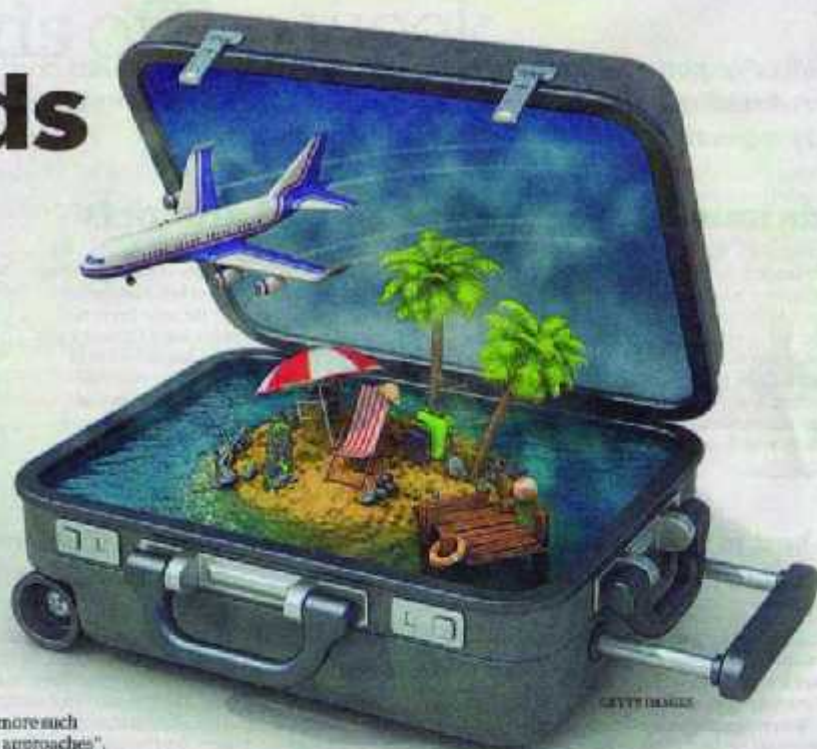


Travel trends to plan a better trip

Follow the advice by industry experts and holiday at your favourite destination in a convenient manner this summer.



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Summer is here, and so is the age-old question: where are you headed for the summer vacation? According to the recently released Summer Holidays Prediction Report, based on the holiday enquiries on HolidaysIQ.com, which gets 45 lakh Indian visitors every month, the number of travellers planning a holiday this summer is up 34.6% compared to last summer. To help you with your planning, we asked industry insiders to crystal gaze on everything from air fares to trends worth capitalising on.

HOTELS

The good news is that reasonably priced accommodation in the country won't be a challenge.

Says Karan Anand, head, relationships, Cox & Kings Ltd: "Room rates in Indian hotels during the summer months are not that high." As the latest Hotel Price Index (HPI) report by Hotels.com reveals, India beats other countries when it comes to getting the best value for hotel tariffs. The average per night cost for a hotel room in India is 4,715 compared with 10,345 shelled out by bliss travellers per night domestically. On an average, Indians spend 7,531 per night in hotel stay while travelling abroad.

Besides, room rates in the coming months are likely to fall due to high inventory. "In the past year, several new hotels have opened across segments, from mid-market to luxury, offering customers more choice. With new inventory and overall demand continuing to grow, room rates will face pressure in the short and medium term," says a Hilton worldwide spokesperson. Subhash Goyal, chairman, STIC Travel Group, adds, "The Ministry of Tourism has allocated 73 crore for the development of tourist facilities and hotel spaces in less-explored areas. With this, the supply side will definitely rise."

AIR FARES

Last year, many factors contributed to a rise in air fares and consumers felt the pinch even after the peak seasons. "This year, to lure customers back to air travel, airlines are even offering tickets at attractive prices. These promotions will help them mobilise their inventories through the year while

keeping the market share in their favour," says Vikram Malhi, country head, Expedia. This has already happened thrice this year, and Malhi foresees "more such price wars as the travel season approaches".

Goyal is not as optimistic. There is usually a hike of 8-10% in air fares during the May-June period. This year, too, we are expecting a similar hike, if not more," he says, adding that, "Fare wars are more of a lean season tactic, which will definitely come into the picture later in the year." The only way out is to hedge your bets by booking early. Another way to ensure a good deal is a packaged tour. Says Vishal Suri, deputy CEO, tour operating, Knomi India: "Our group tour packages include air fares and we work closely with our partners to offer the best to our clients."

HOT SPOTS

According to the HolidaysIQ report, 70% of summer holidays are being planned for popular destinations such as Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Ooty and Darjeeling. "For foreign holidays, we are seeing a preference for Thailand, Singapore, Dubai and Turkey," says Sunil Hastija, executive director, TUI India.

If, however, you want to avoid the crowds and enjoy discounts of 20-40%, try places where summers are the shoulder season—Gau in the monsoon and much of Europe in June. Says Sarinder Singh Sodhi, senior vice-president and head, leisure travel (inbound), Thomas Cook (India) Ltd: "Agra, Jaipur and Kerala make it to the top of the list and hotels can be had at almost half the price." His colleague, Madhav Pai, director, leisure travel (outbound), adds, "The popular off-peak overseas destinations include Australia, New Zealand and South Africa."

TRENDS

"We are seeing an increased demand for cruise vacations and comes from a varied segment of families, honeymoon couples and retired couples," says Hasija. Goyal, too, points out that an increasing number is opting for Alaska and European cruises. "Then there is river cruising, a more kidback experience. These ships are smaller, so they carry fewer passengers and the staterooms tend to

HOT DEALS

Blue Valley Jungle Resorts MADRASALAI



This two-night package covers stay in a standard cottage, all meals, including a barbecue and an evening jeep safari. There is no time limit on the offer.

₹12,200 per couple

Hilton Shilim Estate Retreat & Spa

A 2.5-hour drive from Mumbai, this new luxury resort is offering a 30% discount on room rates if you book before 14 May. A 30% deposit is needed while booking and is valid for stay till the end of year.

₹6,100 per couple

The Chalets, NALDEHRA



The log chalets 23 km from Sainik offers a two-night package, with breakfast, dinner, a welcome cake, and applicable taxes. Offer valid till 31 May.

₹22,990 per couple

be more basic," says Anand. "Adventure tourism, wildlife, theme parks, culinary and wine tours are all high in popularity," claims Suri, adding that "self-driving holidays, say, to New Zealand, are gaining popularity".

There has also been a surge in bookings for offbeat destinations. "While new travellers opt for the regular, popular places, an evolving segment is opting for more unexplored destinations like Vietnam. Nearly 30% of vacationers are picking offbeat places compared to 20% last year," adds Malhi.

SAVING TIPS

Don't delay booking a trip any further. Says Pai: "Booking early ensures optimal value by leveraging the poor demand-supply glut opportunity in terms of air fare deals and hotel stays." So if you book 15-45 days in advance, you could save as much as 15-30% on your stay. Several hospitality companies have already started introducing special packages, which unfortunately come with a limited booking window.

When it comes to flights, Malhi says, "It's best to book 1-2 months in advance as there are a lot of deals to benefit from." The international fares show more volatility, with a week's delay resulting in a fare rise of 23,000-10,000. Says Goyal: "There are last-minute deals, but it can be a high-risk strategy especially during peak season." With cruises the early booking deadline is pushed up. "You should do it 3-6 months in advance as most of the cruise liners open bookings nearly 6-9 months in advance. This is also the surest way to bag the cabin of your own choice," cautions Anand.

Join mailing lists: Be it hotels, cruises or airlines, signing up for e-mail lists can help save money. "You'll get to know about their latest bargains and specials," says Hasija.

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