INDIAN TOURISTS FLOCK TO THE U.S.

U.S. hotels and travel businesses are looking to capitalize on a significant increase in Indian tourists to enhance their revenue, especially as domestic leisure spending declines and the demand from East Asian countries remains below the pre-pandemic levels.

According to data from the U.S. National Trade and Tourism Office (NTTO), nearly 1.9 million Indian tourists visited the U.S. in the first ten months of 2024, **representing an almost 48% increase compared to 2019.** This surge was primarily fueled by a 50% rise in visas issued for business visits and a 43.5% increase in leisure travel.

The notable growth of the middle class in India, along with larger travel budgets and increased flight capacity, is driving the country's international travel boom. In contrast, visitor numbers from China, Japan, and South Korea have declined significantly, with drops of 44.5%, 50.8%, and 23.9%, respectively, compared to 2019 levels, according to NTTO data.

Wealthy travelers from East Asian countries like China prefer to travel within their region, particularly to Southeast Asian destinations, instead of making long-haul trips to the United States.

While European tourists are returning to the U.S., the number of visitors from countries such as the UK, Germany, and France remains below 2019 levels.

Visitor volumes to the U.S. vary: India exceeds 2019 levels, while China, Japan, and South Korea lag. The UK, Germany, France, and Brazil show partial recovery but remain below the pre-pandemic levels.

The U.S. tourism industry has experienced a slow year, with companies like Hilton and Airbnb preparing for weaker revenue as the post-pandemic travel surge stabilizes. Persistent inflation is also causing many Americans to reduce their leisure spending.

"Indian travelers are stepping in to fill part of the void left by the decrease in visitors from China, Japan, and South Korea," stated Laura Lee Blake, CEO of the Asian American Hotel Owners Association, whose members own 60% of the hotels in the United States.

Blake noted, "Their growing interest in exploring smaller cities and secondary markets is aiding the recovery across a wider range of destinations." She added that Indian tourists generally prefer budget and mid-scale hotels.

Some hotels are also introducing amenities that may appeal to Indian visitors, such as chai and samosas in the lobby and popular Indian TV channels available in guest rooms.

Viator, a brand under TripAdvisor, **reported that bookings from Indian tourists to the U.S. surged by more than 50% in 2024, tripling compared to the pre-pandemic levels in 2019.**

"Over the past three years, we've observed an increase of over 45% in nights booked by Indians traveling to the U.S.," stated Dave Stephenson, Chief Business Officer at Airbnb.

Scheduled flight capacity between India and the U.S. increased by 42.3% in 2024 compared to 2019,

according to data from OAG Aviation.

As a result, airline seating capacity between India and the U.S. exceeded one million seats in 2024, exceeding the levels from 2019.

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