKOON
HEAD OF COMMERCIAL
SRILANKAN AIRLINES

SriLankan Airlines and IndiGo work with tourism, airport, and event stakeholders to facilitate smoother group travel experiences

SriLankan Airlines plays a significant role in connecting business and MICE travellers across South Asia, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, the Far East, Europe, and Australia through its strategically located hub in Colombo. The airline serves major convention and business destinations, including Colombo, Chennai, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi,



Hyderabad, Kochi, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Jakarta, Dubai, and Melbourne.

Dimuthu Tennakoon, Head of Commercial, SriLankan Airlines, says, "We work closely with airport authorities, ground-handling partners and destination stakeholders to facilitate a smooth and efficient travel experience for MICE groups. Subject to group size and operational feasibility, dedicated group check-in counters, coordinated airport assistance and streamlined group-handling arrangements can be organised to enhance the departure experience."

SriLankan Airlines offers group fares, flexible bookings, ticketing support, and services for conferences, exhibitions, incentives, and events

Corporate travel programmes

SriLankan Airlines offers tailored corporate travel solutions through negotiated corporate agreements, providing competitive fares, flexible travel options, dedicated account management, and customised service arrangements. The airline also works with corporate partners to develop customised travel solutions for leadership meetings, regional conferences, incentive programmes, and employee mobility requirements. "Our objective is to build long-term corporate partnerships that support both operational travel needs and strategic business engagement across the region," Tennakoon says.

SriLankan Airlines also provides dedicated group and MICE fare programmes for conferences, exhibitions, incentive travel, corporate events, and association meetings. Eligible groups may benefit from special airfare concessions, flexible booking conditions, coordinated ticketing support, and dedicated service throughout the planning and travel process.

The airline works closely with event organisers, wedding planners, professional conference organisers, and travel partners to design customised travel solutions based on event requirements, travel patterns, and delegate profiles.

Partnerships and collabs

SriLankan Airlines also collaborates with convention bureaux, tourism authorities, destination management companies, and event organisers. "These partnerships are important not only for attracting international conferences and exhibitions but also for enhancing Sri Lanka's visibility in key source markets, particularly India and the wider Asian region. The airline views MICE development as a collaborative ecosystem in which aviation, tourism and event stakeholders work together to create globally competitive business events," Tennakoon adds.

How can airlines help

Airlines are a critical enabler of the MICE value chain. Reliable connectivity, convenient schedules, competitive fares, and efficient airport processes directly influence delegate participation, event attendance, and overall destination attractiveness. IndiGo's extensive network connects travellers with leading convention, business, and event destinations across domestic and

international markets, offering options for conferences, exhibitions, corporate offsites, incentive trips, destination weddings, and group travel.

An airline spokesperson says that for large corporate and MICE movements, IndiGo works closely with travel partners, airport stakeholders, and relevant service providers to facilitate a smooth experience. "Depending on the nature, scale and requirements of the event, dedicated coordination and operational support may be provided to help manage group travel efficiently," the spokesperson says.

The spokesperson adds that IndiGo offers dedicated corporate travel solutions, alongside group travel solutions and fares designed to support MICE requirements and events of varying scales. Depending on group size and travel requirements, customers can benefit from competitive group pricing, flexible passenger detail-submission timelines, dedicated servicing support, and customised travel arrangements.

The airline also engages with tourism boards, event organisers, travel partners, and industry associations to support business events and group travel.

These partnerships can improve destination accessibility, support event promotion, facilitate smoother travel planning, and enhance the overall delegate experience. As the industry evolves, coordinated efforts among airlines, destinations, and event stakeholders will remain important in strengthening India's appeal as a global MICE destination.

The airline engages with tourism boards, event organisers, travel partners, and industry associations to support business events and group travel

Air India's corporate programme

Air India's Corporate Travel Programme is designed for large enterprises with extensive travel needs, offering exclusive benefits, priority privileges, and flexible modifications. Corporate fares differ from standard ticket rates, with special pricing and benefits tailored to an organisation's travel requirements. These can include lower cancellation charges, dedicated assistance, and greater rescheduling flexibility.

Corporates can access special fares and discounts tailored to their business travel requirements, while flexible booking provisions can make changing travel dates and managing cancellations easier.

Registered organisations also receive dedicated account management to support their business travel requirements. For small and medium enterprises (SMEs), AI BIZ provides an alternative designed specifically for smaller businesses, combining direct booking with exclusive fares.

Employees can earn Maharaja Points in their individual accounts and redeem them according to the terms and conditions of the frequent flyer programme. Air India's corporate travel programme covers the airline's operating network, while benefits can be customised according to each company's requirements. These may include cancellation fee waivers, special pricing, seat and baggage offers, and a dedicated account manager.

The programme is intended for corporations, business houses, and institutions rather than individual travellers. Eligible business travellers can also accumulate Maharaja Points towards rewards such as cabin upgrades and airport lounge access — adding another layer to the airline's corporate travel proposition. **MT**



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Phuket pairs productivity with paradise

Improved connectivity, rising demand for experiences, and strong wedding business are helping Phuket cement its position as a preferred destination for Indian MICE groups.

By **MT Bureau**

Phuket is consolidating its position as one of the most sought-after MICE destinations for Indian corporates, even as geopolitical uncertainties and rising airfares influence travel decisions. Industry stakeholders say the destination continues to benefit from improved air connectivity, diverse hospitality offerings, and a growing preference among Indian companies for experience-led meetings and incentive programmes.

The momentum is extending beyond traditional conferences and incentives. Indian destination weddings are emerging as a major revenue driver for resorts across Phuket and nearby Khao Lak, while planners report increasing demand for premium experiences, wellness activities, island-hopping programmes, and curated gala events. Despite some slowdown in booking conversions due to higher airfares, enquiry volumes remain robust, signalling continued confidence in Thailand's MICE proposition.

KD Singh, Founder & President, TravelBullz, said Phuket has become one of the strongest-performing destinations in Southeast Asia for Indian MICE groups. "We witnessed significant growth in MICE traffic during 2025 and 2026, with group sizes ranging from 20







KD SINGH
FOUNDER & PRESIDENT
TRAVELBULLZ

We witnessed significant growth during 2025–26, with MICE group sizes ranging from 20–400 travellers.

to 400 travellers. Improved connectivity from multiple Indian cities has reduced transit time and improved affordability, making Phuket increasingly attractive for corporate groups. While enquiries remain strong, rising airfares linked to geopolitical developments have slowed conversions in recent months," he said.

According to Singh, client expectations have evolved considerably, with experiences becoming a key factor in destination selection. "Today's MICE clients are allocating larger budgets towards curated experiences. Demand is growing for island-hopping programmes, wellness retreats, water sports, yacht charters, themed gala dinners, and exclusive leadership experiences. The focus has shifted from simply conducting meetings to creating memorable experiences," he said.

However, he pointed out that challenges remain. "Airport congestion, limited large-scale convention facilities, and seasonal room shortages continue to be concerns. During peak periods, room rates can rise by 100–200 per cent compared with summer months, which impacts planning for larger groups," Singh added.

Jay Abindan, Cluster Director of Marketing, Phuket Marriott Resort & Spa, Merlin Beach; Courtyard by Marriott Phuket, Patong Beach Resort; and Le Méridien Khao Lak Resort & Spa, said the Indian market remains a significant contributor across both the MICE and wedding segments. "At our Phuket properties, MICE contributes approximately 20 per cent of total business, primarily through corporate meetings, incentive trips, and conferences. At Le Méridien Khao Lak Resort & Spa, Indian weddings are a major driver and account for nearly 70 per cent of catering revenue. We host around 20 Indian weddings annually, with some events occupying as many as 250 rooms, effectively resulting in a resort buyout," she said.

Abindan noted that value continues to play a major role in decision-making.



JAY ABINDAN
CLUSTER DIRECTOR OF MARKETING
PHUKET MARRIOTT RESORT & SPA MERLIN BEACH

Indian weddings contribute nearly 70 per cent of catering revenue at Le Méridien Khao Lak.



SARTHAK KHANNA
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
MICE & MORE

Safety, connectivity, and operational reliability have become non-negotiable factors for corporate event planners.

"Indian clients are price-conscious, but they are also looking for value. Thailand offers strong connectivity, quality infrastructure, and flexibility. Our all-inclusive MICE packages remain among the most popular products, while wedding programmes are extensively customised according to family requirements," she said.

She also highlighted Phuket's broader destination appeal. "Connectivity, logistics, and infrastructure are key reasons why Indian corporates and wedding planners choose Thailand. It remains cost-effective and delivers strong value for money, while offering culture, cuisine, beaches, and experiences that delegates can enjoy beyond the meeting room," Abindan added.

From the planner's perspective, safety and operational reliability have become increasingly important in destination selection. **Sarthak Khanna**, Chief Executive Officer, MICE & More, said, "Post-pandemic, clients are far more conscious about safety, political stability, and flight reliability. Phuket scores strongly on all these parameters. It offers excellent infrastructure, venue diversity, direct connectivity, visa-free access for Indians, and a wide range of leisure experiences, making it a compelling option for both conferences and incentive travel."

Khanna believes the destination's competitive advantage lies in its ability to combine business with leisure seamlessly. "MICE success rests on logistics, air connectivity, venue diversity, engaging recreation, operational ease, and cost efficiency — and Thailand, especially Phuket, falls short on none of these. The destination has consistently reinvented itself and continues to inspire confidence among planners," he said.

The growing importance of India is also being felt across Thailand's hospitality sector, with hoteliers increasingly investing time and resources in building stronger relationships with the market.



FREDERIC KOLDE
GENERAL MANAGER
ANANTARA LAWANA KOH SAMUI

The Indian market is among our top five source markets and continues to grow steadily.

Frederic Kolde, General Manager, Anantara Lawana Koh Samui, said, "The Indian market is among our top five source markets and continues to grow year on year. That's why we are actively engaging with the trade and participating in industry initiatives. India is a key growth market for Thailand, and we see significant potential from celebrations, leisure groups, and corporate travel in the years ahead." **MT**





Singapore leans into its MICE potential

Singapore is reinforcing its position as Asia's leading MICE destination through continuous investment in infrastructure, innovation, connectivity, and world-class event experiences.

By **MT Bureau**

Singapore's MICE industry is entering a new phase of growth as the destination invests heavily in expanding its capacity while strengthening its appeal for international business events. Already recognised as one of Asia-Pacific's leading convention hubs, the city-state is looking beyond hosting meetings to create integrated business experiences that combine innovation, sustainability, hospitality, and leisure.

The latest milestone is the planned Downtown MICE Hub near Marina Bay, envisioned as an integrated district featuring convention facilities, hotels, retail, dining, and entertainment. The project supports the Singapore Tourism Board's ambition to triple MICE tourism receipts by 2040, reflecting the government's long-term confidence in business events as a major economic driver. For Indian corporates, Singapore continues to tick every box. Its strategic location in Asia, excellent air connectivity, efficient public transport, seamless visa processes, and reputation for safety make it an easy choice for meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions.

Delegates can move effortlessly between award-winning venues such as Marina Bay Sands Expo & Convention Centre, Suntec Singapore Convention & Exhibition Centre, and Singapore EXPO, while enjoying world-class hotels, dining, and attractions within minutes.

What further differentiates Singapore is its focus on knowledge exchange. The Singapore Exhibition & Convention Bureau supports international events through incentive programmes such as INSPIRE and the Singapore MICE Advantage Programme, encouraging organisers to deliver experiences beyond conference halls through curated networking, innovation showcases, and destination experiences. Singapore recently retained its top Asia-Pacific rankings from ICCA and Cvent, while signing partnerships to secure major international events into the next decade. Combined with continued investment in infrastructure and technology, these efforts ensure a strong pipeline of business events.

> **The city-state is looking to create integrated business experiences that combine innovation, sustainability, hospitality, and leisure**

As competition among Asian destinations intensifies, Singapore stays ahead through continual reinvestment rather than resting on its reputation. For meeting planners and corporate decision-makers, the destination offers more than efficient logistics — it delivers an ecosystem where business, innovation, and memorable delegate experiences converge. **MT**

Urja Bharat brings everything under one roof



ONGC is positioning Goa's Urja Bharat Convention Centre for the MICE market, combining large-scale infrastructure with an industry-led approach to operations and business development.

By **Rahul Bhadana**

The Urja Bharat Convention Centre (UBCC) is located within ONGC's 250-acre Advanced Training Institute campus in Betul, South Goa. Designed as an integrated convention and residential complex, the campus combines the Prithvi Convention Centre, which accommodates more than 3,500 delegates, with the 7,200 sq m Vayu Exhibition Hall, the Aakash Management Development Facility, around 100 executive accommodation units, hybrid event technology, interpreter rooms, a jetty, and a helipad. Together, these facilities allow conferences, exhibitions, corporate meetings, and residential programmes to be hosted within a single campus.

UBCC combines convention, exhibition, accommodation, and event infrastructure within ONGC's 250-acre Advanced Training Institute campus

The venue's large-scale event capabilities were demonstrated earlier this year when the campus hosted India Energy Week 2026, recording around 75,000 footfalls, more than 700 exhibitors, and delegates from over 120 countries.

Referring to the event, **Saket Gupta**, Executive Director, ONGC and Chief, Advanced Training Institute,



SAKET GUPTA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, **ONGC**
CHIEF, **ADVANCED TRAINING INSTITUTE, GOA**



MANISH PATIL
DIRECTOR – HUMAN RESOURCES
ONGC



Goa, said, "Every space that you see here, 250 acres, was utilised for that." Building on that experience, ONGC organised Urjatva to introduce the venue to the travel and events industry and gather feedback ahead of its regular commercial operations.

The next phase is now focused on putting the extensive infrastructure into regular operation and creating a seamless experience for event organisers. ONGC plans to introduce a single-window clearance system to simplify coordination, while professional expertise from the industry will help shape the centre's operating and business model.

As **Manish Patil**, Director, Human Resources, ONGC, noted, convention management is outside the organisation's traditional business, adding, "We are going to learn from our vendors, from our partners."

Gupta described this industry engagement as an important part of the venue's next phase. "We have invited you not as our guests, but as our hand holders, as our guide," he said, emphasising the role of feedback from organisers and venue professionals in shaping the centre's operations. With the infrastructure in place, ONGC's immediate focus is on operations and establishing the systems needed to take UBCC into regular commercial use.

"The organisation is also exploring professional support for the operation and maintenance of the facility as it moves towards this next stage," said **Amita Tandon**, Chief Corporate Communication, ONGC.



AMITA TANDON
HEAD – CORPORATE COMMUNICATION
ONGC



As Goa continues to add convention infrastructure, UBCC enters the market with a campus designed to integrate exhibitions, conferences, learning, and accommodation in one location.

ONGC's next challenge lies beyond construction — turning this infrastructure into a commercially viable and active MICE venue through sustained industry engagement and professional management. **MT**

Gandhinagar emerges as a destination for large events

As conventions grow larger and delegates more demanding, The Leela Gandhinagar is betting on connected infrastructure to turn logistical complexity into a competitive MICE advantage.

By **MT Bureau**

Getting thousands of delegates into one place is only half the challenge of staging a large convention. Keeping accommodation, meetings, dining, and delegate movement connected can determine how smoothly an event runs once they arrive. This is where The Leela Gandhinagar sees its key advantage — a direct connection with the 34-acre Mahatma Mandir Convention and Exhibition Centre, creating an integrated MICE proposition capable of accommodating events with more than 20,000 delegates.

The integration is also shaping how the hotel approaches the business-events market. With GIFT City expanding as a business hub and Gujarat strengthening its infrastructure, the focus is shifting towards larger conventions, corporate summits, and international events. For organisers, a luxury hotel directly connected to the convention centre addresses one of the biggest operational challenges of large-scale events — moving delegates between



RAHUL MEHTA
DIRECTOR – SALES & MARKETING
THE LEELA GANDHINAGAR AND MMCEC



Direct access to Mahatma Mandir creates an integrated MICE ecosystem capable of hosting 20,000-plus delegates



venues. "Our 318 rooms, ballroom of more than 8,500 sq. ft., outdoor spaces, and direct connectivity to Mahatma Mandir Convention and Exhibition Centre make The Leela Gandhinagar an apt space with diverse venues and cuisines. It can cater to people from various parts of the country and abroad and meet the different requirements they may have," said, **Rahul Mehta**, Director – Sales & Marketing, The Leela Gandhinagar and MMCEC.

Beyond meeting rooms

The shift is not only about scale. Delegate expectations are changing, with conference attendees increasingly looking for flexible spaces, seamless technology, and experiences beyond the meeting room. Delegates want business and leisure to work together, rather than treating the two as separate parts of a trip. "We are very steadily investing in technology that can help MICE and conventions in the long term, right from AI-driven bookings to AI-driven tools that could help people with conventions," Mehta said.

The property is using local culture and wellness to differentiate its delegate experience. Its architecture draws on Gujarat's heritage, including stepwell-inspired design and regional crafts such as Bandhej and Ajrakh. "Everybody has said that they loved our services and hospitality. The Leela's ethos of Atithi Devo Bhava was visible to everybody," Mehta said.

ESG shapes choices

Sustainability is becoming another consideration in venue selection, particularly for international organisations. The Leela Gandhinagar has introduced energy-efficient systems, rainwater harvesting, water recycling, and responsible sourcing as part of its Purposeful Luxury approach. "Sustainability is also at the front of what we are doing, from small things like minimal wastage to inculcating the wellness ethos of The Leela hotels in everything that we do in banquets and the convention centre," Mehta said.



Gujarat's MICE moment

Mehta sees Gujarat entering a new phase of MICE growth, supported by GIFT City, infrastructure development, and the state's growing profile for global business events. He expects demand for international conventions, corporate summits, and industry forums to increase over the coming years. "Gujarat as a destination has become very MICE-centric and wedding-centric," Mehta said. "We stand at the forefront of MICE and weddings for Gujarat and hopefully carry the baton forward."

Technology will be central to the next phase. The property plans to invest in virtual venue experiences, AI-enabled planning tools, and enhanced audiovisual capabilities, alongside bespoke culinary and experiential offerings. Mehta also highlighted the potential for technology to make event planning more interactive, including floor-plan tools that allow clients to work out their preferred seating arrangements.

The larger opportunity for Gandhinagar lies in bringing these elements together. If convention infrastructure, accommodation, technology, hospitality, and destination experiences can work as one, the city can offer something increasingly valuable: scale without sacrificing the experience. **MT**

Vows, venues, and a big fat vision



(L-R) Rituraj Khanna, Barun Gupta, Neeraj Dhawan, Suman Billa, Shagun Sethi, Vikas Gutgutia, Rishi Khandelwal, Rajat Dhingra, and Raksha Chawla

India is sharpening its destination-wedding proposition as government and industry join forces to professionalise the sector, promote emerging destinations, and take celebrations to global markets.

By **MT Bureau**

India's ambition to emerge as the world's leading wedding destination gained fresh momentum at the IWIA Grand Mahotsav 2026, where industry leaders and the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) outlined a shared vision to transform the country's wedding economy into a global tourism driver.

Held at The Raffles x Udman Square, Gurugram, the Indian Wedding Industry Association (IWIA) brought together more than 2,000 stakeholders from the wedding, hospitality, tourism, and events ecosystem, including wedding planners, luxury hotels, destination specialists, décor experts, artists, policymakers, and industry leaders. The gathering reinforced IWIA's objective of creating a unified industry platform to drive collaboration, innovation, and business growth while supporting the GoI's 'Wed in India' initiative.

Weddings beyond celebrations

Addressing the gathering, **Suman Billa**, Additional Secretary and Director General, Ministry of Tourism, described the wedding economy as a strategic opportunity extending far beyond celebrations.

"Weddings today are not just events; they are living expressions of our civilisation. The wedding economy spans hospitality, aviation, transport, textiles, jewellery, food, entertainment, and



SUMAN BILLA
ADDITIONAL SECRETARY AND DIRECTOR GENERAL, **MINISTRY OF TOURISM**

India's seven-point wedding tourism roadmap puts destinations, skills, sustainability, infrastructure, and global promotion centre stage





NEERAJ DHAWAN
FOUNDER & CHAIRMAN
IWIA

IWIA plans domestic and overseas roadshows to position India as the world's premier wedding destination



BARUN GUPTA
FOUNDER & VICE PRESIDENT
IWIA

technology. If we work together with a clear roadmap, it can become a powerful engine for tourism, livelihoods, and India's soft power," he said.

Billa outlined a seven-point agenda to unlock India's wedding tourism potential. It includes recognising the celebration economy as a strategic economic sector supported by policy and data, and developing purpose-built wedding destinations backed by infrastructure and connectivity.

The roadmap also calls for promoting emerging destinations such as Hampi, Khajuraho, and the Northeast; integrating local cuisine, culture, and communities into wedding experiences; professionalising the industry through certification, skill development, and technology; embedding sustainability through responsible celebrations and local sourcing; and strengthening government–industry collaboration.

Under this approach, the government would focus on destination development and infrastructure, while the private sector would drive innovation, experiences, and marketing. Billa said these measures could generate livelihoods, support MSMEs, and strengthen India's position as a global celebration destination.

Taking India global

Neeraj Dhawan, Founder & Chairman, IWIA, said the association has been established to promote, protect, and professionalise India's wedding industry while encouraging more celebrations to remain within the country.

"The biggest, largest, and grandest weddings are done in India. We should be doing weddings in India rather than any part of the world. We are planning roadshows across India and overseas, with the support of the Ministry of Tourism's Wedding India initiative, to showcase India as the world's premier wedding destination," he said.

Dhawan described Grand Mahotsav as "the heartbeat of India's wedding industry", adding that the collaboration between IWIA and Incredible India marks the beginning of a journey to position India as the Wedding Capital of the World.

He also highlighted plans to simplify wedding planning through proposed single-window clearances for licences and permissions — an intervention aimed at making it easier to organise large-scale celebrations.

One voice for industry

Barun Gupta, Founder & Vice President, IWIA, said the newly launched association aims to become a unified voice for India's wedding industry.

"Grand Mahotsav celebrates the wedding industry in India. We want to build one nodal body representing the Indian wedding industry globally. We will expand our membership across India and organise roadshows within the country and overseas to promote the 'Wed in India, Be in India' vision," he said.

The event also recognised the contributions of industry veterans, including **Vikas Gutgutia**, Founder & Managing Director, Ferns N Petals, and luxury wedding décor pioneer **Rituraj Khanna**.

The evening concluded with performances by **Mika Singh, Millind Gaba, Ashok Masti**, and **Kaptaan Laadi**, as IWIA sought to establish Grand Mahotsav as an industry platform bringing together the diverse stakeholders driving India's growing wedding economy. **MT**



No room for one-size-fits-all



Indeva is assembling a multi-brand hospitality portfolio that moves from integrated convention luxury to mindful urban stays and smart corporate accommodation — each serving a different traveller.

By **Mansi Chauhan**

What does a traveller need from a hotel when the reason for travelling changes?

For an international buyer spending days inside an exhibition hall, it could be the ability to walk from a meeting to a room without losing an hour in traffic. For an executive on a shorter corporate visit, a functional workspace and efficient stay may matter more than elaborate luxury. Another traveller might want business convenience without allowing the entire trip to feel like business.

Indeva is attempting to build for all three. Rather than creating different names around essentially similar hotels, Indeva is positioning each around a different hospitality need — while connecting them to the business-events economy developing around India Expo Centre & Mart. "Whether it is ExpoInn, Shikina, Plume, Iris, or Śārańga Retreat, every brand has its own identity, yet all are inspired by the elegance of the peacock," said **Barun Gupta**, Chief Operating Officer, Indeva.

The Indeva name itself combines Sanskrit and English, while the infinity symbol and lotus inform its identity. What the portfolio increasingly reveals, however, is an attempt to take that common Indian thread across very different hospitality segments.

ExpoInn: Stay, meet, connect

ExpoInn Suites & Convention, in Greater Noida, is perhaps the clearest expression of Indeva's MICE ambitions because its raison d'être begins with a problem familiar to anyone attending a large exhibition — the hotel commute.

The 134-key property sits within the India Expo Centre & Mart ecosystem and was conceived after years of operating trade fairs and exhibitions revealed a recurring pain point: exhibitors, buyers, and delegates



(L-R) Barun Gupta, Mallika Thakkar, Dr Rakesh Kumar, Mukesh Gupta

As travel purposes diversify, Indeva is creating differentiated hotels designed around the needs of each traveller

were spending considerable time travelling between their hotels and the venue. ExpoInn effectively removes that journey.

Its accommodation ranges from Deluxe Rooms to larger suites. The Deluxe Suite and Executive Suite provide separate living and dining areas and workstations, while the Presidential Suite extends into a more residential format with living and dining areas, a pantry, dressing room, and two bathrooms.

The significance for MICE, however, is not simply room size. High-speed Wi-Fi and in-room workstations address the business traveller upstairs, downstairs, restaurants, cafés, a lounge, meeting facilities, ballroom, and convention infrastructure allow the guest journey to continue without disconnecting from the event.

ExpoInn therefore represents Indeva at its most integrated — stay, meet, dine, network, and attend an event within one ecosystem. "The advantage of having a hotel next to the venue is obvious. An artist can finish performing and be back in their room within minutes," Gupta said.

For an organiser moving hundreds of delegates, speakers, performers, or corporate guests, those saved movements become operationally significant. And that matters because Gupta sees the venue itself moving beyond exhibitions. "If you look at Las Vegas, Frankfurt, or Macau, convention centres don't focus on only one segment. They host exhibitions, corporate meetings, weddings, concerts, sporting events, and entertainment."

Plume: Business reimagined

A short distance away in positioning — although still closely connected to the Expo Mart environment — Plume represents a softer expression of business hospitality. Its vocabulary is telling: calm, curated, mindful, and urban. Where ExpoInn derives much of its identity from integration with large-format events, Plume positions the stay itself as a counterbalance to the intensity of the working day. Modern design, quieter spaces, and a greater emphasis on unwinding sit alongside the practical requirements of business travel.

That makes its role within the portfolio particularly interesting. Not every exhibition visitor wants to remain immersed in the convention experience after leaving the hall. Plume allows Indeva to address the traveller who still needs proximity and productivity, but wants hospitality to provide a degree of separation from work.

Mor Stays: With more character

Mor Stays takes another route altogether. Its proposition is unapologetically corporate, but deliberately attempts to escape the anonymous functionality associated with conventional business hotels. Its language revolves around clean lines, vibrant social spaces, smart functionality, and what the brand calls "productivity with personality".

In other words, Mor is not trying to compete with ExpoInn on convention scale or Plume on mindful luxury. It is built for efficiency.

For a traveller arriving for a short corporate assignment, exhibition, meeting, or quick business trip, that can be precisely the point: a good bed, usable workspace, connectivity, food, and enough personality to prevent efficiency from becoming sterility. Even its name plays into Indeva's wider identity — Mor, Hindi for peacock, doubles as a play on "more". The two properties are chasing different interpretations of the same business traveller.



One traveller is no longer enough

That segmentation becomes even more pronounced when Indeva's forthcoming concepts are considered.

Śāraṅga Retreat, for instance, moves far away from corporate Greater Noida. Planned as boutique luxury properties of around 45–50 keys in spiritual destinations, the brand is being developed around Ayurveda, wellness, culture, temples, and engagement with local communities. "We wanted guests to experience the destination completely — not just stay in a hotel, but engage with the local community, visit temples, understand traditions, and return with a deeper connection," Gupta said.

ExpoInn, Plume, Mor Stays, and Śāraṅga consequently represent four very different answers to the same question: **why has this person travelled?**

For ExpoInn, the answer could be a convention or exhibition. Plume addresses the traveller seeking comfort and decompression alongside work. Mor prioritises agile corporate functionality. Saranga is being designed around immersion and destination-led travel.

Following the event economy

The strategy becomes a little more consequential because the market around these hotels is changing too. India Expo Centre & Mart already hosts events across renewable energy, manufacturing, healthcare, hospitality, home décor, and industrial sectors. Gupta believes future convention centres must go considerably wider.

"Our thinking is that convention centres should be capable of doing everything. That's how the evolution of the industry is happening." That means corporate meetings one week, an exhibition another, followed by a wedding, concert, sporting event, technology summit, or cultural gathering. Each brings a different guest. Each creates a different accommodation requirement. Indeva's opportunity, therefore, is not simply to put more rooms around Greater Noida's exhibition infrastructure. It is to build enough differentiated hospitality products to follow the traveller as the reason for visiting changes.

Seen individually, they are hotels at different price points and positions. Seen together, they reveal something considerably more ambitious: Indeva is trying to build a hotel for every reason to travel. **MT**



From Bhakti to a bigger idea

Global Bhakti Fest emerged while Indeva was developing Saranga Retreat, its hospitality concept focused on spiritual destinations, Ayurveda, wellness, and local culture. What began as an idea for devotional concerts soon prompted a bigger question — why stop at music? The concept expanded into an ecosystem combining a leadership conclave, B2B exhibition, and large-scale concerts.

Scheduled for 14–15 December 2026 at India Expo Centre & Mart, Greater Noida, the festival will connect spirituality with tourism, wellness, culture, technology, sustainability, and business, while engaging younger audiences. The ambition is to build an Indian-born intellectual property with global relevance.

Rosetta Hospitality eyes luxury resort expansion



The luxury resort segment is seeing stronger demand from longer weddings and niche MICE events, encouraging operators to expand capacity and event infrastructure.

By **MT Bureau**

Rosetta Hospitality is looking to expand its luxury resort portfolio as demand for destination weddings and MICE events strengthens. The Bengaluru-based hospitality company currently operates two resorts — in Sakleshpur, Karnataka, and Varca, South Goa — with a third property planned near Devanahalli, Bengaluru, for 2028.

The company is also seeing a shift in the wedding market, with celebrations becoming longer and involving multiple events, creating greater demand for resort buyouts, banquet spaces, lawns, and beachside venues.

The trend is particularly visible in destinations such as Goa, where destination weddings continue to drive business for leisure resorts. **Rajesh Kattakam**, Vice President — Sales & Business Development, Rosetta Hospitality, said the wedding segment has emerged as an important growth area for the company.

"We have actually seen a good increased demand on the wedding segment, especially. We do wedding buyouts and very niche weddings, and over the years we have seen this segment improving a lot. This is showing good results for our hotels at this point of time," he said. Kattakam noted that weddings are no longer restricted to a single-day or two-day celebration. "Instead of making it a one-day affair or a two-day affair, we have also seen events which have come up to three days with multiple events. Families will have their own set of parties and then the bride and groom will have their own set of parties. So, the overall spending capacity has gone up," he said.

Rosetta Hospitality is adding 50 rooms and a 7,500 sq ft banquet hall at its Varca resort by Q1 2028



RAJESH KATTAKAM
VP – SALES & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
ROSETTA HOSPITALITY

Rosetta's Varca property currently has 74 rooms, a 4,000 sq ft banquet hall, three breakout venues, lawns of over 4,000 sq ft, and a beach shack that can accommodate around 300–350 guests. An expansion will add 50 rooms and a 7,500 sq ft banquet hall, taking the property to nearly 130 rooms. The expansion is targeted for Q1 2028. **MT**

MOVEMENTS



PROJJWAL GHOSH
Area Champion – Sales & Marketing, SW Asia
IHG Hotels & Resorts

The InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort has appointed Projjwal Ghosh as Area Champion – Sales & Marketing, Southwest Asia, IHG Hotels & Resorts, and Director of Sales & Marketing. With over 16 years of hospitality experience, he brings expertise in pre-opening, commercial strategy, market development, and revenue growth. Ghosh has held leadership roles with Starwood, Hilton, Accor, and IHG, and also has an Executive MBA in Marketing & E-Commerce.



PRADEEP KANDARI
General Manager
The Leela Gandhinagar & MMCEC

The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts has appointed Pradeep Kandari as General Manager of The Leela Gandhinagar & Mahatma Mandir Exhibition and Convention Centre (MMCEC). With over two decades of luxury hospitality experience, Kandari brings expertise in guest experience, operations, and business growth. A Leela veteran since 2023, he previously served as Hotel Manager at The Leela Palace Bengaluru, following leadership roles with St Regis, Marriott, and Taj Hotels.



VAIBHAV PRABHAKAR KULKARNI
General Manager, Fortune Park JP Celestial, Bengaluru

Vaibhav Prabhakar Kulkarni has been appointed General Manager at Fortune Park JP Celestial, Bengaluru. With over 20 years of hospitality experience spanning hotel operations, sales, business development, revenue management, and team leadership, he will oversee operations, commercial performance, guest experience, and team development. Kulkarni has previously held managerial positions with The Clarks Hotels & Resorts by IHCL, Radisson, Eco Hotels & Resorts, Sarovar Hotels, and Al Areen Holdings.



MANOJ JANGID
General Manager
Le Meridien Surat

Manoj Jangid has been appointed General Manager of Le Méridien Surat. Bringing more than two decades of experience across luxury hospitality brands, his expertise spans hotel operations, commercial performance, food and beverage, revenue optimisation, and organisational leadership. Previously associated with Fairfield by Marriott Kolkata, JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar, and Sofitel Mumbai BKC, Jangid will focus on operational excellence, talent development, commercial performance, and positioning the hotel for leisure.



VIKAS SOOD
General Manager
Jaipur Exhibition and Convention Centre (JECC)

Jaipur Exhibition and Convention Centre (JECC) and Novotel Jaipur Convention Centre, managed by Accor, have appointed Vikas Sood as General Manager. Bringing over 29 years of hospitality experience, Sood has held leadership roles with The Leela, Accor, Marriott International, Hyatt, and Taj Hotels. His expertise spans luxury hospitality, property operations, MICE, and large-scale conventions and exhibitions. In his new role, he will oversee integrated operations across conventions, weddings, and events.



MONICA KENT-GILES
Marketing Director
AIME

Monica Kent-Giles joins AIME as Marketing Director, bringing extensive executive experience across brand management, communications, digital marketing, and events in APAC, EMEA, and the USA. She began her career at Melbourne Convention Bureau and later held senior marketing roles at News Corp, RCSA, Melbourne Airport, and PMY Group. In her new role, Kent-Giles will help strengthen AIME's global presence as preparations accelerate for its 2027 event in Melbourne next February.



BROOKE CAMPBELL
Buyer Engagement Director
AIME

Brooke Campbell has been appointed AIME Buyer Engagement Director, a newly created role focused on enhancing the buyer journey. With more than 20 years' experience across hotels, wholesale, corporate, events, convention centres, and destination bureaux, she has held senior roles at Experience Gold Coast, New Zealand International Convention Centre, and Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre. Campbell will attract high-calibre planners and strengthen exhibitor-buyer connections across global markets.



VIKAS PAL
Director of Sales — MICE
The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru

Vikas Pal has been appointed Director of Sales — MICE at The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru. With close to 15 years of hotel sales experience, he brings expertise in corporate and MICE business, key account management, and revenue-focused sales strategies. Pal joins from Accor, where he served as Director of Sales at ibis Hyderabad HITEC City. In his new role, he will lead the property's MICE sales strategy, strengthen corporate partnerships, and drive convention and events business while supporting revenue growth.

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