



Tourism Leaders Forge Unified Vision at FAITH Conclave Press Briefing

Day 1 briefing sharpens the roadmap for India's tourism economy



At FAITH Conclave 2026's Day 1 press briefing, industry leaders outlined a united agenda for tourism-led growth, stronger policy advocacy and sustainable development. The session highlighted tourism's economic potential, cross-sector collaboration and the need to turn industry recommendations into regular government engagement and actionable outcomes.

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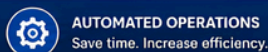
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— B2B TRAVEL INTELLIGENCE —

WTTC KEYNOTE



KEYNOTE HIGHLIGHT

WTTC President's Vision for India

'You Have Everything. What You Need Is a Joint Plan'



At FAITH Conclave 2026, WTTC President & CEO Gloria Guevara said India has every tourism advantage but needs a stronger government-private sector plan. She highlighted growth to the world's fourth-largest tourism economy by 2036, while urging easier visas, better connectivity and greater international spending capture.

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India's Hospitality Industry Benefits From Reverse Talent Migration

Returning professionals and rising domestic demand are reshaping the sector's next growth phase

India's hospitality sector is entering a defining moment. A wave of talented professionals is returning from overseas markets even as robust domestic demand and a rapidly expanding hotel landscape create abundant opportunities. Together, these forces are positioning India for its next phase of sustainable growth.



1) GEOPOLITICAL UNCERTAINTY ACCELERATES RETURN

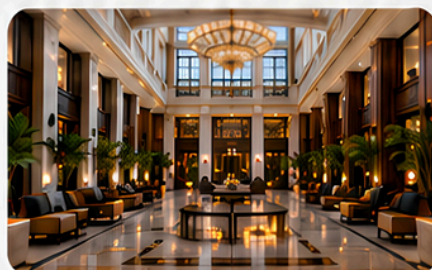
Skilled hospitality professionals are increasingly returning from West Asia—especially the UAE and Oman—and a regional unrest, lower tourism activity, hotel shutdowns for refurbishments, pay cuts and unpaid leave. Radisson Hotel Group has seen more applications across food and beverage, culinary, front office, housekeeping, finance, engineering and senior leadership roles.

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2) INDIA'S EXPANDING HOSPITALITY LANDSCAPE

Growth in hotels, aviation, cruise tourism, destination weddings, MICE tourism and experiential travel is driving strong demand for experienced talent across functions.



3) GROWTH BY THE NUMBERS



WTTC projects India's travel and tourism sector to grow 8.5% in 2026 versus GDP growth of 6.4%.



Contribution of **\$286.1 billion** to the economy.



Support for **48.1 million jobs** across the country.



By 2036, the sector is projected to reach **\$527 billion** and become the world's fourth-largest travel and tourism economy.



4) DOMESTIC TOURISM DRIVES MOMENTUM

- Domestic spending has risen nearly 37% since 2019 to ₹17.7 trillion (\$202.5 billion).
- Domestic visitors account for about 85–86% of tourism spending.
- Domestic spending is forecast to reach ₹19 trillion (\$217.6 billion) in 2026, nearly 47% above pre-pandemic levels.
- IHCL observes this trend most strongly among professionals with five to fifteen years of experience across operations, sales and marketing, revenue management and pre-opening roles.



5) HIRING GETS MORE STRUCTURED

- TeamLease Services projects Net Employment Change of 5.1% for HY1 FY2026–27.
- 63% of employers plan workforce expansion.
- Hiring demand is concentrated in sales and marketing, business continuity and finance.
- Branded hotels may need 100,000 to 150,000 new skilled workers annually until 2029, especially as growth expands into Tier II and Tier III markets.



6) CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITY

Gória Guevara has said India still has room to improve through visa reforms, better connectivity and stronger international demand. India currently offers visa-free access to only three countries compared with 70 for China and 90 for Thailand.





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THE OTA TIGHTROPE:

Why Smart Hoteliers Are Reclaiming Their Margins

OTAs bring reach, but they come at a cost. Smart hoteliers are managing the balance, protecting margins, and building direct relationships that drive long-term profitability.



THE ELEPHANT IN THE LOBBY

OTAs aren't the enemy—they're a utility, like electricity. Essential, yes. But building your entire strategy around paying high commissions? That's a costly mistake.

Smart hoteliers are learning to use OTAs for discovery while building stronger, more profitable direct channels.



THE NUMBERS THAT KEEP YOU UP AT NIGHT

The OTA channel is a **multi-hundred-billion-dollar behemoth** that's projected to keep growing. Two players dominate—Booking Holdings and Expedia—while regional players like MakeMyTrip hold strong in key markets.



Commissions range from 10% to 30% depending on leverage. For many independent hotels, that's closer to the higher end.



THE INDIAN CONTEXT

- Price-sensitive travellers
- High OTA penetration (MakeMyTrip, Agoda, etc.)
- Mobile-first behaviour
- Preference for WhatsApp and UPI payments



WHAT SMART HOTELIERS ARE ACTUALLY DOING

1



MADE THEIR DIRECT CHANNEL IRRESISTIBLE

- Mobile-first booking engines (load in <3 seconds)
- WhatsApp integration for Indian travellers
- UPI & local payment options
- Value-adds without discounting—breakfast, late checkout, complimentary experiences

2



USE METASEARCH AS A SHIELD

By showing direct rates on Google Hotels and metasearch engines, hotels reduce the need for comparison shopping and protect their margins.

3



PLAY THE INVENTORY GAME

Reserve inventory for direct bookings during high demand; let OTAs help fill the rooms in low-demand periods. That's smart revenue management.

4



NEGOTIATE LIKE YOUR MARGIN DEPENDS ON IT

- Performance-based commission structures
- Co-op marketing credits
- Selective participation in promotions (not all promotions are created equal)

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5



BECOME DATA COLLECTORS

Direct bookings = first-party data. Use it for personalised offers, remarketing, and loyalty programmes—advantages OTAs can't match.



THE METRICS THAT ACTUALLY MATTER

Direct booking share

OTA commission as % of revenue

Net ADR by channel

Website conversion rate

Repeat guest share



YOUR MONSOON PLAYBOOK

AUDIT EVERYTHING

- Calculate net profitability by channel
- Map your booking journey on mobile
- Check rate parity across all platforms
- Review your booking engine performance

FIX THE FRICTION

- Reduce booking steps to <3 taps
- Add direct booking perks without discounting
- Activate remarketing for abandoned bookings

REBALANCE THE PORTFOLIO

- Shift inventory to direct during peak windows
- Cut low-return OTA promotions
- Negotiate OTA terms based on performance data



SIKKIM TOURISM: THE HIMALAYAN MODEL *for Green Growth*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT :

Shri Raj Kumar Yadav, IAS
Commissioner-cum-Secretary,
Tourism & Civil Aviation Department


BUILT ON SUSTAINABILITY


Long-standing environmental safeguards: restrictions on plastic carry bags, Styrofoam, waste burning and packaged drinking water bottles at government functions.



Strong focus on community-based rural tourism with homestays, local entrepreneurship and the Mega Homestay Project promoting vernacular architecture and cultural authenticity.



Sikkim Rural Tourism Meet creates direct B2B linkages with domestic and international operators, including buyers from Bhutan and Nepal.

Sikkim is no ordinary mountain state.

Covering just **0.2%** of India's landmass, it holds about **26%** of the country's floral biodiversity, making it one of the richest ecological territories in the Himalayas and a natural fit for high-value, low-impact tourism. Spread across **7,096 sq km**, the state combines snowy peaks, alpine pastures, conifer forests, temperate oak belts and subtropical sal forests, while its forest cover stands at roughly **47%**.

“ *The most competitive destinations of the future will not be the loudest ones — they will be the most responsible, most authentic and most resilient.* **”**

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550+
orchids



40+
rhododendrons



1680+
medicinal plants



144+
mammals

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mountains and peaks



80+
glaciers



534
livers and lakes & wetlands



104+
rivers and streams

PEOPLE. SKILLS. OPPORTUNITIES.

Launched in March 2024, Sikkim **INSPIRES** (supported by the World Bank) is empowering women, youth and rural stakeholders in hospitality, homestay standards and adventure


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