

FKHA Magazine

Volume 01 | Issue 04 | May-June 2024 | ₹100

# SWAGAT

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE FEDERATION OF KERALA HOTELS ASSOCIATION

BI-LINGUAL BI-MONTHLY PUBLICATION



SREE PADMANABHA SWAMY TEMPLE

**WEALTHIEST  
OF ALL !**

*Monsoon!*

**A SYMPHONY OF  
RAIN, RENEWAL &  
REJUVENATION**

ജനത്ത് ഇ കാശ്മീർ  
കാശ്മീരിന്റെ  
ഹൃദയത്തിലേക്ക്  
ഒരു യാത്ര

ടൂറിസത്തിന് വ്യവസായ  
പദവി അനിവാര്യം

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# SWAG

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OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE FEDERATION OF KERALA HOTELS ASSOCIATION

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## SWAGAT

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May-June 2024

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## A LITTLE MORE UNDERSTANDING, PLEASE!

**K**erala's strides in the tourism sector have won laurels from far and wide, reinforcing the State's position as a coveted global tourist destination. Renowned for its natural splendour encompassing the sea, backwaters, verdant forests, vibrant traditional art forms, and holistic Ayurveda practices, Kerala Tourism entices travellers from all parts of the globe.

Each region within Kerala boasts of unique offerings, harbouring immense tourism potential. Kerala is the only State in India that offers a diverse palette of experiences to the visitors. The Western Ghats, kole lands, undulating hill slopes, meandering rivers, lush evergreen forests and the cascading beauty of waterfalls adds to the allure of the place, beckoning eco-tourism enthusiasts from everywhere. Adventure lovers have much on offer by way of ideal settings for trekking, paragliding, rafting, surfing and forest exploration.

The State Tourism Department, Forest Department and private players in the hospitality and wellness sectors have been doing a great job of promoting the State as one of the best tourist destinations in India and provide the tourists unique experiences. However, of late, the instances of human-animal conflicts in some parts of Kerala have been proving a dampener to the State's efforts to promote tourism to earn precious revenue and provide employment to educated youth in large numbers.

It is well-known that the coexistence of humans and wildlife in areas bordering forests presents a unique challenge to any administration. It is, therefore, heartening to note that the recent instances of human-animal conflict have put the government on the alert and several steps have been taken to protect both the humans and the wild animals. However, exaggerated reporting of these conflict situations is casting a shadow over Kerala's tourism landscape. Overblown reporting on human-animal conflict has sown the seeds of fear in the minds of travellers, with deleterious consequences for the State's tourism industry.

Clearly, the media is unaware of the destructive potential of such reporting, which has the potential to spread like wildfire and cannot but result in tourists avoiding the State altogether. Besides hurting the State's tax revenue, this would result in a sharp fall in the employment opportunities and marketing potential that the tourism sector otherwise offers. Already a campaign in on outside Kerala about

the threats posed by wild animals and the fallout of this is already visible in places such as Idukki and Wayanad. If this becomes a trend, it would hurt the tourism sector as a whole, particularly the investors in the hotel and resorts domain.

Media campaigns about human-wildlife conflicts are taking place without any understanding of the ground reality. Wild animal population is on the rise across the country. According to a report by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), released in December 2023, 1510 people lost their lives in 2022 following wild animal attacks. The number of lives lost was 1264 in 2021. The highest number of deaths from human-animal conflict have been reported from Maharashtra. High number of deaths are also being reported from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu and Odisha.

In the last five years, 293 people were killed in tiger attacks. Wild elephants alone have taken 605 lives, the largest such deaths happening in Odisha. Although quite disconcerting, only 106 persons have lost their lives owing to elephant attacks in the State. These figures would show that the loss of life because of human-animal conflict is the lowest in Kerala. It is equally distressing that media reporting of such incidents is highly exaggerated and totally divorced from the facts on the ground.

There are several reasons for the conflict between humans and animals in Kerala and it is absolutely baseless to say that the conflicts are on the rise because of government apathy. Such campaigns would only serve to create negative image for the State in other states and foreign countries. Kerala has high density of population. People, therefore, have no other option but move to areas abutting forests in search of livelihood. Simultaneously, there has been a surge in wild animal population, resulting in wild animals straying into the close-by farms and homesteads in search of food and water.

The provisions of the Central Forest Protection Act, 1972, militates against checking the growth of the wild animal population. When the number of wild animals increase, they would require more land to move about. Since there is no commensurate increase in forest area, the animals would invariably move into human habitations in search of water and food. They end up raiding the crops of farmers.



The stern provisions of the Central Act have made it impossible for the State to do anything to check intrusion by the wild animals and culling those that pose a threat to human life and property, leading to a crisis situation. The State does not even have the power to cull wild boars that have been devastating farms and causing injuries to humans. Although the State Government had sought amendments to the Forest Protection Act and the State Assembly passed a resolution unanimously, nothing happened. Other States had also raised the demand, the Centre refused to respond.

Kerala had taken several measures to bring down human-animal conflicts. It had submitted a Rs. 602-crore detailed project proposal to the Centre for mitigation of human-animal conflicts, but it has still not been sanctioned. Kerala had signed an inter-State charter with Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, formed a committee comprising eminent scientists and experts to suggest ways to bring down such conflicts, declared such incidents a Special Calamity and announced a Rs. 10 lakh solatium for those killed in human-animal conflicts.

But these are not permanent solutions for the challenge on hand. What we need are long-term programmes and projects. The State Government has been doing its best in the matter, but its hands are tied by the 52-year-old Central Forest Act. What is necessary is amendments to the Act in keeping with the changing times. This must be done in consultation with all State Governments. If the law were to be amended taking only the situation in the north Indian States into account, it would deal a blow to South Indian States like Kerala. A section of the media was giving an exaggerated treatment to the question of human-animal conflicts forgetting all these facts.

Despite all these setbacks and limiting factors, Kerala has remained fully committed to sustainable tourism, reflecting a collective resolve to safeguard its natural treasures while providing enriching experiences for visitors. Every human life is important and cannot be allowed to be lost. The media needs to realise this. Exaggerating reporting of human-animal conflict would only create panic among the tourists and forcing them to leave Kerala out of their travel plans. This will have a huge impact on hotels, which are an intrinsic part of the tourism industry. The end result will be large scale loss of jobs and revenue.

The State government should remain vigilant about this possibility and the Central government should initiate urgent steps to amend the Forest Act. On its part, the media would do well to show greater understanding of the complex dimensions of the problem and work together with the authorities to protect the tourism sector, even as we work to save the hapless farmers and the wild animals.



**V. Sunil Kumar**  
President, FKHA  
& Editor, Swagat



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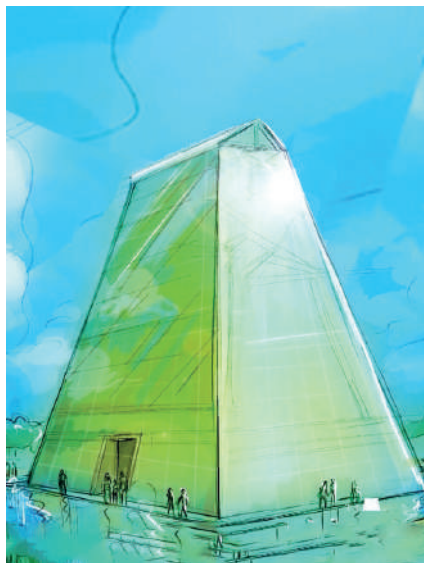
## SREE PADMANABHA SWAMY TEMPLE WEALTHIEST OF ALL!

The Sree Padmanabhaswamy temple in Thiruvananthapuram has captivated the world's attention with its huge treasure trove. No wonder, the temple is today the single important destination of from all over India and abroad, writes **Anuradha Santhosh**

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## RARE MOMENT WHEN TRADITION PREVAILS

In a rare instance of modern logistics making way for tradition, operations at the Thiruvananthapuram International Airport are suspended for five hours twice every year to allow the Arattu procession from the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple to pass through for the deities' holy dip in the Arabian Sea, writes **Anuradha Santhosh**.



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## AN INNOVATIVE PROJECT AWAITING ITS DAY

A proposal submitted to the Government by Federation of Kerala Hotels Association (FKHA) President V. Sunil Kumar, envisaging a Temple Town Project with a museum as its centre piece can bring about transformative changes in the State's tourism potential, aid the capital city's growth and augment the State government's finances.



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വ്യവസായരംഗത്തെ മുന്നേറ്റവും, ടൂറിസം രംഗത്ത് നല്ലൊക്കെ പെട്ടെന്നു നവീന ആശയങ്ങളും ഈ രംഗത്തേക്ക് സർക്കാർ തന്നെ സംരംഭകരെ ക്ഷണിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്ന സാഹചര്യത്തിൽ ടൂറിസം രംഗത്തിന് വ്യവസായ പദവി അനിവാര്യമാണെന്ന് ചൂണ്ടിക്കാട്ടുന്നു. ഫെഡറേഷൻ ഓഫ് കേരള ഹോട്ടൽസ് അസോസിയേഷൻ ജനറൽ സെക്രട്ടറി സ്കാഡ്രൺ ലീഡർ കെ.ബി. പത്മദാസ് (റിട്ട.) എഴുതുന്നു.



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## MONSOON! A SYMPHONY OF RAIN, RENEWAL & REJUVENATION

More than just a weather pattern, the Monsoon is a cultural phenomenon, a time of rejuvenation and revival, a melody composed by the wind, the sky, and the very earth itself.

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## MONSOON MAGIC

Each region of Kerala offers unique experiences that let you truly connect with the rains.

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ANIL MENON

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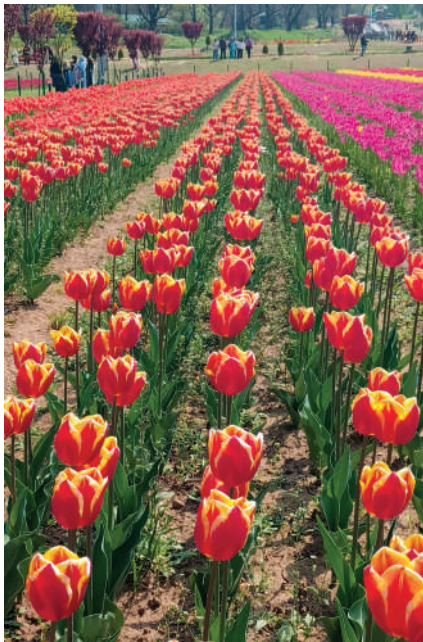
## GO FOR REJUVENATION WITH MONSOON AYURVEDIC THERAPY

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ഭൂമിയിലെ സ്വർഗ്ഗമെന്ന് വിശേഷിപ്പിക്കപ്പെടുന്ന കാശ്മീരിലേക്ക് സഞ്ചരിച്ച മേരി സാമുവൽ കാശ്മീരിന്റെ ഹൃദയം തൊട്ടറിഞ്ഞ തന്റെ യാത്രയുടെ വിശേഷങ്ങൾ പങ്കുവയ്ക്കുന്നു.



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## COCKTAILS EPITOME OF INDULGENCE

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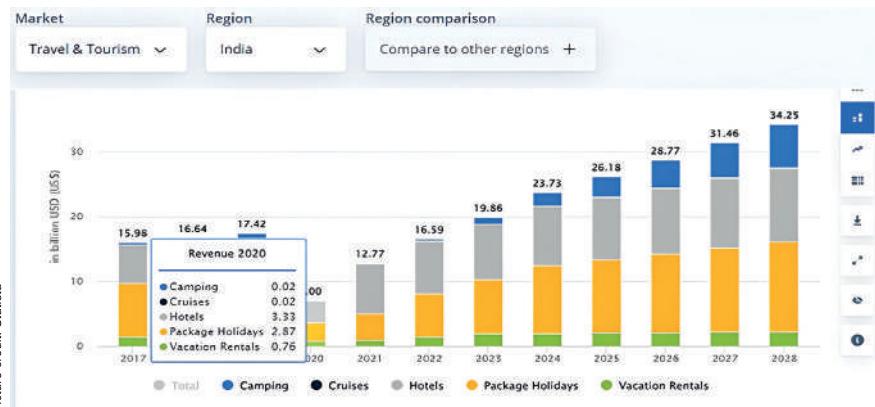


## HEALTH BEAT

## 68 NINE TIPS TO BOOST YOUR ENERGY NATURALLY!

Simple lifestyle changes can go a long way in combating fatigue caused by such factors as sleeplessness, stress, and lack of exercise. With a few simple changes, you'll feel energized, more productive, and happier, writes **Umasankar G.**

# India's tourism industry set to surge to USD 23.72 billion by year end: Statista Report



India's travel and tourism sector is poised for significant growth, with revenues projected to soar to USD 23.72 billion by 2024, according to Statista, online platform that specializes in data gathering and visualization.

According to a recent report by Statista, the country's tourism sector would register a Compounded Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 9.62 per cent from 2024 to 2028. This will result in a market volume of USD 34.25 billion by 2028.

The largest market in India is the Package Holidays market, which is expected to reach a market volume of USD 10.48 billion in 2024. By 2028, Package Holidays market is expected to have 64.74m users. In 2024, user penetration is expected to be 7.8 per cent, which is expected to increase to 10 per cent by 2028.

The Average Revenue Per User (ARPU) is expected to be USD 209.70. By 2028, online sales would account for 60 per cent of

the total revenue in the travel and tourism market in India. Among nations, United States is expected to generate the highest revenue of USD 199 billion in 2024. India's tourism industry is currently focused on promoting sustainable and eco-friendly travel options to attract responsible and conscious travelers.

Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) to India in 2024 is expected to surpass the number during pre-pandemic time. India is emerging as a preferred destination for travellers amid increased conflicts in West Asia and the shift of foreign tourists from China after the Covid-19 pandemic.

There was an annual growth of 305.4 per cent in Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA) in 2023. In 2023, 9.23 million foreign tourists visited India. Although the FTAs arrival tally is still less than the pre-pandemic number of 10.93 million in 2019, 2024 numbers are expected to surpass it.

## Vrindavan's 70-story skyscraper set to elevate India's cultural tourism



Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh, is poised for a transformative development with the construction of a spectacular 70-story temple tower, a monumental \$80 million project designed to enhance tourism and cultural appreciation.

Nestled in the serene landscape of Vrindavan, the awe-inspiring

structure, known as the Vrindavan Heritage Tower or Vrindavan Chandrodaya Mandir, is poised to leave an indelible mark on the region's skyline. Reports indicate that this architectural marvel is currently underway, with an estimated investment of \$80 million (Rs. 668.64 crore).

A prominent leader of ISKCON highlighted the temple's significance as a beacon of Indian culture on the global stage, anticipating its role in revitalizing tourism in India and bolstering the local economy.

Plans for the temple complex include provisions for comfortable accommodations to accommodate the anticipated influx of visitors.

According to projections from the Uttar Pradesh government's tourism department, visitor numbers to Vrindavan are expected to quintuple over the next six to ten years, reaching an astonishing 100 million.

To meet the growing demand, the temple complex will feature one of the largest parking facilities in the region, with multi-level parking capable of accommodating up to 3,000 cars simultaneously. In essence, the Vrindavan Heritage Tower represents a monumental endeavor aimed at not only preserving India's rich cultural heritage but also propelling its tourism industry to unprecedented heights on the global stage.





## Growth expectations and better margins drive gains in hotel stocks



Picture credit: Reuters

The hospitality industry has seen plenty of interest in the equity market since the catastrophic impact of the pandemic, which led to losses in FY21. The hotel industry market cap has more than tripled since 2019 on a combination of strong earnings rebound.

The industry has good tailwinds. The anticipation is, demand for rooms will outrun supply for a few years despite capacity expansions. Also, the enforced efficiency and cost-cutting measures instituted during the pandemic are paying off in terms of better margins.

Top hotel stocks by market capitalisation have hit their all-time highs thanks to growth expectations on the infrastructure front and higher travel and events, and margin improvement through premiumization and cost efficiencies.

Macro growth has translated into a resurgence in corporate travel

and more hospitality events. The government has also been vocal about its initiative to try and make India into a global tourist hub.

There's a premiumisation trend with average room rates up 30 per cent in calendar year 2023 at Rs 7,500 as compared to sub Rs 5,700 during the pre-Covid period (2019).

All cities appear to be above the December 2019 level in terms of average room rates, and many have seen even higher gains. Occupancy rates of 2023 now matches that in 2019. Industry earnings and growth/ recovery rates have also consistently beaten the street in the past six quarters.

Earnings growth could remain strong for hotels in fiscal 2025 and 2026 though growth rates will ease down compared to fiscal 2022-24 as base effects come into play.

Indian Hotels (IHCL), which hit its all-time high in the equity market recently, is expected to see 18 per

cent operating profit growth till fiscal 2026 while Chalet Hotels could see even higher growth rates.

The operating profit margins in fiscal 2024 are expected to be over 25 per cent. This is well above the 14-15 per cent reported in fiscal 2022 and 19-20 per cent reported in fiscal 2019 pre-pandemic.

While Q1 fiscal 2025 will see some slowdown due to elections, IPL-related spends could compensate it. In fiscal 2024, the industry saw room rate growth of 20 per cent for large chains such as IHCL, Marriott, and EIH and mid-high teens growth is expected going forward.

In 2023, revenue per available room or RevPAR (which is a combination of room rates and occupancies) grew year-on-year (Y-o-Y) by almost 88 per cent, and there was Y-o-Y growth again in 2024, pushing RevPAR well above the pre-pandemic period, where it averaged Rs 4,200-4,400 for branded rooms.

In February 2024, industry RevPAR was Rs 6,497 which was 10 per cent above February 2023 with room rates being 8 per cent higher Y-o-Y while occupancies were up by 200 basis points Y-o-Y at 72-74 per cent. Pan-India, room rates are likely to rise from Rs 7,700 to Rs 7,900 in FY25.

Organised players are expanding their footprint in an asset-light manner. Supply growth is estimated to be 4-5 per cent annually over the next 4-5 years, adding over 50,000 rooms to the current inventory of 160,000 branded rooms.

The industry has moved from asset-heavy investing to multiple asset-light options such as management contracts, franchising or revenue-sharing models. These models help boost revenue and operating profit margins by reducing capex. Management contracts could account for 80 per cent of room addition over 2024-28. (rediff.com)

# IndiGo enters wide-body space by placing order for 30 Airbus A350-900 aircraft



Picture credit: IndiGo

Domestic airline IndiGo has placed an order for 30 Airbus A350-900 aircraft, which will enable the carrier to expand its network further, according to an exchange filing issued on April 24. The agreement will mark the entry of India's largest carrier into wide-space body aircraft segment and

further strengthen its fleet.

The deal could be worth \$9 billion, according to Reuters. However, the report said the aircraft maker has stopped publishing the prices of its aircraft and the new deal's cost estimation is based on the catalogue published in 2018. The report also added that airplanes

in such bulk deals are sold for less than half of the official price.

Pieter Elbers, the chief executive officer of IndiGo, said, "Fleet of 30 Airbus A350-900 aircraft will allow IndiGo to embark on its next phase of becoming one of the leading global aviation players. This reaffirms IndiGo's belief in, and commitment to, the growth of India, and in our strategic partnership with Airbus."

The company expects the deliveries to begin from 2027, the filing said. The low-cost carrier also has purchase rights for an additional 70 Airbus A350 family aircraft, it said in a statement. The new aircraft will be powered by Rolls Royce's Trent XWB engine, which will see the beginning of a relationship between the two firms. As of now, the airline operates over 350 aircraft.

## Enhancing spiritual tourism: temple management courses planned



Picture credit: Mumbai University

Mumbai University, in collaboration with the Shikshana Prasarak Mandali, Pune—a trust renowned for managing numerous educational institutions—has joined hands with Temple Connect, an organization dedicated to uplifting the temple ecosystem. This partnership marks

a significant stride in enriching Temple Management courses offered by Mumbai University and the Prin. L. N. Welingkar Institute of Management Development and Research (WeSchool).

This transformative initiative positions Mumbai University and WeSchool as educational pioneers, leveraging their expertise in management education to elevate the Temple Management Education ecosystem. Through a range of programs, including Certificate, Advanced Certificate, and Diploma courses, students will gain practical insights and delve into diverse aspects of temple management, encompassing people management, socio-cultural dynamics, sustainability, and more.

At the helm of these courses is the Temple Management Course

Committee, led by Dr. Suresh Haware and featuring prominent dignitaries. Their vision lays the groundwork for a curriculum that promises holistic education and professional development. Temple Connect will play a pivotal role in engaging with the temple ecosystem and educational institutions, facilitating the involvement of industry experts and providing internship opportunities for students.

As part of this initiative, the course offerings will extend nationwide to various universities and institutions, fostering a collaborative environment for knowledge exchange and enhancing Temple Management practices across India. This concerted effort aims to propel spiritual tourism to new heights while nurturing future leaders in temple management.





## Char Dham Yatra begins on cautious note



Picture credit: Pioneer Edge

Uttarakhand's Chardham Yatra began on May 10 on a cautious note with the State Police monitoring and regulating the flow of devotees to the holy Dhams at Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath.

The sacred portals of Gangotri and Yamunotri shrines were opened on May 10, which was followed by the opening of the Badrinath Dham on the May 12. The Kedarnath Dham was adorned with vibrant marigold

flowers, enhancing its divine ambience, to mark the occasion.

Over 29,000 devotees paid obeisance at Kedarnath Dham on the first day of the pilgrimage of Char Dham Yatra. Taking to their official X handle, the Uttarkashi Police tweeted, "Today, a sufficient number of devotees have reached Shri Yamunotri Dham as per its capacity. Now, sending more devotees is risky." The same vigil is proposed to be kept through the

coming six months of the Char Dham Yatra.

The State government has made mandatory registration for the yatra and over 22 lakh devotees have already registered for the Char Dham Yatra so far. The temples typically open their doors from April to November, with the specific dates announced by the Char Dham temple committee and the Kedar-Badri Mandir Samiti.

For the convenience and safety of the pilgrims, the traffic/journey is being operated through a gate/one-way system on narrow and sensitive routes. "On the Yamunotri walking route, horses, mules and dandi-kandi are being operated through a rotation system," the police tweeted.

The Yatra, which is of profound spiritual significance for the Hindu faithful, is a journey of devotion and introspection that culminates in spiritual rejuvenation and divine communion.

## Mangaluru-Lakshadweep high-speed ferry launched



A high-speed ferry service connecting Mangaluru with Lakshadweep has been launched, bringing the travel time between the Indian coast and Lakshadweep by roughly 5 hours.

On the first journey of the ferry 'Parali', around 16 passengers were ferried from Lakshadweep to the

Old Port in Mangaluru on May 3 on an experimental basis. The vessel reached its destination in just under seven hours, as compared to the earlier 13 hours.

The Lakshadweep Islands Tourism Development Authority, which comes under the Ministry of Tourism, is all set to start Mangaluru-

Lakshadweep tourist liners after the trial runs.

The authorities are skeptical about the monsoon season when the seas become choppy. In order to tackle it, the Lakshadweep Islands Tourism Development Authority has improved the facilities at Kadmat Island which is the first port where the vessel from the mainland would stop.

Lakshadweep is one of the least explored places in India. It is an archipelago of 36 islands sprawled over 32 square kilometres. Lakshadweep is a dream destination for nature lovers, adventure enthusiasts and those who love a serene spot to enjoy their holidays. Two major adventure activities popular with visitors to Lakshadweep are snorkeling and scuba diving.





## Travel and tourism sector on course to generate 58 million jobs by 2033

Picture credit: Wikimedia Commons



Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, India's travel and tourism industry has shown remarkable resilience and is now experiencing boom conditions, according to NLB Services, global technology and digital talent solutions providers.

In 2020, during the peak of the pandemic, India's tourism sector provided employment to 39 million people, constituting 8 per cent of the total workforce. Since then, there has been a notable recovery and expansion.

In 2022, the travel and tourism industry contributed a substantial Rs 15.9 trillion (\$191.25 billion) to India's GDP, with projections for

2023 reaching Rs 16.5 trillion.

Beyond being a significant source of employment, the sector plays a crucial role in earning foreign exchange, underscoring its importance in the national economy.

Demand for talent in the industry surged by 44 per cent as of August last year. Sales roles saw an 18 per cent increase, followed by business development at 17 per cent. Positions for chefs, travel consultants, tour operators, and transportation providers each grew by 15 per cent. Wildlife experts also experienced a 12 per cent rise in demand, showcasing the diverse opportunities within the sector.

Geographical trends reveal that Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra are the top five states attracting domestic tourists. Major cities like Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune, and Kochi lead in job creation.

Additionally, tier-two cities such as Jaipur, Ahmedabad, and Chandigarh are emerging as significant contributors to employment in the sector. Over the next nine years, new job opportunities are expected to arise in emerging cities across Gujarat, Lakshadweep, and West Bengal, further diversifying employment opportunities.

The projected addition of over 58 million jobs by 2033 underscores the travel and tourism sector's pivotal role in India's post-pandemic economic development. With sustained growth, the industry not only enhances India's global tourism appeal but also significantly contributes to its socio-economic landscape by creating diverse job opportunities nationwide. This growth trajectory positions the travel and tourism industry at the forefront of India's broader economic recovery and expansion strategies, going forward, says NLB Services in its latest report.

## Government initiates standardization of hotel check-out times nationwide

Picture credit: wikiHow



The lack of uniformity in hotel check-out times across different regions often presents a challenge for travelers, leading to unintended overstays and additional charges. Recognizing this issue, the government has taken note of consumer feedback and is taking proactive steps to address it.

Government plans are currently underway to engage with industry stakeholders in discussions aimed at establishing standardized

check-out times that align with global norms. This initiative seeks to streamline the check-out process, enhancing convenience for consumers and fostering improved communication between hotels and guests.

By implementing uniform check-out times nationwide, travelers can anticipate smoother check-ins and reduced inconvenience, ultimately enhancing the overall hotel experience.







## Indians like travelling to Egypt, Singapore, Dubai, Vietnam



As the summer season approaches, Atlys, an online platform for visa applications, has unveiled the top destinations and emerging travel trends based on its extensive data analysis.

According to the report, Egypt, Singapore, Dubai, Vietnam, and Thailand have emerged as the top countries for which Indian travelers have applied for visas for summer

vacations, offering an enticing mix of culture, adventure, and relaxation for travelers of all interests.

The report notes that male travelers dominate the visa application scene, representing 77 per cent in the United Arab Emirates and 71 per cent in Singapore. As much as 30 per cent of women travellers have also applied for Singapore visas and 25 per cent of women for UAE visas.

Data compiled by Atlys reveals a diverse age distribution among travellers. While younger demographics, particularly those in the age group of 20 to 35, are prominent, there's a notable representation across various age brackets, indicating the universal appeal of these destinations.

The research also provides insights into city-wise travel. Dubai turns out to be popular among Indian cities for travellers from Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi, and Hyderabad. Cities like Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Delhi are also among the top contributors to the Vietnamese travel surge.

Again, people from cities including Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Delhi, display a strong interest in exploring Singapore. Travellers from Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Delhi have also shown a keen interest in Egyptian wonders, followed closely by those from cities like Chennai and Hyderabad.

## Chennai to get India's largest roller coaster at Wonderla



Wonderla, one of India's biggest theme park companies, is gearing up to launch one of India's largest theme parks, which would also showcase the country's largest roller coaster, in Chennai in the second quarter of 2026.

According to a Moneycontrol report, Wonderla Group's Chennai property would give a tough competition to its current best performing park in Bengaluru, thanks to larger and more thrilling rides. The total estimated cost of the project is

around Rs. 515 crore.

"We have spent Rs 150-160 crore on the Chennai project and the total cost has been revised to Rs 515 crore. Earlier, it was Rs 490 crore but with changes in the park and the kind of attractions we are adding it has gone a little over budget. We are going to have the largest roller coaster in India, an attraction available in parks like Disney and Universal. The cost of the ride is around Rs 70-80 crore," Moneycontrol reported Arun Chittilappilly, Managing Director, Wonderla, as saying.

He expects the Chennai park to compete closely with the Bengaluru property, which recorded 12.7 lakh footfalls and revenue of Rs 196.5 crore in FY24, up from Rs 169.8 crore in FY23.

## Cambodia-India direct flights from June 16



In a significant development aimed at enhancing tourism and connectivity between India and Cambodia, direct flights are set to commence between the two countries starting June 16. This

initiative, facilitated by Cambodia's Angkor Air, will create new travel opportunities for both Indian tourists visiting Cambodia and Cambodian visitors exploring India.

The new direct flight service is expected to significantly increase the flow of tourists between the two countries and facilitate easier travel for those seeking medical tourism in India, which is known for its lower treatment costs compared to neighbouring countries.

Cambodia is home to Angkor Wat, recognized as the world's largest religious structure. Built in the early 12th century, the temple was originally dedicated to the Hindu deity Vishnu.

With flights scheduled four times a week (Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday) between Phnom Penh and New Delhi, the direct air links offer convenient options for travellers.

## Incredible India's Dubai B2B meet strengthens ties with GCC buyers



The Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) and VFS Global, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism (MOT), Government of India, successfully hosted a B2B Incredible India Evening – “Fostering Partnerships and Connections” on May 08, 2024, at Taj Dubai. This exclusive event aimed to strengthen ties within the travel and tourism sector, focusing on driving visitors to India.

The event saw the participation of over 200 esteemed buyers from across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, who engaged with 40 Indian stakeholders, including state tourism boards, Destination Management Companies (DMCs), and airline partners. This platform provided invaluable networking opportunities, fostering meaningful discussions and offering insights into the diverse travel experiences India offers.

The success of the Incredible India networking event reflects a strategic vision to invest in the entire ecosystem of the Travel, Tourism, and Hospitality industry internationally, leveraging the strengths of both public and private sectors. The Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model plays a pivotal role in this transformation, optimizing resource allocation, sharing risks, and fostering innovation.

Gyan Bhushan, Senior Economic Advisor, Ministry of Tourism, India, highlighted the government's dedication to improving tourism infrastructure and making India a top global travel destination. He emphasized that such initiatives underscore the significance of concerted efforts in promoting India's rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and unique experiences to visitors worldwide. Together, we are shaping a vibrant and inclusive tourism ecosystem that showcases the best of India to the world.





## Astro Tourism: New star in India's tourism industry



India's burgeoning tourism industry has introduced an exciting new venture – "Astro Tourism." The country's first Astro Village in Benital, Uttarakhand, is a refreshing addition to the travel landscape.

Uttarakhand's innovative Chief Minister, Pushkar Singh Dhami, has taken decisive steps to open up the state's Himalayan vistas, particularly those at high altitudes, to embrace Astro Tourism. The state's smokeless and unpolluted virgin ecosystems make it an ideal location for this new tourism sector. The aim is to offer a blend of tourism with spirituality and astronomy, adhering to carrying capacity limits to preserve the environment. In Benital (2500m), as night falls, visitors can marvel at the celestial wonders through high-tech telescopes provided by the operators. The crisp air and utter seclusion make it a unique experience. Benital Astro Village

exemplifies India's entrepreneurial spirit in showcasing its diverse offerings to a global audience.

Astro Tourism involves traveling to observe stars and celestial events, promoting community engagement, empowerment, and regional growth. Tourism is crucial for sustainable development in rural areas, and Astro Tourism aligns specific rural resources with consumer demand. With 75% of its population in rural areas, India has vast potential for Astro Tourism.

Astro Tourism combines astronomy and tourism, offering activities like stargazing, observing planets, exploring galaxies, and watching eclipses. This form of tourism is gaining popularity in India and globally, supporting the socio-economic development of local communities in dark sky locations. The Hanle Dark Sky Reserve, centered around the IIA's Indian Astronomical Observatory and notified in December 2022, is

India's first officially designated dark sky region.

The pandemic, ISRO's 'Chandrayaan,' Elon Musk's ventures, and numerous amateur astronomy clubs have fueled India's growing interest in Astro Tourism. There is increasing awareness among amateur astronomy groups and governmental organizations about the significant potential for developing Astro Tourism across the country.

Collaboration and coordination among various initiatives are essential, involving sharing experiences, developing training workshops for prospective guides, and establishing standardized practices.

Over the past decade, many amateur astronomers in India have become 'astro-entrepreneurs,' organizing astronomy events for schools and the public. Some adopt cross-subsidy models, offering free events alongside paid ones.

India also boasts numerous science communication groups conducting voluntary astronomy outreach. As interest in astronomy grows among schools, stakeholders must discuss issues like supporting voluntary efforts, financial models, and reaching under-represented and under-funded groups.

Astro Tourism, still in its infancy, promises to attract more tourists and boost employment, especially in rural areas. India, with its vast area and population, can tap into the potential of Astro Tourism.

Providing basic facilities at Astro destinations will attract global tourists. Luxury resorts across India are keen to include Astro experiences in their offerings. The emergence of dark sky parks and other prepared dark sky locations will drive this demand, much like national parks for astronomy enthusiasts.





## Taj Mahal has a competitor: the Mausoleum of Radha Soami sect founder



The iconic Taj Mahal has a competitor for glory: the mausoleum of the Radha Soami sect's founder Param Purush Pooran Dhani Swamiji Maharaj.

The two mausoleums are just 12 kilometres apart, giving visitors to Agra the opportunity to visit both the places in one day.

The Taj Mahal, a white marble mausoleum built in 1648 by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan as a tomb for his wife, has enchanted generations from far and wide. The newly completed white marble mausoleum of Param Purush Pooran Dhani Swamiji Maharaj is equally exquisitely built.

The mausoleum of the Soami sector founder, which took over a century to build, is now drawing a substantial number of visitors, many of who often compare the two.

In contrast to the Taj Mahal, which was completed within 22 years by the labour of numerous skilled artisans and craftsmen during the 17th century, the construction of the Soami Bagh mausoleum extended over a century.

Resting on a foundation of 52 wells, the towering 193-foot structure, entirely crafted from white marble sourced from Makrana in Rajasthan, stands as one of India's most ambitious undertakings.

The grand mausoleum is situated in the Soami Bagh colony in Agra's Dayalbagh area. Each day, a huge number of tourists visit the mausoleum. While the entrance is free, photography is not permitted within the structure.

The Soami Bagh mausoleum is situated within a community of adherents to the Radha Soami faith, which boasts millions of followers across states such as Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Karnataka, as well as in various foreign nations.

The original samadhi was a basic white sandstone structure. Construction on a new design by an architect from Allahabad began in 1904. Despite delays, men have been working tirelessly since 1922, primarily by hand, on the expansive and intricately adorned construction.

Artisans, some of whom have spent their entire lives on the site,

continue the tradition passed down through generations. While modern machinery aids their work, their craftsmanship remains meticulous.

The building's architectural design is not bound by any specific style, whether modern or traditional, although its conception leans towards oriental influences. There's a concerted effort to seamlessly blend various styles.

The 31.4-foot gold-plated pinnacle, taller than that of the Taj Mahal, required years of effort and a crane from Delhi for installation. Most marble comes from Makrana and Jodhpur, with mosaic stone from Nowshera, Pakistan, and semi-precious stones from Indian riverbeds.

Despite leasing quarries in Mount Abu and Udaipur, acquiring high-quality marble posed difficulties, compounded by labour shortages as skilled masons migrated to Gulf countries.

While the Taj Mahal remains a top tourist choice for its grandeur, spiritually inclined individuals find solace in Soami Bagh.







## Agreement on Visa -free group travel between Russia and India likely by year end



Consultations between Russia and India on a bilateral agreement to ease travel will begin in June and could possibly lead to the launch of a visa-free group tourist exchange programme, Nikita Kondratyev, Director of the Russian Economic Development Ministry's Department of Multilateral Economic Cooperation and Special Projects, has said.

"India is at the final stage of internal state coordination," the Minister was quoted by Russian TV network RT as having said on the sidelines of the International Economic Forum "Russia - Islamic World: KazanForum 2024" in Kazan. The first discussion on a draft agreement was scheduled to take place in June, and a signing was expected by the end of the year, he said.

"Russia and India are set to strengthen their tourism ties as they gear up for the launch of visa-free group tourist exchanges. The first round of consultations between the two nations is scheduled for June, with an aim to finalise a bilateral agreement by the end of the year," the minister said.

Kondratyev said Russia planned to replicate the success of visa-free tourist exchanges already established with China and Iran.

Russia and China initiated their visa-free group tourist exchange on August 1 last year. Similarly, a visa-free group tourist exchange between Russia and Iran commenced on the same date, ushering in a new era of tourism cooperation.







# Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple **WEALTHIEST OF ALL !**

Anuradha Santhosh







The Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram captivated the world's attention when its vaults were unlocked over a decade ago, revealing treasures that rival those found only in tales of legend and on the silver screen. No wonder, the temple is today the single important place of choice for tourists who visit southern Kerala from all over India and abroad.

**P**repare to be amazed as you step into the Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple. You can take a stroll around the corridor, a massive structure supported by a ceiling made of huge granite slabs, while counting the pillars. Explore the Kulasekhara Mandapam, an exquisite example of stone craftsmanship, and admire the intricate sculptures. Don't forget to tap the musical pillars in the corners and listen to the enchanting musical notes they produce.

But be aware, cameras are watching your every move, ensuring strict security measures. It's no surprise given

the immense wealth worth billions of rupees housed just a few feet below.

### **Steeped in history**

The Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple, steeped in history and legends, has attracted riches for centuries. Scholars believe it became prominent by the ninth century A.D., with references dating back to ancient texts praising the deity, Lord Maha Vishnu, in a reclining posture called Ananthasayanam. Over the years, various rulers and patrons, including the Ays, Cheras and early rulers of Venad, contributed to its development and maintenance





**The temple's extensive history, spanning from the 14th century onwards, is meticulously documented in the Mathilakam documents, comprising a staggering 22.75 lakh palm-leaf records.**

The temple's extensive history, spanning from the 14th century onwards, is meticulously documented in the Mathilakam documents, comprising a staggering 22.75 lakh palm-leaf records. Despite the wealth of information contained within, many documents remain untranslated and unstudied.

Throughout its history, the temple has undergone numerous renovations and reconstructions, including the relocation of the main idol, reconstruction of the sanctum sanctorum roof and the installation of new idols and structures. A major renovation took place in A.D. 1733 under the reign of King Anizham Tirunal Marthanda Varma, during which the iconic 18-ft idol of Sree Padmanabhaswamy was consecrated.

The temple's significance reached new heights

on January 19-20, A.D. 1750, when Anizham Tirunal Marthanda Varma submitted his kingdom to the Deity in a historic ceremony known as Thrippadidanam. Subsequently, the deity came to be regarded as the sovereign, and the rulers adopted the title of Padmanabha Dasas, signifying their vassalage to the deity. This event marked a pivotal moment in the temple's history, intertwining it with the story of Travancore and the city of Thiruvananthapuram.

Following this, eight kings and three queens/regents ruled Travancore as Padmanabha Dasas. Even in modern times, the temple's significance remains, as evidenced by Chithira Tirunal Balarama Varma's insistence on the temple being vested in trust with the ruler of Travancore before signing the Agreement of Accession to the Indian Union in 1949.

#### **Architectural gem**

Anizham Tirunal modelled the Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple after the Adi Kesava Perumal Temple at Tiruvattar in Tamil Nadu, which was once a part of Travancore. Both temples depict the deity in a reclining posture known as Shayanamurthy.







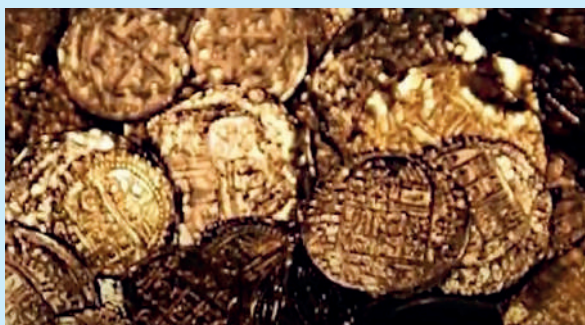
## RICHES IN VAULT A

The Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple has six vaults—Vaults A, B, C, D, E and F—underground. While the riches in Vaults A, C, D, E and F, have been accessed and assessed, the contents of Vault B, containing a treasure trove of unimaginable monetary worth and historical value, have yet to be evaluated. While the contents of Vault B remain a mystery, we have some idea about the treasures in Vault A. Even their true worth and historical significance are yet to be studied. The little that is in the public domain is in itself jaw-dropping. Here are a few vignettes:

- Approximately one lakh historical gold coins, weighing a total of 600 kg to 800 kg, spanning

various periods including Napoleonic, Mughal and British.

- 100 heavy gold chains adorned with gemstones, rings, a crown, anklets and traditional Indian jewellery
- A one-foot-tall gold idol of Lord Vishnu
- A 10-foot-long gold chain
- Gold pots, bags of diamonds and Roman gold coins
- Three diamond-studded crowns
- Gold staff and plates
- Belgian-cut diamonds and emeralds
- Ornaments and coins from different historical periods





Scholars like H. Sarkar note the Ay kings' reverence for Padmanabhaswamy, considering him their tutelary deity. The architectural style of the Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple blends Dravidian and Kerala influences. The sanctum sanctorum, Dhwaja Sthambham, and Chuttambalam reflect Kerala architecture, while the 100-ft tall Gopuram showcases stucco figures in the Vijayanagara style.

The temple features shrines dedicated to various deities, including Ganesha, Narasimha, Krishna, Kshetrapalakan and Sastha. Murals adorn the walls and sculptures in the Kulasekhara Mandapam resemble those at temples in Madurai and Tirunelveli.

Visitors view the main idol through three doors, observing different parts of the deity. Inside, six vaults hold significant treasures, sparking must

### The architectural style of the Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple blends Dravidian and Kerala influences.

interest among the faithful and the travel-bitten around the world.

#### Treasure in the vaults

Vaults C and D hold various articles used for festivals and ceremonies. Vault C contains gold jewellery for adorning idols, a gold umbrella, a gold serpent hood, a gold mace and gold coconut shells embedded with rubies and emeralds. Vault D stores decorative items for Garudavahana ceremonies. Vault E houses articles for worshipping Narasimhamoorthy, while Vault F contains items for daily pooja, including three idols of Sree Padmanabhaswamy.

## RARE MOMENT WHEN TRADITION PREVAILS

Harisankar

In a rare instance of modern logistics making way for tradition, operations at the Thiruvananthapuram International Airport are suspended for five hours twice every year to allow the Arattu procession from the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple to pass through for the deities' holy dip in the Arabian Sea.

On April 26, many who were following flight movements through South Asia would have found a somewhat surprise announcement on the social platform X.

It read: 'Dear passengers, on April 21, 2024, flight services will be suspended from 1600 hrs to 2100 hrs to enable the smooth continuation of the holy Painkuni Arattu procession of Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple through our airport.'

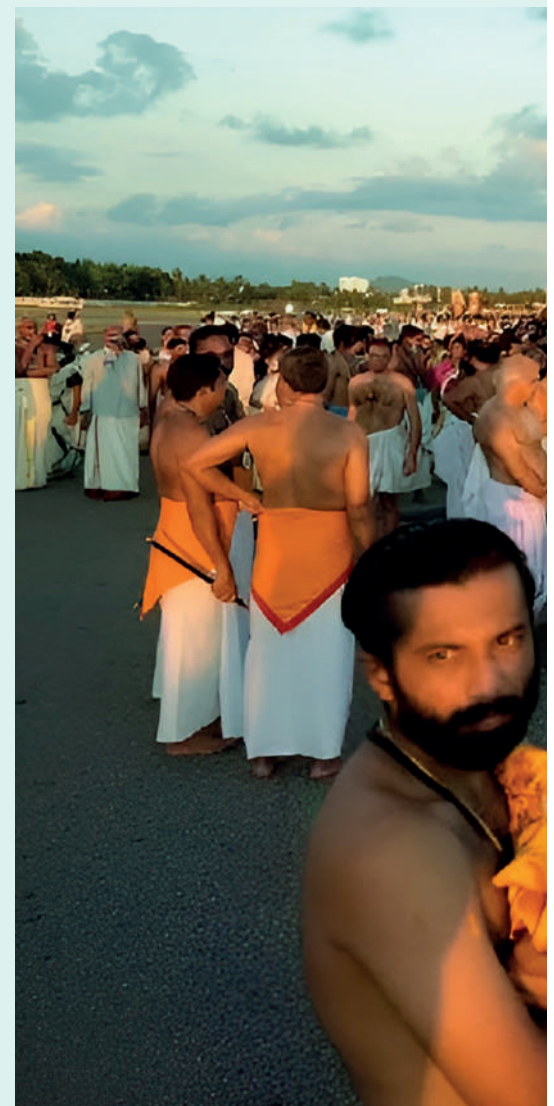
And, any of those were curious to find why an airport should remain closed for five precious hours for a religious ceremony would have been left wondering about the

way tradition meets modernity on Indian shores.

Yes, it is perhaps one rare instance in the entire world of an airport shutting down its operations for several hours in deference to a deity. The reason is simple: the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple came first, the airport much later.

Where the airport is located now was an expanse of pearly white sea sand reaching up to the sea just about 500 metres to the west. This practice has continued even after the airport was established in 1932.

When the airport was built, the Travancore King Sree Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma proclaimed that the facility would





be open to the public for 363 days a year, reserving only two days annually for Lord Padmanabha, the titular deity of the Travancore royal family.

The royal-era ritual has continued even after the Adani Group took over management of the airport in 2021. The airport issues a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) twice every year before the runway is closed during the biannual Alpassi festival of the temple, which falls in October-November, and the Painkuni festival in March-April.

It is an extraordinary display of cultural reverence and

logistical coordination that Thiruvananthapuram witnesses on these two days. This feat of logistical coordination requires meticulous planning and cooperation among airport personnel, local authorities, and religious stakeholders.

As the designated time for the Arattu Procession approaches, the bustling terminal of the international airport would fall into an uncharacteristic hush, as travellers and airport staff alike pause all activities to acknowledge the significance of the moment unfolding before them.

On the street leading to the airport

and the beach beyond, throngs of devotees, including young lot from the local Madrassa in their traditional attire, would gather in anticipation, their spirits buoyed by the rare convergence of ancient rituals and modern logistics.

As the majestic procession wind its way through the city streets, enveloped in the rhythmic chants of hymns and the fragrant swirls of incense, the palpable sense of reverence would transcend barriers of time and space. These moments are rare, just as rare as the temple which stands out for its rich physical and spiritual wealth.





# DEITIES AT THE TEMPLE

## Sree Padmanabhaswamy

The principal deity, Sree Padmanabhaswamy (Lord Vishnu), reclines on the five-hooded serpent, Anantha, with his head facing south and feet north. A lotus emerges from the deity's navel, where Lord Brahma is seated. Beneath the stretched right arm of the main deity lies the Shiva Linga, symbolising the cycle of creation, preservation and destruction in Hindu mythology. The sanctum sanctorum has three entrances.



## Vishwakshenan

Vishwakshenan, the representation of Mahavishnu's Nirmalya Moorthy, is depicted in a seated posture facing south.



## Sree Ramaswamy with Sita and Lakshmana

Sree Ramaswamy is portrayed alongside Seetha and Lakshmanan, with two sets of idols depicting different aspects of Lord Rama's life. There are idols of Lord Hanuman, Ganapathy with eight arms and Devi seated on His lap, and Kaliyamardana Krishna.

## Sree Yoga Narasimha Moorthy

Located on the southern side of the main sanctum, the shrine for Sree Narasimhaswamy features an idol made of Panchaloham facing east, representing the second major deity of the temple.

## Sree Veda Vyasa and Ashwathama

The shrine of Sage Veda Vyasa and Ashwathama, made of Panchaloha, is situated on the northern side of the cheruchuttu, facing west, and is considered rare in India.

## Thiruvambadi Sree Krishnaswamy

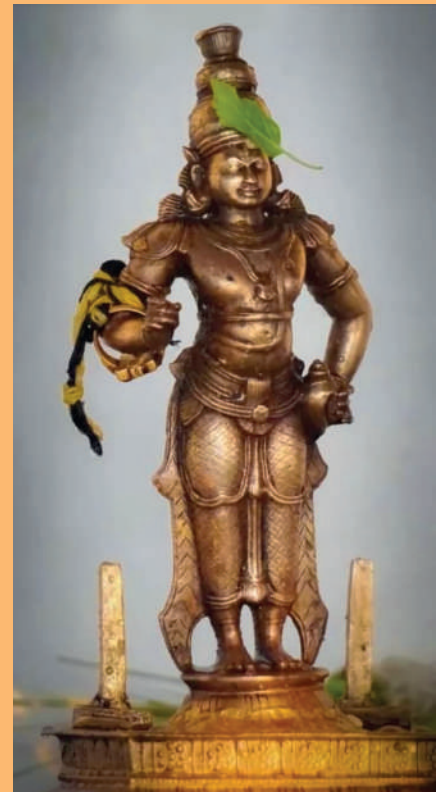
The Thiruvambadi Temple, an independent shrine within the complex, houses an image of Sree Krishna as Parthasarathy. It features a Namaskara Mandapam, a Balikkal, and a silver flag pole.

## Kshethrapalakan

The shrine of Kshethrapalakan, positioned on the northern side of the temple, displays the idol in a sitting posture facing east, along with an idol of Lord Ganesha.

## Agrashaala Ganapathi

Installed in the temple kitchen, this idol of Lord Ganapathi holds significance in the daily rituals of the temple.



## Sree Hanuman, Ashtanaga Garuda Swamy and the Maha Meru Chakram

Near the golden flagpole, there are images of Sree Hanuman and Sree Ashtanaga Garuda Swamy, while the ceiling features the Maha Meru Chakram.

## Sree Dharma Sastha

The independent shrine of Sree Dharma Sastha, depicted in Yogasanam, or yogic posture, faces east and is made of granite.





**The temple has six vaults—Vaults A, B, C, D, E and F—underground. While the riches in Vaults A, C, D, E and F, have been accessed and assessed, the contents of Vault B, containing a treasure trove of unimaginable monetary worth and historical value, have yet to be evaluated.**

The contents of Vault B have yet to be evaluated. On June 30, 2011, a team appointed by the Supreme Court opened Vault A, situated in the southern part of the sanctum sanctorum. After moving a massive rectangular slab, they discovered a dark passage leading to a flight of stairs. With the help of oxygen pumped by firemen, they accessed the vault at the bottom of the stairs, and there they were greeted by a vast treasure trove of gold, precious stones and other valuables.

Among the findings were approximately one lakh historical gold coins, weighing a total of 600 kg to 800 kg, spanning various periods including Napoleonic, Mughal and British. They also found 100 heavy gold chains adorned with gemstones, rings, a crown, anklets and traditional Indian jewellery. Notable items included a one-foot-tall gold idol of Lord Vishnu, a 10-foot-long gold chain, gold pots, bags of diamonds and Roman gold coins, among others.

The observers were stunned by the sight of three diamond-studded crowns, gold staff and plates, Belgian-cut diamonds and emeralds, and various ornaments and coins from different historical periods. Despite the lack of a formal valuation, experts estimate the value of the treasure to be several lakh crores.

#### **The source of the treasures?**

The wealth in the vaults of the Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple primarily accumulated through offerings, royal gifts and a portion of the State revenue. Kings often submitted gold, properties and vast tracts of land to the temple, with records dating back to A.D. 1179.

For instance, a royal donation of 13,000 fanams (primary currency used for trading in medieval Travancore and South India) in A.D.



1469 funded the creation of a gold elephant figure, while another king contributed 1,24,648 fanams for making an idol of Bhoomi Devi. Kings were also weighed against gold in ceremonies and elaborate rituals marked their coronation.

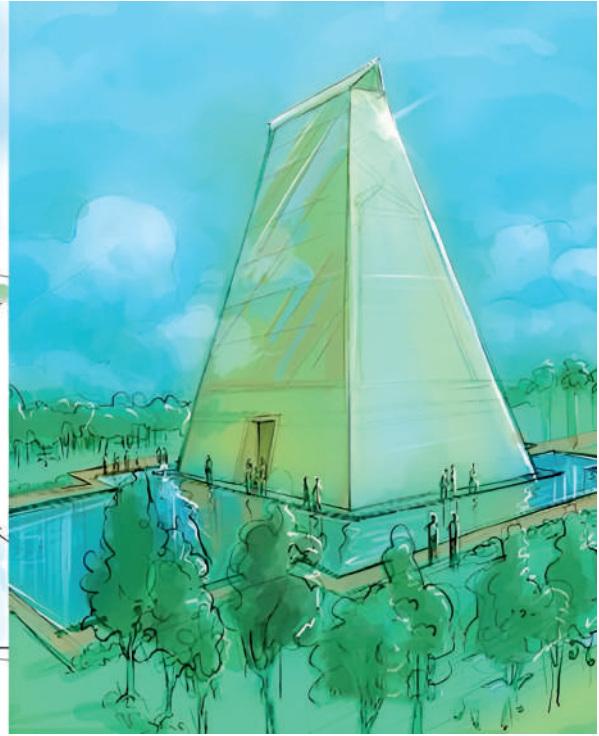
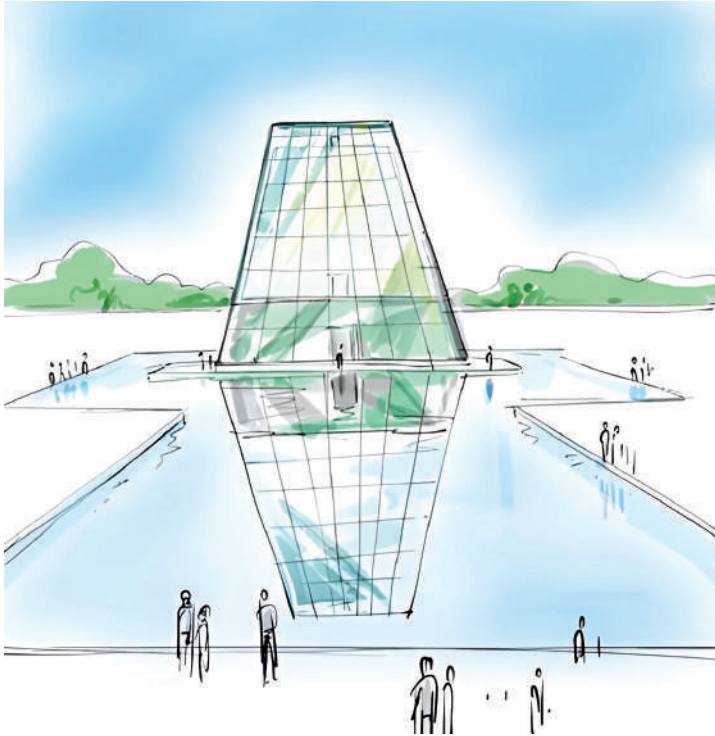
Anizham Tirunal Marthanda Varma's annexation of neighbouring kingdoms likely contributed to the temple's wealth, as did the refuge-seeking Hindu rulers who brought their riches to Travancore during Tipu Sultan's reign. Additionally,

Kerala's extensive trade with foreign lands and contributions from vassal states and visiting kings boosted the temple's coffers. Even colonial powers like the Dutch East India Company and British Resident Colonel Monroe made donations.

Ask devotees and they'll passionately declare: the temple's true wealth lies not in gold or jewels, but in the divine spiritual experience it bestows upon all who enter its sacred halls.

Absolutely, couldn't have said it better. ■





## Temple Town Project

# AN INNOVATIVE PROJECT AWAITING ITS DAY



It's years since we found out that one of the biggest treasures ever found in the entire world is in the glorious land of Lord Ananthapadmanabha. Visitors from far and wide have been making a beeline for Thiruvananthapuram, the land of Ananthapadmanabha, to get a feel of the temple and its invaluable treasures. But, for security reasons, the treasure trove remains away from public sight, in the mystery vaults deep within the temple complex.

The question how the temple of ageless charm and its treasure trove could be used to trigger Thiruvananthapuram's transformation into a world-class spiritual tourism destination has been one of the key concerns of the Government of Kerala and public-spirited citizens of the State capital. A key project that has been with

the State government is the Temple Town Project, mooted within years of the temple's riches becoming public knowledge. A proposal submitted to the Government by Federation of Kerala Hotels Association (FKHA) President V. Sunil Kumar is intended to use the discovery of the temple's immense wealth and the huge interest it has generated in people far and wide to bring about transformative changes in the State's tourist potential, the capital city's growth and the State government's finances.

The project is proposed to be implemented in one square kilometre area within the four walls of the Fort that demarcates the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and its environs from the rest of the city.

At its core will be a museum of international standards with an art





gallery, heritage park, auditorium and a beautiful garden. The project also envisages an amphitheatre, synthetic track, rest house and shopping centres.

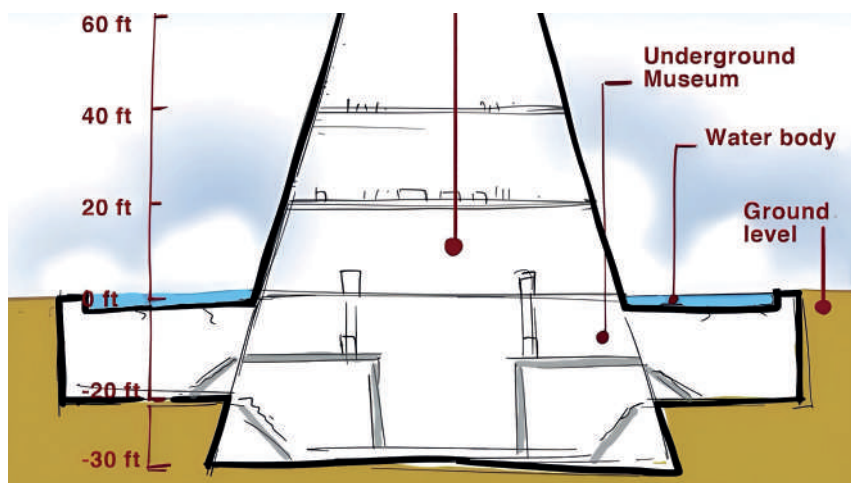
The main attraction and epicenter of the project will be the museum complex, which is proposed to be designed just like the underground vaults where the treasures are safely kept. There would be 20 to 22 stop points to provide additional safety. Light reflected through water will create a unique, scintillating dancing light effect inside the museum.

The proposed 80-ft imposing structure of the museum is inspired by the temple dome and modern architectural techniques. To be made with glass, it will provide a novel experience for the spectators. Security systems of international standards and proper accounting and auditing have been built into the project proposal.

The proposed project has the potential to attract 20,000 to 40,000 local, national and international visitors every day to the temple and its precincts. With such a high volume of visitors, the revenue of the capital city from different sources will increase exponentially. Moreover, there would be a cascading effect in such tourist arrivals as visitors to the temple would also visit other tourist destinations of Kerala.

The State Government and the people of Kerala would stand to gain immensely because the project would promote travel and accommodation facilities, restaurants, shopping complexes, ayurveda and alternative health tourism initiatives. Given the demographic segment expected to visit the temple, this project can also provide a big fillip to authentic ayurveda treatment.

Entry tickets to the museum project alone has the potential to generate revenue of the order of Rs. 250 to Rs. 350 crore. The Government would also get an



estimated Rs. 550 to 650 crore per annum as taxes from activities such as shopping, food, local commutation, accommodation etc. There is also the potential to generate funds from toll fees and parking fees.

Indian and international students, academicians and research fellows are very likely to be in the Kerala capital for longer stays, which would be a source of additional income. Their theses and writings, Thiruvananthapuram's royal past, heritage and charm would become well-known. That in itself would enhance the revenue earnings of the temple manifold.

The city is also uniquely placed to promote Spiritual Tourism that embraces the places of worship of Hindus, Muslims and Christians. The Beemapalli, Palayam Church, the Azhimala Siva Temple, etc. can form part of a spiritual travel

circuit within the city and suburbs. Needless to say, the project has the potential to generate job opportunities in large numbers both within the city and elsewhere.

Once the much-awaited Thiruvananthapuram-Kottappuram becomes a reality, the visitors to the temple would be able to move northward in the State and reach other major tourist destinations. While the Thiruvananthapuram International Airport could become the busiest airport in India, the Vizhinjam harbour could become the landing point for luxury cruise ships.

Thiruvananthapuram is awaiting a breakthrough. The Temple Town Project could well be that breakthrough. It would be a golden milestone in the history of Indian tourism because at its core is Gold's own treasure! ■





# ടൂറിസത്തിന് വ്യവസായ പദവി അനിവാര്യം

സ്കാഡ്രൺ ലീഡർ കെ.ബി. പത്മദാസ് (റിട്ട.)

ജനറൽ സെക്രട്ടറി, ഫെഡറേഷൻ ഓഫ് കേരള ഹോട്ടൽസ് അസോസിയേഷൻ

കേരളത്തിന്റെ സാമ്പത്തിക പുരോഗതിയിൽ പുതിയ വളർച്ചാ മേഖലയായി ടൂറിസം മാറിക്കൊണ്ടിരിക്കുകയാണ്. നിലവിലെ ടൂറിസ്റ്റ് കേന്ദ്രങ്ങളേയും പദ്ധതികളേയും ആകർഷകമാക്കിയും പരിഷ്കരിച്ചും നവീന പദ്ധതികൾ ആവിഷ്കരിച്ചും ലോകത്തെ പുതിയ ടൂറിസം ട്രെൻഡുകൾ ഉൾക്കൊണ്ടും സംസ്ഥാന ടൂറിസം അതിവേഗം മുന്നേറുന്നു. കേരളമാകെ ഒരു ടൂറിസ്റ്റ് ഡെസ്റ്റിനേഷൻ എന്ന നിലയിൽ

ഓരോ പ്രദേശവും ടൂറിസത്തിന് അനുയോജ്യമാവുകയാണ്. സാംസ്കാരിക വൈവിധ്യം കൊണ്ടും പ്രകൃതി സൗന്ദര്യം കൊണ്ടും സമ്പന്നമായ നമ്മുടെ നാട് അതിന്റെ പരമ്പരാഗത കലകളും ചിനിത്തലും ഉത്സവവും കൃഷിയും വരെ ഇന്ന് ടൂറിസത്തിനായി മാർക്കറ്റ് ചെയ്യുന്നു. വിദേശ വിനോദ സഞ്ചാരികളുടെ വരവിലും കേരളം ആണ് മുന്നിൽ. നിശ്ചയമായും കണ്ടിരിക്കേണ്ട പ്രദേശമായി കേരളത്തെ ലോകം രേഖപ്പെടുത്തി കഴിഞ്ഞു.







മലയാളികളും വിനോദ സഞ്ചാരപ്രിയരായി മാറിക്കൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. വിദ്യാർത്ഥികളും യുവാക്കളും മാത്രമല്ല പ്രായമായവരും കുടുംബങ്ങളും വരെ വിനോദ സഞ്ചാരത്തിനായി സമയം കണ്ടെത്തുന്നു. കലയും കായികവും മാത്രമല്ല യാത്രയും ഭക്ഷണവും വിനോദമായി മാറുകയാണ്. ആഭ്യന്തര ടൂറിസ്റ്റുകളുടെ ഗണത്തിൽ ഇന്ന് മലയാളികളും പിന്നിലല്ല. ടൂറിസം ജനങ്ങൾക്കും ജനങ്ങൾ ടൂറിസത്തിനും എന്ന നിലയിൽ കേരളത്തിലെ ടൂറിസം കൂടുതൽ ജനകീയമായി വികസിക്കുകയാണ്. സംസ്ഥാന ജി.ഡി.പി യുടെ പത്ത് ശതമാനത്തോളം ഇന്ന് ടൂറിസത്തിൽ നിന്നാണ് ലഭിക്കുന്നത്. വിദേശനാണ്ഡം നേടി തരുന്നതിലും പുതിയ തൊഴിലവസരങ്ങൾ സൃഷ്ടിക്കുന്നതിലും കേരളത്തിൽ ടൂറിസത്തിന് നിർണായക സ്ഥാനമുണ്ട്. സ്വകാര്യ മേഖലയെ കൂടി സഹകരിപ്പിച്ച് ടൂറിസത്തെ കൂടുതൽ ഉത്തേജിപ്പിക്കുകയാണ് സംസ്ഥാന സർക്കാർ. സ്വകാര്യ സംരംഭകർ പി.പി.പി. മാതൃകയിലും ബി.ഒ.റ്റി മാതൃകയിലും ടൂറിസം പദ്ധതികൾ ആരംഭിച്ചു കഴിഞ്ഞു. ടൂറിസം പദ്ധതികൾക്ക് മാത്രമായി ഒരു ഇൻവെന്റേ

ഴ്സ് മീറ്റും സംസ്ഥാനത്ത് ആദ്യമായി കഴിഞ്ഞ വർഷം നടന്നു. പതിനയ്യായിരത്തോളം കോടി രൂപയുടെ പദ്ധതികൾ സമർപ്പിക്കപ്പെട്ടു. സമർപ്പിക്കപ്പെട്ട പദ്ധതികൾ മുന്നോട്ടു കൊണ്ടുപോകുന്നതിന് ഫെസിലിറ്റേഷൻ സെന്ററും ആരംഭിച്ചു. ഇത്തരത്തിൽ ടൂറിസം രംഗം മുന്നേറുമ്പോൾ ഈ മേഖലയുടെ അഭിഭാഷ്യ ഘടകമായ ഹോട്ടൽ വ്യവസായ രംഗത്ത് പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നവർക്ക് ചില നിർദ്ദേശങ്ങൾ കൂടി അവതരിപ്പിക്കാനുണ്ട്.

വ്യവസായ രംഗത്ത് കാലോചിതമായ മാറ്റങ്ങൾ കൊണ്ടുവരുന്നതിനും, നിക്ഷേപകർക്ക് സംരംഭങ്ങൾ തുടങ്ങാൻ കൂടുതൽ മെച്ചപ്പെട്ട അന്തരീക്ഷം സൃഷ്ടിക്കുന്നതിനും സംസ്ഥാനത്തിന്റെ സാധ്യതകളും ദാർബല്യങ്ങളും തിരിച്ചറിഞ്ഞു അതിൽ അന്തർലീനമായ നേട്ടങ്ങൾ പ്രയോജനപ്പെടുത്തുകയും ചെയ്യുന്ന ഒരു ബദൽ കാഴ്ചപ്പാട് ഉയർത്തിപ്പിടിക്കുന്ന പുതിയ വ്യവസായനയം 01.04.2023 ന് സർക്കാർ അംഗീകരിച്ചു. വ്യവസായ സംരംഭങ്ങളെ കൂടുതൽ ആകർഷിക്കുന്നതിനും, അതുവഴി കൂടുതൽ തൊഴിൽ അവസരങ്ങൾ സൃ

ഷ്ടിക്കുന്നതിനുമാണ് പുതിയ വ്യവസായ നയം ലക്ഷ്യമിടുന്നത്.

സംസ്ഥാനത്തെ നിക്ഷേപ സൗഹൃദമാക്കുന്നതിന് നിരവധി നടപടികൾ സർക്കാർ സ്വീകരിച്ചു. നിക്ഷേപകരെ നിരുത്സാഹപ്പെടുത്തുന്ന നിയമങ്ങളിലും ചട്ടങ്ങളിലും ഭേദഗതി വരുത്തി. 2016 മുതൽ സംസ്ഥാനം ഈസ് ഓഫ് ഡുയിംഗ് ബിസിനസ്സ് പരിഷ്കാരങ്ങൾ നടപ്പിലാക്കുന്നതിന് നടപടികൾ തുടങ്ങി. സംസ്ഥാന വ്യവസായ വികസന കോർപ്പറേഷനെ നോഡൽ ഏജൻസിയാക്കി നിയോഗിച്ചു. കേരള നിക്ഷേപം പ്രോത്സാഹിപ്പിക്കലും സുഗമമാക്കലും ആക്ട്-2018 പോലുള്ള നിയമനിർമ്മാണങ്ങൾ നടത്തി. ലൈസൻസുകൾക്ക് കെ-സിഫ് ഓൺലൈൻ ഏകജാലകം, ഇൻവെസ്റ്റ് കേരള ഹെൽപ്പ് ഡെസ്ക്, കേന്ദ്രീകൃത പരിശോധന സംവിധാനം (കെ-സിസ്) തുടങ്ങിയ നിരവധി നടപടികൾ സർക്കാർ സ്വീകരിച്ചു. അതോടൊപ്പം പുതിയ മേഖലകൾക്ക് വ്യവസായ പദവി നൽകുമെന്നും ഈ പുതിയ വ്യവസായനയം വാഗ്ദാനം ചെയ്യുന്നു.







സ്ഥിര മൂലധന നിക്ഷേപത്തിന്റെ പത്ത് ശതമാനം നിക്ഷേപ സബ്സിഡി (പരമാവധി 10 കോടി), അഞ്ച് വർഷത്തേക്ക് മൂലധന നിക്ഷേപത്തിന് നൂറ് ശതമാനം സംസ്ഥാനം ജി.എസ്.ടി. റി-ഇൻബേഴ്സ് മെന്റ്, ഭൂമി വാങ്ങുകയോ, പാട്ടത്തിന് എടുക്കുകയോ ചെയ്യുമ്പോൾ സ്റ്റാമ്പ് ഡ്യൂട്ടി, രജിസ്ട്രേഷൻ ചാർജ്ജ് എന്നിവ ഒഴിവാക്കൽ തുടങ്ങി നിരവധി സാമ്പത്തിക പ്രോത്സാഹനങ്ങളും വൻകിട വ്യവസായങ്ങൾക്ക് പുതിയ വ്യവസായ നയത്തിൽ പ്രഖ്യാപിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. ഹോട്ടൽ വ്യവസായരംഗത്ത് കോടികണക്കിന് രൂപയുടെ നിക്ഷേപം നടത്തിയിട്ടുണ്ടെങ്കിലും ഇതിനെ സുറിസത്തിന്റെ ഭാഗമായി കാണുന്നതിനാൽ മറ്റ് വ്യവസായങ്ങൾക്ക് ലഭിക്കുന്ന പ്രോത്സാഹനങ്ങളൊന്നും ഹോട്ടൽ വ്യവസായത്തിൽ നിക്ഷേപം നടത്തുന്നവർക്ക് ലഭിക്കുന്നില്ല. പുതിയ നയം വരുന്നതിന് മുമ്പ് വ്യവസായ മേഖലയിൽ ഉണ്ടായിരുന്ന ആനുകൂല്യങ്ങളായ ഒറ്റത്തവണ കെട്ടിടനികുതി ഒഴിവാക്കൽ, വൈദ്യുതി-വാണിജ്യ നിരക്കിന് പകരം വ്യവസായ നിരക്ക്, ബാങ്ക് വായ്പകളിൽ വ്യവസായങ്ങൾക്കുള്ള ആനുകൂല്യം തുടങ്ങിയവയും ഹോട്ടൽ മേഖലയ്ക്ക് ലഭിച്ചിരുന്നില്ല.

ഹോസ്പിറ്റാലിറ്റി ഇൻഡസ്ട്രി എന്ന നിലയിൽ അതിവേഗം വളരുന്ന മേഖലയാണ് ഹോട്ടൽ വ്യവസായം. 10 കോടി മുതൽ

100 കോടി വരെ മുതൽ മുടക്കിയാണ് സ്റ്റാർ ഫെസിലിറ്റി ഹോട്ടലുകൾ ആരംഭിക്കുന്നത്. ഇതിലൂടെ ആയിരക്കണക്കിന് തൊഴിലവസരങ്ങൾ നേരിട്ടും, പരോക്ഷമായും നൽകുന്നു. ഉപ്പ് മുതൽ കർപ്പൂരം വരെയുള്ള നിത്യോപയോഗ സാധനങ്ങളുടെയും, നിരവധി വ്യവസായ-വാണിജ്യ ഉൽപ്പന്നങ്ങളുടെയും വലിയ ഉപഭോക്താക്കൾ കൂടിയാണ് ഹോട്ടലുകൾ. നിരവധി ചെറുകിട-ഇടത്തര വ്യവസായങ്ങളുടെ വളർച്ചയ്ക്കും നിലനിൽപ്പിനും ഹോട്ടൽ വ്യവസായം ഉത്തേജകമാകും. സുറിസത്തിന്റെ ഭാഗമായ ഹോട്ടൽ വ്യവസായരംഗത്ത് മുതൽമുടക്കിയിട്ടുള്ളവരും, ഇപ്പോഴും മുതൽ മുടക്കിക്കൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്നവരും സ്വകാര്യ സംരംഭകരാണ്. സുറിസം രംഗത്തേക്ക് സ്വകാര്യ സംരംഭകരെയും സർക്കാർ ക്ഷണിക്കുന്നുമുണ്ട്. എന്നാൽ മറ്റ് വ്യവസായങ്ങൾക്ക് ലഭിക്കുന്ന പരിഗണനയും പ്രോത്സാഹനവും ഹോട്ടൽ വ്യവസായത്തിന് ലഭിക്കുന്നില്ല.

തിരുവനന്തപുരത്ത് കഴിഞ്ഞ വർഷം നടന്ന സുറിസം ഇൻവെസ്റ്റേഴ്സ് മീറ്റിൽ 39 പദ്ധതികൾ സുറിസം വകുപ്പ് അവതരിപ്പിച്ചപ്പോൾ 73 പദ്ധതികളാണ് സ്വകാര്യ നിക്ഷേപകർ സമർപ്പിച്ചത്. സുറിസം വകുപ്പ് 2511.10 കോടി രൂപയുടെ പദ്ധതികൾ സമർപ്പിച്ചപ്പോൾ സ്വകാര്യ മേഖല 12,605.55 കോടി രൂപയുടെ നിക്ഷേപങ്ങളാണ് വാഗ്

ദാനം ചെയ്തത്. മീറ്റിൽ സ്വകാര്യ മേഖല വാഗ്ദാനം ചെയ്ത പദ്ധതികളേറെയും ഹോട്ടലുകൾ, റിസോർട്ടുകൾ തുടങ്ങി ഹോസ്പിറ്റാലിറ്റി മേഖലയുമായി ബന്ധപ്പെട്ടതാണ്. അന്നേ ദിവസം ധാരണാപത്രത്തിൽ ഒപ്പ് വച്ച മൂന്ന് പദ്ധതികളും ലക്ഷ്യ റിസോർട്ട്, റിസോർട്ട് എന്നിവയുടേതായിരുന്നു.

സ്വകാര്യ മേഖല സുറിസം രംഗത്ത് മുതൽ മുടക്കാൻ ആത്മാർത്ഥമായി മുന്നോട്ടുവരുമ്പോൾ അവരെ പ്രോത്സാഹിപ്പിക്കുന്നതിന് സർക്കാർ നയപരമായ ചില തീരുമാനങ്ങൾ കൂടി എടുത്തേ തീരൂ. അതിലൊന്ന് സുറിസത്തിന് വ്യവസായ പദവി നൽകുക എന്നതാണ്. ഈ രംഗത്ത് പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നവർ നിരന്തരം ആവശ്യപ്പെടുന്നതാണ് ഇത്. 1986 ൽ രാജ്യത്ത് ആദ്യമായി കേരളത്തിൽ സുറിസത്തിന് വ്യവസായ പദവി നൽകിയെങ്കിലും പിന്നീട് അത് റദ്ദാക്കപ്പെട്ടു. ഇന്ന് രാജ്യത്തെ ഭൂരിപക്ഷം സംസ്ഥാനങ്ങളും സുറിസത്തിന് വ്യവസായ പദവി നൽകിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. ഇായിടെയാണ് ബംഗാൾ സർക്കാർ സുറിസത്തിന് വ്യവസായ പദവി നൽകിയത്. കഴിഞ്ഞ വർഷം 05.04.2023 ൽ ചേർന്ന സംസ്ഥാന സുറിസം അഡ്വൈസറി കമ്മിറ്റി യോഗത്തിൽ സുറിസം മന്ത്രി, സുറിസത്തിന് വ്യവസായ പദവി നൽകുമെന്ന് പറഞ്ഞെങ്കിലും തുടർ നടപടികളൊന്നും ഉണ്ടായിട്ടില്ല.





മറ്റൊന്ന് ക്ലാസ്സിഫിക്കേഷൻ സംബന്ധിച്ചാണ്. രാജ്യത്തിൽ ഏറ്റവും കൂടുതൽ സ്റ്റാർ ഹോട്ടലുകൾ പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നത് കേരളത്തിലാണ്. വിദേശ ടൂറിസ്റ്റുകൾ ഏറെ ആകർഷിക്കപ്പെടുന്ന സ്ഥലം കേരളം ആയതുകൊണ്ടാണിത്. കേരളത്തിലെ ഹോട്ടലുകളുടെ സ്റ്റാർ ക്ലാസ്സിഫിക്കേഷൻ വളരെയേറെ കാലതാമസം നേരിടുന്നു. 801 ഹോട്ടലുകളാണ് കേരളത്തിൽ സ്റ്റാർ ക്ലാസ്സിഫിക്കേഷൻ നടത്തിയിട്ടുള്ളത്. ഇരുന്നൂറോളം ഹോട്ടലുകൾ ക്ലാസ്സിഫിക്കേഷൻ നടത്തേതായിട്ടുണ്ട്. കോടികൾ നിക്ഷേപം നടത്തിയവർക്ക് ഹോട്ടൽ പ്രവർത്തനം ആരംഭിക്കാൻ കഴിയാത്ത സാഹ



ചര്യം ഇതുമൂലം നിലനിൽക്കുകയാണ്. അതോടൊപ്പം ബാർ ഹോട്ടൽ ലൈസൻസ് കിട്ടാൻ വേണ്ടി മാത്രം ഹോട്ടലുകൾ നിർമ്മിക്കുന്ന പ്രവണത ടൂറിസത്തിന് ഗുണകരമല്ല. ടൂറിസത്തിന് കൂടി പ്രയോജനപ്പെടുന്ന രീതിയിൽ ത്രി-സ്റ്റാറിന് 30 ഉം, ഫോർ സ്റ്റാറിന് 40 ഉം, ഫൈവ് സ്റ്റാർ 50 മുറികൾ എങ്കിലും വേണമെന്ന വ്യവസ്ഥ ഏർപ്പെടുത്തണം. ഹോട്ടലുകളുടെ ക്ലാസ്സിഫിക്കേഷൻ സംസ്ഥാന ടൂറിസം വകുപ്പിന്റെ നേതൃത്വത്തിൽ സംസ്ഥാനതല കമ്മിറ്റി രൂപീകരിക്കുകയും വേണം.

മാറിയ ജീവിത സാഹചര്യങ്ങളിൽ ടൂറിസം വികസനത്തിൽ നൈറ്റ് ലൈഫിന്റെ പ്രാധാന്യം ലക്ഷ്യമാക്കി നമ്മുടെ പല അയൽ സംസ്ഥാനങ്ങളിലും ബാർ ഹോട്ടലുകളു

ടെ പ്രവർത്തന സമയം രാവിലെ ഒരു മണി വരെയായി നിജപ്പെടുത്തിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. ആയതുപോലെ നമ്മുടെ സംസ്ഥാനത്തും, കോർപ്പറേഷൻ, മുനിസിപ്പൽ പരിധിയിലും, ഐറ്റി, ടൂറിസം മേഖലകളിലെങ്കിലും ബാർ, ബിയർ & വൈൻ ഹോട്ടലുകളുടെ പ്രവർത്തന സമയം സമാനമായി ദീർഘിപ്പിക്കേണ്ടതാണ്.

എല്ലാ മാസം ഒന്നാം തീയതിയും ഉത്സവങ്ങളുടെയും പ്രാദേശിക അവധിയുടെയും പേരിലും ഡ്രൈവേ ഏർപ്പെടുത്തുന്നത് ഒഴിവാക്കേണ്ടതാണ്. ഇത് ടൂറിസ്റ്റുകളെ ആകർഷിക്കുന്നതിന് ഉതകുന്നതല്ല. ടൂറിസം, ഐ.റ്റി രംഗങ്ങളിൽ കേരളത്തിൽ ഉണ്ടായിരിക്കാൻ ഉണ്ടായതിനെത്തുടർന്ന് വളർച്ചയ്ക്ക് അനു

സരിച്ചും, യുവാക്കളെ വീര്യം കുറഞ്ഞ മദ്യത്തിലേക്ക് ആകർഷിക്കാനും സംസ്ഥാനത്തെ ത്രി-സ്റ്റാറിന് മുകളിലുള്ള ഹോട്ടലുകൾക്ക് മൈക്രോ ബ്രൂവറി, ക്രാഫ്റ്റ് ബിയർ ഉല്പന്നങ്ങൾ വിൽക്കുന്നതിന് ലൈസൻസ് നൽകണം.

വ്യവസായ രംഗത്തെ മുന്നേറ്റവും, ടൂറിസം മേഖലയുടെ നവീന ആശയങ്ങളും, ടൂറിസം രംഗത്തേക്ക് സർക്കാർ തന്നെ സ്വകാര്യ സംരംഭകരെ ക്ഷണിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്ന സാഹചര്യത്തിൽ ടൂറിസത്തിന് വ്യവസായ പദവി എന്ന ആവശ്യത്തോടൊപ്പം ഇക്കാര്യങ്ങൾ കൂടി സർക്കാർ അംഗീകരിച്ചാൽ ടൂറിസം മേഖലയുടെ വളർച്ചയിൽ ഇനിയും വലിയ മുന്നേറ്റം സൃഷ്ടിക്കാനാകും. ■





# MakeMyTrip's

## Summer Travel Trends 2024

### A Snapshot of Indian Wanderlust

# SPIRITUAL TOURISM, WEEKEND GETAWAYS TO THE FORE IN INDIA

Harisankar

**M**akeMyTrip's inaugural "India Travel Trends Report" paints a vibrant picture of the evolving travel preferences among Indian globetrotters. This comprehensive report, drawn from the habits of over 100 million active users on MakeMyTrip's platform, highlights some interesting trends that are shaping the travel landscape in 2024.

One of the standout revelations is the growing interest in weekend getaways and spiritual tourism. As more Indians seek to balance the hustle and bustle of daily life with short, rejuvenating breaks, the allure of quick escapes and soul-enriching journeys is stronger than ever.

The family travel segment has seen remarkable growth, surging by 20% compared to the previous year. This uptick underscores a renewed enthusiasm for shared experiences and quality time spent together.

Solo travel is also on the rise, with a commendable 10% increase, reflecting a shift towards personal exploration and self-discovery among Indian travellers.

In a significant trend, the number of people taking more than three trips per year has jumped by 25% in 2023 compared to 2019, signalling a robust revival of travel appetite post-pandemic. Family travel bookings, in particular, have skyrocketed by 64% in 2023 compared to 2022, while solo travel bookings have climbed by 23% in the same period.

MakeMyTrip's report not only highlights these impressive figures but also illustrates the dynamic and diverse tapestry of travel preferences in India today. Whether it's a serene spiritual retreat or a spontaneous weekend getaway, Indian travellers are embracing a wide range of experiences, driven by a passion for discovery and adventure.



### Spontaneity and Strategic Planning

MakeMyTrip report also gives fascinating insights into the booking habits of Indian travellers, highlighting a mix of spontaneity and strategic planning. The data reveals that a significant portion of domestic travel bookings are made on a whim, with 46% of domestic flights being booked less than a week before the travel date. In contrast, international travel shows a more measured approach, with about half of all international bookings being made at least two weeks in advance. Interestingly, only one-third of international bookings are made more than a month ahead, indicating a flexible approach to planning overseas trips.

Travelers from Kolkata stand out for their meticulous planning, often booking flights over three months in advance, whether for international or domestic journeys. This, perhaps, suggests a unique preference for long-term travel arrangements in this region.

Gender preferences also play a role in travel arrangements. Women tend to pre-book window seats, while men show a preference for aisle seats. Hotel bookings further underscore the trend of last-minute planning, with around 56% of reservations made less than a week before the travel date. However, for international stays, 33% of travellers secure their hotel rooms at least 30 days in advance.

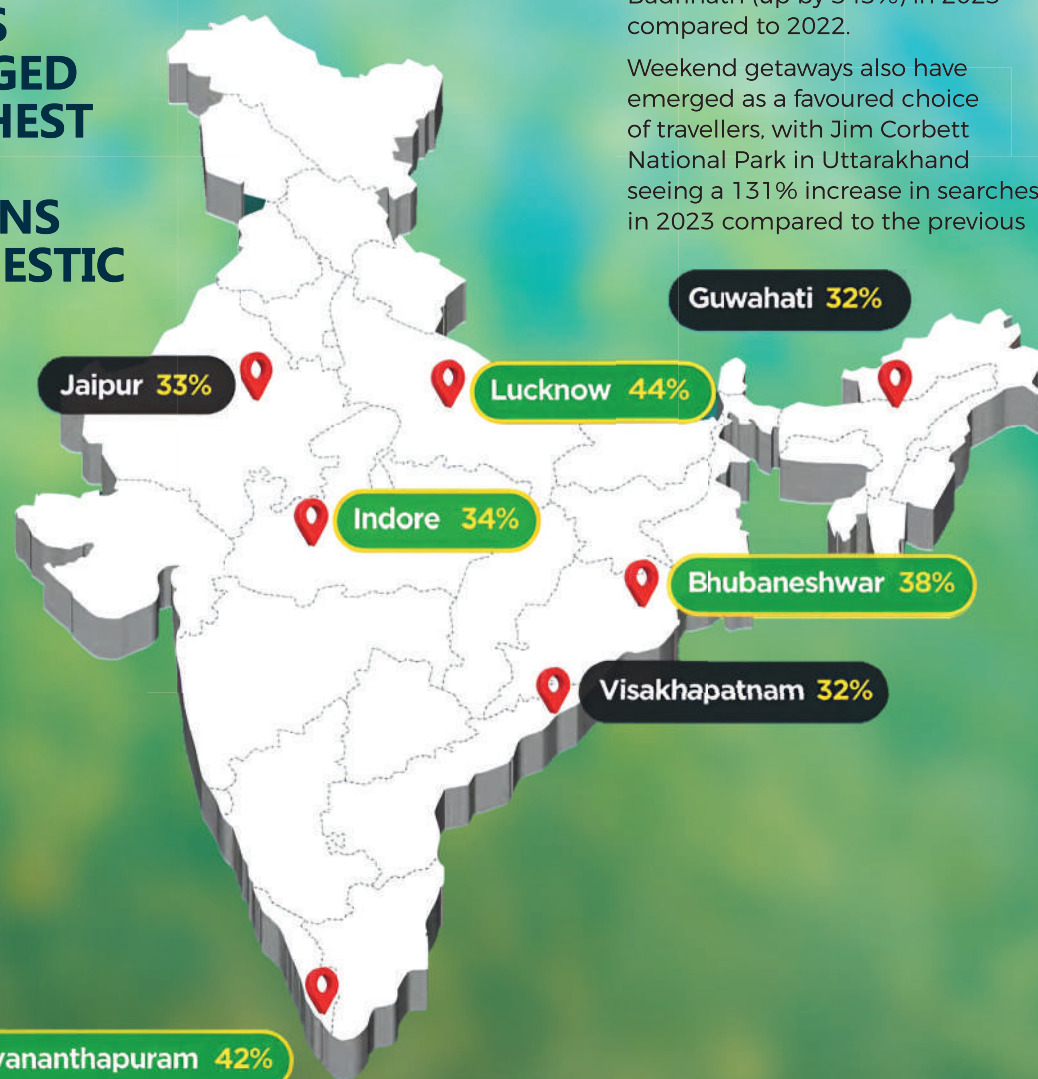
This blend of impulsive domestic travel and more calculated international travel planning provides a comprehensive look at the diverse and dynamic behaviours of Indian travellers.

### Spiritual Sojourns, Weekend Escapes

The report uncovers a compelling surge in spiritual sojourns and spontaneous weekend getaways among the Indian travellers. Notably, spiritual tourism has witnessed a remarkable 97% rise in searches over the past two years, driven primarily by residents of tier-2 and tier-3 cities. This trend is underscored by significant increases in searches for key spiritual destinations: Ayodhya (up by 585%), Ujjain (up by 359%), and Badrinath (up by 343%) in 2023 compared to 2022.

Weekend getaways also have emerged as a favoured choice of travellers, with Jim Corbett National Park in Uttarakhand seeing a 131% increase in searches in 2023 compared to the previous

## TIER 2 CITIES HAVE EMERGED AS THE HIGHEST GROWTH DESTINATIONS IN THE DOMESTIC FLIGHTS CATEGORY





year. Other popular weekend destinations include the serene hill stations of Ooty and Munnar, which continue to captivate travellers.

In the broader context of summer travel, Goa reigns as the most popular destination for Indian travellers. The report highlights that Udaipur and Srinagar experienced the highest growth in internet search volumes during 2023 as compared to the previous year, reflecting a rising interest in these picturesque locales.

The top 20 domestic destinations that accounted for 45% of online searches between March and April FY24 are a diverse mix of cultural, historical, and natural

attractions. This list includes Goa, Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Ooty, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Chennai, Rishikesh, Jaipur, Pune, Manali, Lonavala, Udaipur, Mussoorie, Munnar, Gurgaon, Puri, and Varanasi.

Puri and Varanasi stood out as the most sought-after pilgrimage destinations, with Ayodhya maintaining consistent growth in interest. This data paints a vivid picture of the evolving preferences of Indian travelers, blending a quest for spiritual fulfilment with a love for quick, rejuvenating escapes.

Other emerging domestic destinations registering the high growth in searches compared to

last year include Lakshadweep, Nandi Hills, Chalakudy, Chevella, Omkareshwar, Marayoor, Jibhi, Chakrata, Sonmarg, Ganpatipule, Purulia, Khatu, Dwarka, and Thiruvannamalai.

### Goa Leads the Way

The MakeMyTrip report affirms Goa's steadfast popularity as the top domestic destination for Indian travellers. This trend is set to continue, with Goa retaining its crown as the favourite spot for sun, sand, and sea. Following closely are Srinagar and Udaipur, which have shown the highest growth in searches from March-April 2023 to March-April 2024, reflecting their rising appeal.





### Regional Preferences and Premiumization

MakeMyTrip's Summer Travel Trends 2024 report highlights intriguing regional preferences and a noticeable trend toward premiumization in the Indian travel market. Residents of northern States exhibit a higher preference for hostel bookings, valuing affordability and social experiences. In contrast, travellers from eastern India favour traditional hotel accommodations, while those in the south lean towards alternative options such as homestays, appreciating the local and personalized experiences they offer.

Family travellers, in particular, demonstrate a willingness to splurge, with nearly 20% searching for properties with tariffs exceeding Rs. 10,000 per night. For general hotel bookings, the Rs. 2,500-7,000 per night range remains the most popular. However, the segment seeing the highest growth is the Rs. 10,000-15,000 per night range, indicating an emerging trend towards more premium accommodations.

Homestays have seen a significant boom in 2023, with the average rate of Rs. 2,500 to Rs. 7,000 per night making up around 45% of all bookings. This category remains a budget-friendly and culturally immersive option for travellers. Notably, both homestays and villas are experiencing the highest growth for properties with tariffs around and over Rs. 20,000 per night, signalling a trend towards more luxurious and unique accommodations.

"Summer is always one of the biggest quarters of the year in terms of travel intent, and this year too, the buoyancy in the sector continues. We are observing a healthy growth in searches over those recorded last year at this time," notes Rajesh Magow, co-founder and group chief executive officer of MakeMyTrip.



"India is a large country, and summer leisure travel begins with the southern region where the holiday season arrives early, followed by the west, and then finally the north. We haven't observed any change in trend this year as well," he says.

International travel is also on the rise, especially to Southeast Asian destinations, buoyed by visa-free entry policies in countries like Thailand and Sri Lanka. Phuket, Singapore, Bali, Bangkok, and Kuala Lumpur dominate MakeMyTrip's 'Top 10' international search and booking trends. Additionally,

emerging destinations such as Baku (Azerbaijan), Almaty (Kazakhstan), and Nagoya (Japan) are seeing substantial growth in search queries, potentially drawing travelers away from the more traditional hotspots.

Water-centric vacations are capturing the imagination of Indian travellers, with 83% agreeing that proximity to water induces relaxation, and 38% expressing a keen interest in water-related experiences. This trend is expected to drive a surge in activities like floating yoga, water sound baths, and snow meditation.

## Kerala rolls out 'Green Leaf' rating for hospitality sector



In a move aimed at ensuring high standards of hygiene and sanitation at major tourism destinations, the Kerala Government has rolled out the 'Swachhata Green Leaf Rating' for hotels, resorts, lodges, homestays and eateries.

The initiative has been launched by the Suchitwa Mission and the Department of Tourism as part of the national flagship programme of the Union Jal Shakti and Tourism

Ministries.

As many as 357 hospitality facilities have been identified State-wide for coverage during the first phase of the project. The idea is to encourage owners of hotels, resorts, lodges, homestays and eateries to adopt Best Practices to provide improved and safe sanitation facilities.

The Suchitwa Mission has come up with an online portal to implement the programme. Each of the hospitality players covered under the scheme would be given one, three or five 'green leaf' ratings after verification.

"Suchitwa Mission has set up a portal for the three-phase process – orientation, voluntary declaration and verification – as the number of operators is huge in our State and it's impossible to carry out this process manually," an official associated with the project told The New Indian Express. The rating declaration and certification is

expected by June.

Segregation of solid waste at source, disposal of solid waste and other waste, including biomedical waste, mattresses, rubber, metals, and e-waste, on-site management of greywater, separation of black and greywater, and recycling of treated water are among the parameters on which each institution will be assessed.

Participating entities need to score at least 50% under each head to become eligible for the Swachhata Green Leaf Verification. In due course, the ratings will be made part of industry branding ratings by Tripadvisor, OYO, Booking.com and others to integrate "safely managed sanitation."

Marks will be awarded out of a total of 200. Of this, 80 marks each will be total for faecal sludge management and solid waste management, while 40 marks will be for greywater management.

## Mesmerising ad campaign for Kerala Tourism



The State Tourism Department has come up with mesmerising advertising campaigns in foreign countries, publishing the beautiful culture and traditions of God's Own Country.

These advertisements have been circulated in many countries, including London. One of those is the double bus branding, which has gone viral and been a major hit on social media platforms.

Alappuzha's houseboat and snake boat races have been stuck all over a double-decker line bus in London. The view also includes a beautiful glimpse of Alappuzha's landscape and water bodies. The logo of Kerala Tourism is also added to it. Advertisements for Kerala tourism have already appeared on buses in London.

State Tourism Minister PA Muhammad Riyas shared the video of the bus on his social media page along with a note that read: "This is the new campaign strategy of Kerala Tourism." He also went ahead and asked viewers to drop in the comment box new campaign ideas that the Tourism Department can take up and implement in foreign countries.





## Kerala logs 15.92% growth in tourism sector



Kerala welcomed 2.18 crore domestic tourists during calendar 2023, logging 15.92% year-on-year growth in tourist arrivals, according to Kerala Tourism Secretary K. Biju.

Speaking at a tourism partnership event held in Hyderabad, Mr. Biju

attributed this achievement to the that State's innovative tourism initiatives. "Our relentless efforts have not only made Kerala a safe and welcoming destination but also transformed it into an all-weather holiday paradise," he said.

During the event, a delegation of

Kerala tourism officials showcased their endeavours to promote adventure tourism in that State. Emphasising the development of eco-adventure tour packages centred around Kerala's natural wonders, the officials highlighted their aim to provide exhilarating experiences for modern travellers.

"We are witnessing a growing trend of destination weddings across Kerala, fuelled by the State's astonishing natural beauty and exceptional hospitality," added Mr. Biju.

The event also featured cultural performances, showcasing Kerala's traditional art forms such as Kathakali, Kalaripayattu and Mohiniyattam, offering attendees a glimpse into that State's rich cultural heritage.

## Kochi Water Metro completes first year with 20 lakh ridership



Kochi Water Metro, first-of-its-kind public transport initiative in the country, has completed one year of service, registering a ridership in excess of two million on April 29.

What started as nine specially designed boats conducting services

along two routes has become a network of five routes with 14 boats today. Recently, services commenced to the Fort Kochi terminal, a tourist hotspot in the city. Water Metro is going to expand its networks to more areas this year, by opening five more routes in the city.

Work on the terminals at Kumbalam, Paliyamthuruth, Willingdon Island, Kadamakudy and Mattanchery are progressing. Cochin Shipyard, builders of vessels for the Kochi Water Metro, is expected to deliver five more boats to the KMRL by the time these terminals are ready.

The Kochi water metro project envisages connecting 38 terminals spread across 10 islands in and around Kochi, with a fleet of 78 fast, electrically-propelled hybrid ferries. KWML aims to complete the construction of 32 terminals by December 2024.

KWML expects to receive the next set of boats from Cochin Shipyard by the end of July or early August. Once the boats are received, the Chittoor-Cheranalloor route from High Court Junction will be operational. Once Phase-I is fully operational in 2024, it is expected to serve 34,000 passengers a day.





## After three-and-a-half months, Kakkayam Eco-tourism Centre reopened



Three-and-a-half months after it was closed due to the wild animal attacks in the area, Kakkayam Eco Tourism Centre has been re-opened.

Kakkayam Forest and Urakkuzhi waterfalls are part of the Kakkayam Eco Tourism Centre, which is located on the Kakkayam Dam site in Koorachuntu panchayat. The eco and the hydel tourism centres were closed on January 20 after a wild gaur attacked tourists. Though the boating at the hydel centre was reopened by March 1, another gaur attack that killed a local farmer forcing the authorities to postpone the re-opening.

Around 1,000 tourists have been visiting the Kakkayam Eco-tourism Centre every day till its closure, the number surging to 2,000 during weekends.

## Tamil Nadu's loss, Kerala's gain? Huge crowds in Idukki, especially Munnar



Tourist arrivals to various destinations in Idukki district such as Munnar and Wagamon registered a surge in early May, mostly likely owing to implementation of e-pass regulations by Tamil Nadu for entry to Nilgiris and Kodaikanal.

Tourist arrivals ranged between 3,500 and 7,500 in Wagamon on weekends. The cantilever bridge and Adventure Park at Wagamon and the Botanical Garden at Munnar have proved to be big draws with the tourists. The

Eravikulam National Park (ENP), a prime tourism spot in Munnar, has also been experiencing good turnout of visitors.

Intermittent rains and lightning did not prove a dampener with visitors arriving by busloads and moving around the destinations.

Nithin Lal, Assistant Wildlife Warden of ENP, mentioned that the park's daily visitor capacity of 2,880 was reached starting from May 1. Hotels in the district are reporting good occupancy levels, many of them

reporting saturation bookings in May and June.

The surge in tourist arrivals has been causing traffic snarls on weekends. Observers say the number of tourists reaching Munnar is equivalent to that in 2006 when *Neelakurinji* (*strobilanthes kunthiana*) bloomed.

The Eravikulam National Park, which is home to the Nilgiri Thar, the Mattupetty Dam, Eco Point and Top Station areas have been experiencing sizeable crowding this year, particularly on weekends.

For those heading to Munnar from the nearby districts in Kerala, Mankulam, Chinnakanal, Bison Valley and Kunjithanny areas are some of the other options. Those from Kochi have accommodation options at Chithirapuram, which is around 15 km away from the town. This stretch has many hotels, homestays, safari and trekking options and a fantasy amusement park. Tourists are also flocking to locations such as Powerhouse and Attukadu waterfalls, tea plantations and spice plantations.





## SriLankan Airlines strengthens presence in south Kerala with new office in Thiruvananthapuram



As part of its strategy to enhance its presence in the southern regions of Kerala and to improve travel services for passengers from south Kerala,

SriLankan Airlines has opened a new office in Thiruvananthapuram.

Established in collaboration with Translanka Air Travels Pvt. Ltd., the new office is also expected to be beneficial for travellers from Kanyakumari, Nagercoil and Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu.

Translanka Air Travels Pvt. Ltd. have been appointed as the General Sales Agent (GSA) for South Kerala.

The new office was inaugurated by Mr. Dimuthu Tennakoon, Head of Worldwide Sales and Distribution at SriLankan Airlines, at a ceremony held at the Pulimood junction close to the state secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram.

The event, marked by traditional customs such as the lighting of the lamp and ribbon-cutting, was attended by notable figures including Mr. Fawzan Fareid, Regional Manager for India, Bangladesh, and Nepal at SriLankan Airlines; Mr. Sandun

Jayasinghe, Area Manager, Trivandrum at SriLankan Airlines; Mr. B. Ramesh Kumar, Managing Director of Translanka Air Travels; Mr. Radhakrishnan, Vice President of Translanka Air Travels; Mr. K.C. Chandrahasn, Managing Director of Kerala Travels Interserve Ltd.; Mr. K.V. Muralidharan, President of the Travel Agents Association of Kerala, along with other leaders in the trade and media representatives.

During the inauguration, Mr. Tennakoon spoke about SriLankan Airlines' proactive plans to promote Sri Lanka as a tourist destination among residents of Kerala. He pointed out the geographical proximity of Kerala to Sri Lanka, noting that Colombo airport is conveniently accessible from Trivandrum and Kochi. Although Kerala's three international airports already serve as significant transit points to Colombo, there is still considerable untapped potential for tourism between the two regions. To capitalize on this, SriLankan Airlines plans to conduct a series of roadshows, meet with travel agents, and launch various marketing campaigns to attract tourists from Kerala to Sri Lanka.

Having initiated flights to Trivandrum in April 1980, SriLankan Airlines has long maintained robust connections between Trivandrum and Colombo, providing smooth travel options to numerous global destinations. Presently, the airline operates four weekly flights between Trivandrum and Colombo on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays.

Reflecting on the airline's longstanding presence in Trivandrum, Mr. Tennakoon reiterated SriLankan Airlines' commitment to offering exceptional service and connectivity to the people of Southern Kerala. With Sri Lanka being the closest international destination to South Kerala and Trivandrum, the region continues to attract an increasing number of visitors, drawn by its unique cultural offerings, culinary experiences, and picturesque landscapes.

As SriLankan Airlines begins this new partnership and outreach effort, it aims to further enhance the travel experience for passengers and strengthen the relationship between Kerala and Sri Lanka.

# Thiruvananthapuram International Airport wins CII accolade for waste management



**T**hiruvananthapuram International Airport has won the Zero Waste to Landfill (ZWL) accolade of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII-ITC) Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Development. Thiruvananthapuram is the Indian Airports to achieve this prestigious recognition.

The CII-ITC, which did a ZWL assessment of the Thiruvananthapuram International Airport, found that the airport has

implemented the best waste management practices and achieved a 99.50% waste diversion from landfill. The audit also found that the airport has successfully diverted 100%

of plastic waste and 100% of MSW waste (wet and dry).

The process involved integration of a robust value chain system and adoption of 5R principles (Reduce, Reuse, Reprocess, Recycle, Recover) of Sustainable Waste Management, which helped Thiruvananthapuram airport to achieve this recognition.

The goal of Zero Waste to Landfill (ZWL) is to divert at least 99 percent of generated waste from landfills while reducing the amount of waste generated.

The assessment of ZWL practices at Thiruvananthapuram International Airport was conducted for the financial year 2022-2023. The main sources of waste generation at the site were paper waste, cutlery waste, food waste and road waste, which contributed majorly to the municipal solid waste.

The airport has a waste management system that follows the ISO 14001:2015 standard, which aims to improve environmental performance and reduce waste-based cradle to cradle principle. The system involves waste segregation, recycling, monitoring, and reduction, as well as an Environmental Management System (EMS) that sets and evaluates environmental goals. The airport has established well demarcated sites for the collection of segregated waste and transferring it to the recycling yard & recovery facility.

# Kerala Tourism to bring a supreme actor, a bridge and a film into a single frame



Actor Mohanlal (left) with Tourism Minister P.A. Mohammed Riyas

**K**erala Tourism is all set to create history by turning a bridge where some of the most touching scenes in the blockbuster film 'Kireedam' into a tourist centre in honour of Malayalam cinema's supreme actor Mohanlal.

"The project that lets the people enjoy the beauty of the 'Kireedam'

bridge and the Vellayani Lake, bringing the scenes from the movie back into their minds, is in its last stage. The bridge that is part of the Vellayani Lake in Thiruvananthapuram where the significant scenes from the movie 'Kireedam' was shot will now be a tourist centre," Tourism Minister P.A.

Muhammad Riyas announced on his social media handle.

The bridge on the Vellayani Lake too was a major 'character' in 'Kireedam' a film made by Siby Malayil, a filmmaker credited with several popular films. Scenes shot with the bridge as their backdrop, particularly the popular melody 'Kannerpoovinte Kavilil Thalodi', are still etched in the collective memory of the film-going public. There is a mesmerising charm to some of the sequences that show the beauty of the Vellayani Lake and the solitude of the bridge.

Kerala Tourism Department's plan is to use the bridge's place in popular culture to transform the lake and the verdant paddy fields around it into a centre of village tourism.



## Kerala Tourism Partners with Morex Group for the Bekal Tourism Village Project



The Kerala Government has signed an agreement with the Qatar-based Morex Group for the development of the prestigious Bekal Tourism Village Project at an estimated investment of Rs 250 crore. This is the first investment proposal to become a reality among a raft of schemes showcased at the Tourism Investors Meet 2023 (TIM) that was held last year in Kerala.

Tourism Minister Mr P. A. Mohamed Riyas handed over the Licence Agreement for the Bekal Tourism Village Project to Mr Sherief Maulakkiriath, Chairman & Managing Director, Morex Group of Companies, Kanhangad.

Bekal Resorts Development Corporation Limited (BRDC), a Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) under the Department of Tourism, is the implementing agency of the Bekal Tourism Village Project in Kasaragod district, in northern Kerala.

The Bekal Tourism Village Project was presented under the Government Project category at the TIM, where investment proposals of Rs 15,000 crores were made.

"Numerous investors had expressed a keen interest in the project, prompting the invitation of

Expression of Interest (EoI) from them. Following a thorough examination of the submitted documents and adherence to official procedures, Morex Group emerged as the selected entity," stated Mr Riyas.

Mr Riyas said the Morex Group would invest Rs 250 crore in two phases for the Bekal Tourism Village Project, encompassing tourism activity zones catering to both domestic and international visitors.

According to the Minister, the initiative is poised to significantly enhance the tourism potential of Bekal and the wider Malabar region. He further emphasised the possibility of Bekal emerging as a prominent hub for MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) events and destination weddings.

"As part of the follow-up to the TIM (Tourism Investment Meet), the newly established Facilitation Centre is diligently evaluating investment proposals, with more projects expected to come to fruition in the upcoming months," the Minister added.

Noting that tourism will generate more job opportunities, Mr Riyas said tourism development needs more private investment in novel

projects in the state. The Bekal project, he said, would strengthen the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model and would be completed in a time-bound manner, thereby generating more job opportunities.

As per the agreement, around 33.18 acres of land at Kolavayal in Ajanur panchayat of Hosdurg taluk in Kasaragod district will be handed over to the Morex Group for the Bekal Tourism Village Project. The licence period is for 30 years.

Mr. E. Chandrasekharan, MLA, Kanhangad, who chaired the event, emphasized the significance of Bekal as a highly sought-after tourism destination and expressed optimism that the forthcoming project will significantly enhance its tourism prospects.

Kerala Tourism Director, Mr P. B. Nooh, extended a warm welcome to all attendees. Presenting the report, Managing Director of BRDC, Mr P. Shijin, outlined the objectives of the Bekal Tourism Village Project, which aims to integrate various forms of tourism, including eco-tourism, experiential tourism, adventure tourism, agro-tourism, village tourism and cultural tourism, at a single location. An initial allocation of approximately Rs 50 lakhs was earmarked in the 2022 budget for the project's initial activities in the area.

Mr. iManikandan K., President, Block Panchayat, Kanhangad, and Director, BRDC; Ms. T. Shobha, President, grama panchayat, Ajanur; Mr Sabeesh K., Vice President, grama panchayat, Ajanur; Mr Manoj Kumar K., Managing Director, KTIL; Ms. Sikha Surendran, Managing Director, KTDC; Mr Mohammed Naif K., Executive Director, Morex Group, and Mr Khalid Ali M. A. Shaheen, Sponsor, Morex Group, were also present.



# ജൂനന്ത്-ഇ-കാശ്മീർ

## കാശ്മീരിന്റെ പുനർജന്മം

മേരി സാമുവൽ

യാത്രക്കുറിപ്പുകൾ പലപ്പോഴും വാങ്മയ ചിത്രങ്ങൾ വരയ്ക്കുന്നവയാണ്. യാത്ര എന്ന അനുഭവം ഓരോരുത്തർക്കും ഓരോന്നാവുമ്പോൾ വാങ്മയങ്ങളിൽ തെളിയുന്നതാവണമെന്നില്ല വ്യക്ത്യനുഭവം. അനുഭവത്തിനും പരാവർത്തനത്തിനും ഇടയിൽ നഷ്ടപ്പെടുന്നതെന്തോ അതാവുന്നു അപ്പോൾ യാത്ര. ഭൂമിയിലെ സ്വർഗ്ഗമെന്ന് വിശേഷിപ്പിക്കപ്പെടുന്ന കാശ്മീരിലേക്ക് സഞ്ചരിച്ച മേരി സാമുവൽ പിന്നാലെയെത്തുന്നവർക്ക് വഴികാട്ടിയാവുന്നു ഈ കുറിപ്പിലൂടെ...







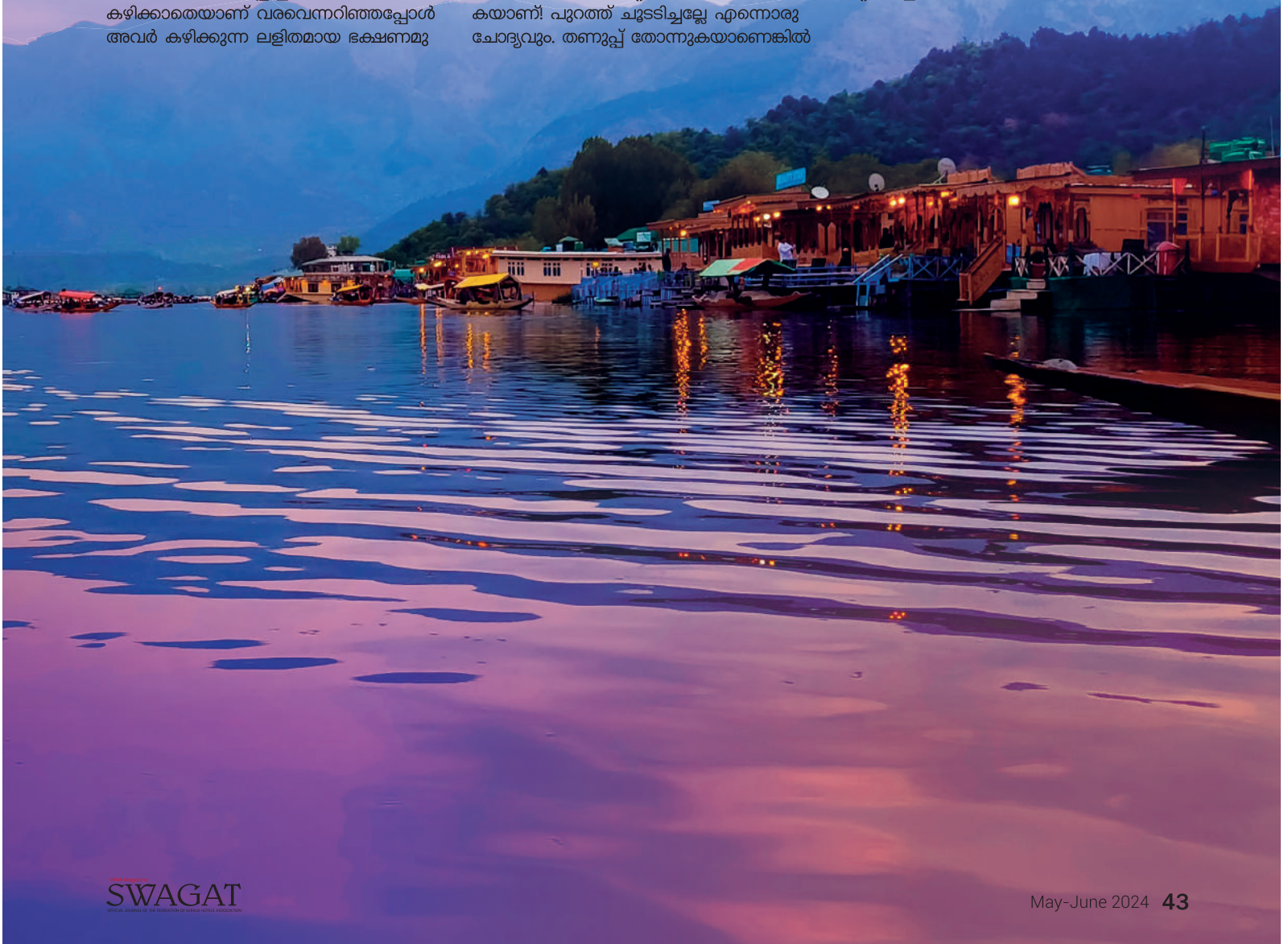
കൂട്ടുകാരിക്കൊപ്പം ശ്രീനഗറിലേക്ക് ഇറങ്ങിത്തരികെുമ്പോൾ ഏറെ പറഞ്ഞുകേട്ട ടൂലിപ്പ് വസന്തം കാണുക എന്നതായിരുന്നു ഏകലക്ഷ്യം. പെട്ടെന്ന് തീരുമാനിച്ച യാത്ര യായതുകൊണ്ട് കാശ്മീരിൽ കാണേണ്ട മറ്റുസ്ഥലങ്ങളെക്കുറിച്ച് വലിയ ഗവേഷണമൊന്നും നടത്താനുള്ള സമയം കിട്ടിയില്ല. പോരാത്തതിന് ചെന്നിറങ്ങിയതും കയ്യിലെ മൊബൈൽ കണക്ഷനും കട്ട്. ജമ്മു കാശ്മീരിൽ പോസ്റ്റ് പെയ്ഡ് സിം അല്ലാതെ ഒന്നും നടക്കില്ല. വിമാനത്താവളത്തിന് പുറത്തിറങ്ങി അഞ്ഞുറു രൂപയ്ക്ക് ടൂറിസ്റ്റ് സിം എടുത്തു.

ദാൽ ഗേറ്റിലായിരുന്നു ഞങ്ങളുടെ ഹോംസ്റ്റേ. പുത്തുലഞ്ഞ ആപ്പിൾമരം കാവൽ നിൽക്കുന്ന നീലകൈവരിയുള്ള കുഞ്ഞുവീട്. ആപ്പിൾ കവിളുകളും അപ്പപ്പൻതാടി കണക്ക് താടിയുമുള്ള ഉടമസ്ഥൻ മുഹമ്മദ് അമീൻ ഞങ്ങളെയും കാത്ത് ഗേറ്റിനരികെ തന്നെയുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. താഴെ രണ്ടു മുറികളും മുകളിൽ ഒരു മുറിയും ഒഴിവുണ്ടെന്ന് അദ്ദേഹം പറഞ്ഞു. മുകളിലെ മുറി ഉറപ്പിച്ചു. ഭക്ഷണം കഴിക്കാതെയാണ് വരവെന്നറിഞ്ഞപ്പോൾ അവർ കഴിക്കുന്ന ലളിതമായ ഭക്ഷണമു

ണ്ട്, അതുവേണമെങ്കിൽ തരാമെന്നായി. അതല്ലെങ്കിൽ ഒരഞ്ചുമിനിറ്റ് നടന്നാൽ സൗത്തിന്ത്യൻ ഭക്ഷണം കിട്ടുന്ന ഹോട്ടലുണ്ടെന്നും. സൗത്തിന്ത്യൻ കഴിക്കാൻ സൗത്തിന് ഇത്രേം വരേണ്ട കാര്യമില്ലല്ലോ, ലളിതഭക്ഷണം മതിയെന്ന് ഏകകണ്ഠേന തീരുമാനിച്ചു.

അമീൻ ഭായ് പോയി കൃത്യം അരമണിക്കൂർ കഴിഞ്ഞപ്പോൾ ഒരു വലിയ ട്രേയിൽ ആവി പറക്കുന്ന ചിക്കൻ കറിയും ചോറുമായി വന്നു. പാലക് ചീരയിട്ടു വെച്ച ഒരൽപ്പം കൊഴുപ്പുള്ള ആ ചിക്കൻ കറി കുട്ടിയുള്ള ഊണ് ലളിതമല്ല, രാജകീയമായാണ് ഞങ്ങൾക്കു അനുഭവപ്പെട്ടത്. ചിക്കൻ കറിയുടെ കൂട്ട് അമീൻ ഭായിയോട് ചോദിച്ച് എഴുതിയെടുക്കണമെന്നും തീരുമാനിച്ചു. അമൃതേത്ത് കഴിഞ്ഞ സ്ഥിതിക്ക് ഒന്നു മയങ്ങിട്ടാവാം അടുത്ത കാര്യമെന്നു വെച്ച് കുട്ടിലിലേക്ക് ചാഞ്ഞ് പത്തുമിനിറ്റ് കഴിഞ്ഞില്ല, നടുവുറത്തുകുടി ചൂടിന്റെ യൊരു നാട കടന്നുപോയതു പോലെ. ചാടിയെഴുന്നേറ്റ് നോക്കുമ്പോൾ കൂടെ വന്നവളും എഴുന്നേറ്റ് അന്തംവിട്ടിരിക്കുകയാണ്! പുറത്ത് ചൂടിച്ചല്ലേ എന്നൊരു ചോദ്യവും. തണുപ്പ് തോന്നുകയാണെങ്കിൽ

കിടക്കക്കരികിലെ സ്വിച്ച് ഇട്ടാൽ മതിയെന്ന് അമീൻ ഭായി പറഞ്ഞിരുന്നു. അങ്ങനെ സ്വിച്ചിട്ടു നോക്കിയതാണെന്നവൾ. വിരിച്ച് മാറ്റിനോക്കിയപ്പോൾ കിടക്കക്ക് കുറുകേ ഒരു ഇൻസുലേറ്റഡ് വര കിടക്കുന്നു. പേടിച്ചും ശങ്കിച്ചുമാണ് തൊട്ടുനോക്കിയത്. കറന്റുടിച്ചില്ല--പകരം ചൂടിച്ചു. റൂം ഹീറ്ററിനു പകരമുള്ള സംവിധാനമാണത്രെ. ചൂടിനു പകരം ഇതുപോലെ തണുപ്പ് പായുന്ന കിടക്ക ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നെങ്കിൽ ഒന്നുരണ്ണും വാങ്ങി നാട്ടിലോട്ടു കയറ്റിവിടാമായിരുന്നു എന്ന് പരിതപിച്ച് രണ്ടാളും പിന്നോം കിടന്നു. സംഗതി കൊള്ളാം, ചൂടടിച്ച് ഉറങ്ങിപ്പോയതറിഞ്ഞില്ല! നാലു മണിക്ക് ചൂടുവെള്ളത്തിൽ കുളിയും പാസാക്കി രണ്ടാളും കൂടി ചുറ്റുവട്ടം കാണാനിറങ്ങി. അരമണിക്കൂർ കറങ്ങി യൊരു കാപ്പിക്കട കണ്ടുപിടിച്ച് മെനു പരതിയപ്പോൾ കാപ്പിക്ക് പൊന്നുംവില. തണുപ്പിലോരോ കാപ്പിയെന്ന മോഹം റദ്ദാക്കി ഹോട്ട് ചോക്കലേറ്റ് കുടിച്ച് അവിടുന്നിറങ്ങി. തൊട്ടുമുന്നിൽ ആൾക്കൂട്ടം ഇരമ്പുന്ന ദാൽ തടാകം. ലേക്കിലെ ഷിക്കാര സവാരിയും ഷോപ്പിങ്ങും അടുത്തദിവസത്തേക്ക് മാറ്റിവെച്ച് ഞങ്ങൾ മുറിയിലേക്കു മടങ്ങി.







ക്കിന് ട്യൂലിപ്പ് പൂക്കളാണത്രെ! ആംസ്റ്റർ ഡാമിൽ നിന്നാണിവയുടെ വരവ്. പൂന്തോട്ടിൽ ഒറ്റക്കും കൂട്ടായും ചാഞ്ഞും കിടന്നുമൊക്കെ ഫോട്ടോയും വീഡിയോയും പിടിക്കുന്നവരിൽ ഭൂരിഭാഗവും മലയാളികളായിരുന്നെന്ന് പ്രത്യേകം പറയേണ്ടതില്ലല്ലോ.

സബർവൻ മലനിരകളുടെ താഴ്വാരത്തിലാണ് ട്യൂലിപ്പ് പൂന്തോട്ടം അവിടുന്നിറങ്ങി മല കയറിയാൽ 17ാം നൂറ്റാണ്ടിൽ ഷാജ ഹാൻ ചക്രവർത്തി മകൻ ദാദാ ഷിക്കോവിനു വേണ്ടി പണികഴിപ്പിച്ച ചഷ്മാഷാഹി പൂന്തോട്ടം കാണാം. മലഞ്ചരിവിൽ നിന്നുദ്ഭവിക്കുന്ന വറ്റാത്ത നീരുറവയാണ് ഈ പൂന്തോട്ടത്തിന്റെ ജീവനാഡി. അതിനും കുറച്ചുകൂടി മുകളിലേക്ക് കയറിയാൽ ഇതേ മാതൃകയിൽ മറ്റൊരു പൂന്തോട്ടം കൂടിയുണ്ട് - പരിമഹൽ. ദാദാ ഷിക്കോവ് വാനനിരീക്ഷണം നടത്തിയിരുന്നതും പിന്നീട് ജഹാംഗീറിനാൽ കൊല്ലപ്പെട്ടതും ഈ ഉദ്യാനത്തിൽ വെച്ചായിരുന്നുവത്രെ.

നടന്ന് കാൽകഴച്ച് ഒരിടത്തിരുന്നപ്പോൾ ദാ വരുന്നു രണ്ട് പെൺകുട്ടികൾ മൈലാഞ്ചിക്കോണുമായി. അവരുരുപ തന്നാൽ രണ്ടുകയ്യിലും മൈലാഞ്ചി ഇട്ടുതരാമെന്ന്. വേണ്ടെന്നു പറഞ്ഞുനോക്കിയെങ്കിലും പിള്ളേര് പോകുന്ന മട്ടില്ല. ഒടുവിൽ ഒരു കയ്യിൽ മാത്രം മൈലാഞ്ചിയിട്ട് അവരെ പറഞ്ഞയച്ചു. അഞ്ച് മിനിറ്റ് കൊണ്ട് കരകുറന്ന് ഒരു ഡിസൈൻ!

പൂന്തോട്ടങ്ങളൊക്കെ കറങ്ങിയപ്പോൾ ഉച്ച കഴിഞ്ഞു. തിരികെ അടിവാരത്തിൽ വന്ന് കാൾബീരി ബിരിയാണി കഴിച്ചു.



നേരേ മുറിയിലേക്ക്. ചുടുവള്ളിക്കിടക്കയിൽ ഒന്നുറങ്ങി ഫ്രഷായി ദാൽ തടാകം ലക്ഷ്യമാക്കി വെച്ചുപിടിച്ചു. അമീൻ ഭായി ഏർപ്പാടാക്കി തന്ന നിസാർ ആയിരുന്നു ഷിക്കാരയുടെ സാരഥി. ഷോപ്പിങ്ങിനു പുറമേ തടാകക്കരയിലെ ഗ്രാമങ്ങളിലേക്കും കൊണ്ടുപോകണമെന്നു പറഞ്ഞപ്പോൾ മുഖായിരം രൂപയാവുമെന്ന് നിസാർ. വീണ്ടും മുറിഹിന്ദി പ്രയോഗം തുടങ്ങിയപ്പോൾ അമീൻ ഭായിരക്ഷക്കെത്തി. മൂന്ന് മണിക്കൂർ കറങ്ങുന്നതിന് ആയിരത്തി അഞ്ഞൂറിൽ ഉറപ്പിച്ചു നിസാർ ഷിക്കാരയിറക്കി.

രാവിലെ ട്യൂലിപ്പ് പൂന്തോട്ടം കാണാനിറങ്ങി. ഭക്ഷണം ഒഴിച്ച് എന്തും ഇവിടെ വില പേശി ഉറപ്പിച്ചില്ലെങ്കിൽ കീഴ് ചോരുന്ന വഴിയറിയില്ല. ഉള്ള മുറിഹിന്ദിയൊക്കെ വെച്ച് ഇരുന്നു രൂപയ്ക്കൊരു ഓട്ടോക്കാരനെ തരമാക്കി. ഇരുന്നുറിൽ കൂടുതൽ കൊടുക്കരുതെന്ന് അമീൻ ഭായി പ്രത്യേകം പറഞ്ഞിരുന്നു.

ട്യൂലിപ്പ് പൂന്തോട്ടം ഒരു കാഴ്ച്ച തന്നെയാണ്! എഴുപത്തിനാല് ഏക്കറിൽ പലതട്ടുകളാക്കി തിരിച്ചുള്ള പൂന്തോട്ടത്തിൽ എഴുപതിലേറെ ഇനം ട്യൂലിപ്പ് ചെടികൾ അസംബ്ലിക്ക് നിന്ന സുകൾ കുട്ടികൾ കണക്കെ അച്ചടക്കത്തോടെ നിൽപ്പാണ്. ഹോളിൽ നിന്ന് കൊണ്ടുവന്നു പിടിപ്പിച്ച ഡാഫഡി പ്ലുകൾ, ഹയാസിന്തുകൾ, ഓർണമെന്റൽ ചെറി തുടങ്ങി നാൽപ്പതിലേറെ പൂവിനങ്ങൾ പകരുന്ന പ്രസന്നത വേറെ...

ദാൽ തടാകത്തിനരികെയുള്ള ഈ ഉദ്യാനം പണ്ട് അറിയപ്പെട്ടിരുന്നത് സിറാജ് ബാഗ് എന്നായിരുന്നു. ഏഷ്യയിലെ ഏറ്റവും വലിയ ഈ ട്യൂലിപ്പ് പൂങ്കാവനത്തിൽ ഒരു വസന്തത്തിൽ വിരിയുന്നത് ദശലക്ഷക്കണ







ഗോൾഡൻ ലേക്കും ലോട്ടസ് ലേക്കും പിന്നിട്ട് തടാകത്തിന്റെ കുഞ്ഞു കൈവഴികളിലേക്ക് തിരിഞ്ഞപ്പോൾ കണ്ടു പാലക്കും സാഗും പച്ചക്കറികളും വിളഞ്ഞു നിൽക്കുന്ന ഒഴുകുന്ന കൃഷിയിടങ്ങൾ. ഇടയ്ക്ക് കൊച്ചുവഞ്ചികൾ തുഴഞ്ഞ് പോകുന്ന മനുഷ്യർ. കവു കുടിച്ചും ചില്ലറ ഷോപ്പിങ്ങ് നടത്തിയും തിരികെ എത്തിയപ്പോഴേക്കും നേരം ഇരുണ്ടു. തണുപ്പും വീണുതുടങ്ങിയിരുന്നു.

വിനോദസഞ്ചാരികളും വാഹനങ്ങളും നിറഞ്ഞ ശ്രീനഗറിലെ നിരത്തുകൾ പെട്ടെന്ന്

മടുപ്പിക്കും. ട്രാഫിക് പൊലീസുകാർ എന്നൊരു വിഭാഗം അവിടെയില്ലെന്നു തോന്നുന്നു. സിഗ്നലൊക്കെ വെറും സങ്കൽപം മാത്രം. മിക്കവാറും സിഗ്നൽ പോസ്റ്റുകളും പോസ്റ്റായി നിൽപ്പാണ് വിളക്കു തെളിയുന്ന അപൂർവ്വം എണ്ണത്തീലാകട്ടെ മഞ്ഞനിറം കണ്ടതേയില്ല. ചുവപ്പ് വിളക്ക് തെളിഞ്ഞിരിക്കുമ്പോഴും തലങ്ങുംവിലങ്ങും വരുന്ന വണ്ടികൾ ഇടിക്കാതിരിക്കണമെങ്കിൽ സർക്കസ് പരിചിരിക്കണം. മിക്ക കാരുകൾക്കും സൈഡ് മിററുമില്ല, പൊട്ടാത്ത ബമ്പറുമില്ല, അതിലൊന്നും ആർക്കുമൊരു പരാതിയുമില്ല !

വഴിയിൽ തിരക്ക് കൂടുന്നതിനു മുമ്പേ അമീൻ ഭായിയുടെ മകൻ ടാക്സി ഡ്രൈവർ കൂടിയായ മുദാസിറിനെ വിളിച്ചെഴുന്നേൽപ്പിച്ച് സോനാ മാർഗ്ഗ് കൂടി കണ്ടുവന്നതോടെ ഏതാണ്ടെല്ലാം കണ്ടുതീർന്ന മട്ടായി. എന്നാൽ പിന്നെ അനന്താഗിലുള്ള കാശ്മീരി സുഹൃത്തിനെ വിളിച്ചുകൂട്ടാൻ എന്നായി കൂട്ടുകാരി. 'സമയമുണ്ടെങ്കിൽ അനന്താഗ് വരെ വന്ന് അവരുടെ ആതിഥ്യം സ്വീകരിച്ചിട്ടു പോകണം' എന്ന ക്ഷണം കിട്ടിയതോടെ പിന്നൊന്നും നോക്കിയില്ല അമീൻ ഭായിയോട് യാത്ര പറഞ്ഞ് ദാൽഗേറ്റിൽ നിന്ന് ഷെയർ ടാക്സി പിടിച്ചു.



പുൽവാമയും അവന്തിപുരയും കടന്നു പോകുന്ന എൻഎച്ച് 44ന്റെ ഇരുവശവും മഞ്ഞക്കടൽ കണക്ക് കടുകുപാടങ്ങൾ പൂത്തുകിടക്കുന്നു. അനന്താഗിൽ മുസഫറിന്റെ കാറ്റും ഡ്രൈവറും ഞങ്ങളെ കാത്തുനിന്നിരുന്നു. അവിടുന്ന് വീണ്ടും ഒന്നര മണിക്കൂറുണ്ട് വെരിനാഗിലെ ഖമ്മം എന്ന ഗ്രാമത്തിലേക്ക്. വില്ലോ മരങ്ങൾ കുമ്പിട്ടു നിൽക്കുന്ന താലം നദിയും കടന്നുവേണം വെരിനാഗിലെത്താൻ.

ഒരുവശത്ത് പൂവിട്ടുനിൽക്കുന്ന ആപ്പിൾ തോട്ടങ്ങളും മറുവശത്ത് മഞ്ഞയിൽ കുളിച്ച കടുകുപാടങ്ങളും. മുകളിൽ എല്ലാത്തിനും സാക്ഷിയായി മഞ്ഞുതൊപ്പിയിട്ട, പൈൻമരങ്ങൾ നിറഞ്ഞ മലനിരകൾ.



'കാശ്മീരിന്റെ കവാടം' എന്നറിയപ്പെടുന്ന വെരിനാഗ് ശാന്തസുന്ദരമായ ഗ്രാമമാണ്. മജീദ് മജീദിയുടെ ഫ്രെയിമുകളെ ഓർമ്മിക്കുന്ന പശ്ചാത്തലവും ആപ്പിൾ കവിളുകളുള്ള കുട്ടികളും. ഇടക്ക് ചെമ്മരിയാട്ടിൻ കുട്ടത്തെ മേച്ചുകൊണ്ട് അലസം നടന്നു പോകുന്ന പരമ്പരാഗത വസ്ത്രമായ 'ഫെറാൻ' അണിഞ്ഞ പുരുഷന്മാർ. കൈകൾ മാറത്തു ചേർത്തുവെച്ച്, ഒരൽപം കൂനിയാണ് അവരുടെ നടത്തം. സൂക്ഷിച്ചു നോക്കിയാൽ കഴുത്തിലൂടെ പിണച്ചിട്ടിരിക്കുന്ന ഒരു വളളി കാണാം. 'കാംഗി' എന്ന മൺചട്ടി തൂക്കിയിട്ടിരിക്കുന്നതാണെന്ന് മുസഫർ. വസന്തകാലത്തും ഒരുകാലത്തു മുകളിലൂയരാത്ത താപനിലയിൽ തണുപ്പിനെ ഓടിക്കാൻ കാശ്മീരികൾ കൊണ്ടുനടക്കുന്ന കുഞ്ഞുനെരിപ്പോടാണത്.







ഇടനെഞ്ചിലെ ആ കനൽച്ചുടിനെ ഫെറാ നിനകത്ത് പൊതിഞ്ഞുപിടിച്ചാണ് അവരുടെ നടപ്പ്. മജ്നുവിന്റെ മാറിൽ ലൈല എങ്ങനെയാണോ അതുപോലെയാണ് കാശ്മീരിക്ക് കാംഗ്രി എന്നൊരു ചൊല്ലു തന്നെയുണ്ടത്രെ! കുട്ടികൾക്കും സ്ത്രീകൾക്കും ഉപയോഗിക്കാൻ പല വലിപ്പത്തിലുള്ള കാംഗ്രികൾ ഉണ്ടെന്നും പോവുന്നതിനു മുമ്പ് അത്ഭുതത്തു കാണാനും ഫോട്ടോ എടുക്കാനുമുള്ള സൗകര്യം ഒരുക്കാമെന്നും മുമ്പാകെ പറഞ്ഞു.

വീടത്തിയപ്പോഴേക്കും മഴ പൊടിഞ്ഞു തുടങ്ങിയിരുന്നു. അപ്രതീക്ഷിതമാണ് കാശ്മീരിലെ കാലാവസ്ഥ എന്ന് മുമ്പാകെ. രാവിലെ വെയിലാണെങ്കിൽ ഉച്ചയ്ക്ക് മഴയും വൈകിട്ട് മഞ്ഞുമഴയും വരെ പെയ്തേക്കും. ഹോംസ്റ്റേയിലേതുപോലെ കട്ടിലും കസേരയുമൊന്നും കണ്ടില്ല. മുമ്പാകെ വീട്ടിൽ. പകരം എല്ലാ മുറിയ്ക്കലും ചുട്ടുകമ്പളങ്ങൾ വിരിച്ചിട്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. ഞങ്ങളെ സ്വീകരിച്ചു കൊണ്ടുപോയിരുത്തിയത് അടുക്കളയിലാണ്! കുടുംബാംഗങ്ങളെ അടുക്കളയിലാണത്രെ സ്വീകരിക്കുക.

മുന്നടിയോളം പൊക്കമുള്ള റൂം ഹീറ്റർ പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നത് പാചകവാതകത്തിലാണ്. തറയിൽ വിരിച്ചിട്ട കമ്പളത്തിനു മുകളിൽ പല വലിപ്പത്തിലുള്ള തലയിണകളും കുപ്പികളും. ചായ വിളമ്പുന്നതിനു മുന്നോടിയായി ചിത്രത്തുന്നലുള്ള ഒരു നീളൻ തുണി വിരിച്ചു. അതിൽ പലഹാരങ്ങളുടെ വെള്ളിത്തട്ടവും ചായയും നിറന്നു. വാൽനട്ട് കേക്കും പലവിധത്തിലുള്ള ബിസ്കറ്റുകളും കുൽച്ചുകളും ഉപ്പു ചുവയ്ക്കുന്ന മിക്സ്ചറുമായിരുന്നു വിഭവങ്ങൾ. അത് കഴിച്ചു തീരാറായപ്പോഴേക്കും മുമ്പാകെ ഓരോ ഉമേശ കുറേ കമ്പിളി ഉടുപ്പുകളുമായി വന്നു. തെർമൽവയ റൊക്കെ ഞങ്ങൾക്കുണ്ടെന്നു പറഞ്ഞപ്പോൾ രാത്രിയിലെ തണുപ്പിനതു പോരാതെ വരുമെന്നായിരുന്നു പ്രതീകരണം. അത് സത്യമാണെന്ന് പിന്നീട് ബോധ്യമായി.

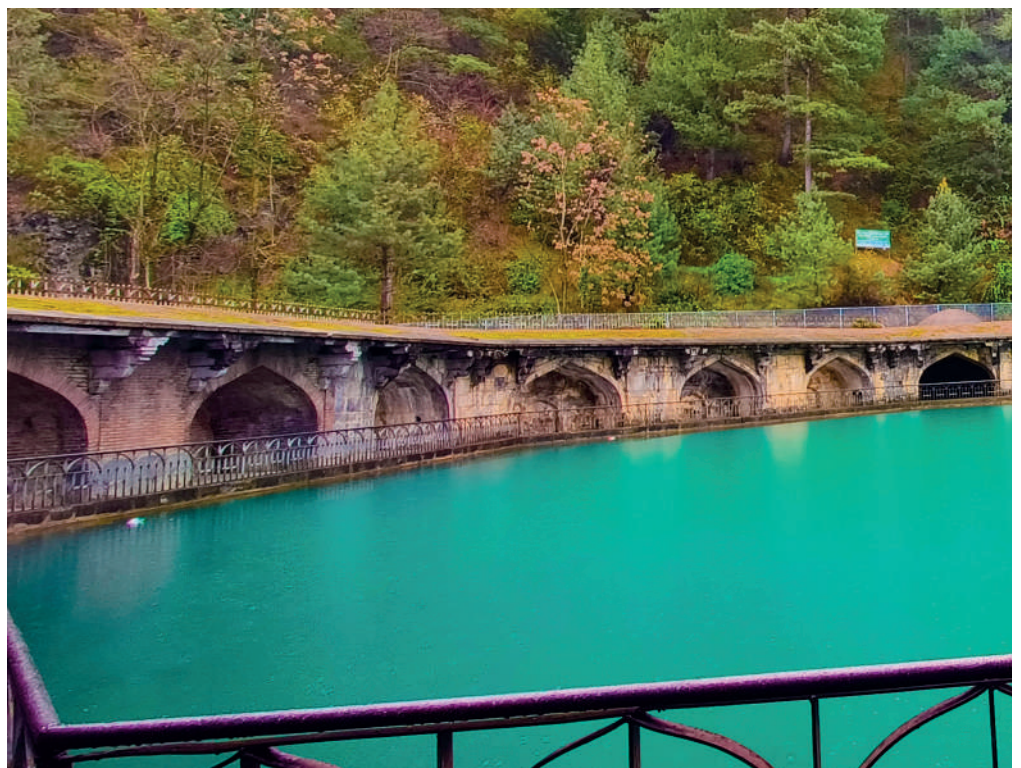
അത്താഴത്തിനൊരു ചെറുസദ്യ തന്നെയായ കശ്മീരി വസ്ഥാൻ ആണ് ഉമേശ തയ്യാറാക്കിയിരുന്നത്. കബാബ് കൊണ്ടൊരു കറി, ചിക്കൻ കുറുമ മട്ടൻ കൊണ്ടുള്ള റോഗൻ റോഷ്, ഇറച്ചി ചതച്ചുരുട്ടി ഉരുളകളാക്കി തയ്യാറാക്കുന്ന മത്സ്ചന്ദ്, ആട്ടിറച്ചി ഉരുളകളാക്കിയത് തൈരിലിട്ട് തയ്യാറാക്കുന്ന വിശേഷവിഭവമായ യക്കിനി, കൂടെ ചോറും.

വെള്ളിപാത്രങ്ങളിൽ വിളമ്പിയ വിഭവങ്ങൾ കണ്ട് അമ്പരന്നിരിക്കുമ്പോൾ പിടിയുള്ള താലവും വെള്ളിക്കുജയുമായി മുമ്പാകെ വീണ്ടും വന്നു. കൈകഴുകാനാണത്രെ ആ താലം. അതിഥികളുടെ പ്രായമനുസ

രിച്ചാണ് കൈകഴുകാൻ വെള്ളമൊഴിച്ചു തരുന്നത്. മുത്തയാൾക്ക് ആദ്യം. കുറികളിൽ ഉപ്പും കൊഴുപ്പും മുന്നിട്ട് നിന്നു. താഴ്വരയിലെ തണുപ്പിനെ പ്രതിരോധിക്കാനാണത്രെ ഉപ്പ്. ഉപ്പിട്ട് തയ്യാറാക്കുന്ന നംകീൻ ടീ ആണ് എല്ലാവരും കട്ടൻ പോലെ കുടിക്കുന്നത്. ഉപ്പും പാലും പിരിയാതെ നിൽക്കുന്നതെങ്ങനെയെന്ന ചോദ്യത്തിന് ഉമേശ സുന്ദരമായൊരു പുഞ്ചിരി തന്നു.

രാത്രിയിൽ നല്ല മഴയായിരുന്നു. മുമ്പ് കമ്പിളിയും റൂം ഹീറ്ററും തന്ന ചൂടിയാണ് കിടന്നുറങ്ങിയത്. രാവിലെ നമ്കീൻ

ചായയും കുൽച്ചയും കൊണ്ടാണ് ഉമേശ ഞങ്ങളെ സൽക്കരിച്ചത്. കുൽച്ച എന്നു കേൾക്കുമ്പോൾ നമ്മളിവിടെ കഴിക്കുന്ന കനം കുറഞ്ഞ ചപ്പാത്തി ആണെന്ന് കരുതരുത്. ഗോതമ്പ് പൊടിയും ഡാൽഡയും ചേർത്ത് ബേക്ക് ചെയ്തെടുക്കുന്ന, കാഴ്ചയിൽ പഴയ ബട്ടർ ബിസ്കറ്റിനെ ഓർമ്മിക്കുന്ന സംഗതിയാണ് കുൽച്ച. അതിൽ വെളുത്ത എള്ള് ചേർത്തതും നേരിയ മധുരമുള്ളതുമാകെയായി പലതരമുണ്ട്. നമ്കീൻ ചായയിൽ അതിനെ കുതിർത്ത് കഴിക്കുന്നതാണ് അവരുടെ പ്രാതൽ. ചായ എത്ര വേണേലും തരും.







ആകാശമാനന്ദം തെളിഞ്ഞപ്പോൾ ഞങ്ങൾ വെരിനാഗിലെ കാഴ്ചകൾ കാണാനിറങ്ങി. ശ്രീനഗറിൽനിന്ന് വ്യത്യസ്തമായി വൃത്തിയും വെടിപ്പുമുള്ള റോഡുകളും തിരക്കില്ലാത്ത മനുഷ്യരും. വാൽനട്ട്, ആപ്പിൾ തോട്ടങ്ങൾക്കു നടുവിലൂടെയുള്ള റോഡിൽ വല്ലപ്പോഴും എതിരെ വരുന്ന കാറുകൾ. ആട്ടിൻകുട്ടങ്ങളെ മേച്ചുപോകുന്ന ഫെറാൻഡാരികളെ പലതവണ കണ്ടു. ഇവിടെയു മുണ്ടൊരു പ്രസിദ്ധമായ മുഗൾ പുന്തോപ്പ്. കുന്നിൻചെരിവ്, ഉറവ, പുന്തോട്ടം മട്ടിലാണ് ഇവിടെ ഇതുവരെ കണ്ട മുഗൾ പുന്തോപ്പുകളെല്ലാമെങ്കിൽ ഇവിടെ അഷ്ടകോണാകൃതിയിൽ പടുത്ത വലിയൊരു കുള്ളത്തിൽ നിന്നാണ് നീരുറവയുടെ ആരംഭം. വെരിനാഗ് ഉറവ എന്നറിയപ്പെടുന്ന ഈ കുള്ളമാ നെത്രെ തലം നദിയുടെ ഉത്ഭവ സ്ഥാനം.

പീർ പഞ്ചൽ മലനിരകളുടെ അടിവാർത്താണ് വെരിനാഗ് സ്ഥിതി ചെയ്യുന്നത്. പൈൻ മരങ്ങളും ദേവദാരുകളും നിറഞ്ഞ കുന്നിൻമുകളിൽ നിന്ന് മഞ്ഞ് നീങ്ങുമ്പോൾ ദൂരെ പീർപഞ്ചലിന്റെ വെള്ളമുടികൾ കാണാം. മഴക്കോളില്ലാത്തപ്പോൾ ഇവിടെനിന്നുള്ള കാഴ്ച ഏറെ സുന്ദരമാണെന്ന് മുമ്പാർ പറഞ്ഞു.

കൊകർനാഗിലുള്ള അമ്മവിട്ടിലേക്ക് പോകുന്ന വഴി ബൊട്ടാണിക്കൽ ഗാർഡനിൽ കൂടി കയറിയിട്ട് പോകാമെന്നായി മുമ്പാർ പരമ്പരാഗത മുഗൾ പുന്തോട്ടങ്ങളോടു കിടപിടിക്കുന്നതാണ് ഈ ആധുനിക

ബൊട്ടാണിക്കൽ ഗാർഡൻ. ഇന്ത്യൻ മേപ്പിൾ എന്നറിയപ്പെടുന്ന ചിനാർ മരങ്ങളടക്കം ഒരുലക്ഷത്തിലേറെ വൈവിധ്യമാർന്ന സസ്യലതാദികൾ ഭംഗിയായി നടുവളർത്തിയിട്ടുള്ള പുന്തോപ്പ്. ഇറങ്ങി നടക്കാവുന്ന ആഴം കുറഞ്ഞ നീരുറവകൾക്കു കുറുകേ നിരവധി മരപ്പാലങ്ങൾ. പുൽത്തകിടിയിൽ പലയിടത്തായി പണിതിട്ടുള്ള കുടിരങ്ങളിൽ കമ്പളം വിടർത്തിയിട്ട് വീടുകളിൽ നിന്ന് തയാറാക്കിക്കൊണ്ടുവന്ന ഭക്ഷണം ആസ്വദിക്കുന്നവർ. ഇന്ന് ഞങ്ങളുടെ ഊണും ഈ പുന്തോട്ടത്തിലാണ്. ഉമേശ കമ്പളവും പട്ടുറുമ്പാലും വിശേഷ്യേപ്പാഴേക്കും ഡ്രൈവർ തസ്ലീം രണ്ടാക് പാത്രങ്ങളുമായി വന്നു. തലേന്നത്തെ കൈകഴുകൽ ചടങ്ങുകൾ വീണ്ടുമാവർത്തിച്ചു. പിന്നാലെ മട്ടൻ വീരവങ്ങൾ കൂട്ടിയുള്ള ഊണും.

രാവിലെ മുതൽ പലവട്ടം പെയ്തും തോർന്നും നിന്നിരുന്ന മഴ അതിനിടെ ശക്തമായി. അതോടെ ചുറ്റിക്കറക്കം അവസാനിപ്പിച്ച് മടങ്ങാമെന്നായി. കൊകർനാഗിൽ പട്ടാളക്കാർ കുറച്ചു കൂടുതലാണല്ലോ എന്ന ചോദ്യത്തിന് ബുർഹാൻ വാനിയുടെ ഗ്രാമത്തിലേക്കാണ് നമ്മൾ പോകുന്നതെന്നായിരുന്നു മുമ്പാറിന്റെ മറുപടി. ഒരു ചരിത്രസ്മാരകം കാട്ടിത്തരുന്ന ലാഘവത്തോടെ വാനിയെ കൊന്നു കത്തിച്ച വീടും കക്ഷി കാണിച്ചു തന്നു. ഓരോ നൂറുമീറ്ററിലും ആയുധധാരികളായ പട്ടാളക്കാർ കാവലുണ്ട്.

മുമ്പാറിന്റെ ഉമ്മിയും സഹോദരിമാരും ഞങ്ങളെ കാത്തിരിക്കുകയായിരുന്നു. കമ്പളം വിരിച്ച മുറിയിൽ കടന്നിരുന്നതും വലിയൊരു കമ്പിളി കൊണ്ടുവന്ന് ഞങ്ങളെ പൊതിഞ്ഞു. കയ്യാറകളും മഫ്ളറും തുടങ്ങി സകല പ്രതിരോധസ്തുക്കളെയും നിരായുധമാക്കുന്ന തണുപ്പിനെ തുരത്താൻ ഇന്നലെ മുതൽ ആകാംക്ഷയോടെ കാണാൻ കാത്തിരുന്ന കാംഗ്രിയെത്തി. മൺചട്ടിയിൽ എരിയുന്ന തീക്കനലും അത് ഇളക്കാനൊരു കുഞ്ഞു ചട്ടുകവും ചേർന്നതാണ് കാംഗ്രി. ചട്ടിയെ പൊതിഞ്ഞ് ചുരൽപോലുള്ള വള്ളികൊണ്ട് മെട്ചിലുരുണ്ട്. കൈകൾ ചൂടാവുമ്പോഴേക്ക് നംകിൻ ചായയും കുൽച്ചയും പല ഹാരങ്ങളുമെത്തി. ഇന്നവിടെ തങ്ങാമെന്ന സ്നേഹനിർബന്ധങ്ങളെ നാളെ വെളുപ്പിന് തിരിച്ചുപോകാനുള്ളതാണ്, ഇനി വരുമ്പോൾ തീർച്ചയായും വന്നിരിക്കുമെന്ന ഉറപ്പിൽ തടയിട്ടു. തിരികെ വീടെത്തുമ്പോഴേക്ക് മഴ ആലിപ്പഴമഴയായി മാറിക്കഴിഞ്ഞിരുന്നു.

ഒറ്റദിവസം കൊണ്ട് കൂട്ടുകാരിയായി മാറിയ ഉമേശ എന്റെ കയ്യിലെ മൈലാഞ്ചി ഡിസൈൻ കണ്ട് ചിരിയോട് ചിരിയായിരുന്നു. വസ്ത്രം മാറി അടുക്കളയിലെ ഹീറ്ററിനു മുന്നിൽ സ്ഥാനം പിടിച്ചതും ചൂടുചായയും മൈലാഞ്ചിക്കോണുമായി ഉമേശ വന്നു. വരുംവഴി ഞങ്ങളറിയാതെ വാങ്ങിയതാണ് മൈലാഞ്ചി. ചായ കുടിച്ചു തീരുമ്പോഴേക്ക് വലതുകയ്യിൽ ഭംഗിയുള്ളൊരു ഡിസൈൻ പൂർത്തിയായിക്കഴിഞ്ഞിരുന്നു. രണ്ട് ദിവസം കൊണ്ട് ഞങ്ങളുടെ ഹിന്ദിയും ഉമേശയുടെ ഇംഗ്ലീഷും മെച്ചപ്പെട്ടുവെന്നും ഒരാഴ്ച കൂടി നിന്നിരുന്നെങ്കിൽ താൻ ഭംഗിയായി ഇംഗ്ലീഷ് പറയാൻ പഠിച്ചേനെെന്നും ഉമേശ പരിഭവിച്ചു. അടുത്ത തണുപ്പുകാലത്ത് കേരളത്തിലേക്ക് പോരേ, എല്ലാത്തിനും പരിഹാരമുണ്ടാക്കാം എന്ന് ഉമേശയെ സമാധാനിപ്പിച്ചു.

ഒരു കൂട നിറയെ വാൽനട്ട്, ബദാം, കൂങ്കുമ്പൂവിന്റെ ഓരോ ചെപ്പുകൾ, കാൾജീരി ഫെറാൻ, അതിലേറെ സ്നേഹം, എല്ലാം തന്നാണ് മുമ്പാർ ഞങ്ങളെ യാത്രയാക്കിയത്. എയർപോർട്ട് വരെ ഉമേശ കൂടെ വന്നു. കെട്ടിപ്പിടിച്ച് യാത്ര പറയുമ്പോൾ സംശയമേതുമില്ലാതെ ഉമേശ പറഞ്ഞു, 'വിൽ മിസ്സ് യു'. മഴക്കോൾ മുടിയ ശ്രീനഗറിനു മീതെ വിമാനമുയർന്നപ്പോൾ ഞങ്ങളുടെ മനസിലും അതേ വികാരമായിരുന്നു 'വിൽ മിസ്സ് യു, കാൾജീർ !' മറ്റൊരിടവും ഞങ്ങൾക്ക് ഇത്രമേൽ ഹൃദയമായി ആതിഥ്യമരുളിയിട്ടില്ല ഇതേവരെ... ■



## United Arab Emirates

# Dubai set for summer real estate rental boom



Short term rented accommodation market in Dubai is set to boom during the summer months, according to accommodation management firm Frank Porter.

In its latest report, Frank Porter says that the short term rental market is set to enjoy a busy summer thanks to the UAE's diversified entertainment offerings, compelling summer calendar of events, government tourism incentives, and the addition of more flight routes across Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Ras Al Khaimah.

Dubai had set a record in hosting international short-term visitors during 2023 welcoming 17.15 million international overnight visitors. The numbers are set to exceed 2023 levels in 2024. A record number of visitors have already arrived in Dubai so far this year with an almost 20 per cent year-on-year increase in overnight visitors during the first few months of 2024, a trend which is expected to continue into the summer months.

With summer fast approaching, this traditionally quieter season in the UAE is likely to stay buoyant. Popular summer destinations across Europe may look less appealing to travellers this year due

to surges in pricing, drawing even more travellers to consider Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and fast-developing neighbouring Emirates such as Ras Al Khaimah, as attractive vacation options, even throughout the warmer months.

With large malls, which have shopping, entertainment and dining under one roof, and its 800-plus hotels with temperature-controlled pools, as well as its indoor theme parks, water activities, and incredible host of world-class restaurants, there is more to do than ever before even when temperatures soar.

In addition, the Dubai Government has big ambitions to increase the tourism sector's contribution to GDP to reach AED450bn (\$122.5bn) by 2031, and its annual summer campaigns are essential to it reaching those goals.

Summer will see the UAE's tourism boards launch campaigns to further incentivise international tourists such as "kids go free" deals, dining offers, and city-wide retail festivals, offering even more reason to visit. The short-term let market offers an attractive option for those summer travellers.

Not only is a short term let property often more affordable (though UAE hotel prices do tend to drop in the

summer), they can also provide a more personalised, exclusive, and comfier stay.

Summer is a season when travellers tend to book longer trips, filling the long school holidays and making the most of quieter months in the corporate world.

Those looking for three or four weeks away or more will often take a business-and-leisure approach to their trip, working for a portion of it to allow them to stay away from the office longer.

Short-term rentals present an excellent option for those taking this hybrid approach to their travels thanks to a more "home-from-home" feel with separate living, dining, sleeping and working areas.

Anna Skigin, CEO of Frank Porter said: "Each year the UAE builds its all-season offering and with popularity and visitor numbers at an all-time-high, we look forward to summer 2024 being a record-breaking season for short-term lets.

"The country does not stop during summer, in fact, the ever increasing and diverse offerings, from theme parks and museums to hotels with their swimming, spa, and dining experiences, offer endless things to do during a summer visit.

"The busiest season for family travel, a summer short-term let helps families settle in for a longer break to enjoy a home away from home.

"The breadth of short-term let properties now available in UAE mean all travelers will find something that suits them, whether that be a studio in DIFC for a solo traveler's 'bleisure' trip, or a large apartment in a prime spot such as Dubai Marina or Palm Jumeirah where a family can enjoy being in shooting distance of all the city's attractions while enjoying a homely accommodation."

(Business Insider/Frank Porter)





## China

## Domestic tourism soars in China but foreigners stay away



Photo courtesy: BBC

With the Chinese economy facing massive challenges, there have been concerns over its growth potential, at least in the immediate future. Yet a key exception is emerging in the form of domestic tourism, says a BBC report.

The five-day public holiday to mark labour day saw 295 million trips made within China, according to figures from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. This was 28% higher than pre-pandemic figures recorded in 2019. The Transport Ministry's figures are also staggering: 92 million rail trips; almost 10 million air trips and 1.25 billion highway journeys, says the report.

However, this comes as international arrivals continue to lag, with foreigners currently entering China at barely 30% of 2019 levels.

Schubert Lou, chief operating officer at travel agency Trip.com, told the BBC: "We've seen very strong domestic travel demand with search volumes in hotels up 67% compared to last year, and flight volumes up 80%."

Tourism industry consultant Peng Han from Travel Daily says that the general uncertainty about the Chinese economy is putting more emphasis on saving, so people are

looking for good value options. They are going on holidays and paying for things but doing so much more frugally.

This is where an increase in big-spending foreigners could help. But they are simply not travelling to China in the numbers they used to. In 2019, nearly 98 million international visitors came to the country. Last year it was only 35 million - including business trips, students and the like.

For many in the tourism industry here specialising in services for foreign travellers, "uneven" would be an understatement. Three years of harsh Covid prevention measures drove down arrivals from other countries, but that alone can't account for the current situation.

Official travel advice from some governments echo this sentiment, at times quite harshly. Washington warns potential travellers to "reconsider travel to Mainland China due to the arbitrary enforcement of local laws, including in relation to exit bans, and the risk of wrongful detentions".

Australia advises "a high degree of caution" warning that "Australians may be at risk of arbitrary detention or harsh enforcement of local laws, including broadly defined National Security Laws".

The political environment has also taken a toll on flight availability and price. This is especially the case with connections to and from North America. Last month's 332 scheduled round trips between China and the US contrasts with 1,506 in April 2019. As a result, finding a seat on a direct flight can be extremely difficult and those that are available are very expensive.

Washington has increased the number of Chinese airline flights permitted to land - but only from 35 per week to 50. It is still well short of the 150 weekly trips pre-Covid. The Biden administration is coming under pressure from unions and US airlines to not increase this any further because, they argue, Chinese airlines have an unfair advantage over them as they have state support; don't face the same onerous Chinese regulations; and, crucially, can fly over Russian airspace, making trips shorter and cheaper.

Chinese officials have acknowledged that the foreign traveller numbers have been low but they are now trying to turn this around. One way they're attempting to attract more foreign visitors is by increasing the number of countries whose citizens don't need a visa to enter. Trip.com says this resulted in an almost immediate increase in passenger arrivals from Southeast Asia.

In 23 Chinese cities, transit passengers from more than 50 countries are also able to stay for a few days visa free if they have an onward ticket. In Shanghai, hotels above a three-star level have been told that they should prepare to deal with international credit cards and an initial batch of 50 taxis have also started accepting them.

(Extracted from report by Stephen McDonell/BBC)

## Joby to Launch Air Taxi Service in UAE



Come 2026, and you will be able to fly from Dubai International Airport to Palm Jumeirah in 10 minutes, shaving off 30 minutes from the car ride you have been taking so far. Joby Air Taxis will cover 200 miles in 10 minutes, revolutionising travel in the city and beyond.

Joby Aviation, a company developing all-electric aircraft for commercial passenger service, has announced that it has signed a definitive agreement with Dubai's Road and Transport Authority (RTA) to launch air taxi services in the Emirate by early 2026, with Joby targeting initial operations as early as 2025.

The agreement, signed at the World Governments Summit in Dubai in the presence of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, UAE Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, provides Joby with the exclusive right to operate air taxis in Dubai for six years, and will position Dubai as a world leader in delivering the fast, clean and quiet air travel enabled by Joby's revolutionary

technology. The agreement secures a variety of support from the RTA, including financial mechanisms, for entry and maturing of service operations in Dubai.

JoeBen Bevirt, founder and CEO, Joby Aviation, said: "It is an honor to partner with the government of Dubai to demonstrate the value of sustainable air travel to the world. "Today's landmark agreement delivers on all three ingredients required to successfully launch an air taxi service - a definitive path to operations, well-placed infrastructure supported by dedicated partners, and an aircraft with the capacity and range to deliver meaningful journeys.

His Excellency Mattar Al Tayer, Director-General, Chairman of the Board of Executive Directors for RTA, commented on the agreement, saying, "the air taxi service is part of RTA's efforts to embrace future transportation technologies and offers a novel and efficient mobility option for Dubai's residents and visitors, enabling fast, safe, and convenient travel to key city spots. This service will

also enhance seamless multimodal transportation, improving citywide connectivity, and ensuring a smooth travel experience for passengers."

Joby additionally signed an agreement with Skyports, who will design, build and operate four initial vertiport sites across Dubai. RTA, Skyports and Joby have worked together to identify Dubai International Airport (DXB), Palm Jumeirah, Dubai Marina and Dubai Downtown as the launch locations for Dubai's air taxi service.

In November 2023, Joby's aircraft had become the first electric air taxi to fly in New York City, building on a number of recent successes including the launch of production at the Company's initial manufacturing facility in California in June 2023 and the first ever delivery of an electric air taxi to the U.S. Department of Defense in September 2023. Joby is listed on the New York Stock Exchange and has raised more than \$2 billion of funding to date, including investments from Toyota, Delta Air Lines, SK Telecom, Uber and Baillie Gifford.





## ATM 2024

### GLOBAL TRENDS

## Gulf tourist visa scheme announced at ATM 2024



At the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2024, Abdulla bin Touq Al Marri, the UAE Minister of Economy, announced the introduction of the 'GCC Grand Tours' visa.

This initiative, endorsed by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), will facilitate a unified visa system allowing travellers to visit all six GCC countries and stay in the region for over 30 days.

The visa is a strategic effort to simplify travel logistics and boost tourism across the GCC states. The 'GCC Grand Tours' visa is designed to extend tourists' stay beyond 30 days, enhancing their travel experience across the GCC.

According to Minister Al Marri, the new visa system will make travel within the GCC more convenient and cost-effective for tourists. This ease of access is expected to increase tourist activity and, consequently, boost employment opportunities within the region.

The GCC states had reached a consensus on this Unified Gulf Tourist Visa in November last, though the exact date of its implementation remains undecided.

In 2021, international spending accounted for 35% of the market share within the GCC, contributing a substantial \$109 billion to the total GDP of the GCC economies.

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## Schengen Visa fees to rise 12% globally starting June 11



The European Commission has reportedly accepted a proposal to hike Schengen visa fees worldwide by 12 percent. The increased visa fees are to come into force from June 11, an announcement by Slovenia's Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs said.

"The European Commission adopted a decision to increase

short-stay Schengen visa fees worldwide by 12 per cent. This increase will apply globally starting June 11, 2024," the Slovenian government said.

The fee for adult applicants will rise from €80 to €90, while the fee for children aged six to twelve will go up from €40 to €45. Additionally, countries that do not cooperate with the EU in readmitting their

irregularly staying citizens may see their visa fees surge to €135 or even €180.

This visa fee hike decision follows a scheduled review of EU visa fees that took place in December 2023, which occurs every three years as stipulated by the Schengen Visa Code. The EU attributed the fee hike to inflation and increased salaries for civil servants. The previous increase in February 2020 had seen the fees rise from €60 to €80.

In 2023, the Schengen Area received over 10.3 million short-stay visa applications, a 37 per cent increase from 2022. This was, however, still below the 2019 peak of 17 million applications.

The Schengen Area comprises 29 European countries, including 25 EU member states.

## Dubai International Airport welcomed 23 million passengers in Q1, India ranked top destination



Dubai International Airport (DXB) made a stellar start to the year by recording its busiest quarter in history, with 23 million guests passing through its terminals, marking an 8.4 per cent increase compared to the same period last year.

In a statement, Dubai Airports said that the total passenger traffic for the quarter reached 23,052,060 guests, with January recording the

highest traffic at 7.9 million.

Paul Griffiths, CEO of DXB, said: "The robust growth trajectory at DXB continued in the first quarter of the year, with the hub recording some truly impressive numbers. Thanks in part to the proliferation of cities being added to our network by our home base carriers, Emirates and flydubai, in recent months.

"As Dubai emerges as a global leader in attracting talent, businesses, and tourists from across the globe, our focus remains on sustaining growth momentum and enhancing the overall airport experience for every guest passing through our terminals. With a strong start to Q2 and an optimistic outlook for the rest of the year, we have revised our forecast for the year to 91 million guests, surpassing our previous annual traffic record of 89.1m in 2018," he said.

With connections to 256 destinations across 102 countries through 90 international carriers, DXB strengthens Dubai's position as a global business and logistics hub. India remained DXB's top destination country, with passenger traffic reaching 3.1 million guests, followed by Saudi Arabia (2 million), the UK (1.5 million), and Pakistan (1.1 million).

The top cities by passenger numbers included: London (961,000 guests), Riyadh (795,000 guests), Jeddah (669,000 guests), and Mumbai (637,000 guests).

The first quarter saw 109,238 total flight movements, an 8.3 per cent increase year-on-year, with load factor reaching 79.1 per cent in Q1. DXB managed 26.8 million bags during the period, the Dubai Airports statement said.





# World's First 6G Device Launched in Japan

In a world where speed and connectivity reign supreme, the race towards the next generation of wireless technology has reached a new milestone. A Japanese consortium has unveiled the prototype of what is touted to be the world's first high-speed 6G device, promising data transfer rates at lightning speed. This groundbreaking innovation opens the door to a realm of possibilities previously unimaginable.

The purported 6G device boasts an astounding data transmission rate of 100 gigabits per second (Gbps), dwarfing the capabilities of current 5G technology by a staggering factor of 20. Utilizing the 100 gigahertz (GHz) frequency indoors and the 300 GHz band outdoors, this prototype showcases the potential for unprecedented connectivity speeds.

While the allure of higher frequencies lies in their potential for faster data transfer, they also present significant challenges. The shorter wavelengths limit the

distance the signal can travel and diminish its penetration strength. As such, achieving widespread coverage and reliable connectivity with 6G technology will require innovative solutions to overcome these obstacles.

The transition from 4G to 5G primarily focused on enhancing data capacity for activities such as video streaming and mobile browsing. However, the advent of 6G heralds a new era of possibilities. With its unparalleled speed, 6G has the potential to revolutionize communication and entertainment. Real-time holographic communication and immersive virtual and mixed-reality experiences are just a glimpse of what 6G could enable.

The impact of 6G extends far beyond our personal connections. It has the potential to revolutionize various industries. Here's a glimpse into what the future holds:

**Healthcare:** Imagine real-time data transmission from medical

devices, enabling remote surgeries or instant access to critical patient information.

**Transportation:** 6G could pave the way for autonomous vehicles that communicate seamlessly, leading to safer and more efficient transportation systems.

**Artificial Intelligence:** With its unparalleled speed and capacity, 6G could fuel the development of even more sophisticated AI applications that can analyze data faster and make more informed decisions.

While the unveiling of the 6G prototype marks a significant milestone, widespread adoption is still a distant reality. The development of 6G networks will necessitate the creation of a new generation of devices equipped with built-in 6G antennas. Additionally, addressing challenges such as signal interference from walls and environmental factors like rain will be crucial for ensuring reliable connectivity.







# Monsoon!

## A SYMPHONY OF RAIN, RENEWAL & REJUVENATION

Anil Menon

**T**he rains are here. It's the Monsoon season in Kerala! In June, the rain comes like a whisper, with a mild thunderclap in the distance. You go to bed after a sultry day, not sunny, but high in ambient temperature. But, when you wake up, there you have it! The rain, with its pitter-patter on the stiles, forming little puddles in the courtyard!

At first you begin to wonder if it's a summer night's dream but, when a cool breeze wafts in through the windows, you realise that it is the Monsoon! Of course, the Monsoon has changed. Its advent and exit are far more erratic than in the past when it used to keep its date with the Kerala coast exactly on June 1. But the charm remains. And the







## MONSOON PACKAGE

sheer pleasure of watching rain-washed plantain leaves swaying as if in agreement with some gossip of the whispering raindrops.

More than just a weather pattern, the Monsoon is a cultural phenomenon, a time of rejuvenation and revival, a melody composed by the wind, the sky, and the very earth itself. It's a symphony that plays out in three distinct acts, each offering a unique way to experience the magic of the Kerala Monsoon.

### Act I: The Emerald Embrace of the Coast

The curtain rises along the Malabar Coast, where the Arabian Sea puts on a show unlike any other. The first whispers of the monsoon arrive, gentle at first, a playful teasing by the wind. Coconut palms sway rhythmically, their fronds glistening like emeralds under the ever-changing Monsoon sky. The air is thick with the scent of petrichor, the earthy fragrance that announces the rain's imminent arrival.

### Act II: The Lush Embrace of the Midlands

As the Monsoon progresses, the melody deepens. We move inland, to the verdant embrace of Kerala's backwaters. Paddy fields, once a golden canvas, transform into emerald mirrors reflecting the dramatic Monsoon sky. Lush green hills rise in the distance, shrouded in mist, their slopes cascading with countless waterfalls awakened by the rains.

Wake up to the gentle pitter-patter of rain on your thatched roof, the sound a natural lullaby. Take a traditional canoe ride through the backwaters, the gentle sway of the boat punctuated by the rhythmic splash of oars, the silence broken only by the chirping of birds and the soft whispers of the rain. In the evenings, curl up with a good book by the crackling fireplace, the sound of the rain a comforting lilt that washes away all stress.

### Act III: The Misty Embrace of the Hills

The final act unfolds in the misty embrace of the Western Ghats. Munnar, Kerala's crown jewel, transforms into a wonderland draped in a veil of Monsoon mist. Rolling hills painted in various shades of green disappear into the swirling clouds, creating a landscape of ethereal beauty. Waterfalls thunder with renewed vigour, their spray painting rainbows across the sky. The air is crisp and clean, infused with the invigorating aroma of wet earth and wild herbs.

Imagine sipping on a steaming cup of locally grown tea while watching the clouds dance across the mountain peaks, the rhythmic drumming of the rain creating a natural soundtrack. After a day of exploring the misty hills, unwind by the fireplace with a book, the crackling flames casting a warm glow on the room, a stark contrast to the cool, misty world outside.

### The Enchanting Finale

The Kerala Monsoon is more than just rain; it's a multidimensional experience that touches the soul. It's the rhythm of the rain on the rooftop, the scent of wet earth, the vibrant green that explodes across the landscape.

It's the warmth of a crackling fireplace on a cool evening, the sound of cascading waterfalls, the taste of a steaming cup of tea brewed with the first flush of the monsoon. It's a symphony of rejuvenation, a time for introspection and renewal, a reminder of the interconnectedness of nature and humanity.

So, this monsoon season, pack your bags, embrace the rhythm of the rain, and embark on your own Kerala adventure. Let the symphony of the monsoon wash away your worries and leave you feeling refreshed, rejuvenated, and deeply connected to the magic of this incredible land. ■

SWAGAT





# Monsoon Magic







## MONSOON PACKAGE

**T**he Kerala Monsoon isn't just about finding cozy havens; it's also about embracing the invigorating spirit of the season with exciting activities. Each region offers unique experiences that let you truly connect with the rains.

### **Dance with the Waves**

The rhythmic drumming of the Monsoon on the Arabian Sea presents a unique opportunity for surfers. Kovalam and Varkala beaches transform into a haven for experienced surfers, with powerful waves that offer an exhilarating challenge. For beginners, lessons

are available from experienced instructors, allowing you to learn the ropes in a safe and controlled environment.

Up north in Kerala, you can head to the Muzhappilangad Beach, possibly the only true drive-in beach in the entire country.

The most unique feature of Muzhappilangad Beach is that you can drive your car directly onto the hard-packed sand. Drive from end to end on this 4-kilometre stretch of golden sand that offers a thrilling experience of cruising along the coast in your car. But, during the Monsoon, do it with care.





Beyond surfing and the beach cruise, the Monsoon also unveils hidden coastal gems. The towering lighthouses along the coast take on a dramatic air, their powerful beams piercing the Monsoon clouds. Subject to permissions, climb to the top of the Alappuzha lighthouse for breathtaking panoramic views of the churning sea and the lush green hinterland.

### **A Gentle Journey Through Serene**

The backwaters transform into a watery wonderland during the Monsoon. As the water levels rise, the canals and lakes become a network of vibrant green veins snaking through the lush landscape. This is the perfect time to embark on a traditional canoe ride, a gentle journey that allows

you to soak in the beauty of the Monsoon-kissed Kerala.

Glide past swaying coconut palms and emerald paddy fields, dotted with quaint villages. Observe the vibrant birdlife that thrives in this verdant ecosystem, from the colourful kingfishers to the majestic egrets. For a truly immersive experience, visit a local village and witness the traditional methods of fishing practiced in the backwaters. Participate in a cooking class and learn to prepare a delicious Kerala sadhya (feast) using fresh, locally sourced ingredients.

### **Trek Through Misty Jungles**

The Western Ghats come alive during the monsoon, with waterfalls cascading down verdant slopes and the air heavy with the

invigorating scent of wet earth. This is a paradise for trekkers, offering a chance to explore the lush jungle trails shrouded in a veil of mist. Munnar boasts several well-maintained trails that lead to breathtaking viewpoints and hidden waterfalls.

The Monsoon also the rivers of Kerala like the Iruvanjipuzha for white water rafting experience, but that is for later in the year, from September to November. During these months, the rivers would be gushing with high-intensity currents and rapids. But from June the rivers would show the world the full force of the season's energy. The monsoon also brings forth a bounty of wild mushrooms, a prized ingredient in Kerala's cuisine. Join a guided foraging expedition with



Picture Credit : Parameswaran P, Wayanad





Picture Credit : Parameswaran P, Wayanad

a local expert to learn about the different varieties and their culinary uses.

### Delectable Delights of the Monsoon

The Kerala Monsoon not only refreshes the land but also inspires a delectable array of seasonal dishes. Local kitchens transform into havens of aroma and flavour, with dishes that celebrate the bounty of the season. Here are some unique delicacies that will tantalise your taste buds:

**Kappa-Meen Curry** (Fish Curry with Tapioca): This comforting dish is a staple during the monsoon. Tender chunks of fish are simmered in a flavourful coconut milk curry with chunky tapioca pearls. The creamy texture and subtle sweetness of the tapioca perfectly complement the spicy curry, creating a delightful symphony of flavours.

**Ilaneer** (Tender Coconut Water): Nothing beats quenching your thirst with a glass of cool Ilaneer, the tender water of young coconuts. This refreshing drink is naturally sweet and loaded with electrolytes, making it the perfect way to rehydrate after a monsoon adventure.

**Ela Ada** (Steamed Rice Pancakes): These soft, pillowy pancakes are a popular monsoon snack. Made with a fermented rice batter and steamed in banana leaves, they are filled with a variety of savoury or sweet fillings, like grated coconut and jaggery.

**Nadan Beef Fry** (Spicy Kerala Beef Fry): This dish is a must-try for meat lovers. Tender chunks of beef are stir-fried with an aromatic blend of spices, creating a flavourful and slightly spicy dish that is perfect for a rainy evening.

**Kadala Curry** (Black Chickpea Curry): This protein-rich curry is a staple in Kerala and takes on a special flavour during the monsoon. Black chickpeas are simmered in a spicy curry with coconut milk, creating a hearty and satisfying dish that is perfect with steamed rice or appams (fermented rice pancakes).

These are just a few of the many delicious dishes that grace Kerala's tables during the monsoon season. Each bite is a celebration of the season's bounty and a testament to the resourcefulness and creativity of Kerala's culinary traditions. So, embark on your monsoon adventure in Kerala, not just to experience the beauty of the rains but also to savour the delectable flavours that come with them... **Anil Meneon**







# GO FOR REJUVENATION WITH MONSOON AYURVEDIC THERAPY

**T**he Monsoon season in Kerala, with its lush greenery and cool, moist atmosphere, provides the perfect setting for a rejuvenating Ayurvedic therapy—the “Karkidaka Chikitsa” or “Monsoon Ayurvedic Therapy.” This traditional treatment, deeply rooted in the Ayurvedic principles of ancient India, is designed to revitalize the body and mind, cleanse the system of accumulated toxins, and enhance overall health.

## Why Monsoon?

The Monsoon period, particularly the months of June to August, is considered the best time for Ayurvedic treatments. During this season, the atmosphere is dust-free, cool, and moist, which opens the body's pores and makes it more receptive to herbal oils and treatments. The cool weather helps the body absorb the therapeutic oils and herbs more effectively,

enhancing the efficacy of the treatments.

## Key Components

**Panchakarma:** The cornerstone of Ayurvedic therapy, Panchakarma involves a series of detoxification treatments designed to cleanse the body of toxins (ama) and restore balance (doshas). This includes five primary procedures:

**Vamana (Emesis Therapy):** Induces vomiting to eliminate toxins from the stomach and respiratory tract.

**Virechana (Purgation Therapy):** Cleanses the intestines using herbal laxatives.

**Basti (Enema Therapy):** Administers medicated oils or decoctions through the rectum to cleanse the colon.

**Nasya (Nasal Administration):** Clears the nasal passages and sinuses using herbal oils.







**Raktamokshana (Bloodletting):** Removes impurities from the blood.

**Abhyanga (Oil Massage):** A full-body massage using warm herbal oils tailored to the individual's dosha. Abhyanga improves circulation, relaxes the muscles, and promotes detoxification through the skin.

**Shirodhara:** A unique therapy where a continuous stream of warm herbal oil is poured onto the forehead. This treatment calms the nervous system, alleviates stress, and enhances mental clarity.

**Swedana (Herbal Steam Bath):** Involves sweating induced by steam infused with medicinal herbs, which helps open the pores and eliminate toxins through the skin.

**Pizhichil (Oil Bath):** A luxurious treatment where warm oil is poured over the body while being gently massaged. This therapy is particularly effective in treating rheumatic diseases, joint pain, and muscle stiffness.

**Njavara Kizhi:** Involves the application of poultices filled with cooked Njavara rice and medicinal



## MONSOON PACKAGE



herbs. These poultices are dipped in warm milk and herbal decoctions and then massaged over the body. This treatment rejuvenates the tissues, enhances strength, and improves skin texture.

### Dietary Regimen

**Karkidaka Chikitsa** also emphasizes a specific diet to aid the detoxification process. Traditionally, a special medicinal porridge called "Karkidaka Kanji" is consumed. This porridge is made from a blend of medicinal herbs and Njavara rice, known for its nourishing and restorative properties. The diet is generally light, warm, and easy to digest, supporting the body's natural detoxification process.

### Benefits

The monsoon therapy in Kerala provides a holistic approach to

health, addressing physical, mental, and emotional well-being. It strengthens the immune system, improves digestion, reduces stress, and enhances vitality. Moreover, the treatments are tailored to the individual's constitution, ensuring a personalized healing experience.

**Karkidaka Chikitsa** during the monsoon in Kerala is more than just a treatment; it is a rejuvenation of the body and soul. This Ayurvedic therapy harnesses the healing power of nature and ancient wisdom to provide a transformative experience that restores balance and promotes long-term health. The synergy between the monsoon's natural environment and the therapeutic practices of Ayurveda creates an ideal setting for deep, holistic healing.

**Anil Meneon ■**





# COCKTAILS EPITOME OF INDULGENCE

Kiran Kumar

From the vibrant hues of freshly squeezed juices to the nuanced depths of artisanal bitters, cocktails traverse a kaleidoscope of tastes and textures, reflecting the diverse culinary landscapes of the world.







## FEATURE

Step into the enchanting world of cocktails, where each sip is a symphony of flavours and a celebration of craftsmanship. A cocktail, the epitome of indulgence, is more than just an alcoholic mixed drink—it is a fusion of spirits and artistry, blending one or more libations with an array of tantalizing ingredients.

From the vibrant hues of freshly squeezed juices to the nuanced depths of artisanal bitters, cocktails traverse a kaleidoscope of tastes and textures, reflecting the diverse culinary landscapes of the world. Across continents, mixologists craft their masterpieces, drawing inspiration from age-old classics and infusing them with contemporary flair.

Amidst this creative whirlwind, a plethora of online platforms serve as repositories of mixological wisdom, offering a treasure trove of original recipes and inventive interpretations of beloved concoctions. Welcome to the captivating realm of cocktails, where every libation tells a story,

and every sip is an adventure awaiting exploration.

Since their arrival in the 1800s, these alcoholic elixirs, crafted by blending spirits with an array of complementary ingredients, have woven themselves into the fabric of social and culinary history. Over the decades, cocktails have evolved, adapting to the shifting tastes and trends of society while retaining their timeless allure.

From the classic simplicity of a Martini to the complex layers of a modern mixology masterpiece, cocktails have undergone a metamorphosis, reflecting the ever-changing palate of the discerning drinker. With each passing era, new techniques, ingredients, and cultural influences have left their indelible mark on the cocktail landscape, ensuring its continuous evolution and relevance in the modern world.

As custodians of tradition and agents of innovation, cocktails remain a timeless testament to the artistry and ingenuity of the human spirit, inviting enthusiasts



to embark on an endless journey of exploration and enjoyment.

The cocktail story goes back to the British tradition of punches—elaborate concoctions blending spirits, fruit juices, and spices in communal bowls, fostering conviviality and merriment. It was amidst this spirited ambiance that the term “cocktail” made its debut, etching its place in history on March 17, 1798, in the pages of a newspaper.

From its humble origins as a humble libation served in punch bowls to its modern incarnation as a symbol of sophistication and indulgence, the cocktail has traversed centuries, adapting and evolving with the ever-changing tastes and trends of society.

What the transformation from ‘punches’ to ‘cocktails’ in 1798 marked was the birth of a cultural phenomenon, sparking a revolution, paving the way for a myriad of inventive concoctions that continue to captivate and delight drinkers around the globe.

There are several theories around why cocktails are called ‘cocktails’, the most popular of which relates to horse racing, horse with a tail like cock’s, which was the symbol that the racehorse was mixed and not a thoroughbred. Though the origin of mixed drinks can be traced back to the 18th century, it wasn’t clear where, who, and how the “original” cocktail was created.

As cocktails evolved into a social badge of honour during the Shakespearean times, mixing drinks and bartending into big news. Jerry Thomas or Professor Thomas, an American bartender, helped define the art of bartending. Using the experience he had gained by working all over Europe and America, he wrote “The

Bartender’s Guide (or How to Mix Drinks).”

It is one of the first comprehensive recipe books that became a standard-bearer for new and experienced bartenders alike, becoming a significant milestone from the Golden Age of the history of cocktails.

In the mid-20th century, cocktail drinks took a step back as the drug culture overtook them. However, around the 1990s, people like Dale DeGroff of New York’s famous Rainbow Room revived the classic cocktail culture from Professor Thomas’ time. DeGroff’s craft cocktail movement brought historical values and strict quality standards back to a formerly devolved industry.

The story of how cocktails came to be will never be complete without mentioning the role of ice. The perseverance of person name Frederic Tudor, an American businessman and pioneer merchant, also known as ‘Ice King’ brought in a revolution.

Through his Tudor Ice Company, he made it possible for anyone to enjoy an iced drink at any time. This shift in availability of ice influenced the invention and popularity

of cocktails in and around the U.S., eventually fuelling their rise in other parts of the world as well.

Mixology also became popular throughout this period and bartenders showcased their exceptional skills in mixing drinks by using the bar tools and, in the process entertaining the guests, which gave rise to ‘Flair bartending’.

Today there is an unending list of cocktails and bartenders who have risen to celebrity status. Cocktail will always remain the favourite drink as part of celebrations and functions across the world. As Dale DeGroff said, “Cocktails are like a good book, it’s best to have a variety on hand to suit different moods”.

Kiran Kumar is Principal, FKHA-IHM (Federation of Kerala Hotels Association – Institute of Hotel Management). ■







# FULL THROTTLE AHEAD!

HVS India Hospitality Industry Overview 2023 sees continued growth, driven by sustained domestic demand, the return of international travel to its full glory, and the growth of niche tourism segments during 2024.

Harisankar

The year 2023 marked a crucial turning point for the global travel and tourism industry, as it continued its recovery while navigating challenges.

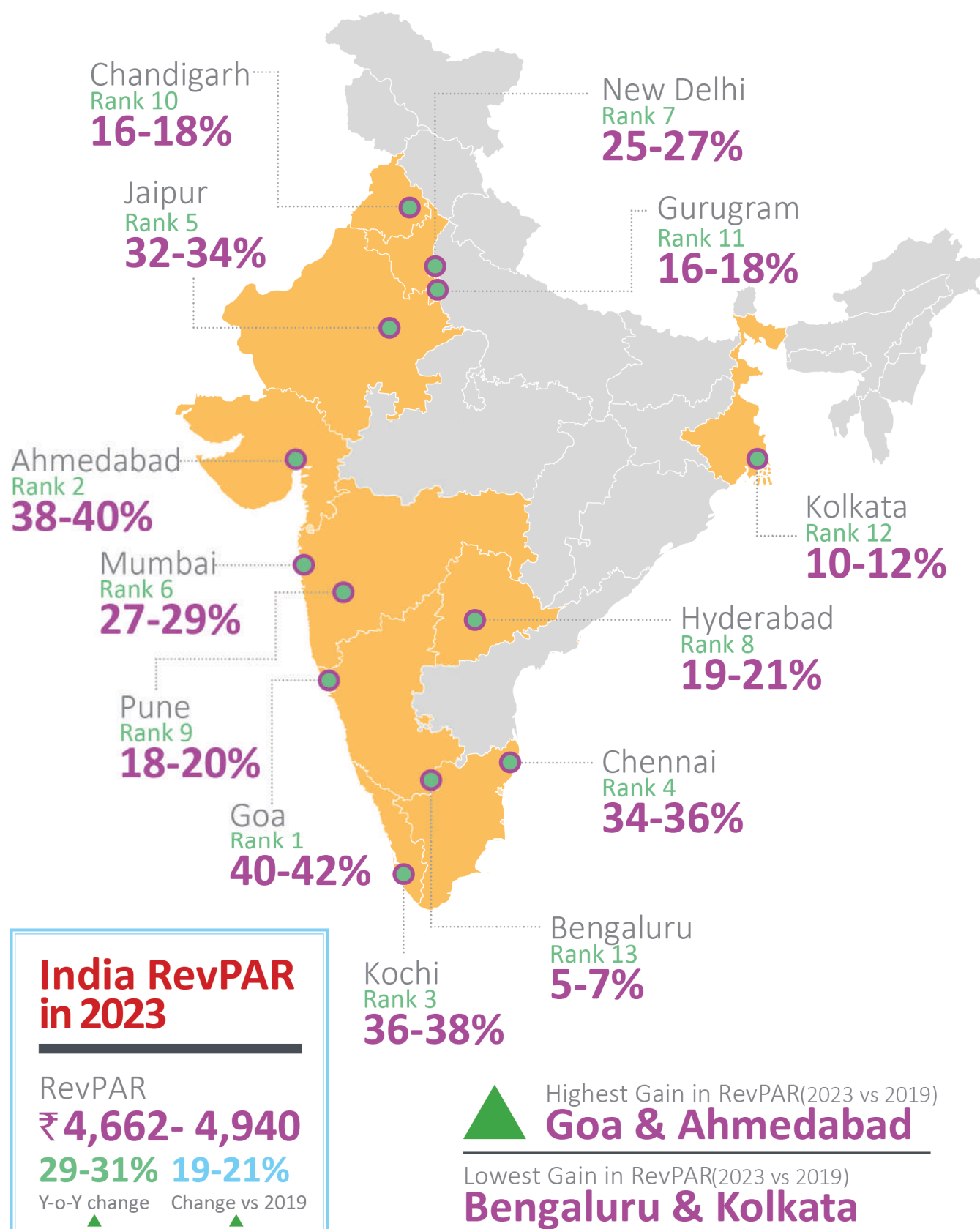
Amid extreme climate changes, escalating geopolitical tensions, growing economic headwinds, and rising travel costs, the global

travel industry shifted gears making vigorous strides towards pre-pandemic levels, as more and more people travelled for business, education, and leisure activities.

In this global narrative of resurgence, India stood out not just as a participant but as a beacon of growth and optimism.



## RevPAR Increase Across Key Markets in India







## REPORT

Buoyed by robust economic India showcased remarkable resilience and dynamism. These milestones, along with the steady rise in domestic tourism and the revival of inbound tourism catalyzed the travel and tourism sector, in turn propelling the hospitality sector to new heights in 2023.

While revenge travel gradually declined, the leisure segment experienced sustained growth, driven by evolving traveller preferences and a rising interest in unique experiential travel. Inbound tourism displayed promising signs of recovery, with 9.2 million foreign tourist arrivals during the calendar year 2023, marking a remarkable 49% year-on-year growth and just over 15% short of all-time-highs last experienced in 2019.

After nearly three years of restricted cross-border travel, outbound tourism from the country witnessed a strong comeback, mirroring a trend akin to the pent-up demand that fuelled domestic tourism in the last two years. Consequently, over 27 million Indian nationals travelled overseas during the year, registering a 26% growth compared to 2022 and 1.3% compared to 2019.

The strong revival of weddings, MICE and corporate travel segments, coupled with high-

profile events like the G20 meetings and the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup played a pivotal role in revitalizing the fortunes of the sector during the year.

The performance of the Indian hotel sector in 2023 mirrored this optimism, with key performance indicators such as occupancy rate, average rate (ARR), and Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR) witnessing significant growth. The sector closed the calendar year 2023 with a nationwide occupancy rate in the range of 63-65%, up 3-5 percentage points (pp) from the previous year and nearly reaching the pre-pandemic level of 65-67% in 2019.

The ARR for 2023 reached an impressive INR 7,400-7,600, which surpassed the figures from 2022 by 21-23% and 2019 by 24-26%, highlighting the sector's ability to push rates driven by the buoyant demand. The growth in average rates helped RevPAR to reach INR 4,662-4,940 in 2023, indicating a significant increase of 29-31% from 2022 and 19-21% in 2019.

Destinations across the spectrum, from bustling metros like Mumbai and Delhi to popular leisure destinations like Goa and Jaipur, and serene, lesser-explored locations such as Rishikesh and Kashmir emerged as stalwarts of

this growth, each telling its unique story of recovery and opportunity.

The year also marked a record number of brand signings, underlining the sector's confidence in the Indian market's potential. This growth was not just quantitative but strategic, with a keen focus on expanding into smaller cities and underserved markets. These developments reflect a sector that is not just recovering but reimagining its future.

Looking ahead to 2024, the outlook for India's hospitality sector is imbued with a sense of optimistic realism. HVS anticipates continued growth, driven by sustained domestic demand, the return of international travel to its full glory, and the growth of niche tourism segments coupled with the gigantic growth taking place in travel infrastructure across the country. With a landscape as dynamic and diverse as India's, the potential for innovation, expansion, and sustainable development in the travel and tourism sector is boundless.

We expect India-wide occupancy to improve to 66-67% in 2024, coupled with a 6-8% increase in ARR will push RevPAR to INR 5,281 during the year, almost 31-33% higher than the pre-pandemic RevPAR recorded in 2019. ■







# Nine tips to boost your Energy Naturally!

Umasankar G.

**M**ost of us feel we need more energy. It's the constant complaint of many that they do not have the energy they need to get things done. Fortunately, there are things you can do to enhance your natural energy levels.

Simple lifestyle changes can go a long way in combating fatigue caused by such factors as sleeplessness, stress, and lack of exercise. With a few simple changes, you'll feel energized, more productive, and happier. Here are the 9 tips:





1

## Control stress

Stress-induced emotions consume huge amounts of energy. Talking with a friend or relative, joining a support group, or seeing a psychotherapist can all help diffuse stress. Relaxation therapies like meditation, self-hypnosis, yoga, and tai chi are also effective tools for reducing stress.



2

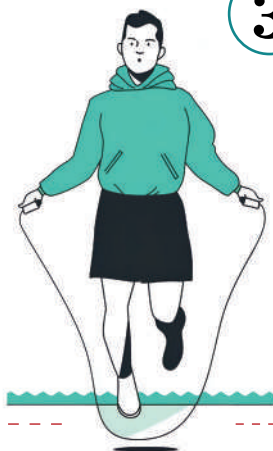
## Lighten your load

One of the main reasons for fatigue is overwork. Overwork can include professional, family, and social obligations. Try to streamline your list of “must-do” activities. Set your priorities in terms of the most important tasks. Pare down those that are less important. Consider asking for extra help at work, if necessary.

3

## Exercise

Exercise almost guarantees that you'll sleep more soundly. It also gives your cells more energy to burn and circulates oxygen. And exercising can lead to higher brain dopamine levels, which helps elevate mood. When walking, pick up the pace periodically to get extra health benefits.



4

## Avoid smoking

Smoking siphons off your energy by causing insomnia. The nicotine in tobacco is a stimulant, so it speeds the heart rate, raises blood pressure, and

stimulates brain-wave activity associated with wakefulness, making it harder to fall asleep. And once you do fall asleep, its addictive power can kick in and awaken you with cravings.



5

## Restrict your sleep

If you think you may be sleep-deprived, try getting less sleep. This advice may sound odd but determining how much sleep you actually need can reduce the time you spend in bed not sleeping. This process makes it easier to fall asleep and promotes more restful sleep in the long run.

Here's how to do it:

Avoid napping during the day.

The first night, go to bed later than normal and get just four hours of sleep.



If you feel that you slept well during that four-hour period, add another 15–30 minutes of sleep the next night.

As long as you're sleeping soundly the entire time you're in bed, slowly keep adding sleep on successive nights.

6

## Eat for energy

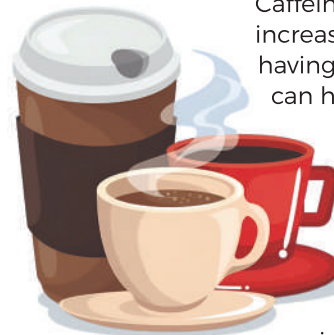
Eating foods with a low glycaemic index — whose sugars are absorbed slowly — may help you avoid the lag in energy that typically occurs after eating quickly absorbed sugars or refined starches. Foods with a low glycaemic index include whole grains, high-fibre vegetables, nuts, and healthy oils such as olive oil. In general, high-carbohydrate foods have the highest glycaemic indexes. Proteins and fats have glycaemic indexes that are close to zero.



7

## Use caffeine to your advantage

Caffeine does help increase alertness, so having a cup of coffee can help sharpen your mind. But to get the energizing effects of caffeine, you have to use it judiciously. It can cause insomnia, especially when consumed in large amounts or after 2 p.m.



8

## Limit alcohol

One of the best hedges against the midafternoon slump is to avoid drinking alcohol at lunch. The sedative effect of alcohol is especially strong at midday. Similarly, avoid a five o'clock cocktail if you want to have the evening. If you're going to drink, do so in moderation at a time when you're not mind energy wind having your down.



9

## Drink water

What's the only nutrient that has been shown to enhance performance for all but the most demanding endurance activities? It's not some pricey sports drink. It's water. If your body is short of fluids, one of the first signs is a feeling of fatigue.



# Eat lower on the seafood chain

Many health-conscious consumers have already cut back on hamburgers, steaks, and deli meats, often by swapping in poultry or seafood. Those protein sources are better than beef, and not just because they're linked to a lower risk of heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. Chicken and fish are also better for the environment, as their production uses less land and other resources and generates fewer greenhouse gas emissions.

And choosing seafood that's lower on the food chain — namely, small

fish such as herring and sardines and bivalves such as clams and oysters — can amp up those benefits. "It's much better for your health and the environment when you replace terrestrial food sources — especially red meat — with aquatic food sources," says Christopher Golden, assistant professor of nutrition and planetary health at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. But instead of popular seafood choices such as farmed salmon or canned tuna, consider mackerel or sardines, he suggests.

### Why eat small fish?

Anchovies, herring, mackerel, and sardines are all excellent sources of protein, micronutrients like iron, zinc, and vitamin B12, and heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids, which may help ease inflammation within the body and promote a better balance of blood lipids. And because you often eat the entire fish (including the tiny bones), small fish are also rich in calcium and vitamin D, says Golden. (Mackerel is an exception: cooked mackerel bones are too sharp or tough to eat, although canned mackerel bones are fine to eat).



Small fish are also less likely to contain contaminants such as mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) compared with large species like tuna and swordfish. Those and other large fish feed on smaller fish, which concentrates the toxins.

It's also more environmentally friendly to eat small fish directly instead of using them to make fish meal, which is often fed to farmed salmon, pork, and poultry. Feed for those animals also includes grains that require land, water, pesticides, and energy to produce, just as grain fed to cattle does, Golden points out. The good news is that increasingly, salmon farming has begun using less fish meal, and some companies have created highly nutritious feeds that don't require fish meal at all.

#### **Small fish in the Mediterranean diet**

The traditional Mediterranean diet, widely considered the best diet for heart health, highlights small fish such as fresh sardines and anchovies, says Golden. Canned versions of these species, which are widely available and less expensive than fresh, are a good option. However, most canned anchovies are salt-cured and therefore high in sodium, which can raise blood pressure.

Sardines packed in water or olive oil can be served on crackers or crusty, toasted bread with a squeeze of lemon prepared like tuna salad for a sandwich filling added to a Greek salad tossed with pasta, either added to tomato sauce or with lemon, capers, and red pepper flakes.

Golden is particularly fond of pickled herring, which you can often find in jars in supermarkets, or even make yourself; here's his favourite recipe.

#### **Bivalve benefits**

Bivalves are two-shelled aquatic creatures that include clams, oysters, mussels, and scallops. Also known as mollusks, they're good sources of protein but are quite

low in fat, so they aren't as rich in omega-3's as small, fatty fish.

However, bivalves contain several micronutrients, especially zinc and vitamin B12. Zinc contributes to a healthy immune system, and vitamin B12 helps form red blood cells that carry oxygen and keep nerves throughout the body healthy. While most Americans get enough B12, some may not.

And from a planetary health perspective, bivalves are among the best sources of animal-based protein. "Bivalves can be 'nature positive' because they don't require feed and they filter and clean up water," says Golden.

#### **Aquatic plant foods**

You can even go one step further down the aquatic food chain by eating aquatic plant foods such as seaweed and kelp. If you like sushi, you've probably had nori, the flat sheets of seaweed used to make sushi rolls. You can also find seaweed snacks in Asian and many mainstream grocery stores. The truly adventurous may want to try kelp jerky or a kelp burger, both sold online.

Nutrients in seaweed vary quite a bit, depending on species (kelp is one type of brown seaweed; there are also numerous green and red species). But seaweed is



Be aware, however, that bivalves can become contaminated from runoff, bacteria, viruses, or chemicals in the water. So be sure to follow FDA advice about buying and preparing seafood safely.

Although we tend to think of coastal cities as the best places to find seafood, it's available throughout the United States. For less-common varieties, try larger Asian markets, which often carry a wide variety of fish and bivalves, Golden suggests.

low in calories, is a good source of fibre, and also contains iodine, a mineral required to make thyroid hormones.

Similar to terrestrial vegetables, seaweeds contain a range of other minerals and vitamins. For now, aquatic plant foods remain fringe products, but they may become more mainstream in the future, according to Golden. (Courtesy: Harvard Medical School health advisories). ■



# ROARING SUCCESS! RECORD ATTENDANCE AT ARABIAN TRAVEL MARKET 2024 (ATM)

The 31st edition of Arabian Travel Market (ATM), held from 6 to 9 May at Dubai, crossed another milestone with record attendance of more than 46,000 industry professionals from over 160 countries, including 33,500 visitors.

This year's event, held at the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC), was the largest to date, featuring four days of impactful industry discussions and unrivalled networking opportunities across the MICE, leisure, luxury, and corporate travel sectors.

The final day focused on nurturing the next generation of travel and tourism talent with sessions like "Educating Young Entrepreneurs: Building a Career in Travel" and "Network with Future Leaders."

ATM 2024 saw a 15% year-on-year growth, setting a new

attendance record and showcasing the strength, resilience, and momentum of the global travel and tourism sector.

Over 2,600 exhibitors gathered at DWTC to explore industry growth drivers and future opportunities, aligning with the event's theme, "Empowering Innovation: Transforming Travel Through Entrepreneurship."

Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, President of Dubai Civil Aviation Authority (DCAA), Chairman of Dubai Airports, and Chairman and Chief Executive of Emirates Airline and Group, inaugurated ATM 2024.

This year's edition featured 2,300 exhibitors from 165 countries, with approximately 41,000 visitors attending. Having launched in 1994 with 300 exhibitors and 7,000 trade visitors, ATM has now established







itself as a globally renowned event integrating all travel sectors.

During the opening, Sheikh Ahmed emphasized the massive interest that the ATM has generated among attendees, reaffirming Dubai's status as a major tourism and travel destination. He highlighted Dubai's role in shaping the industry's future by bringing together leaders from allied sectors worldwide.

Accompanied by Abdullah bin Touq Al Marri, Minister of Economy; Hilal Saeed Al Marri, Director General of the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism; Danielle Curtis, Director of Arabian Travel Market in the Middle East; and other top officials, Sheikh Ahmed toured various pavilions.

ATM 2024's four-day conference agenda featured 200 speakers across more than 50 sessions on two main stages: the Global Stage and the new Future Stage. The Global Stage hosted daily summits on entrepreneurship, developing markets, sustainability, and luxury. The Future Stage focused on innovation-related topics such as AI, NextGen destinations, travel technology, and future trend forecasts.

Highlights of the opening day included the Global Stage



Welcome: The Gateway to Global Insights keynote speech by Issam Abdulrahim Kazim, CEO of Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing, and the Ministerial Debate on streamlining tourism within the GCC. The Market Insights Summit marked four days of focused deliberations on entrepreneurship, luxury, and sustainability.

On Day Two, the Future Stage discussed impactful travel technology trends at the "Beyond the Hype: Demystifying 2024 Travel

Tech Trends" session. Meanwhile, the Global Stage featured aviation experts from IATA, Riyadh Air, AviationXLab, and Cirium, exploring how technology is disrupting aviation. Paul Griffiths, CEO of Dubai Airports, led a session on navigating the future of air travel.

The Travel Tech exhibition continued until May 7, showcasing innovative technologies driving the travel and hospitality sector. The Entrepreneurship Summit on May 7 explored nurturing travel and tourism entrepreneurship to drive economic growth and examined how global disruptions act as catalysts for innovation.

ATM 2024 was part of Arabian Travel Week, a ten-day festival of travel and tourism events in Dubai. Other events included the ATM Start-up Competition, ATM Travel Tech, GBTA Business Travel Forums, and Buyer Networking.

The event, held in conjunction with Dubai World Trade Centre, had strategic partners including Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism (DET) as the Destination Partner, Emirates as the Official Airline Partner, IHG Hotels & Resorts as the Official Hotel Partner, and Al Rais Travel as the Official DMC Partner.



## ‘COOL SUMMERS IN INDIA’ CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED AT ARABIAN TRAVEL MARKET



The Ministry of Tourism launched its 'Cool Summers of India' digital campaign to promote India as a holistic destination throughout the year at the Arabian Travel Mart 2024, held in Dubai from May 6 to 9. The event marked a significant step in strengthening India's presence in the Middle East tourism market.

The Tourism Ministry's 'Incredible India' pavilion was Inaugurated today by Mr. Satish Kumar Sivan, Counsul General of India to Dubai. The Indian delegation to ATM 2024 comprised tour operators and representatives of luxury hotels, wellness resorts, and the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation.

The Ministry of Tourism launched the 'Cool Summers of India' campaign at Arabian Travel Mart highlighting lesser-known yet refreshing destinations in the country which is a 365-day

destination. The digital campaign challenges the notion of India being too hot for summer travel, emphasizing its offerings in hill resorts, including the Himalayas. The campaign went live on social media handles of 'Incredible India' immediately on its launch. The campaign features a list of 50 summer getaways, most of them in North India.

As part of this campaign, a two-phase list of sites has been drawn which will be revealed once the campaign goes live. Under phase one, a list of about 50 summer getaways have been chosen, most of these being in north India

The event provided a platform for Indian tourism players to exhibit their offerings, forge alliances within the industry, and attract visitors from the MENA region. This, in turn, is expected to bolster revenue generation and foster job creation within the tourism sector, a PIB release said.





## Inter FoodTech 2024

Dates: 5-7 June 2024

Venue: India International Convention & Expo Center, Dwarka, New Delhi

The 3rd edition of India's premier technology supplier fair for food & beverage manufacturing industry, Inter FoodTech, along with its concurrent trade fairs Snack & BakeTec and Pac MechEx are scheduled to be organized at India's brand new and state-of-the-art trade fair venue, India International Convention & Expo Centre, Dwarka, New Delhi from 05 to 07 June 2024. Around 20,000-50,000 visitors and 500+ exhibitors are expected to participate, which will help develop Varkala beach further.



## Snack & BakeTec 2024

Dates: 05-07 June 2024

Venue: India International Convention And Expo Center, New Delhi

Snack & BakeTec is a global trade fair for snacks, bakery, and confectionery processing and packaging technology & services. The latest edition, being concurrently with the Inter FoodTech 2024, will emphasize crucial technologies to help visitors optimize their production facilities. Industry experts will hold informative seminars and live machine demonstrations, providing valuable opportunities to explore the future of food and beverage manufacturing.



## World of Hospitality 2024

Dates: 13-15 June 2024

Venue: Palace Grounds, Bengaluru

World of Hospitality is a business event for HORECA professionals. It aims at becoming the most comprehensive product showcase covering the gamut of Foodservice & Hospitality Equipment, Tableware, Interiors and Design, Housekeeping, Hospitality Technology, and Specialty Coffee & Tea on a single platform. Estimated Turnout: 20,000 - 50,000 visitors and 500+ exhibitors.



## India HoReCa Expo 2024

Dates: 03-05 July 2024

Venue: CODISSIA TRADE FAIR COMPLEX, Coimbatore, India

India HoReCa Expo is the marketing platform for suppliers to the industry to network, meet face-to-face and build key relationships with key buyers and decision-makers in India's hospitality and food service industry. A variety of exhibitors, including many international brands, will showcase their most recent products and present a platform to discuss the latest innovations and trends in the industry. Professionals, decision makers of the hospitality, catering, and leisure industries, restaurants, cafes, bakeries & fast food outlets, engineers, architects, decorators, Hospitals, Supermarkets, Importers, wholesalers, suppliers, and Consultants will visit this show.



## India International Travel Mart (IITM)

Dates: 26-28 July 2024

Venue: Palace Ground, Bengaluru, Karnataka

The India International Travel Mart (IITM) is a lively travel fair that showcases India's diverse travel offerings, featuring everything from exotic destinations to luxury experiences. It's where travel enthusiasts, industry professionals, and curious adventurers come together to explore, discover, and connect. With colourful stalls, cultural performances, and enticing deals, IITM promises an unforgettable journey through India's landscapes and vibrant culture. Get ready to be inspired and embark on your next adventure at IITM.



## Suman Billa assumes charge as Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism



**S**uman Billa, 1996 batch Kerala cadre IAS officer, has taken charge as Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism (MoT), Government of India.

Mr. Billa brings a wealth of experience to his new position, having previously served as Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism and Secretary, Kerala Tourism.

An alumnus of the Madras Christian College (MCC) and the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, Mr. Billa is also a British Chevening Gurukula Scholar from the London School of Economics.

Mr. Suman's association with Kerala Tourism began in 2005 when he was appointed the Director of Kerala Tourism. In July 2012, Mr. Suman took charge as Secretary, Kerala Tourism, which saw him taking the lead to realise many innovative projects in a time-bound manner.

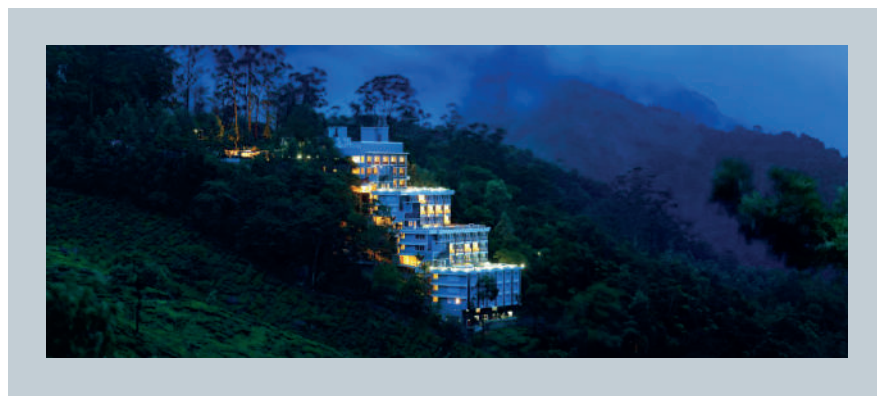
The projects that he led included the 'Great Backwaters' campaign, the 'Hop-on Hop-off' boat service in the backwaters of Kochi, Visa-on-Arrival service at the international airports at Thiruvananthapuram and Kochi, reduction of Luxury Taxes in hotels to 5% during the off-season and 'Kerala Blog Express'.

His untiring efforts turned out crucial for the Muziris Heritage Project and staging of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale; the biggest contemporary art biennale of India. The State signed an agreement with the UNESCO for the promotion and protection of the ancient 'Spice Route Heritage'.

He was also instrumental in the conceptualization and organization of online competitions for promoting travellers to Kerala, the Clint Memorial International Painting Competition and Online Video Quiz on Ayurveda and Kerala being a few of these.

His tenure as Tourism Secretary also saw Kerala bagging many prestigious awards and honours including two PATA Gold Awards, National Tourism Awards and UNWTO Ulysses Award.

## Chandy's Windy Woods, Munnar, finds place in Tripadvisor world's top 25 hotels list



**C**handy's Windy Woods, luxury resort in Munnar, has secured the 11th position in World's Top 25 hotels list of Tripadvisor Travelers' Choice Award, 2024. Windy Woods also has been adjudged first among top 25 hotels in India.

The winners of Tripadvisor Travelers Choice Award are selected from over eight million hotels listed

on Tripadvisor. Chandy's Windy Woods is also ranked seventh among Top Hotels in Asia, sixth among World's 25 Luxury hotels, fourth among Asia's Top 25 Luxury hotels and first among India's Top 25 Luxury hotels.

Windy Woods Munnar is the only hotel from India to find a place in the Tripadvisor list. In 2020 and

2021, Chandy's Windy Woods was placed 12th in the World and first in India for two consecutive years.

"We got this award competing with the largest luxury hotel chains and iconic brands in the world. This is the perfect example of the 'Kerala Model' in tourism where ordinary people use locally available resources and still manage to create world class products," says Mathew Kuruvilla, Managing Director, Chandy's Hotels & Resorts.

"A global award like this from a highly regarded company in the Travel & Tourism sector like Tripadvisor will definitely bring Kerala, once again in the limelight and the same would help in promoting Kerala's tourism further in the international markets", says, Alen Mathew Kuruvilla, CEO, Chandy's Windy Woods Munnar.







## John Distilleries wins three awards at London Spirits Competition



India's John Distilleries (JDL) has secured the gold medal at the 2024 for its Paul John single malt whiskey 'Nirvana'. Additionally, JDL's

Roulette London Dry Gin and Paul John XO Brandy have both been honoured with 'Silver' medals.

John Distilleries (JDL) is the only Indian company to be awarded in three different categories: whiskey, gin, and brandy. "We are honoured to have been awarded at the London Spirits Competition. It is indeed a privilege to be appreciated for the quality of our products," remarked JDL Chairman and Managing Director, Paul P. John.

Previously, JDL had also earned various awards at the International Wine and Spirit Competition, the World Whiskey Awards, and the San Francisco World Spirits Competition. Nirvana is crafted from Indian six-row barley and matured in charred American oak casks.

## The Leela Ashtamudi, A Raviz Hotel, in Conde Nast Traveller's Best New Hotels in India 2024 Hot List



Tourism sector in Kerala has received a big thump up with Conde Nast Traveller picking The Leela Ashtamudi, A Raviz Hotel, as

one of the hotels in its Best New Hotels in India 2024 Hot List.

Located along a southern braid of the off-radar Ashtamudi Lake, two

hours from Thiruvananthapuram airport, The Leela Ashtamudi, A Raviz Hotel, is a gloriously secluded 93-key tropical getaway.

Set within five lush acres of coconut palms, bamboo, and mango trees, The Leela Ashtamudi is spread across the Heritage and Tower wings, private pool villas, and two traditional, 200-year-old tharavad cottages—wooden ancestral homes transported from hinterland villages of Erattupetta and Anchal.

The rooms offer lake views and cozy nooks to watch life play out—even the breezy lobby opens right onto the lake. An ode to Kerala in every aspect, the property's sloping tiled roofs, grand pillars, and waterfront verandah are inspired by the Nalukett style of architecture.

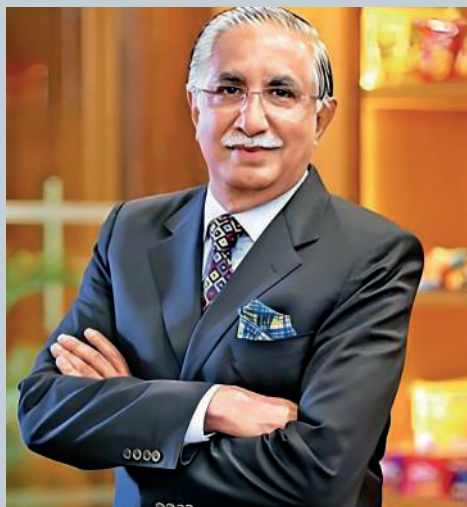
Evenings bring with them a plethora of options: opt for a Mohiniyattam or Kuchipudi performance on the property or cruise through the lake on a houseboat under a sky painted golden by the setting sun. Traditional Ayurvedic therapies are on offer at the Favourite Kerala Ayurveda and Spa.





## MILESTONES

### FAITH appoints hospitality veteran **Nakul Anand** as Patron-in-Chief



early this year following his retirement from the ITC Hotels. He was the representative of the Hotel Association of India (HAI) in FAITH, which is the umbrella body of 10 trade associations in the travel, tourism and hospitality sector.

The decision to appoint Anand as Patron-in-Chief was taken at a recent board meeting of the Federation.

In a media release announcing his appointment, Rajiv Mehra, general secretary of FAITH,

leveraging his vast experience and expertise to further the organisation's mission of fostering growth and development within the Indian tourism and hospitality sector, the FAITH release said.

Anand, an Economics Honors graduate from the Delhi University with an AMP Degree from Australia's Bond University, had joined ITC Hotels as a management trainee in 1978 and, in a journey of 45 years, he rose to top positions in the company before retiring as Executive Director early this year.

Under his leadership, FAITH had prepared and presented a vision document for Indian tourism for 2035 and 2047. International Travel Mart of India (ITM) was launched under his leadership. With him at the helm, FAITH also made several interventions to get the anomalies in GST, ECLGS scheme of the government, etc. corrected.

Post-retirement, Anand had joined a hotel staffing startup, Shiftz, as an investor.

The Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality (FAITH) has chosen Nakul Anand, former Executive Director of ITC Hotels, and one who led the Federation as its chairman since its inception till recently, as Patron-in-Chief.

Anand had relinquished his chairmanship of the Federation

said that the decision was taken considering Anand's exceptional contributions and unwavering dedication to the tourism and hospitality industry as former Chairman of FAITH and former Executive Director at ITC Ltd.

In his new role, Anand will continue to serve as a guiding force of FAITH,

### **Narayan Tharoor** appointed Cluster General Manager, Courtyard by Marriott, and Port Muziris, Kochi Airport Hotel



Narayan Tharoor has taken over as the Cluster General Manager for Courtyard by Marriott and Port Muziris, Kochi Airport Hotel, marking a significant milestone for both properties.

With an illustrious career spanning over two decades in hospitality, Mr. Tharoor brings a wealth of experience and a proven track record of excellence to his new leadership position.

In his capacity as Cluster General Manager, Mr. Tharoor will provide strategic direction and operational

guidance to both Courtyard by Marriott and the Port Muziris, Kochi Airport Hotel.

Mr. Tharoor had previously served as General Manager at Holiday Inn Zirakpur and Mr. Tharoor. Expressing happiness about his new role, Mr. Tharoor said, "I'm thrilled to embark on this journey with Courtyard by Marriott and Port Muziris, Kochi Airport Hotel. Together, we will strive to elevate guest experiences, maintain service excellence, and drive innovation in Kochi's dynamic hospitality landscape."







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