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Dear Friends

The Nobel Prize is considered the most prestigious award in the world in its field and stands out for its superiority. While I have had the pleasure of meeting the royalty, PMs, Presidents, Chancellors across the globe, I had the unique pleasure of meeting, interacting and interviewing Nobel Laureates at a glittering ceremony of Nobel Prize in Stockholm and Oslo.

When my dear old friend Eihab Attia moved as head of marketing - UAE and Oman for Orascom Hotels, he got me interested in his properties. As I was flying to Germany on Oman Air, I thought it a great opportunity to include his hotels into my schedule. It turned out to be a great experience as I visited three of his properties - Sifawy Boutique Hotel, Muscat, Salalah Rotana Resort and Fanar Hotel & Residence, Salalah. Salalah truly is a beautiful destination - where tourists can experience cold, lush greenery, rains - even waterfalls all which are natural. It even has a UNESCO site.

What a pleasure it was experiencing Pullman Maldives. The resort is spread across 12 hectares of dense vegetation (a rich abundance of huge banyan trees and tropical palms) and landscaped gardens with 122 villas - both overwater and on the beach including the option of underwater bedroom suites. But its the first time that I experienced the Aqua Villa. With a focus on marine life the aqua villa provides an aquarium as a bedroom so guests can discover the magic of the ocean relishing an open view of sea creatures. Apart from the submerged bedroom there's also a second bedroom with a private infinity pool looking out across the ocean. There are 2 aqua villas (1,216 square foot each) both facing east - in a prime position to watch the sunrise.

Mercure Maldives is an adult only hotel, With 750+ Mercure hotels worldwide this may be the only adult Mercure property that I am aware. This 70-villa boutique-style resort is where the natural tropical jungle blends with the crystal-clear lagoon. Like Pullman this resort too follows a generous all-inclusive concept including a wide selection of dining and beverages at no additional charge and complimentary excursions and discounted spa treatments.

Just a short taxi ride from Singapore city centre (15-20 minute drive), the 500-hectare Sentosa resort island provides guest's a true island life filled with lush greenery, rainforests, rich biodiversity, home to an exciting array of wildlife - marine world, animal world, nocturnal creatures, golden sandy beaches, tropical beaches, world-renowned golf courses, a deep-water yachting marina, themed and thrilling attractions along with numerous luxurious hotels, resorts and spa retreats to relax and rejuvenate. Shangri-La Rasa Sentosa was kind enough to host us. What a wonderful property it is. With an inventory of 450+ rooms and suites with private balconies that provide guests with expansive views of sea, multiple pools, landscaped gardens.

After two years of virtual celebration guests from business, tourism, education, politics, film, media and gastronomy gathered to physically celebrate the Stuttgart Meets Mumbai wine festival. Prominent among them was the presence of Karlsruhe team lead by Karlsruhe's Lord Mayor Dr Frank Mentrup. In July India Summer Days are also happening in Karlsruhe.

How would like to spend your holiday in a heritage royal Haveli? Well Mandawa Haveli in Jaipur provides such an opportunity to relish the bygone era with modern facilities. With an inventory of 70 rooms Mandawa Haveli, is one of the most spectacular Haveli in Jaipur. Originally built in 1896, as a town house of Thakur Bhagwat Singh the 15th ruler of Mandawa the team has been successful in maintaining the old charm while adding modern facilities like a swimming pool, restaurants etc.



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A DESTINATION WITHIN A DESTINATION; HAWANA SALALAH, OMAN



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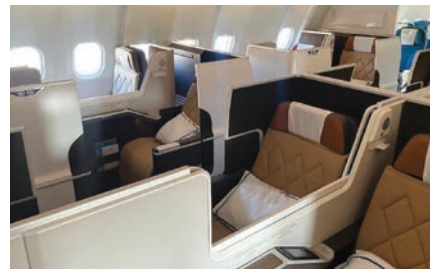
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Glittering ceremony of Nobel Prize in Stockholm and Oslo



Representatives of the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates for 2022 with the Gold medal and Diplomas. Ales Bialiatiski, Memorial, represented by Natallia Pinchuk, Center for Civil Liberties, represented by Oleksandra Matviichuk
© Nobel Prize Outreach, photo: Jo Straube



Nobel Prize award ceremony in Konserthuset Stockholm, 10 December 2022.
© Nobel Prize Outreach. Photo: Nanaka Adachi

While I have had the pleasure of meeting the royalty, PMs, Presidents, Chancellors across the globe, I had the unique pleasure of meeting, interacting and interviewing Nobel Laureates, says **Chandragupta Amritkar**

As a journalist when around 25 years back I had done my first Nobel Prize story remotely and later some quizzes on Nobel Prize winners, I dreamt someday I would interview at least one Nobel laureate and then in a span of two days met several Nobel laureates, attended the Nobel Peace Prize Award Ceremony in Oslo and interviewed two - Nobel laureate Douglas Diamond and Nobel laureate Svante Pääbo.

A dream finally fulfilled.

The Nobel Prize is considered the most prestigious award in the world in its field and stands out for its superiority. The coveted Nobel Prizes are a result of Alfred Nobel, a wealthy Swedish industrialist and inventor of dynamite signed last will giving the largest share of his fortune to



a series of prizes in physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature and peace. The economics award – officially known as the Bank of Sweden Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel – was not created by Nobel, but by Sweden’s central bank in 1968. Each prize is worth 10 million kronor (nearly \$900,000) and will be handed out with a diploma and gold medal on December 10 – the date of Nobel’s death in 1896. Nobel Prizes have been awarded to individuals 959 times (61 to women) and organisations 30 times between 1901 and 2022.

In 2022 fourteen laureates were awarded a Nobel Prize for achievements that have conferred the greatest benefit to humankind. Their work and discoveries range from paleogenomics and click chemistry to documenting war crimes.



ITB Berlin back as an in person event

Come March and the travel fraternity from across the globe will converge in Berlin to visit the world's largest travel trade show ITB Berlin. A preview to this global event



As ITB Berlin returns back as an in person event after a gap of 3 years the travel community are quite excited. Scheduled to take place from 7 - 9 March this year it will be a pure B2B event. While previously it used to be a 5 day event with both B2B and B2C audiences, ITB Berlin 2023 will be for only 3 days a pure B2B event. While we spoke to a few exhibitors

we got a mixed response with quite a few preferring a 5 day event with B2C presence on last two days and a few others feeling in a fast paced world 3 days B2B is good enough.

Since 1966, ITB Berlin has grown substantially starting with nine exhibitors from five countries (Egypt, Brazil, Federal Republic of Germany, Guinea and Iraq) in 1919 it had 10,000+ exhibitors from 181 countries attracting 160.000 visitors of which 113.500 were trade visitors.

Despite its size and uniquely diverse range of products and services covering 180+ countries and territories, ITB Berlin is clearly structured: In addition to a geographical breakdown by destination, the halls are also divided by market segments on the most important tourism tracks e.g. Business Travel, MICE, Travel Technology / Mobile Travel Services, Technology, Tours & Activities (TTA), Cultural Tourism, LGBTQ+ Travel, Youth & Adventure Travel, Responsible Tourism, Medical Tourism, Luxury Tourism and Career in Tourism.

Technology, Innovations and startups

The strong appearance by the Travel Technology segment reflects the huge innovative force of the tourism industry. The travel tech providers are from over 30 countries and represented in four halls (Halls 5.1, 6.1, 7.1c and 8.1.), where they will present their latest products and ideas for the entire tourism industry. For the second time, the Technology, Tours & Activities (TTA) segment will be represented live at the World's Leading Travel Trade Show. The TTA marketplace in Hall 4.1 is an important meeting place for tour managers, operators, technology specialists, travel destinations and agencies. This is where trade visitors can find both startups and established companies who are presenting their innovative products and the latest survey findings.

The young Deborah Rothe (just 31 years) has taken over as Exhibition Director and Project Manager of ITB Berlin. She replaces David Ruetz (54), who has become Senior VP of Travel + Logistics at Messe Berlin, in which role he oversees the ILA Berlin Airshow as well as the global ITB brand family, along with its strategic development.

Rothe has been employed at Messe Berlin since 2011 and joined ITB Berlin in 2014. From August 2019, as Head of Business Development & Sales, her focus was on developing ITB Berlin and marketing exhibitor and visitor business for the show. She was also instrumental in driving the B2B networking event series TRVLX by ITB in European markets, which in future will continue to be an established part of the ITB portfolio.

"With Deborah Rothe, I am delighted to be appointing an experienced colleague for this important task at ITB Berlin. With her long years of experience at ITB Berlin, not only does she know the event extremely well, she also has in-depth industry knowledge", said David Ruetz, Senior Vice President, Messe Berlin.

"As Exhibition Director of the World's Largest Tourism Trade Show, I look forward to the tasks and challenges ahead. Together with our global ITB brand family and ITB Berlin we provide an impetus for many areas of the travel and tourism industry. That is why new concepts, innovation and ongoing development are essential. I look forward to driving this effort with the team", said Deborah Rothe, Exhibition Director, ITB Berlin.



On all three days of the show on the ITB eTravel Stage in Hall 6.1, established companies and aspiring startups will be represented in the role of ideas factories for tech-driven innovation and digital transformation in the tourism and hotel industries.

A premiere at the ITB Berlin Convention 2023 will be the "Board of Experts", whose members will each be responsible for one or more of the planned 15 to 20 thematic tracks. Under the motto "Mastering Transformation", we will be looking at buzzwords such as skills shortage, climate change, post-covid and energy transition. You will find numerous answers to these topics in our range of topic tracks at the ITB Berlin Convention.

For example, the "eTravel Track" is dedicated to technology-driven innovation and digital transformation in the travel industry and how to productively harness it. The "Marketing & Distribution Track" will gather leading thought leaders from the travel and hospitality industry to provide a global update on how leaders can stay competitive and successfully navigate the transformation processes ahead.

The "ITB Future Track" will delve into the economic and political developments of tomorrow to find out which sustainable trends will put future tourism on the road to success.

A wide range of topics from the fields of travel technology, marketing & sales, future travel, MICE, sustainability and social responsibility and more await participants from all over the world at the ITB Berlin Convention 2023.

HOME OF LUXURY by ITB

A new luxury travel segment providers of luxury accommodation, transport, services and products will provide a special glimpse of the luxury tourism market and a straightforward themed look at luxury forms of travel. Exhibitors representing luxury hotels

including the Spanish enterprise Iberostar Hotels & Resorts, Severin's Resort & Spa and SCHLOSS Fleesensee / BEECH Resort Fleesensee / MAREMÜRITZ Yachthafen Resort etc. alongwith Italian travel agency FUORITINERARIO and Quark Expeditions.

At the Marshall Haus at Messe Berlin, four separate exhibition areas entitled The Garden, The Library, The Nest and The Gallery will be devoted to individual forms of luxury tourism. The open networking event for media members will take place on 8 March from 2.30 to 5.30 p.m. and on 9 March from 11.45 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the exhibition areas The Garden, The Library and The Gallery at the Marshall Haus.

Partial Indian Exhibitors

Adventures Overland India; Amritara Hotels & Resorts Pvt Ltd.; CGH Earth; Ebix Travels Private Limited; Evolve Back Resorts; Trans India Holidays PVT Ltd.; Gainwell Enterprises Pvt. Ltd.; Goa - Department of Tourism; Indian Chakraa Tours; Indo Asia Tours; Inis Venture Pvt. Ltd.; Karnataka Tourism; Kerala Tourism; Kiran Nadar Museum of Art; Le Passage to India Tours and Travels Pvt. Ltd.; Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board; Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation Ltd.; Ebix Travel & Holiday Ltd; Namaste Tours Pvt. Ltd.; Orange County Resorts & Hotels Ltd.; Orange - The Destination Management Company; Orient Express Travels & Tours; Qtech Software Pvt. Ltd.; QuadLabs Technologies Pvt. Ltd.; Sanyog Gupta Voyages; Shiv Vilas Resorts (PVT) Ltd.; Shreyas Retreat; Sita; Somatheeram Ayurveda Group; Somatheeram Ayurvedic Hospital & Yoga Centre Pvt Ltd.; Swades Tours and Travels; The Indian Hotels Company Limited (Taj Hotels); Tamil Nadu Tourism; The Blue Yonder; The Nattika Beach Ayurveda Resort; Tripmax; Veena World; Vervotech and ZentrumHub.

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Orascom Groups alluring hotels across Oman

When my dear old friend Eihab Attia moved as head of marketing - UAE and Oman for Orascom Hotels, he got me interested in his properties. As I was flying to Germany on Oman Air, I thought it a great opportunity to include his hotels into my schedule.

Sifawy Boutique Hotel

On arrival into Muscat, my first hotel was Sifawy Boutique Hotel. An hour's drive it is located along the Jebel Sifah Marina. With 68 guest rooms (25 Sifawy rooms, 29 suites and 14 apartments) Sifawy has been designed by renowned Italian designer Alfredo Freda. Each room is designed in 3 unique colour schemes of white, blue and yellow and all boast a private balcony with beautiful views of the marina or swimming pool.



They were kind enough to provide me with a nice suite with a very spacious bathroom. In the mornings the balcony was ideal for relaxing and enjoying the view from the balcony as it was facing the Marina. Sifawy's restaurants use fresh, locally-sourced ingredients whenever possible. The cuisine at Al Sabla (which means social centre of an Omani village) an all-day dining restaurant was delicious. The chef was kind enough to provide Indian vegetarian dishes. Al Sabla also offers a unique blend of international and regional flavours. The Breeze Bar located alongside the swimming pool offers pool-side snacks, fresh juices and cool drinks. Gastronomy can be a plus point at Sifawy for those who enjoy food.

Sifawy also features a large swimming pool, outdoor Jacuzzi, fitness centre, treatment room, apart from a wide range of activities and excursions.

In the evening I took a short walk down the stunning marina, passing by residences, cafes and shops. I was informed that Jebel Sifah is spread over 6.2 million sqm and is designed to include world-class hotels. It also houses freehold residences, which are available to own or rent, an 84-berth marina, and a wide range of dining and leisure facilities. Sifah's nine-hole par 36 golf course is the first ever seaside golf course, which can also be played as a varied 18 hole par 72 course by utilizing second pin flags.

"But that's not all, you must visit the Dunes Beach which would be ideal for your Indian readers," said Tarek the GM at Sifawy Boutique Hotel who was kind enough to take me there. A bit far away from Sifawy the Dunes can be a perfect destination for a luxury beachfront wedding and top corporate events. I loved the place with both the majestic Al Hajar Mountains and pristine beach as a backdrop.

"Developed by our tourism developers Muriya we offer a stunning location for not just luxury weddings but also MICE. We have a nice restaurant (which was closed during my visit) with chefs who can provide a lavish feast of international and locally inspired cuisine along with our mixologists," said Tarek.

Salalah Rotana Resort

On my return from Germany I flew into Salalah to cover two more resorts of the group. The added bonus for me was my friend Eihab Attia was also going to be there.



Located 35km from Salalah International Airport, Salalah Rotana Resort is a perfect place to spend a week relaxing and visiting UNESCO World Heritage sites and other attractions.

The resort has 422 deluxe guestrooms and suites and all 422 rooms and suites overlook the beach, lagoons, water features or the hotel's man-made canals. The upscale hotel's Omani-inspired architecture features a series of clusters surrounding the main building.

The resort has six dining venues with the most popular one being Saffron - the all-day dining restaurant. The buffet spread is amazing and features an array of authentic cuisine from around the world including India. Apart from this venue the resort has The Beach Bar & Restaurant; Club Rotana Restaurant & Lounge; Far East at Silk Road; Arabesque Lounge & Terrace; Coco-Shack Beach Bar. "If you are on your honeymoon or a romantic couple and want a spice in your romance then we can arrange an intimate beach dinner with private butler service," said Eihab Attia.

The resort is also ideal for a business meeting, conference, seminar or special event with state-of-the-art facilities outstanding dining and leisure offering and 400+ rooms to cater to even a huge gathering. Due to its incredible location and romantic atmosphere Salalah Rotana is also a popular wedding destination. The Al Hajar Ballroom is the ideal venue for a large reception.

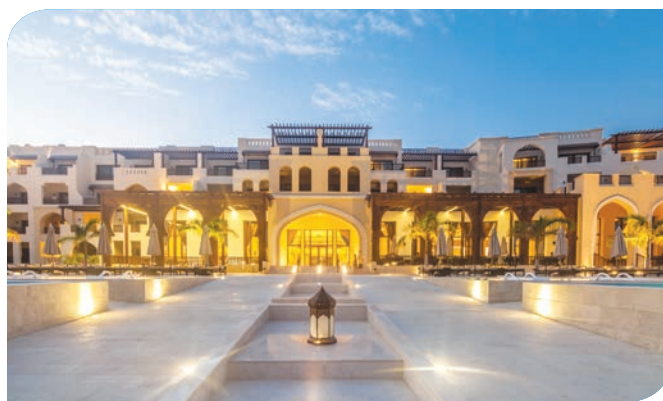
Apart from this the resorts Bodylines Fitness & Wellness Club features world-class facilities including a fully-equipped gymnasium, two swimming pools, two tennis courts, saunas and steam rooms while Zen the spa is the place to relax or rejuvenate. Youngsters will love Flipper's Kids Club which features more than 450 sqm of play areas, four play rooms, and a raft of activities.

Fanar Hotel & Residence

My next visit was Fanar Hotel & Residences a five star beachfront resort, close to the Rotana. With 577 guestrooms and suites it offers rooms open to an outdoor balcony area with seating or ocean view rooms with panoramic views of the Indian Ocean and marina.

There are plenty of restaurants and bars that guest can access (though room service is also available 24 hours a day). Guests have access to three different restaurants for breakfast -

Al Souk: Main Restaurant All Day Dining; Sindbad: Second Restaurant All Day Dining and Aubergine : Mediterranean Cuisine Breakfast. Then there are Breakers: Beach Restaurant Lunch &



Dinner; Cocos: Pool Bar; Dunes: Pool Bar; Sandbar: Beach Bar; Zanzi Bar: Beach Bar; Horizon: Rooftop Bar and Ivory lounge: Lobby lounge.

The resort can be a dream destination if guests are able to use all the facilities and offerings. It has two main pools (one of them is heated during winter season), one child pool – incase you come with your family, an outside Jacuzzi, motorized and nonmotorized water sport activities, beach volley, beach tennis, beach football fields and a fully equipped tennis court.

Bikes are available at a nominal charge.

The El Gouna meeting room is a multi purpose banquet room with a private entrance with garden. A unique venue that can be used for meetings, press conferences, product launches, business presentations, cocktail receptions, private gala dinners or intimate wedding receptions.

ABOUT THE GROUP

Orascom Development with 20+ years of experience is a leading developer of integrated towns with a strong foothold in Egypt and the Middle East. The Group offers hotels, private

villas and apartments, leisure facilities such as golf courses and marinas along with all related facilities and supporting infrastructure. Orascom Development has a diverse portfolio of stunning destinations in popular tourist areas across Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, covering more than 100 million sq. m. As a hotel owner and operator, the group has 33 hotels with more than 7,000 rooms in six countries. They operate with internationally renowned strategic franchise partners, including Rotana, Steigenberger, Sheraton, Movenpick, Radisson and the ultra-high-end luxury brand – The Chedi, or as independently branded properties.





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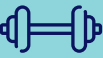
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The resort also has private beaches (1.2km total) equipped with lounge chairs with umbrellas and beach bars, including one beach dedicated to Premium Package guests with special beach beds, hammocks and a dedicated bar.

The Hawana Aqua Park that I missed is Oman's first water theme park in Salalah. Spread over 65,000 sqm it offers gigantic waterslides and high-speed rides to playgrounds for the kids, boomerang slides, and wave pools making it the perfect place to be for families. There is also a food court with cafeterias and a restaurant.

During my visit another property adjacent to Fanar Hotel & Residences, Juweira Boutique Hotel was getting renovated. "We are planning to make it an Adults Only hotel. Many will love the picturesque marina promenade of Hawana Salalah which will be designed in a classic oriental theme," said Eihab Attia. With 82 rooms it will offer a variety of recreational facilities and services, including 2 large swimming pools, a state-of-the-art wellness centre and intimate guestrooms.

What to see in Salalah

Holidays in Middle East, means deserts, sand dunes, heat and mountains but in Arabian Peninsula exists a city in Oman where tourists can experience cold, lush greenery, rains - even waterfalls all which are natural.

"There's a lot to see and do in Salalah. It even has a UNESCO site. The ideal time to visit Salalah as well as enjoy our resorts is during Khareef (Monsoon) season from July to September as one can experience refreshing light rain showers, cooler temperatures, creates seasonal waterfalls and much needed greenery," said Eihab Attia.

Eihab was kind enough to arrange a sightseeing tour for me.

Waterfalls at Wadi Darbat located in a lush green valley with a river running across the mountains provide tourists with a spectacular view of a valley with pools and an impressive waterfall. There are a few small restaurants and boats are available on rent.

The Land of Frankincense, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2000 is where the frankincense tree (*Boswellia sacra*) thrives naturally. Long-distance trade in frankincense was ongoing by the 3rd millennium BCE and included links to Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley Civilisation and ancient Egypt. In recognition of the importance of the frankincense trade across the ages, four sites have been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage Sites list: Al-Baleed Archaeological Park (worth walking through the excavations), Khor Rori (Sumhuram), Shisr (Ubar) and Wadi Dawkah.

Khor Rori also known as Sumhuram is a river mouth lagoon - at the mouth of Wadi Darbat and was an important harbour for frankincense trade. It has many archaeological ruins that date back from 4th century BC to 4th Century AD. The remains found include Fortifications, Temples, Residences, Frankincense storage rooms etc.

The Frankincense Land Museum, part of the Al Baleed Archaeological Site, recounts the city's maritime history and role in the spice trade. The displays are gorgeously presented taking tourists back to the origins of Frankincense discovery in Oman.

Apart from this one can visit the Sultan Qaboos Mosque - the largest mosque in Salalah that has a colossal structure with an elegant mix of Arabic and Modern architecture.

Salalah truly is a beautiful destination and with three wonderful properties to stay.

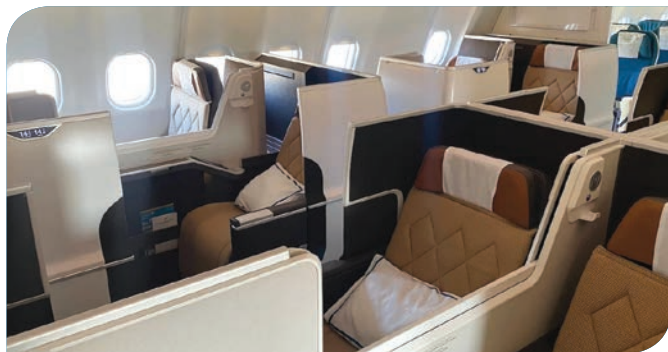


Oman Air's incredible business class experience

Oman Air remains one of my favorite airlines, and I was able to experience Oman Air's incredible business class on both International and domestic sectors as I experienced four sectors – Mumbai to Frankfurt, Munich to Muscat, Muscat to Salalah and Salalah to Mumbai, says **Chandragupta Amritkar**.

The Apex seats and amenities

The flight from Mumbai to Muscat was good, boarding quick, food and hospitality was warm and nice but it was the Muscat to Frankfurt that was par excellence. Oman Air (WY) operates a fleet of around 50 aircraft, with long haul flights operated by Oman Air long haul flights are operated by a mix of Airbus A330-200 and A330-300 and Boeing 787-8 and 787-9 aircraft. Most of them feature the same Business Class seats - the APEX Suite (a denser 2-2-2 cabin configuration but cleverly designed by staggering the seats along the sides of the cabin and providing a passageway from the window seats thus all seats have direct aisle access). While all Oman Air Business Class seats are good, the window seats can be preferred as they give a feel of almost like enclosed suites (thanks to adjustable privacy dividers) and they also benefit from extra legroom due to the positioning of the seats. Though personally I miss their old business class 1-2-1 configuration with all seats having direct aisle access and baggage space attached to your seat.



With a pitch of 80 inches and a bed length of 76 inches the seat turns into a fully lie-flat bed. There's nice ottoman to place your feet with storage underneath the ottoman for a hand bag. We were provided with quilted duvets and fluffy pillows as well as cotton sleeper suits and slippers for this 7 hour plus flight. Each seat has a 17-inch personal monitor and two USB ports. While there are a lot of movie choices including Indian movies, I opted to watch the map for most of the flight.

Guests also enjoy a set of unisex Amouage kits (the Omani luxury fragrance brand) which contains body lotion, facial moisturiser and lip balm along with a dental kit, mouthwash, shaving kit, silk eyeshades, hairbrush, socks and ear plugs.

The inflight dining

'The dine on demand service' which means you eat at your suitable time is an advantage for those who had sufficient food in the lounge. We were offered pre-departure Omani coffee ('Kahwa') with Omani dates. Pre-departure beverages also include Champagne, water or juice. After take-off they have À la carte menu with varied dining options accompanied by fine wines and for the vegetarian they can book in advance their choice of meal. During meal we were offered specialty coffees – Espresso, Cappuccino, Mocha or even hot chocolate which I prefer (by the way Oman air serves one of the best hot chocolate that I have

tasted).

The lounge experiences

For frequent travellers Business Class lounge facilities are an ideal antidote especially for those who don't want to wait in a crowded airport terminal. At Muscat International Airport Oman Air First and Business Class lounges are located on the 5th floor of the terminal. On entering the lounge, the soft brown and gold



hues are soothing to one's eyes and the marble floors to walk. The lounge has two self-serve buffets (hot and cold food) and a bar in-between. Those opting for a quick nap there are curtained nap pods, for longer rest there are four sleeping rooms, private showers etc. A spa provides an assortment of treatments (those were good old days when it used to be complimentary, though Wi-Fi still remains complimentary).

On the Salalah Muscat flight, the Oman Air Salalah Lounge is located past security and has comfortable couches and leather chairs. In a relaxed environment had some snacks and a juice as I waited for my flight to depart.

At Frankfurt and Munich airports Oman Air partners with other airlines and third-party lounge providers.

Wi-Fi

While Wi-Fi is available, it's a bit on the higher end. Quite a few airlines give free Wi-Fi for social media messaging apps (even in economy) and a limited MB for free in business class, I believe Oman Air can also do the same and bring smile on the faces of the passengers. Also it would be great if frequent fliers can redeem miles for free Wi-Fi.

Oneworld alliance

Oman Air is expected to be implemented into oneworld soon. "This is a big step moving forward. We will provide more options and destinations to customers with our alliance's members. Ours is the third airline in the Middle East along with Qatar Airways and Royal Jordanian to be part of oneworld. Oman Air's Sindbad frequent flyer program will be able to earn and redeem miles on all oneworld member airlines, with top tier members receiving additional benefits including lounge access," said Sunil V A, Regional Vice President ISC & FE.

A picturesque experience of two



An hour's flight from Male airport to Kooldoo Island, Pullman Maldives and Mercure Maldives, each catering to different needs, both are all inclusive resorts with complimentary airfare. Co-ordinating with the quadrant Soumitra Pahari, Regional Cluster EAM, sales & marketing, Pullman Maldives and Hontiveros, Cluster director of marketing communications, marketing executive Pullman Maldives Maamutaa and the twin properties from Mumbai.

Pullman: Experience an aquarium as your bedroom

What a pleasure it was experiencing Pullman Maldives. Landing into Male I was greeted by Pullman staff who led me to "VIP" domestic airport lounge. I had a long wait as my connecting domestic flight had been cancelled. The domestic flight from Male is an hour to the Kooldoo airport and then a 20-minute speedboat ride to Pullman.

Considering the travel time, it certainly is not located for a couple of nights stay factoring the additional travel and time consumed. Ideally guests should look at a week's stay and this gives you additional benefits too.

The resort is spread across 12 hectares of dense vegetation (a rich abundance of huge banyan trees and tropical palms) and landscaped gardens with 122 villas providing a holistic integrated approach to wellbeing for couples and families. Located both overwater and on the beach including the option of underwater bedroom suites. There is a freshwater lake in the heart of the island, a rather rare fact in the Maldives.

The Beach Villas/ honeymoon suites can be a good option for honeymoon celebrations thanks to the seclusion with tropical vegetation covering the villa from all around. They have a spacious private pool with a private deck opening to your own private beach. The 2 Bed Room Beach Pool Villa is perfect for families and can accommodate 4 adults plus children. The Royal Suite has four bedrooms that would allow in 10 guests making it ideal families and group of friends.

The Aqua Villa Experience

With a focus on marine life the aqua villa provides an aquarium



as a bedroom so guests can discover the magic of the ocean relishing an open view of sea creatures. Apart from the submerged bedroom

there's also a second bedroom with

a private infinity pool looking out across the ocean. There are 2 aqua villas (1,216 square foot each) both facing east - in a prime position to watch the sunrise.

Being a part of the all-Inclusive experience there are 6 F&B outlets with a-la-carte options. The buffet at Melange is superb with a huge spread including plenty of Indian options. Its open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The Phat Chameleon is a unique dining experience at the first organic, vegan and vegetarian restaurant in the Maldives. The Souq Oven provides guests an opportunity to discover the Mediterranean flavors by the sea with Italian cuisine during lunch time and a combination of Middle Eastern and Turkish cuisine at dinner time. There are also three bars - the hub - pool bar, saffron affair - sunset bar and sol rising - sunrise lounge.

The amount of activities can keep you busy for a week and most of them are included in your all-inclusive package. Fitness and wellbeing centers, gym, table tennis, golf sim, karaoke, teen-only club, kids club, wedding pavilion, tennis court, gardens options for scuba diving and snorkelling, jet skiing, paddle boarding, kayaking, diving, sky diving etc.

Apart from this there is the Pullman Spa by Phytomer that uses sustainable eco-friendly ingredients from the sea and the land. From multiday spa journeys to facials and beauty therapies one can experience full relaxation and rejuvenation.

The next morning I proceeded to Mercure - a mere 20 minute motor boat ride.



in Accor properties in Maldives

Island Accor has two wonderful luxury properties offering a different set of guests but the best part is the activities.

Resort Manager, Mercure Maldives, Christophe Victor, Maamutaa and Mercure Maldives Kooddoo, Margaux Communications and Emelyn Nanglegan, Cluster sales and Mercure Maldives Kooddoo, I proceeded to visit



An All-Inclusive Adult Only Mercure Hotel

When my dear friend Soumitra Pahari, Resort Manager, Mercure Maldives told me this was an adult only hotel, I was surprised. With 750+ Mercure hotels worldwide this may be the only adult Mercure property that I am aware of.

From Pullman, Mercure Maldives Kooddoo Resort is just 20 minutes by motor boat. Located amid lush native vegetation on Kooddoo island, this 70-villa boutique-style resort is where the natural tropical jungle blends with the crystal-clear lagoon, making it the perfect place to connect with nature as you experience picture-perfect sunset views. "The image of a Mercure hotels in India is totally different. We have always seen Mercure as a building with rooms and restaurants. But here its totally different with villas spread across vegetation and ocean," said Soumitra.

"The best part of Mercure Maldives is that it requires no further speedboat journey or seaplane flight. Though our staff will welcome you at Kooddoo Airport and bring you by buggy in reality it's a walkable distance from the airport," said Soumitra. And as he said this, we witnessed a flight landing just adjacent to the resort.

Like Pullman this resort too follows a generous all-inclusive concept including a wide selection of dining and beverages at no additional charge and complimentary excursions and discounted spa treatments.

All the villas have direct access to the lagoon - either from the beach villas providing jungle vibes, or the overwater villas with private sun deck, plunge pool and sun loungers, providing direct dive access into the Ocean. The largest villa is 490 sqm villa with four bedrooms, each with own entrance and en suite bathroom including outdoor shower and tub

On the F&B front they have 2 restaurants - Alita Restaurant, an all-day dining restaurant with a buffet concept providing an unobstructed view of the lagoon and Vista Restaurant, an overwater restaurant providing Italian flavours. The Pool Bar is another attraction for the guests. Floating Breakfast gives a start



to a romantic day provided by Mercure in the intimacy of the turquoise blue waters or candlelit moments on the beach with a special romantic dinner setup.

Nestled amid palm trees, ferns and banana plants, the Suvadiva Spa is an oasis of serenity and a perfect place to revitalize and indulge in the pleasure of absolute relaxation. Suvadive, the ancient name of the three southernmost atolls of the Maldives archipelago.

Some of the all-inclusive benefits include - Unlimited beverages throughout the stay with 40 international wines on offer, minibar replenished every day, unlimited meals in 2 restaurants and pool bar, complimentary non-motorized water sports like SUP, kayaking, snorkelling etc.

The longer you stay, the more extra benefits you'll get with Long Stay Benefits including discounted spa treatments, free excursions, and more. The additional benefits are 5 nights one can select 1 excursion + 1 activity, 8+ nights one can select 2 excursions + 2 activities and 13 nights one can select from 3 excursions + 3 activities. Many opt to use the vouchers for spa, jet ski and the dolphin cruise (We all managed to see dolphins).

After a great stay at Mercure I left to catch my flight to Male, for the first time, as the flight was landing (we could see the flight from the resort). Just 25 minutes before the take off.

Truly a once-in-a-lifetime romantic getaway for guests.



Karlsruhe makes an Impact in India

After two years of virtual celebration guests from business, tourism, education, politics, film, media and gastronomy gathered to physically celebrate the Stuttgart Meets Mumbai wine festival. Prominent among them was the presence of Karlsruhe team lead by Karlsruhe's Lord Mayor Dr Frank Mentrup.

Every year it's become a ritual for my friends from Karlsruhe to make their gracious presence in Mumbai during the Stuttgart meets Mumbai - a two day wine festival – organized annually in Mumbai. This year was no exception as my good old friend Martin Wacker not only graced the occasion but a whole Karlsruhe team lead by Karlsruhe's Lord Mayor Dr Frank Mentrup. “It's the first time that we are visiting India post pandemic. I am so happy that all of us are safe and now we look forward to tightening our relationship with India and especially Maharashtra and Pune,” said Martin Wacker, MD KME Karlsruhe Marketing and Event GmbH.

Delegations from Baden-Württemberg visit Maharashtra

From 31 January to 5 February two delegations from Baden-Württemberg and Karlsruhe paid an important visit to Maharashtra. Baden Württemberg is a partner state of Maharashtra and its capital Stuttgart has a twin-city status with Mumbai. On the other hand



city of Karlsruhe has a sister-city relationship with Pune. So naturally the delegation visited Mumbai and Pune as well as Aurangabad.

Apart from several other topics the major focus was on

green hydrogen technology and attracting skilled workers. The delegation mainly consisted of Minister of State Dr Florian Stegmann, Karlsruhe's Lord Mayor Dr Frank Mentrup, KME Managing Director Martin Wacker and the Managing Director of the Kreishandwerkerschaft (representation of the interests of craft companies in Karlsruhe), Andreas Reifsteck.

In the field of renewable energies and especially in hydrogen and fuel cell technology, there is great potential for cooperation, especially with Karlsruhe University of Applied Sciences. In addition, the state of Maharashtra, located on the west coast and in the centre of India, is actively promoting the settlement of German companies and offering areas for this purpose. In Pune, for example, the 90-hectare "Eco Industrial Park" is to be planned

with Karlsruhe's support, offering space for small and medium-sized enterprises. In cooperation with the Karlsruhe University of Applied Sciences (HSKA), a project is also underway for the sustainable further development of the Rabale industrial zone in Thane focusing mainly on areas of mobility, energy supply and innovative infrastructures.

A few years back Karlsruhe opened an office in the old slaughterhouse for the consortium ABPRO (Aurangabad Business Promotion Center). The idea is to support medium-sized companies from India in setting up in Baden-Württemberg in a pilot project.

The signing of the Indo-German Mobility and Migration Agreement in December 2022 brought significant relief in the recruitment of skilled workers. The Karlsruhe Kreishandwerkerschaft now wants to increasingly address young trainees from India. Interested persons are now being familiarised with German culture and language through training courses. But training is also being promoted in the other direction: for example, young people are learning technical trades in the "Indo-German Tool Room" in the city of Aurangabad. The German-style training makes the graduates sought-after specialists on the labour market.

The city is at the heart of the Karlsruhe Technology Region, one of the most dynamic and successful economic regions in Europe. Over 4,200 companies are active in the IT and media sector alone. So there's great potential for tech exchange.

The delegation successfully returned to Germany with a multitude of new impressions, new contacts and new impulses for Indo-German cooperation.

www.india-karlsruhe.com

Karlsruhe: UNESCO City of Media Arts

In 2019, Karlsruhe became the first and so far only city in Germany to be awarded the title Creative City of Media Arts by UNESCO and to join the international UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN). As a UNESCO Creative City, Karlsruhe is committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular





the role of creativity and culture in building sustainable urban societies.

Karlsruhe is a city where media art in its various forms is part of life. With the ZKM | Centre for Art and Media, Karlsruhe is home to

one of the most important media art institutions worldwide. The ZKM's research, teaching and innovations are leading and are recognised worldwide. The ZKM is also curatorially involved in the SCHLOSSLICHTSPIELE Karlsruhe, a media art spectacle that delights tens of thousands of visitors every summer with impressive projection mapping shows and makes media art in public spaces an experience for everyone. The Seasons of Media Arts also present digital, interactive and virtual art in public spaces and transform the city of Karlsruhe into a stage of innovative, cooperative and networked media art open to all.

The city of Karlsruhe and its creative actors contribute to the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in a variety of ways and carry innovations and know-how from the mutual relationship between media art and the fields of cultural and creative industries, IT, science and research, as well as democracy and fundamental rights into the member cities and the global context.

www.cityofmediaarts.de

INDIA SUMMER DAYS Karlsruhe (Günther-Klotz-Anlage, 21 - 23 July 2023)

Colours, scents, sounds: sensory perceptions play a major role



in India. Add to that liveliness, cheerfulness and joie de vivre. All this can be experienced at the INDIA SUMMER DAYS, which take place parallel to southern Germany's largest family festival DAS FEST, in Karlsruhe's Günther-Klotz-Anlage. With free admission, the INDIA SUMMER DAYS present India's diverse culture and celebrate the strong German-Indian partnership of many years.

In addition to a stage programme lasting several days with dance, live music and shows, visitors to Karlsruhe will also have the opportunity to immerse themselves in Indian culture, among other things at the programme in the Indian village and with free yoga offers. In addition, Indian handicrafts, books, jewellery, textiles and, of course, spices await guests visiting the bazaar during the festival weekend. And of course, the authentic Indian cuisine on offer also invites visitors to experience India by taste.

The INDIA SUMMER DAYS Karlsruhe are under the patronage of the Minister President of Baden-Württemberg, Winfried Kretschmann.

www.indiasummerdays.de

Karlsruhe – A city to fall in Love

Having been 5 times to Karlsruhe, it's a city that you can't fail to fall in love with. Lots of greenery, palaces, world's first interactive museum, dynamic marketplace, convenient to reach most locations by local transport of the green transport – cycle. Add to this it's a tech savvy city with lots of educational institutes.

Karlsruhe is in the shape of a fan with a geometrical focal point from where 32 streets and paths radiate like the rays of the sun. Then there's the ZKM: the world's largest culture factory and the world's first interactive museum. Karlsruhe's market square (Marktplatz) is the heart of the city where visitors can admire the symbol of the city of Karlsruhe, a pyramid of red sandstone measuring some seven metres in height. The unusual structure covers the tomb of Margrave Karl Wilhelm. The city has all the clubs, bars and pubs that a night owl could ask for including traditional brewery pubs



The Staatliche Kunsthalle (State Art Museum) is one of the oldest and most important art museums in Germany. Opened in 1846, it is one of the few early German art museums that has still largely retained its original structure and furnishings. The collection, which features works from seven centuries, focuses on German, French and Dutch painting.

The Karlsruhe Municipal Gardens (Stadtgarten) contain a zoo and are one of the largest downtown parks in Germany. The Palace Gardens (Schlossgarten) are another popular destination. In addition to extensive green spaces and fountains and sculptures from a variety of eras, the grounds feature an idyllic lake. Shopping opportunities are plentiful in Karlsruhe, including Ettlinger Tor, southern Germany's largest indoor shopping centre, and Kaiserstrasse, Baden's longest shopping street.

Addu: A captivating destination



Addu, this heart-shaped Atoll is home to some of the most diverse natural habitats in Maldives. Its intriguing history, distinctive culture, unique beauty and certain mysteries probably makes Addu a better destination than Male feels **Chandragupta Amritkar**

It was a chance meeting with Misbah Nazeer, Manager - Business Development, Addu International Airport Pvt. Ltd, Gan International Airport at an event in Mumbai that I came to know about Addu, the southernmost atoll of the Maldives.

Having been to Maldives four times earlier, the thought of taking an internal flight to reach Addu, dissuaded me from accepting Misbah's invitation to Addu. But I have to admire his perseverance as he kept sending me information and videos on Addu showcasing its unique beauty and intriguing history. Finally his passion for his city/region persuaded me to visit Addu.

Addu is a 90 minute flight from Male, which is a 3 hour flight from Mumbai. Addu has an international airport on GAN Island which caters to both domestic and international airlines and private jets. The four islands in Addu are Gan, Feydhoo, Maradhoo and Hithadhoo - connected to each other by causeways.

Equator Village

Arriving late evening into GAN International Airport, Misbah was there to personally receive me. A five minute drive and we reached Equator Village – my hotel for the next 3 nights. Mohamed Waheed, the Resort Manager was there to receive us. On arrival he presented me with a certificate commemorating my crossing of the equator. “This is presented to all our guests who have flown



to Addu, the Maldives southernmost atoll, as you will cross the Equator. Many guests preserve it and prominently display it,” said Waheed.

Located on Addu Atoll's former Royal Air Force (RAF) base - the resort is built on what used to be the old Sergeants mess halls (RAF airstrip is now GAN International Airport), this resort by the sea oozes with culture, history, and certain mystery. Located 64 Km south of the equator, Equator Village is not a typical Maldivian resort – it is a tropical haven of old English charm mixed with modern amenities.

The resort's 78 spacious bungalows, designed with simple European elegance, have its own verandah opening into a lush courtyard garden. Overlooking the gardens and pool, the Vaivaru restaurant offers buffets of Western, Oriental, Eastern Asian and local cuisine plus lots of fresh fruit and salads. Right across the restaurant is the Veragan Bar providing a good selection of all-inclusive drinks and cocktails. Serena Spa offers a wide selection of treatments including ancient Ayurveda therapies and beauty treatments.

In water, on land or indoors (table tennis, volleyball, squash, tennis court) there are plenty of activities at Equator Village. The resort offers organised trips including visit to the largest wreck dive site in the Maldives; a cargo shipwreck from 1946, Bushy Island and dolphins excursions. Cycling is also popular.

The 'Real' Maldives

Many call Addu Atoll the 'Real' Maldives, the other side to the Maldives that many do not see. Addu Atoll is a natural anchorage and was used by the British during World War II as a secret base that was never located by the Japanese during the war. Most of the structures were originally built by the British who officially started working on developing the island as a military base in 1941. After the end of the Second World War, the British negotiated with the government to keep the island for 30 more years with an aim to build an air force refuelling station. “A long runway was built, locals got various job opportunities (earning in pounds), they were

given free healthcare. But once military traffic reduced and British left in 1976, it was handed over to the Maldivian Government with almost an equivalent of an ICAO code 4D air strip comprising of then state of the art equipment and facilities,” said Misbah Nazeer.

Today GAN airport is quite modern and is the gateway hub to the southern region of Maldives. Catering to domestic flights and international flights, GAN Airport is the second largest international airport in the Maldives. Currently, the airport operates domestic carrier Maldivian and Sri Lankan airlines as an international carrier and the runway code 4D was upgraded to 4E, which allows aircrafts, a320 flights to operate.



Gais Naseer, MD

“A lot of upgrading is now in process. We are working on a 30 million USD redevelopment project that includes expansion of the Terminal building, a new ATC tower, ARFF facility, airport roads and upgrading ancillary facilities. In addition to this 2 hotel projects in GAN will start early next year with over 150 rooms. The hotel will have MICE facilities. The Government of Maldives has planned to facilitate 8000 tourist beds in Addu, which include 3 new resort islands, and tourism guest house/hotel zones with over 4000 beds, which ideally places Addu for the midmarket tourists,” said Gais Naseer, MD, Addu International Airport.

They idea of a 1000+ capacity MICE center in a hotel is a good idea as it has tremendous economic benefits to the host country and city hosting the event, it helps mitigate the seasonal nature of a destination. All sectors related to hospitality – hotels, transportation, restaurants, touris spots, local vendors etc stand to benefit.

Gais Naseer believes India can play a vital role. “Having done my engineering from India, I understand the Indian market and foresee great potential both as tourists and investors. Also we are looking at either Vistara or Indigo starting flights to Addu from India. If properly projected I am sure India can be the biggest market for Addu.”

Currently Maldivian operates regular flights daily from Male to GAN. Srilankan airways operate 2 weekly flights via Colombo. Flydubai is scheduled to commence daily flights from Dubai to GAN soon. More international airlines are expected to begin operations in the near future. With more airlines GAN is poised to be the gateway that will connect the south of Maldives to the world.

8000 tourist beds in Addu City

The Addu City Council plans to provide financial assistance to those who recently received land from the tourism zones. “Apart from this we are all working towards our President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih promise of 8000 tourist beds in Addu City. We

Some Features & Attractions of ADDU

- Addu City is located right on the equator.
- Highest elevated natural land in Maldives (2.5 m)
- Large natural islands connected via causeway (Link Road)
- Southernmost Point– Gan
- Addu Nature Park
- RAF Mnument Gan
- Thakurufaanu Mosque - Hithadh
- Vibrant coral reef garden- Great snorkelling
- Largest shipwreck dive site - British Loyalty
- Manta Ray cleaning point – year round
- The guest house industry of Addu is growing rapidly and currently there are 12 popular guesthouses in all the islands of Addu.
- In the Maldives the White Tern bird is found only in the Maldives southern Addu atoll. The bird’s prevalence in Addu is somewhat of a mystery, with many linking its dominance to a lack of crows in the islands.
- Popular activities include – Swimming, Snorkelling, Scuba Diving, Surfing, Kayaking, Skydiving, Island Exploration, Bird Watching etc
- There are many World War II era sites, such as an old cinema, the cannon guns used by the British placed in certain areas for public viewing.
- Addu has a wide selection of authentic dishes all made using fresh ingredients especially coconut based.

aim to achieve it in a couple of years,” said a confident Ali Nizar, Addu City Mayor.

Maldives Fund Management Corporation (MFMC) recently launched the Hanked Integrated Tourism Project; an extensive tourism development project in Addu City. Under the project 1,041

rooms with various accommodation options will be developed; each with a unique design. MFMC said the project will revitalize Addu and enhance the tourism experience in the city. The Hanked Integrated Tourism Project will be included as part of the government’s bid to bring 8,000 tourism beds to Addu. Hanked is a tourism-centric region in Addu that includes hotels, guesthouses, and other tourism-related businesses.



Ali Nizar, Mayor



Mohamed Aslam, MP

“Addu has the potential to attract investors for developments. These include traditional leisure resort tourists – infact we are already on the verge of tying up with a company for redevelopment of the now defunct Shangri La Resort, guesthouses, MICE tourism, wellness tourism, culinary tourism, hospitals etc. We are seeking investments from Indian corporate and like-minded partners who will help in the development of Addu,” said the dynamic and extremely active Mohamed Aslam, MP, Hithadhoo North constituency.

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

Addu and Fuvahmulah have been declared UNESCO Biosphere Reserves (only the second designated biosphere reserve in the Maldives after Baa atoll).

Biosphere reserves are ‘learning places for sustainable development’. They are sites for testing interdisciplinary



approaches to understanding and managing changes and interactions between social and ecological systems, including conflict prevention and management of biodiversity. Biosphere reserves include terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems. Each site promotes solutions reconciling the conservation of biodiversity with its sustainable use.

These newly designated UNESCO Biosphere Reserves features a diverse range of habitats, ranging from tropical woodlands and wetlands to freshwater lakes, well-vegetated marshland areas, white sandy beaches of different variations and pebble texture plus gravel beaches and fertile lands of humus greater in area than any other island in the Maldives.

The Private Museum of Treasure in Maldives

A private collection of Ibrahim Firaq is worth a visit. He started collecting when he was just 28 years old thanks to his grandfather, who used to store ancient products at home. His collection includes newspaper clips, artefacts, historical materials, stamps, post cards, old games, sea treasures, old coins and many more. What started as a hobby this private museum is truly a national treasure, each item telling the history of the Addu city and Maldives.



Addu City road development project

The biggest ever road development project in Addu that includes a storm water drainage system has been started. The project is worth MVR 1.2 billion and would be overseen by Afcons Infrastructure Limited. “A total of 107 kilometers of roads are set to be constructed across Addu City. The new roads will resolve the issue of flooding. Also the project would see the installation of 103 kilometers of storm water drainage systems,” said Ali Nizar.

Forty kilometers of road would be built with tar and bricks and 67 kilometers of road would be built by using a cement stabilized base layer.

Addu City land reclamation project

The fieldwork for the Addu City land reclamation project has already commenced. The project’s scope comprises, laying stones and sand at both ends of the Hankede district in Addu. The dredging work for the development master plan is being done by the Dutch business Van Oord India Private Limited and we hope the project will be finished between by last quarter of 2023.

Van Oord India Private Limited was given the USD 84 billion Addu City Land Reclamation Project, which is being carried out thanks to a direct line of credit facility from the Exim Bank of India. The firm plans to reclaim land from the islands Hithadhoo, Maradhoo, Maradhoo-Feydhoo, and two islands inside the confines of the lagoon for the purpose of tourism development. The project would result in the reclamation of 194.3 hectares of land in Addu. Additionally, an 11-km road embankment will protect the area as part of the project.

The Martyr’s of Addu - Unsung heroes



During World War II, 39 brave men from Hithadhoo were doomed onboard the trade vessel Fathuhul Mubaarik “Yaahunbaraa” in November 1943. In the famine and hardships brought on by the raging war, 39 sailors/traders set sail towards Ceylon risking their lives to get food supplies back home for the local community. Little did they know that all but two of the crew would lose their lives to the unforgiving Japanese submarine attack.

The two captives; Abbeyyaa ge Ibrahim Didi and Sikkagey Mohamed Ali Naseer courageously refused to give any information about the location where they came from despite the horror and torture they suffered, thus saving Addu from the Japanese attempts to attack and destroy Gan, where the British navy base Port-T was located. Their sacrifice shielded the islands from the cross

fires of the brutal war. These men must be remembered and honoured in our history books so generations to come will know about the sacrifice. Here I wish to honour the men who lost their lives on the great “Yaahunbaraa”.

- Misbah Nazeer

South Palm Maldives



For my last night in Addu, Misbah, a genuine ambassador for Addu, asked me to visit South Palm Resort Maldives. A 15 minute speedboat ride from the jetty/airport brings you to the resort. As I arrived in the afternoon I was led to the main dining venue, the Banyan Restaurant for lunch right across the Indian Ocean. The buffet spread is huge with Experience International, Asian and even Indian cuisine, along with traditional Maldivian Food.

“India is a major market for us and we get a lot of Indian guests. Keeping this in mind all our outlets including the main restaurant’s buffet offers a vast selection of cuisines including vegetarian, vegan, and Jain food as well. Many Indian guests have appreciated our delicious culinary delicacies,” said Moosa Didi, CEO of South Palm Maldives Pvt.Ltd

Located on a private Island at the remote, southern tip of Maldives, South Palm Resort Maldives surrounded by white sandy beaches with a clear lagoon, and tranquil blue ocean views of Addu Atoll is certainly a place of unprecedented serenity, privacy and comfort.

South Palm Resort Maldives offer a choice of 6 Villa categories - a choice of 100 land-based beach-front Villas and 30 over-water Villas. While the beach-front Villas are superb their Family Villa spread over 100m2 with inter-connecting rooms can be quite popular with Indian families. The Water Villa and Over Water Pool Villa (attached pool with a lagoon view) are quite popular for couples and honeymooners.

The resort also has a unique family village that consists of a kid’s park, kids’ activities, our exceptional Family Villas which are all designed to cater to families traveling with children.

Apart from the Banyan Restaurant the Moodhu Bar, a funky pool-side bar that hosts live music and traditional Maldivian entertainment in the evenings is quite popular. The Kanduolhi Bar

overlooking the lagoon is the perfect setting for a sunset cocktail or afternoon snack. The bar has a large barbecue for grilling delicious meats and fish.

The island has a wealth of activities- beach volleyball and football, excursions and local island tours, the Kurumba Spa boasts the first ever floating spa rooms in Maldives, possibly the world. The atoll, with the 30 unique dive sites, an amazing marine life, all-year round Manta Ray and Dolphin sightings is certainly worth a visit.

The resort also has a MICE center with a capacity for 100 people. The first event held at the resort was from India. “We have been promoting Addu along with Misbah from Gan International Airport at Indian trade events like OTM and SATTE. Along with my dynamic DoSM Shafwaaz Abdulla we have been in touch with a lot of tour operators in India. Our biggest advantage is that we are able to offer friendly and affordable prices while maintaining the high service standards. Add to this a few of our staff even speak Indian languages like Hindi, Tamil making Indian guest more comfortable,” said Moosa Didi.

Veshisaafu (saving mother earth), a local non-profit organization has been working to keep the community of Addu clean and fight against plastic pollution. Established in 2019 by Fathmath Saeed and a few like-minded members,



Veshisaafu has been working hard to raise awareness on plastic pollution and lead community clean ups regularly. In addition the NGO works on planting trees and conserving local trees like breadfruit and screwpine, thus inspires the community to reduce the loss of greenery in the city. The NGO works hand-in-hand with the local authorities, institutions, schools and other non-profit organisations towards the common goal of fighting against plastic pollution and advocating for important environmental issues.



16 August – 17 September 2023
Karlsruhe Palace
www.schlosslichtspiele.info

SCHLOSS LICHTSPIELE

Light Festival Karlsruhe



KARLSRUHE
UNESCO CITY OF MEDIA ARTS

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KARLSRUHE
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Sentosa: An Island Paradise



On invitation to cover a top end hotel investment event in Singapore I decided to use this opportunity to include Sentosa in my schedule. While Concorde Hotel was kind enough to host us in Singapore, I co-ordinated with Jacqueline Low, Director, Sales, Business and Channels Development and Kelvin Pang, Manager, Strategic Communications & PR from Sentosa Development Corporation for Sentosa visit. Kelvin Pang put up a packed 2 day itinerary for me and my family.

Just a short taxi ride from the city centre (15-20 minute drive), the 500-hectare Sentosa resort island provides guest's a true island life filled with lush greenery, rainforests, rich biodiversity, home to an exciting array of wildlife - marine world, animal world, nocturnal creatures, golden sandy beaches, tropical beaches, world-renowned golf courses, a deep-water yachting marina, themed and thrilling attractions along with numerous luxurious hotels, resorts and spa retreats to relax and rejuvenate.

Shangri-La Rasa Sentosa

Arriving into Sentosa we reached Shangri-La Rasa Sentosa (SRS), Singapore. What a wonderful property it is. With an inventory of 450+ rooms and suites with private balconies that provide guests with expansive views of sea, multiple pools, landscaped gardens.

Being a family friendly resort it can be a major attraction for Indians who love to travel with families. Moreover, SRS is the only beachfront resort in Singapore - with direct access to a beach. SRS offers a range of activities - the natural water swimming pools, sea sports at its private beach, daily pool games, kids club, a children's pool complete with waterslides and splash pads, Nestopia, an open-air play space with the longest slides on Sentosa, Chi, The



Indians have always been attracted to Singapore and recently India became the second largest contributor to Singapore tourists count with almost 612,300 visitors from India. They also stay the longest with an average length of stay of 8.61 days compared with an average of 5.19 days.

Spa. On the beach, equipment's are available for land and sea sport activities - badminton, soccer and volleyball on land and Kayaks, stand up paddle boards and paddleboats on sea.

The resort offers multiple dining options – buffets, à la carte, beachfront dining etc. We choose Alfresco dining for breakfast (an enormous and well laid buffet breakfast) and it turned out to be a good choice too as we had peacocks strutting past us and trying to nibble on leftovers on the ground. We also had Indian food at the famous Casserole restaurant.

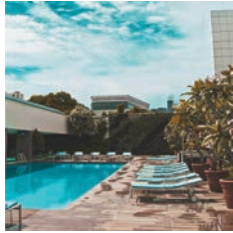
SRS would also be a perfect MICE venue with more than 6,000 sqm of dedicated space and a wide selection of venue options, especially the unique beachfront spaces that can be curated for themed outdoor experiences. They have also 10 function rooms with natural daylight.

To enjoy Sentosa's attractions the Sentosa Cable car and the Sentosa A bus stop are just outside the hotel. Infact from the hotel we just walked over to Siloso Point to take the Singapore Cable Car to Merlion Station. The cable car is a wonderful experience providing a bird's eye view of the island - a 360° panoramic views. Exiting Merlion Station we had a short walk to Royal Taj for lunch. Located in a restored colonial building this Indian restaurant provides Indian cuisines with a modern twist. It also offers a selection of vegetarian & international dishes in its all-day dining menu. Along with the lunch we enjoyed the pani puri shots most.

We walked back to Merlion Station to take the Singapore Cable Car to Imbiah Lookout Station to reach Madame Tussauds Singapore, the famous wax museum, the seventh Asian branch of the Madame Tussauds chain of wax attractions worldwide.



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Madame Tussauds Singapore has more than 80 unique celebrity wax figures from Asia, Hollywood, Bollywood, Tollywood (many Indian actors) and other celebrities. Madame Tussauds first ever boat ride is a great experience. Called the 'Spirit of Singapore', it takes you through a fantasy - tropical jungle, gardens, chirping bird sounds, and sights with spectacular colours. Marvel Universe 4D cinema experience includes special effects of wind, water as you witness the battle between Captain Marvel, Thor, Black Panther, Rocket, Spider-Man, Ant-Man vs Loki in a bid to save the world. Guests can also star in immersive experiences and plenty of interactive activities.

We were too tired out and decided to skip Fort Siloso Night Adventure which is Singapore's only preserved coastal fort with an extensive collection of World War II memorabilia.

After a relaxing morning we had lunch at Trapizza (close to SRS) – some of the best pizzas were presented. After lunch we boarded Bus A towards Resorts World Sentosa. Due to time constraints we had to select between Universal Studios and S.E.A. Aquarium and we opted to visit S.E.A. Aquarium - certainly one of the world's

biggest oceanariums. It has more than 100,000 sea creatures and over 800 different species living together in a 45 million litres of water houses. The aquarium comprises 10 zones with 49 habitats, each boosted with refreshed educational content, interactive and immersive experiences, up-close animal encounters and more. It also has one of the world's largest viewing panel, 36-metre (118 ft) wide and 8.3-metre (27 ft) tall. Visitors just sit and gaze in at the sweeping ocean scenery beyond the spotless glass panels and a marine enthusiast can spend hours. The massive glass panel at the Open Ocean habitat weighs more than 250,000 kilograms. From dangerous sharks to endangered species, the SEA Aquarium in Singapore offers an enthralling experience.

After spending a couple of hours at S.E.A. Aquarium we headed to board Sentosa Bus C towards Imbiah Lookout to reach SkyHelix Sentosa. There was a queue as limited people can sit at a time.

Named after its distinct vertical helix-like structure, SkyHelix Sentosa is Singapore's highest open-air panoramic ride at 79 meters above sea level. As you rise up the open-air gondola dangling your feet in the air, you get to admire exquisite 360-degree views from Sentosa to the Keppel Bay area and the Southern Islands, making your experience all the more memorable. After sunset, the attraction gets lit up with bright LED lights, a whole new glowing dimension to the experience.



After SkyHelix we boarded Sentosa Bus C towards Beach Station to reach Central Beach Bazaar – a central station to take buses to Singapore. It is a new attraction that offers a day-to-night carnival beach experience, featuring the return of iconic Sentosa Musical Fountain, which is augmented by the tallest fountain in Southeast Asia, the Sentosa SkyJet.

At 80 metres tall, equivalent to a 24-storey building, Sentosa SkyJet is the tallest fountain in Southeast Asia. With vibrant street food concepts and International flavour, it's truly a one-stop family-friendly beach destination. Later in the evening we boarded Sentosa Bus A towards Siloso Point to return to Shangri-La Rasa Sentosa.

Museum of ice cream – Singapore



As a profound lover of ice creams, I made it a point to visit the Museum of ice cream in Singapore. This pink paradise brings the love of ice cream to life and is an unique experience - a chance to connect with your sweeter side, at the same time gain knowledge about the history of ice creams. As you pass through the pink decked rooms, you can try unlimited ice creams with delicious flavours and sprinklers. The ice cream options range from creamy, crunchy, fruity or spicy. They also have non-dairy alternatives for lactose intolerant and vegan people. You also get a small goodie bag that you can fill up with their special collection of sweet treats and chocolates.

There are multiple interactive activities for kids and adults such as bungee jumping, a disco room, banana swings, basketball, a unicorn playground and the world's largest sprinkle pool to jump into. Their themes change every month according to the occasions such as Halloween, Valentines, Christmas, etc. Grab yourself a scoop!

- Pooja Amritkar

An experience at a gorgeous heritage Haveli



How would like to spend your holiday in a heritage royal Haveli? Well Mandawa Haveli in Jaipur provides such an opportunity to relish the bygone era with modern facilities.

While there may be plenty of branded hotels in Jaipur the pleasure of staying in a heritage hotel is totally a different experience. Mandawa Haveli is a gorgeous place not only to reside but also a perfect base to explore Jaipur. “Its centrally located just adjacent to the old city. One can see the Nahargarh Fort that stands on the edge of the Aravalli Hills from our Haveli. Most ancient monuments - the City Palace, Hawa Mahal, the Observatory all are in 2-3 Km radius. The famous Birla Mandir and Moti Dungri Temple dedicated to Lord Ganesha is also close by,” said Thakur Randhir Vikram Singh, CMD, Mandawa Haveli who is also the President of The Indian Heritage Hotels Association (IHHA) - thanks to whose initial efforts Heritage Tourism movement started in India.



With an inventory of 70 rooms Mandawa Haveli, is one of the most spectacular Haveli in Jaipur. Originally built in 1896, as a town house of Thakur Bhagwat Singh the 15th ruler of Mandawa the team has been successful in maintaining the old charm while adding modern facilities like a swimming pool, restaurants etc.

Once you enter the main courtyard you will be amazed by the size of the property. Being a Haveli, all rooms are in different

sizes with diverse amenities. The best are the suite rooms and the large bathroom with a royal bathtub. Most rooms have a patio with chairs and table making it a great place to have your morning tea listening to the chipping of birds and enjoying nature.



They have a multi cuisine restaurant serving continental, Indian and Rajasthani cuisine. With both an a la carte menu and a daily buffet they have space inside the restaurant and a terrace seating.

While we were there for 4 nights we noticed a lot of International travellers. “Before covid 95% of our guests were foreigners mainly from France and Germany. During covid we got a lot of staycations from this area and domestic tourism picked up well post pandemic, especially marriages. Hopefully we should start picking up on International guests soon and also start attending global trade shows like ITB again to promote our heritage hotels in Jaipur and in Mandawa,” said Thakur Randhir Vikram Singh.

The hotel also a bar located in the original audience hall of the Haveli also space for a private roof top dining. Every evening they also have cultural shows – when we were there it was a puppet show.

A great place to stay if you want to experience Indian heritage and culture.

“We saw occupancy of 82% round the year”

Located bank on the Mumbai-Pune express highway and right adjacent to the IT hub – Hinjewadi, one cannot miss this iconic structure – Sayaji hotel a nine storied hotel. Sayaji Hotel Pune has created a reputation of outstanding service accompanied by delicious food. The excellent ambience and spacious rooms with warm hospitality make it a desirable property for both leisure and MICE. Taking it a notch up is **Ajay Kanojia, the dynamic and innovative GM at Sayaji Hotel, Pune**. Ajay Kanojia has been a driving force through covid time and now making sure the hotels average occupancy has reached its optimum since opening. In a tête-à-tête with our editor he spoke about his hotel with great passion. **Excerpts**

How has the year been for Sayaji Pune?

Post Covid this was the first year and it has been quite unpredictable. No one new how the year would go. April was decent month and from May business started to increase and we also saw an increase in occupancy sometimes touching 90%. Seeing the growth, I and my team took the decision to hike the ADR by 10%. It was a good decision and we saw occupancy of 82% round the year. Infact 82% average is our highest since we opened the hotel.

How do you compare yourself with competition in your segment in PCMC area?

If we talk about PCMC (Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation) area the average inventory of branded hotels is 150 while we have the highest inventory 240 rooms among our competitors. We are also number one in terms of occupancy percentage month on month – with 82% compared to 72% by competitors.

What keeps Sayaji at the top?

Quite a few plus points. First its our F&B followed by our superior service. We have a fabulous and a huge spread for our buffet – and one of the few to have a lunch buffet too. Our prices are also very competitive. As our team serves live snacks on the table it has been much appreciated.

We have also improved our room service controls, so none of our orders are missed or delayed (I experienced this service for not just room service but also housekeeping). We have also renovated all the rooms and the next step is our restaurants.



Ajay Kanojia

What about MICE and wedding?

With such a huge inventory we are the best option in PCMC area. But we have become selective so we don't have to compromise on our ADR as well as on maintaining our superior services and F&B. We have also add a new hall Pearl while Ruby can cater to 1000+ people and is quite popular for evening events. Parking is not an issue as we have 50,000 sq.ft. area including valet parking.

On the wedding front we did 46 weddings which included a substantial residential wedding. This also shows our popularity in Pune region. Our hotel is conveniently located from Mumbai, right on the highway and can be also a destination wedding. Also, Pune weather is much pleasant.

What about F&B?

As I mentioned it remains a major plus point for us. Our all day dining restaurant is very popular among the locals who come with their families. Our Sunday brunch (11am – 3 pm) has picked up well. Apart from an elaborate buffet with a huge desert section, we have live music.

Any CSR activities?

Plenty. During road safety week in co-ordination with the traffic police we created helmet awareness and those who were without helmets we provided them with helmet from our side. When we make new uniforms for our staff, the old ones, without logo, are distributed to poor people. We invited blind school kids over lunch to give them a feel of a hotel. Blood camps are also done regularly.

Staff welfare is a priority and apart from normal care, we have started a monthly cafeteria festival where a set of staff plan, design, decorate and create a themed meal. This brings forward their creativity. Periodically we have day trips with staff and seniors are sent for relaxation and to better connect among themselves to other destinations.

Any expansion plans for the group?

We already have 17 hotels in operation and 24 in pipeline. These consist of all our three brands – Sayaji, Effotel and Enrise. In my region, under my supervision we will soon open 2 more properties in Lonavala and Talegaon.



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