

Indian Travelers Take to the Skies

How to be ready for an emerging airport shopper base.

The global travel retail industry is in a period of transition, with consumer behavior rapidly changing, the structural environment shifting, and passenger spend under pressure due to lower conversion. As the entire industry grapples with the upheaval, new and emerging passenger groups

are coming into focus, with India increasingly taking the spotlight as an extremely promising consumer base.

India is the world's most populous country and has the fifth largest economy, which grows rapidly

every year. This growth is only expected to accelerate as free trade agreements with the United Kingdom, the European Union, and other major economies come into force, facilitating transportation and connectivity with the rest of the world. This rising wealth and prominence in the global economy is accompanied by a boom in air travel: India is now the world's third-largest air transport market, behind only the United States and China. In 2025, over 174 million passengers traveled to, from, and within India. Following the disruption caused by the pandemic crisis, India's aviation market has proven remarkably resilient, with international travel exceeding 2019 levels by nearly 20 percent at the end of 2024.

This robust growth in passenger numbers is accompanied by a similarly strong expansion in travel retail sales in India, which grew 21 percent from 2023 to 2024. In response to the soaring demand, India has made significant investments in its aviation infrastructure and network. The

Indian government's UDAN regional airport development and airport privatization programs aim to bring air travel to new markets. Airline seat capacity has risen by nearly 78 percent over the past decade, and the number of airports in the country has more than doubled in the same period. One of these new greenfield airports is Noida International Airport, the forthcoming second airport serving the Delhi National Capital Region. Heinemann will commence retail operations there in 2026, serving international and domestic passengers.

"We see a real opportunity at Noida International Airport to develop the customer base with the airport from a blank slate," says Johannes Sammann, Heinemann Asia Pacific CEO. "We have a great partner in the Bommidala Group in India. Together, as more Indians travel overseas more frequently, we can raise the bar for their passenger experience expectations in their home airports."



Heinemann Asia Pacific CEO Johannes Sammann speaks at the 2025 APTRA India Conference in Mumbai, India



Holi-themed activation to commemorate the Indian Festival of Colors at Frankfurt Airport

The impact of Indian passengers is being felt beyond their home market. Between 2019 to 2024, Indian international visitor spend surged by 53 percent, reflecting not just growing traveler numbers, but also growing disposable incomes. Indian shoppers are therefore becoming increasingly important customers at Heinemann stores around the world. Sales from customers traveling to India from Heinemann locations increased by 56 percent between 2022 and 2024. As a result, Heinemann is increasingly adapting its outreach to Indian traveler preferences. At Frankfurt Airport, Indian spend per passenger is nearly double the average spend per passenger of all nationalities, and the average transaction value (ATV) for India-bound passengers is 22 percent higher than the average.

“For the next year, our project is to take a deeper look at the figures,” says Georg Fuhrmann, Managing Director at Frankfurt Airport Retail (FAR), the joint venture of Gebr. Heinemann and Frank-

furt Airport. “What are the focus articles? What are the flight times so that we can really present the right products to the right passenger groups? For example, Americans and Indians are two of our biggest spenders, so how do we make sure we have the right assortment on the shelves when the flights to the United States are departing and then again when the flights to India are taking off.”

In response to rising Indian traveler spend, Frankfurt Airport and FAR had already started making efforts to be more culturally relevant to Indian passengers in 2025. They launched a Holi-themed marketing activation to commemorate the Indian festival of colors and one of the most important festive travel occasions in India. For Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights and another major travel and shopping occasion, FAR also partnered with airlines to offer festive vouchers to passengers bound for India at the check-in counter. Frankfurt Airport and FAR are also investing in improving the customer experience for the Indian traveler. In

Sören Borch, Director Marketing

“Our Category Experience teams are constantly gaining more insights, and we are adapting the assortment accordingly. Fragrances, confectionery, spirits, and regional products are particularly popular among Indian travelers.”

2025, Frankfurt Airport expanded its personal shopper service for Indian passengers, adding team members equipped with the language skills and cultural knowledge to support travelers. These personal shoppers not only create a more comfortable shopping experience for travelers, but they also provide important customer insights to the FAR team, who can use their feedback to optimize assortments and communications. FAR team members have also participated in intercultural training to better understand what motivates and appeals to Indian travelers. Creating spaces with impact and offering the best assortment in line with the passenger profile is key. “Our Category Experience teams are constantly gaining more insights, and we are adapting the assortment accordingly. Fragrances, confectionery, spirits, and regional products are particularly popular among Indian travelers,” says Sören Borch, Director Marketing at Gebr. Heinemann.

Brands are increasingly taking note of this rising passenger and consumer base, as evidenced by the surge in travel retail exclusives and targeted marketing for Indian passengers. For instance, Dewar’s launched its limited-edition Diwali range in 2025, offering it not just in Indian airports, but also in major hubs across Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, including Frankfurt and Munich airports.

