

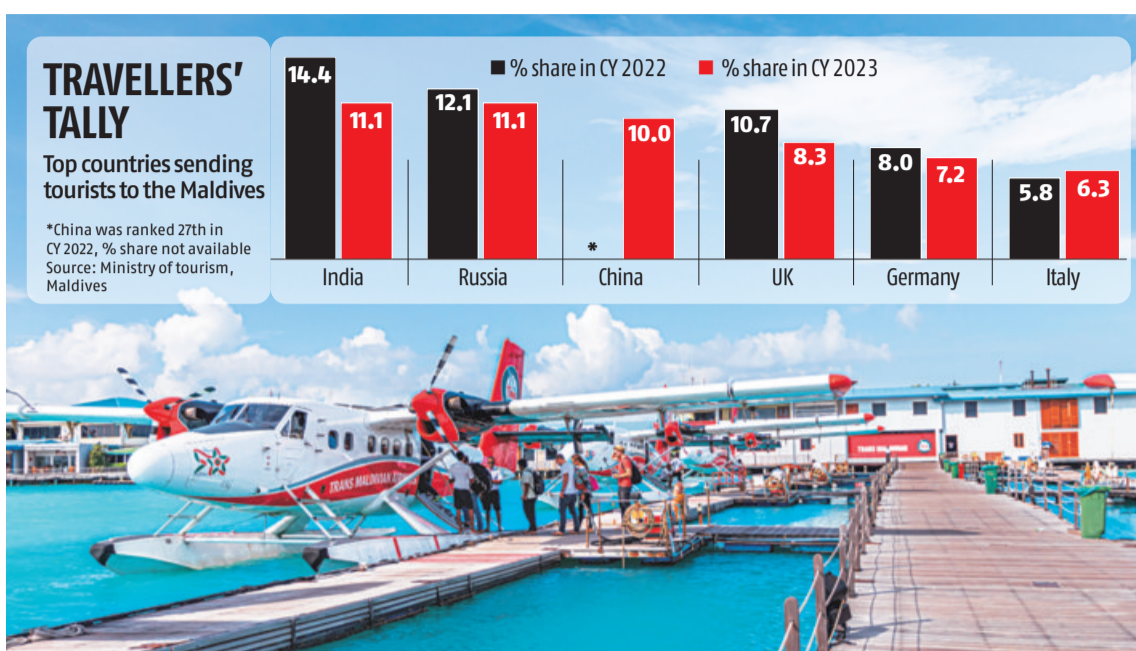
Chinese arrivals in Maldives rose to third spot in 2023

SURAJEET DAS GUPTA
New Delhi, 10 January

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu's request to China on Tuesday to "intensify" efforts to send more tourists to its shores comes at a time when the country is already figuring among the top five — led by India — that contribute to footfall in the island nation. The statement, made during Muizzu's first visit to China after taking over as president, comes days after three junior ministers in the Maldives made offensive remarks against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

While the three ministers have been suspended, there has been no statement of apology from the Maldivian government, which has led to a strong backlash in India with many pushing for a ban on travelling to the archipelago in the Indian Ocean. However, data for the first nine days of January shows that tourist arrivals from India to the Maldives has been at similar levels as last year during the same period.

At the same time, more Chinese tourists are flocking to the Maldives than before. According to data from the country's ministry of tourism, in calendar year (CY) 2022, China was ranked 27th in the list of nations sending tourists to the Maldives. India, with a 14.4 per cent share of total arrivals, was at the top, followed by Russia (12.1 per cent) and the UK (10.7 per cent).



the country's visitor pie last year and closed in on India, which sent 203,198 tourists (11.1 per cent). Russia, which was in the second spot, was behind India by only 52 tourists last year.

While the arrivals from India have fallen by around 13 per cent in CY 23 compared to CY 22, data from the ministry of tourism in Maldives shows that Chinese tourist numbers had grown by over 13 to 14 times in the same period.

This is because Chinese arrivals reduced to a trickle (12,000-odd from January to November) in CY 22 due to stringent pandemic restrictions on travels abroad. After the curbs were lifted, there

has been a big spike in the influx of tourists from China to the Maldives.

Despite the backlash over the comments on PM Modi, the number of Indian visitors to the Maldives in the first nine days of January is at 3,791, accounting for 7.4 per cent of the tourist inflows in 2024. That is more or less in line with the numbers during the same period last year, when 3,356 arrivals from India accounted for a share of 7.4 per cent.

In January, the bulk of the tourists to the Maldives come from Europe. Hence, Russia, Italy and the UK collectively account for 26 per cent of arrivals in the first nine days of the year.

Says Anil Kalsi, secretary and vice-president, Travel Agents Federation of India, "Passengers who have booked and paid for holidays tend to lose most of their money if they cancel at a short notice. Considering the ground situation isn't worrisome, pre-booked passengers are going ahead with their plans. But future bookings are seeing a downward trend as national sentiments become a deciding factor."

Kalsi says that many Indian tourists are giving the Maldives a miss and are exploring alternative destinations such as Thailand, Bali, Malaysia, Vietnam, Almaty, Baku and even Tbilisi.

SpiceJet plans flights to Lakshadweep, Ayodhya

AJINKYA KAWALE
Mumbai, 10 January

SpiceJet will soon launch flights to Lakshadweep, as the airline enjoys exclusive rights under the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS), Ajay Singh, the carrier's chairman and managing director, said at its annual general meeting (AGM) on Wednesday.

Lakshadweep has one operational airport on Agatti Island, 90 minutes from Kochi. All domestic flights to the island are routed through Kochi.

Apart from plans to start flights to the archipelago, SpiceJet said it has plans to launch flights to Ayodhya from major cities across India. The low-cost carrier's plans to launch flight services to Lakshadweep come amid strained relations between India and the Maldives, worsened by travel platform EaseMyTrip's suspension of flight bookings to the island nation.

EaseMyTrip had suspended the flight bookings on Monday after social media posts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent

Lakshadweep visit drew harsh remarks from three Maldivian deputy ministers who have since been suspended.

Another travel booking website, Cleartrip, witnessed a two-fold increase in cancellation of flight bookings to the Maldives.

That said, Rajiv Mehra, president, Indian Association of Tour Operators, has called for the introduction of additional flights and development of infrastructure suitable for tourism in Lakshadweep.

"For Lakshadweep, there is a police clearance certificate that is required for Indians. This rule should be amended, and more flights should be introduced. This can be done immediately and the rest of the infrastructure should be upgraded over time," he said.

Meanwhile, 2023 saw the commencement of 60 new RCS routes, whereas 154 new RCS routes were awarded under the Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik (UDAN) scheme. RCS-UDAN was launched in 2016 to enable air operations on unserved or underserved routes connecting different regions.

Anti-India agenda used in Maldives polls: EU report

The ruling coalition of Progressive Party of Maldives and the People's National Congress deployed anti-India sentiments and attempted to spread disinformation around this theme during the 2023 presidential elections, according to a report issued by the European Union. The European Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) to the Maldives published its final report on Tuesday on the two rounds of election that took place on September 9 and 30. The EU EOM found the campaign run by the coalition was based on fears of Indian influences on the nation.

Maldives, China sign 21 pacts after Muizzu-Xi meeting

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday held talks with his Maldivian counterpart Mohamed Muizzu after which the two countries signed 20 key agreements and elevated their bilateral ties to a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership. The two heads of state announced the elevation of bilateral ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Muizzu and his wife Sajida Mohammad were given a ceremonial welcome at the Great Hall of People by Xi and his wife Peng Liyuan at the Great Hall of People.

Barbie, Oppenheimer score SAG award nominations

REUTERS
Los Angeles, 10 January

Barbie and Oppenheimer landed nominations on Wednesday for the Screen Actors Guild awards, setting up a new battle between the box office blockbusters ahead of the Academy Awards.

The two films that squared off in a showdown dubbed "Barbenheimer" last

summer will vie for the best movie cast award alongside The Color Purple, Killers of the Flower Moon and American Fiction.

Barbie star Margot Robbie was nominated for best movie actress and will compete with Poor Things star Emma Stone and Lily Gladstone of Killers of the Flower Moon, among others.

Cillian Murphy, who played atomic bomb scientist J Robert Oppenheimer,

was nominated for best actor.

The SAG awards are closely watched because actors form the largest group of voters for the Oscars, the film industry's top prizes that will be bestowed in March.

Winners of the SAG awards will be handed out at a red-carpet ceremony held in Los Angeles on February 24 and streamed live on Netflix.

पंजाब नैशनल बैंक **punjab national bank**
...भरते का प्रतीक! ...the name you can BANK upon!

Information Technology Division, HO, 5, Sansad Marg, New Delhi - 110 001
(Email ID: eprocurement@pnb.co.in, Phone: 011-23724596)

TENDER NOTICE

Punjab National Bank invites online bids (both technical and commercial) through GeM Portal (Government e Marketplace) from eligible bidders for procurement of Centralised Proxy Solution.

Interested bidders may visit website <https://gem.gov.in> and Bank's websites <https://tender.pnbnet.in> or <https://www.pnbIndia.in> for details.

Last date for Online Bid submission is 31-01-2024 till 16:00 hrs.

THE INSTITUTE OF CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS OF INDIA
(Set up by an Act of Parliament)
"ICAI Bhawan", Indraprastha Marg, New Delhi-110 002

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

ICAI invites proposal from eligible and experienced service providers for **QUESTION BANK SYSTEM AND COMPUTER BASED TEST AT CENTRES FOR SELF PACED LEARNING**. Details are available at the ICAI website at the link www.icai.org/tender.

Last date for submission of bids is **January 29, 2024**.

Secretary, ICAI

#BSMorningShow

In focus

How can Indian airlines balance pilot fatigue and profits?

Today's Special

Are India's auto dealers facing a problem of plenty?

Market Insight

Is it time to book profit in real estate stocks?

TEAM MARKSMEN

FORGING SUCCESS
ELEVATING INDUSTRY EMPOWERING PEOPLE

Celebrating & Honouring **Best Workplaces in the Manufacturing Sector**

This exclusive industry-centric platform, conceptualised and executed by Team Marksmen, highlighted companies that have been role models when it comes to growth, innovation, and resolving challenges that the sector faces

THE BRANDS RECOGNISED FOR CRAFTING AN ELEVATED WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE INCLUDED

ajanta pharma limited	AJAX	Amway	ASTRAL	ATHER	CEL CENTURY EXTRUSIONS LIMITED
Crompton	HIKAL	LUMINOUS	Meril	MD100	
neo metaliks ltd.	NRB BEARINGS	NUVOCO	axplora	runaya	
SCHAEFFLER	Spartan	TATA BLUESCOPE STEEL	QUELEX	VIRAJ	SIGMA

Presented by **MARKSMEN DAILY** | Televised on **INDIA TODAY TELEVISION** | Magazine partner **in Focus** | Media partners **Business Standard Insight Out** | Research partner **LeadCop Ventures** | Brought to you by **TEAM MARKSMEN**

BEST BUSINESS PROGRAMME (GOLD)
at afaqs! 'The Future of News' Awards

Business Standard MORNING SHOW

Get the answers in today's episode

Visit mybs.in/MorningShow or scan this code to watch.

Mon - Fri | 8am

businessstandard | bsindia | business.standard | business-standard.com

UPCOMING EVENTS

TRANSFORMATION LEADERS 22nd March 2024 Mumbai	MOST TRUSTED BRANDS 22nd March 2024 Mumbai	NICE 05th April 2024 Bengaluru	ACCELERATE 25th April 2024 Mumbai
--	---	---	--

ENQUIRE NOW | contact@teammarksmen.com | +91 99607 30059 | www.teammarksmen.com