

HOTELS & RESTAURANTS INDIA fhrai magazine

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A MONTHLY ON HOSPITALITY TRADE

By DDP Publications

BIG BUDGET EXPECTATIONS 2025

HOSPITALITY HIGHWIRE
VIKRAM COTAH



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President's Note



Dear Members and Stakeholders,

As we step into 2025, the hospitality industry finds itself at a critical juncture of transformation and opportunity. The year gone by has taught us invaluable lessons, and as we usher in a new year, we are filled with optimism and determination. With resilience in our DNA, we are ready to embrace the new challenges and avenues for growth that 2025 promises.

The hospitality sector in India, as we all know, is on the cusp of a new era. Following the disruptions of the pandemic, the road to recovery has been swift, and our industry has proven its agility. In 2024, we saw an uptick in domestic travel, a surge in the number of international tourists, and a growing demand for new experiences, driving the sector to new heights. The role of technology, sustainability, and personalised services has never been more pronounced, and these trends are poised to define the year ahead.

Looking at the growth prospects for 2025, we are witnessing key trends that will continue to shape the hospitality landscape in our country. The demand for experiential travel remains strong, with tourists seeking more than just accommodation—they want meaningful, immersive experiences. Whether it is wellness retreats, adventure tourism, or culinary tourism, providing unique, memorable experiences will be a defining factor for hotels and resorts.

Another prominent trend is the growing importance of sustainability. Guests today are more conscientious about the environmental footprint of their travels, and as an industry, we must rise to the challenge. From adopting green building standards to reducing food waste and integrating renewable energy solutions, sustainability is no longer just a buzzword but a critical driver of business.

While the future is promising, we need to be mindful of the challenges that remain, and this is where government support becomes crucial. The hospitality industry has long called for policy reforms to create a more conducive environment for growth. We urge the government to simplify the tax structure and provide tax incentives for sustainable practices, which will encourage more businesses to invest in green technologies. Additionally, reducing

the regulatory burden and implementing streamlined licensing processes will go a long way in attracting both domestic and international investors.

In addition, the continued focus on tourism infrastructure development is vital. Upgrading transportation systems, improving regional connectivity, and creating world-class tourism hubs will ensure that India becomes even more attractive to global travelers. We also expect greater emphasis on public-private partnerships to boost innovation and investment in tourism and hospitality.

“

Looking at the growth prospects for 2025, we are witnessing key trends that will continue to shape the hospitality landscape in our country.”

For FHRAI, 2025 marks a year of strengthening our commitment to the growth of the hospitality and tourism sector. Our focus will be on fostering collaboration between all stakeholders, advocating for policies that benefit the industry and ensuring that the demands of our members are at the forefront of all discussions. We will continue to work tirelessly to create an environment that supports the growth of Indian hospitality on the global stage.

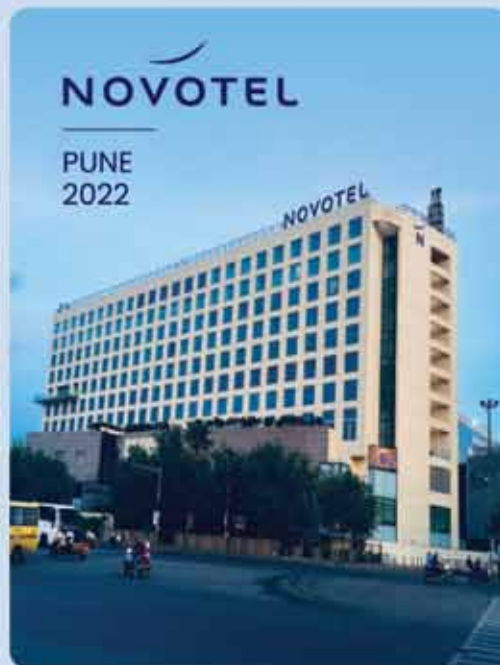
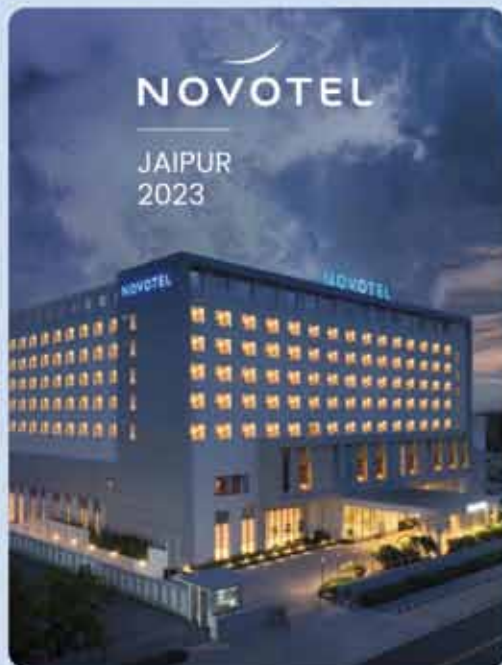
As we look to the future, our vision remains clear: to build a more inclusive, sustainable, and tech-driven hospitality ecosystem that not only meets but exceeds the expectations of today's discerning travellers. Together, let's make 2025 a year of progress, growth, and unparalleled success.

Wishing all members of the FHRAI family a prosperous and fulfilling New Year!

Warm regards,
K Syama Raju
President, FHRAI

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Passion and purpose Reimagine hospitality

From plastic-free environment to smoke-free sanctuary, Vikram Cotah urges young hoteliers to lead way for sustainability and drive meaningful change.

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Fostering future-ready education

FHRAI recommends actionable measures to government, from resolving gaps in educational policies to hospitality expectations.



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Expectations from Union Budget 2025

Ahead of Budget 2025, the hospitality industry advocates for infra classification and new GST rates for India's economic growth.



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Top trends shaping hospitality in 2025

Nikhil Sharma stresses travellers prioritise meaningful experiences with emphasis on wellness and sustainable values.



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Using immersive experiences in hotel design

The growing demand for holistic experiences prompts hotels to rethink their design strategies for next-gen travellers.

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FHRAI urges to revise star classification guidelines

From streamlining classification process to establishing uniform guidelines, FHRAI recommends revamping existing star classification procedures of MoT.



digitise the process through a single-step online document submission and review mechanism. It can significantly reduce processing time from 60-90 days to less than 30 days. Automate and expedite the inspection scheduling process and pre-set inspection slots should be available for hotels to select, ensuring timely inspections. Enable a single-window query resolution, where all queries from MOT/DOT can be consolidated and addressed at one time instead of raising queries at multiple stages.

Simplification of NIDHI

The requirement to capture 40 elements in rooms and 20 in bathrooms is excessive. The focus should be on key compliance metrics, reducing the workload on inspection teams and hotels. The need to redesign the app interface is important to differentiate between mandatory and desirable elements for 5-star deluxe, 1-star, and 2-star hotels.

Reinstatement of HRACC guidelines

Reintroduce HRACC guidelines and objective scoring. The previous checklist system was more objective, transparent, and fair. The new textual grading system should be revised to ensure conformity with HRACC guidelines. Replace vague textual descriptors with quantifiable metrics. Hotels should not be able to compensate for poor scores in one area (e.g., kitchen) with high scores in another (e.g., rooms). Each segment must meet a minimum threshold.

Corrections and clarifications

Several parameters listed as “optional” in the NIDHI+ app are mandatory as per

Implement a single-step online document submission to cut processing time from 60-90 days to less than 30 days



In a significant move to achieve greater quality and accountability of the hospitality industry, FHRAI has proposed to revise the star classification guidelines of the Ministry of Tourism (MoT), Government of India.

Following are the suggestions put forth by FHRAI:

Streamlining the classification process

To reduce paperwork and repeated review,



**K SYAMA RAJU**President
FHRAI

HRACC guidelines. This misalignment must be corrected to avoid confusion for hotels and inspection teams. Hotels built before 2012 are exempt from STP (Sewage Treatment Plant) requirements. The app should have an option for such exemptions, reducing unnecessary compliance pressure.

Eliminate disincentives for classification

The hotel's classification status should not be linked to penalties, increased licensing fees, or taxes. It should be used as a quality assurance tool rather than a revenue-generation mechanism for the government. In states like Kerala, star classification is

comes. This would improve accountability and reduce arbitrary decision-making.

Decouple star classification

Central and state governments must recognise that star classification is a quality benchmark and not a revenue tool. It should not be linked to eligibility for incentives, subsidies, or taxes. To protect the integrity of the classification process, bar licenses should not be contingent on star classification. This will ensure that hotels pursue classification for quality and not for commercial advantage.

Encourage voluntary participation

Encourage hotels to apply for classification by offering benefits like marketing support, access to tourism promotion programmes, and fee waivers for the first classification. This approach will increase voluntary participation. A dedicated online platform needs to be created for all classified hotels

“Central and state governments must recognise that star classification is a quality benchmark and not a revenue tool.”

mandatory for bar licenses. This condition should be removed as it devalues the process. Bar licenses should be governed under a separate regulatory framework. Also, state-level disincentives should be removed. States like Maharashtra impose higher property taxes, water charges, and utility rates on classified hotels, discouraging hotels from seeking classification.

Greater transparency and accountability

Create a real-time tracking system for classification applications. This would increase transparency and accountability, allowing hotels to see the exact status of their application. Introduce a formal appeal process where hotels can contest classification out-



to be listed, giving them visibility and marketing advantages, thus incentivising other hotels to seek classification.

Foster consistency across states

Remove inconsistencies in state-level rules and classifications, ensuring uniformity in processes and parameters across the country. Set up a central grievance redressal system where hotels can raise issues about discrepancies or unfair treatment.

Besides, FHRAI put forth additional suggestions for improving the Star Classification Scheme of MoT.

Universal design for accessible rooms

The handicapped-challenged room should be a universal accommodation. Hotel rooms should not be empty, so if there is no handicapped individual, it should suffice to a normal person.

Making pool handrails optional

Swimming pool handrails should be optional based on the pool design and ease of getting in and out of the pool wherein latest pool designs consider this aspect.

Reclassification for up to 3-star hotels

Site inspection should not be made mandatory for reclassification of up to 3-star hotels. It should be allowed to do it online or by paperwork.


Removing land use permission

The permission for land use in India should be removed, as it involves complex process. In many states, land use permission is not required nowadays.

Easing wellness centre classification

For India to attract the global wellness travellers and grow domestic tourism too, classifications should be allowed for properties who name themselves as Wellness Centre, Wellness Clinic, etc. Having the word “resort” or “hotel” should be relaxed for such centres. It should not be mandatory.

Revising mini bar/fridge requirements

All 3-star hotels shall have the facility of a mini fridge, and all 4-star, 5-star, and 5-star deluxe hotels shall have the facility of mini bar. Minibar should be optional or on request due to minimal usage. 

To reduce processing time, digitise the process through a single-step online document submission and review mechanism



FHRAI seeks clarification on GST for F&B

FHRAI seeks prompt action to address the ambiguities related to GST on F&B services for restaurants operating on hotel property.



 DDP Bureau

Tn a letter addressed to **Vipul Bansal**, IAS, Commissioner of Commercial Taxes, Government of Karnataka, FHRAI has sought support in providing clarifications regarding linking GST on food services in restaurants to room rates charged for accommodation.

In the letter, FHRAI stated, "A lot of confusion is prevailing in the sector due to the ambiguities in the



GST Act concerning the charging of GST in the restaurants operating in the hotel premises.”

What are the challenges?

The current practice of linking taxation of food services in restaurants to the room rates charged for accommodation is erroneous, posing several difficulties. This paves way to several operational challenges to the industry. However, neither the act nor the authorities provide any satisfactory solutions or answers to the numerous day-to-day problems of the industry in their GST compliance. To make matters worse, the industry receives hefty notices from the department despite not being at fault.

Urgent intervention and support

To address the challenges, FHRAI requested urgent support and intervention to provide clarification on critical issues related to GST compliance in the hospitality sector.

The concerns highlighted by FHRAI are as follows:

- What is the period for charging



The current practice of charging GST in the restaurants operating in the hotel creates operational challenges to the industry

GST at 18 per cent for a restaurant in case of a shift in the room tariff of the hotel where the restaurant operates, from below ₹7500 to above ₹7500?

- Some budget hotels in temple towns and pilgrimage centres offer family rooms that can accommodate 7-8 people, but the room tariff of that particular room might be above ₹7500. Will that hotel come under the luxury category and common guests staying in that hotel and eating in the restaurant need to pay GST at 18 per cent for their food and beverage (F&B)?
- With the onset of a season or a particular event, room tariffs of budget hotels may also go up in some locations for a particular period. Are these hotels required to follow two types of GST compliances for the same month?

**K SYAMA RAJU**President
FHRAI

The industry calls for swift actions concerning GST charging in restaurants operating in hotels

- If on any given day, the room tariff of a budget hotel crosses the threshold of ₹7500, their F&B rates will also shift to 18 per cent from 5 per cent. In that case, do the guests who are on a continuous stay with the hotel need to pay two different types of taxes between two consecutive days?
- How can a hotel charge F&B at 18

per cent for the bookings taken through the online travel agents (OTAs)? In such cases, the higher amount charged above ₹7500 includes the commission of OTAs up to 30 per cent and the hotels end up getting way below ₹7500. However, the hotels are forced to charge GST at 18 per cent in their restaurants and face loss of

business, due to this anomaly in the law.

Therefore, FHRAI requested for immediate action to get a clarification issued by the GST Council effective from the retrospective date.

Swift measures will help tackle the issue of charging GST for F&B restaurants operating in the premises of hotels. ❏



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Passion, persistence, and purpose

Reimagine hospitality

From plastic-free environment to smoke-free sanctuary,
Vikram Cota urges young hoteliers to lead way for sustainability
and drive meaningful change.



The world of hospitality is changing. What once revolved around luxury and indulgence now has a new heartbeat: purpose. Today, young hoteliers and entrepreneurs have an opportunity like never before—to not just build businesses but redefine the industry itself. At GRT Hotels and Resorts, our journey toward sustainability and wellness has been one of passion, persistence, and purpose. From becoming entirely single-use plastic-free to transforming every property into a smoke-free sanctuary with pristine air quality, we have proven that meaningful change is possible. It starts with one bold decision at a time.

But this is not just our story. It is a call to action for the next generation of hoteliers to rise up, reimagine what is possible, and create spaces that not only serve guests but inspire them.

Plastic-free revolution: First step toward impact

If you think becoming plastic-free is too big



VIKRAM COTA

CEO

GRT Hotels and Resorts

a leap, let me tell you—it starts with small, deliberate steps. We made a commitment to eliminate single-use plastics, knowing it would not be easy. It required rethinking operations and guest experiences, and collaborating with our team and suppliers.



“The future is not about choosing between luxury and responsibility but combining them to create a new kind of hospitality.”

How we did it

Glass over plastic: Replaced plastic water bottles with glass across all properties, coupled with in-house water filtration systems and bottling plants

Reusable amenities: Swapped single-use toiletries for refillable dispensers with chemical free products, helping significantly to reduce waste

Vendor partnerships: Worked with local suppliers to source biodegradable packaging and eco-friendly products

Action plans

- Start with one area—replace plastic water bottles or toiletries first
- Find eco-friendly alternatives through partnerships with local vendors
- Communicate your commitment to guests—people love supporting a brand with purpose

Creating smoke-free sanctuaries: Wellness at the core

When we declared all our properties smoke-free zones, it was not just about keeping the air clean. It was about signalling our unwavering commitment to guest and team wellness.

How we achieved it

We equipped our properties with air monitoring systems to ensure optimal air quality and completely eliminated smoking areas. Today, our guests breathe cleaner and fresher air and it is a benefit they notice and appreciate. Smoke-free properties also reflect a broader philosophy—wellness is not a feature; it is a foundation.



A changemaker to the core

Vikram Cotah is the CEO of GRT Hotels and Resorts and the author of ‘The Great Butterfly Effect: The Sustainability Story of GRT Hotels.’ Under his leadership, GRT Hotels has become a pioneer in sustainable hospitality, inspiring the next generation to lead with purpose.



Implementation strategies

- Begin with smoke-free zones in common areas before expanding to your entire property
- Enhance indoor air quality with purifiers, ventilation systems, or even air-purifying plants

Young hoteliers can lead with agility and passion, turning every property into a beacon of purpose

- Promote wellness through small additions like healthier dining options or in-room yoga mats

Butterfly effect: Power of small changes

Every big transformation starts small. It is a message I have poured into my book, *The Great Butterfly Effect: Sustainability Story of GRT Hotels*. Our story is proof that even the smallest, intentional actions can ripple outward to create monumental change.

By eliminating single-use plastics, creating smoke-free sanctuaries, and implementing wellness-centric programme, GRT Hotels has become a role model in sustainable hospitality, inspiring others to follow suit. But the message is simple—you can do this too.

Future belongs to young hoteliers

The hospitality industry is ripe for disruption, and it is the next generation that will lead the charge.

Here is why you are perfectly positioned to make a difference:

Guests want purpose: Travellers today are actively seeking out brands that align with their values. Sustainability and wellness are no longer trends; they are expectations.

You can start fresh: Unlike legacy brands tied to outdated processes and practices, young hoteliers have the agility to implement sustainable practices from day one.

Technology is your ally: From energy-efficient systems to digital guest engagement tools, tech makes sustainability easier.

The future is not about choosing between luxury and responsibility but



Redefining hospitality

At GRT Hotels, we believe sustainability and wellness are not just strategies, but they are responsibilities. They are also opportunities to connect with guests in deeper, more meaningful ways.

For young hoteliers, this is the right moment. They have the creativity, agility, and passion to lead the hospitality industry into a new era—where every property is not just a destination but a beacon of purpose and possibility.

The opportunity to inspire change is in their hands. Start small, think big, and even the smallest act can spark and shape revolution.

Final word of encouragement

In the book, *The Great Butterfly Effect*, I write about the power of incremental change—the idea that one action, no matter how small, can create waves of transformation. That is exactly what sustainability in hospitality is about.

One decision leads to another, and soon, you will find yourself not just running a hotel but redefining what hospitality means. Young leaders, the future of hospitality is yours to shape. Let's make it a future worth celebrating. ▣

combining them to create a new kind of hospitality.

Action plans: Where to begin

If you are inspired but unsure where to start, here is a roadmap to kickstart your journey:

Define your why: Decide what matters most to you—whether it is reducing waste, promoting wellness, or supporting local communities. This clarity will guide your decisions.

Start small: Choose one area to focus on. Replace plastic straws, set up recycling bins, or introduce plant-based menu options. These changes are simple but impactful.

Leverage local resources: Partner with local suppliers, artisans, and farmers to reduce your carbon footprint while showcasing your region's uniqueness.

Invest in wellness: Add wellness-focused amenities like herbal teas, meditation spaces, or spa services. These small additions elevate the guest experience.

Tell your story: Share your sustainability journey with guests and staff. Transparency builds trust and inspires others.



Steering towards future-ready education and workforce



FHRAI puts forth actionable recommendations to government, underscoring the gap in educational policies and evolving hospitality expectations.



DDP Bureau

FHRAI has written to **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, Union Minister for Culture and Tourism, highlighting actionable recommendations from the HR Summit organised by the FHRAI's Centre of Excellence. The summit brought to the fore the need for a strong policy framework to address policy gaps in education, training, and workforce management within the hospitality sector.

The letter stated that such measures will not only address the existing gaps but also foster innovation, competitiveness, and inclusivity in the hospitality sector, aligning with India's economic and tourism growth goals. It further added that the federation would be privileged to support the Ministry in advancing these initiatives through further discussions or collaborative efforts.

A strong policy framework will not only address existing gaps but also foster innovation and inclusivity in hospitality



GYAN BHUSHAN

IES, CEO, NCHMCT, and
Senior EA, MoT, Govt. of India

Meanwhile, FHRAI has also written to **Gyan Bhushan**, IES, CEO, NCHMCT, and Senior Economic Advisor, Ministry of Tourism, Gov-

ernment of India, addressing key recommendations from the recent HR Summit.

In the letter, the federation put forward key suggestions that underscored the need to align educational policies and training frameworks with the evolving demands of the hospitality industry, and implementation of better human resource policies to ensure its sustained growth and competitiveness.

Besides, the federation urged NCHMCT to incorporate the suggestions into its policies and guidelines to ensure that hospitality education and practical trainings and activities are well-aligned and future-ready. ❑



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IAAPI Amusement Expo 2025 set for 19-21 February

Shrikant Goenka sheds light on how amusement parks, along with resorts and F&B, can influence tourist experience and promote tourism destinations.

What was the thought process behind the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between IAAPI and FHRAI?

Amusement parks, hotels, resorts, retail outlets, and F&B establishments are integral components of the tourism industry. Recognising the importance of cross-industry networks for tourism growth, we initiated an MoU with FHRAI to foster collaborative growth and highlight industry partnerships. The MoU aims to promote meaningful interactions and business opportunities among association members, focusing on collective growth and mutual benefits through cross-sector collaboration.

What are the key highlights of this year's IAAPI Amusement Expo?

The 23rd edition of the Amusement Expo is scheduled to take place from 19-21 February 2025, in Mumbai. The exhibition will feature over 170 exhibitors from India and 28 other countries, showcasing cutting-edge



SHRIKANT GOENKA

Chairman, Indian Association of Amusement Parks and Industries (IAAPI)

rides, games, and immersive experiences. As the only event of its kind in India, the expo has already generated significant excitement within the industry, with a strong visitor response driven by our digital campaign.

How do amusement parks and theme parks help create tourism destinations?

India is home to over 300 amusement parks, and the sector's growth

is poised to expand beyond city limits. Depending on location and available resources, options such as amusement parks, water parks, theme parks, mythological parks, adventure parks, and indoor amusement centres can be explored. Medium-sized parks typically require an investment of ₹20 to ₹50 crores, while small parks can operate with a capital expenditure of ₹6 to ₹15 crores.

Integrating amusement parks, theme parks, water parks, adventure parks, and indoor amusement centres (IACs) with resorts creates ideal holiday and weekend destinations. These destinations appeal to families and groups by offering packages that combine stay options, park entry, and dining, ensuring repeat visitors.

What is the growth outlook for India's amusement park sector over the next 5 to 10 years?

The Indian amusement park and indoor amusement centre industry was valued at approximately ₹11,500

India's amusement park industry is projected to grow to ₹22,000 crores by 2030

crores (US\$1,386 million) in 2023 and is projected to grow to around ₹22,000 crores (US\$2,651 million) by 2030. Over the past decade, more than 40 new parks have been established in cities beyond the metros, with investments ranging from ₹5 to ₹30 crores. □





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Fostering best practices for food safety

FSSAI's training programme hosted by HRAWI, aimed to equip professionals with food safety practices in their daily operations.



DDP Bureau

The Hotel and Restaurant Association of Western India (HRAWI) organised FSSAI's Food Safety Supervisor Training in Advance Catering (FoSTaC) and

Management Training Programme in Mumbai. The training session, attended by 35 hospitality professionals, focused on food handling, hygiene, sanitation, and waste management. Participants gained hands-on knowledge to implement food

35 hospitality professionals attended the training session, focussing on food handling, hygiene, and sanitation

safety practices in their operations, supporting industry standards.

The event was inaugurated by Prof Praveen Andrews, Trainer, along with Chef Vividh Madhusudan Patil and Priyadarshani Swapnil Mule from Sofitel Mumbai BKC.



Ambica Empire wins two awards

The Ambica Empire Hotel bags two awards at the Tamil Nadu Leadership Awards, recognising their significant contributions to hospitality.



DDP Bureau

The Tamil Nadu Leadership Awards was recently held at Taj Club House, Chennai. Supported by CMO Asia, the World Federation of Hospitality Professionals & Stars of the Industry group, the event saw many celebrated hospitality personalities and dignitaries present at the award ceremony.

At the event, the Ambica Empire Hotel was honoured with the prestigious "Luxury Business Hotel of The Year 2024," presented by Dr Sanjeev Seth, Managing Director, IL&FS Tamil Nadu Power Company

and Raji Thomas, Chief Corporate Relations and Outreach Officer, Indira Group of Institutes, Pune. This recognition reflects its unwavering commitment to excellence.

Besides, R Kalathinathan, General Manager, Hotel Ambica Empire, re-

The award recognises Ambica Empire Hotel's unwavering commitment to excellence



ceived the "Tamil Nadu's Best General Managers Award" in the hospitality industry for the year 2024.



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Expectations from Union Budget 2025

Ahead of Budget 2025, hospitality industry is strongly pressing for infra classification, new GST rates, and input tax credits for India's economic growth.

Prioritise streamlined tax structure: HRANI

“

Measures like tax reliefs, subsidies, and incentives for skill development could encourage investment and employment generation.”



SURENDRA KUMAR JAISWAL

President
HRANI

As the Union Budget 2025 approaches, the hospitality and tourism industry is filled with optimism and anticipation. This sector, which significantly contributes to India's GDP and employment, plays a crucial role in highlighting the country's cultural and economic vibrancy. With the growing prominence of spiritual and religious tourism, especially through grand events like Maha Kumbh 2025, the upcoming budget holds significant promise for our industry.

One area of focus is the rationalisation of GST rates for the hospitality sector. A fair and streamlined tax structure can further strengthen India's position as a global tourism destination. For instance, lower GST slabs on hotel tariffs,

along with the delinking of food services from room tariffs, could provide greater flexibility and affordability to travellers. The industry also hopes for sustained reforms aimed at simplifying business operations. A straightforward, technology-driven framework for these processes could foster confidence, especially small and medium enterprises that form the backbone of this sector.

Introduction of a single-window clearance system is crucial for hotel and tourism projects. Simplifying the approval process can help avoid delays and attract investments. This could also aid in the development of underexplored regions, especially spiritual and experiential tourism. The industry has also been advocating for infrastructure status, which would enable easier access to institutional credit and favourable financing terms. Such recognition would help align India's hospitality standards with global benchmarks. Furthermore, we look forward to central infrastructure status and state-level recognition of industry status, accompanied by tangible benefits. Measures like tax reliefs, subsidies, and incentives for skill development could go a long way in encouraging investment and employment generation across the country. □

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Infra development for tourism is key: SIHRA

“

A visionary and supportive Union Budget can help us overcome challenges and position India as a global leader in tourism.”



K SYAMA RAJU

President
SIHRA

The South India Hotels and Restaurants Association (SIHRA) eagerly anticipates the forthcoming Union Budget of India, which has immense potential to influence the hospitality and tourism sectors, a cornerstone of India's economic growth and cultural identity.

The hospitality industry has always been a significant contributor to India's GDP, employment, and foreign exchange earnings. As we continue to recover from the challenges posed by the pandemic, this year's Union Budget presents a crucial opportunity for the government to reaffirm its commitment to the tourism and hospitality sectors, which play a vital role in the nation's journey towards a US\$5 trillion economy.

The SIHRA calls upon the government to consider the following key measures to propel the industry forward:

- **Infrastructure development for tourism:** Enhanced budgetary allocations should be made for the development of tourism infrastructure, particularly in South India, where the natural and cultural diversity offers immense potential for tourism growth.
- **Rationalisation of GST:** Reducing the GST rates is crucial for the hospitality sector, which will provide the much-needed impetus to attract more domestic and global tourists.
- **Incentives for sustainability initiatives:** Funding for green initiatives in hotels and

restaurants will promote sustainable practices, aligning with India's commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2070.

- **Support for MSMEs in hospitality:** Targeted support for small and medium enterprises in the hospitality sector, including access to credit and subsidies, will help empower local businesses and create employment opportunities.
- **Tourism marketing and promotion:** Increased funding for international and domestic marketing campaigns to position India as a premier travel destination, emphasising the rich heritage, cuisine, and experiences South India offers. The hospitality industry is not just a business but a bridge connecting people, cultures, and economies. A visionary and supportive Union Budget can help us overcome challenges and position India as a global leader in tourism.

We urge the government to consider the needs of this vital sector, which holds the key to economic revival, job creation, and sustainable development. SIHRA remains committed to working closely with policymakers, industry stakeholders, and allied sectors to ensure the hospitality industry thrives and contributes significantly to the nation's progress. ■





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Extend infra status to ₹10 crore plus projects: HRAWI

“

Delinking restaurant GST from room tariffs and allowing ITC for banquets and restaurants will promote fair competition.”



PRADEEP SHETTY

VP, FHRAI and
Spokesperson, HRAWI

As we step into a new fiscal year, the hospitality industry awaits the Union Budget 2025-26 with high hopes and pressing demands. A top priority is the long-awaited infrastructure status for the hospitality sector. Current criteria for infrastructure classification limit projects below ₹200 crore or apply to hotels rated three-star or above in cities with populations over a million. This excludes most hotels in the country, whose project costs typically range from ₹10 to ₹50 crore. Expanding the scope to include all hotels built at a project cost of ₹10 crore and above, regardless of star rating or city population, will ease access to low-cost financing, promoting growth in heritage, eco-tourism, and tier II and III cities.

The industry also urges streamlining licensing and approval systems through a single-window clearance system at both central and state levels. Simplifying these processes will attract investors and eliminate delays that deter potential projects.

GST rationalisation too remains a critical ask. Delinking restaurant GST from room tariffs and allowing Input Tax Credit (ITC) for banquets and restaurants will promote fair competition and simplify compliance. The system of GST shifting to different slabs in the same hotel on different dates i.e. either under or over ₹7500/room rate creates compliance issues. Also, the GST rates for restaurants and banquets within hotels should be simplified by delinking them from hotel room tariffs. Restaurants availing ITC could be taxed at 12 per cent, while those not claiming ITC may continue at 5 per cent, ensuring fairness and simplifying compliance.

Additionally, under the current GST regime, the pace of supply provisions plays a crucial role in determining whether a transaction will be taxed as intra-state or inter-state, which in turn dictates whether CGST/SGST or IGST will be levied. This distinction directly impacts the availability of ITC for business clients in the hospitality sector.



Lastly, the industry strongly emphasises the need for rationalisation of excise rules and liquor licensing processes. Simplifying these systems is vital to reduce operational challenges and enhance India's appeal as a global leisure destination. By addressing these concerns, the government can position India as a leading tourism hub, boosting economic growth, employment, and global competitiveness. ▣

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Grant GST relief and industry status: **HRAEI**



SUDESH PODDAR
President
HRAEI

“Investment in infrastructure, especially in remote tourist destinations, can significantly expand India’s tourism economy.”

The foremost expectation from the Union Budget 2025 is substantial relief on GST for foreign guests to make India a global tourism hub. The hospitality industry should be supported by allowing Indian hotels to charge zero GST or receive a GST refund for foreign guests, similar to benefits given to Indian software companies on exported services. This will not

only enhance competitiveness but also foster more inbound tourism.

The abolition of the 18 per cent GST category for hotels with room rates exceeding ₹7,500, merging it with the 12 per cent GST category, would stimulate both domestic and inbound tourism. This move can make India’s hospitality more competitive, enhance affordability, and attract more international visitors.

Another long-standing demand from the sector is granting ‘industry status’ to hospitality. This would improve access to finance, regularise policies, and provide a more structured approach to tourism development, ultimately benefiting both stakeholders and consumers.

We anticipate a reduction in the GST rate from 18 per cent, which will also help MSMEs and startups thrive. Input tax credits for energy-efficient practices and infrastructure investments to develop Grade A buildings are also anticipated to fuel the sector’s growth.

Investment in infrastructure, especially in remote tourist destinations, and a focus on sustainable tourism can significantly expand India’s tourism economy, envisioning a US\$3 trillion industry by 2047. Hence, the infrastructure or real estate sector, a key contributor to the economy, is also awaiting GST reforms. Potential GST rationalisation for under-construction properties in the commercial and residential segments can boost demand.

Reduced GST on construction materials and streamlined approval processes will significantly impact demand in tier II and III cities, turning them into engines of economic growth. Lower GST on the real estate sector will aid the construction and development of new hotels and restaurants. ❑



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Hospitality Engine for job creation

To leverage surge in travel demand, tourism, hospitality, and aviation sectors must join forces to boost economic growth, says **Puneet Chhatwal**.



Lipla Negi

Puneet Chhatwal, MD & CEO, Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL), has long been a vocal advocate for uniting all stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality sectors to secure the long-overdue recognition they deserve. At a recent event in the capital, he strongly endorsed

the unification of tourism, hospitality, and aviation, highlighting the powerful economic potential these three sectors could unlock. "These sectors are fundamental to India's economic development, but there's a catch—unless they work in harmony, they risk missing the larger opportunity." However, Chhatwal's vision of a unified force goes beyond creating synergies between

sectors; it is about reshaping India's growth narrative. He stressed that the government must move beyond the narrow lens of domestic and inbound tourism to fully capitalise on the unprecedented surge in demand for travel. "When we talk tourism, we get lost in domestic and inbound travel," he observed, emphasising that tourism alone cannot drive the kind of growth India needs. He ex-



plained that hospitality is the real engine behind job creation. "The job creation is maximum in hospitality. Similarly, aviation needs to work together with these sectors. Without this coordination, we will not make the kind of progress we seek."

Taxation: A levelled playfield

One of the key areas where Chhatwal sees room for improvement is in the taxation of the hospitality industry. He firmly believed that the current tax structure, particularly the high GST rates, is hindering the sector's growth and competitiveness within the South Asian region. He said, "It should have never reached a 28 per cent GST on hotels."

Double support: Centre and state

One of Chhatwal's key critiques focused on the lukewarm support tourism and hospitality receive from both the central and state governments. He argued that the central government is falling behind, especially in terms of providing adequate infrastructure for the hospitality sec-

tor. "If the government is making strategic investments in highways, roads, and airports, hospitality must be integrated alongside," he highlighted. "At the same time, states need to incentivise hospitality," he urged, stressing that the outdated view of hospitality as a luxury sector must be discarded. "It's a sector that drives maximum job creation," he pointed out.

Chhatwal praised FHRAI's Annual Convention in Goa, held in October 2024, for its thought-provoking theme, 'India: Incredible to Inevitable,' which aptly highlighted the urgent need to unlock India's true tourism potential. "The nation is now calling for transformation, and this call is coming from all corners of the industry. With limitless stories to tell, we are a nation like no other. Yet, despite all we offer, the stark reality remains: while Paris attracts 25 million tourists, we struggle to draw even 10 million, including OCIs and NRIs. It is time to confront this challenge and reshape our tourism landscape." ■

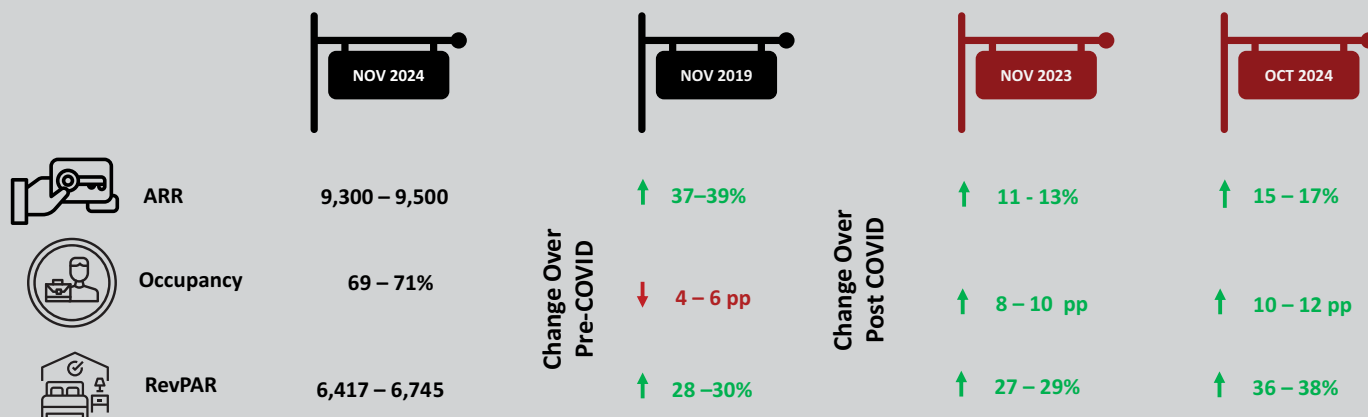
FHRAI's Annual Convention 2024 highlighted the need to unlock India's true tourism potential with its thought-provoking theme—Tourism @2047: Incredible to Inevitable India



PUNEET CHHATWAL

MD & CEO
Indian Hotels Company Limited





Source: HVS Research; Data for Calendar Year

Mumbai leads hotel demand

Indian hotel sector saw a significant boost in performance in November 2023, with occupancy rate increasing by 8-10% YoY.



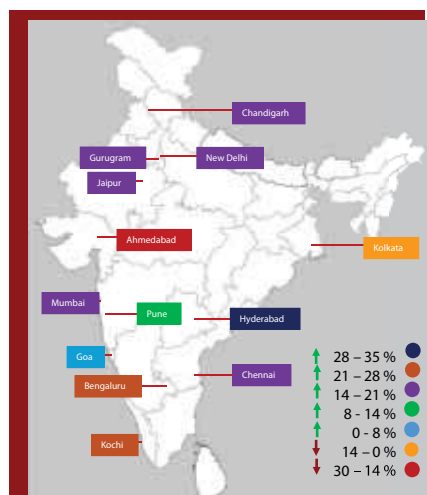
According to HVS Hospitality Monitor, the Indian hotel sector saw a strong performance in November 2024, with occupancy rates rose by 8-10 per cent points year-on-year and 10-12 per cent points compared to the previous month. It reported strong growth in ARR (average room rate) with 11-13 per cent rise compared to the previous year, further bolstering RevPAR (revenue per available room), and driving overall performance upward.

All key markets witnessed significant increases in occupancy rates compared to the same period last year. Mumbai led the market with an occupancy rate of over 80 per cent,

November 2024 witnessed growth in both occupancy rates and average room revenue compared to same period last year

ARR Trends Across Key Indian Markets

(Change over November 2023)

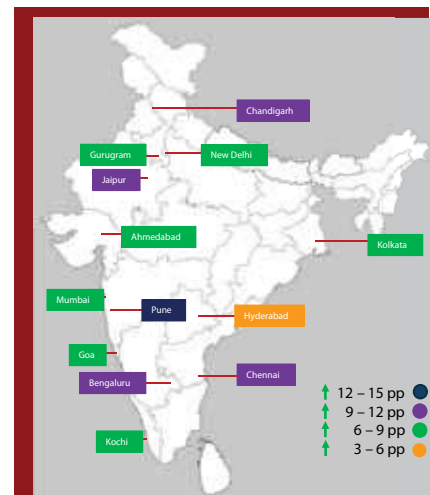


boosted by the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) segment and high-profile events such as Dua Lipa's concert at the end of the month. Pune recorded the highest occupancy growth, with an increase of 12-14 percentage points, driven primarily by events like the India International Travel Mart 2024.

Other cities, including Bengaluru, Jaipur, and Chandigarh also reported the growth of double-digit

Occupancy Trends Across Key Indian Markets

(Change over November 2023)



occupancy growth compared to the previous year.

All major markets, except Ahmedabad and Kolkata, recorded an increase in ARR compared to the previous year. Mumbai continued to lead the market with the highest ARR ranging between ₹13,500-15,000, while Hyderabad recorded the most significant growth, with 28-30 per cent year-on-year increase in average rates. □

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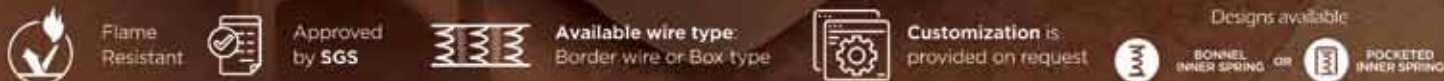
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Decoding best talent management practices

Panelists at FHRAI's HR Summit emphasise proactive steps for industry-specific training, effective talent management, and gender-balanced leadership in hospitality.



Moderated by **Yogendra Agnihotri**, Area Senior Director, People and Culture, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, the third session focused on the topic, "Managing Human Resource in Hospitality Industry," at the FHRAI's HR Summit.

Talent management

The expansion of hotels presents exciting growth opportunities. However, it also poses challenges in attracting and retaining skilled



VIKRAM SHARMA

Cluster Director, HR
The Westin, Gurugram

workforce. One major challenge is the preference of many aspiring hospitality professionals for prestigious

brands like JW, Westin, or W. This makes it difficult to recruit and retain staff for select-service brands in smaller cities. **Vikram Sharma**, Cluster Director, Human Resource, The Westin, Gurugram, shared, "To address this issue, we focus on building a strong company culture. A culture that offers clear career paths and provides growth opportunities. We also leverage technology to engage and train our employees." Sharma further said that the company prioritises employee satisfaction and positive work culture, offering advancement opportunities. They aim to hire and hold top talent, even in smaller markets.

The Job Plus is a site for the hospitality sector, that focuses on addressing the talent needs of the sector. **Divya Krishan**, Vice President, Operations, The Job Plus, explained that they employ a demand-first approach by identifying specific job roles and skill requirements, and then mobilising and training the right talent. A key advantage of this strategy is its speed and certainty. The organisation delivers skilled talent to the industry within 12 weeks of receiving a demand.

Elaborating on the unique aspect of their programmes, Krishan shared that it is entirely funded by the industry. Students do not pay any fees for their training, instead, their future employers invest in their development. This forward-thinking approach demonstrates the industry's commitment to nurturing future talent. By investing in the development of young talent, hotels can ensure a pipeline of skilled professionals who are eager to grow within their organisations. This not only benefits the individual employees but also contributes to the long-term success of the industry as a whole.



Skill development and engagement

To better prepare students for industry roles, curriculums need to be revised by incorporating industry-relevant subjects like kitchen economics, facilities management, and revenue management. **Dr Nisheeth Srivastava**, Principal, IHM Mumbai, said, "Enhancing faculty development by providing opportunities to upskill and stay current with industry trends can also be helpful. Specialised train-

ing programmes should be devised to leverage the industry expertise we have." A strong partnership between academic institutions and hotels can also help create structured internship and mentorship programmes.

Yash Raghav, General Manager, Training, Sarovar Hotels & Resorts, underscored a significant gap that exists between the skills and knowledge that hospitality students acquire in academic institutions and the expectations of the industry.





While hotels are investing in their own training programmes to bridge this gap, there is a need for a more collaborative approach involving industry and academia.

Talking about its key initiatives to develop managers' leadership and networking skills, Raghav said, "We have launched a general manager development programme to address the industry-wide shortage of experienced leaders. This programme has successfully placed several graduates into key leadership roles."

In addition to such corporate programmes, he shared that the brand has a dedicated team of trainers who work at the hotel level to ensure and implement consistent training standards, and develop a strong culture of learning and development in the hotel.

Significance of gender diversity

Commenting on gender equality in hospitality, Sharma said, "It starts with believing in talent, regardless of



DR NISHEETH SRIVASTAVA

Principal
IHM Mumbai

"Inclusion is not just a buzzword but a fundamental human right, where everyone, regardless of their abilities, is valued."

gender. Our all-women hotel, Westin, Hyderabad, is more than just a publicity stunt. It is a statement that says anyone can do any job."

Encouraging women leaders to grow within the system, organising women leadership workshops, and inspiring women from various industries to share their success stories will inspire youths. These approaches are effective ways to become a gender-balanced industry.

He added, "Tracking the initiatives' progress, setting goals, and collaborating with women-focused institutions, the industry can increase diversity. Women's strong emotional intelligence makes them effective managers and HR professionals."

Adding to the discourse, Krishan said, "A significant issue in hospitality is the underutilisation of women, despite their strong interest in the industry. At The Job Plus, we have achieved a 50 per cent diversity ratio in our projects, employing over a thousand women this year." ■

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Advocating skill-based education

Hospitality think tank discusses the urgent need for an action plan to make hospitality careers more attractive and entice talent.



DDP Bureau

The second session focused on the topic “Addressing Low Enrolment and High Attrition in the Hospitality Industry” at the FHRAI’s HR Summit. It explored key challenges within the industry, the importance of effective marketing strategies, and the need for raising awareness about career opportunities in the hospitality sector.

Appeal of hospitality careers

Ashima Gulati, Head of Operations, L&D, ITC Hotels, began by discussing the lack of awareness about hospitality careers. Even in top-tier schools, many students are unaware of the diverse opportunities the industry offers, primarily due

to communication gap, which calls for a need to proactively reach out to students and educate them about the industry’s potential.

The industry needs to advocate for more practical exposure and skill-based learning, rather than focusing on theoretical knowledge. Gulati emphasised, “One potential solution is to explore the concept of a gig workforce allowing students to gain exposure to different departments and roles and enhance their skills and understanding.”

Poonam Tyagi, General Manager, Corporate Human Resources, The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group added, “We need to reevaluate the appeal of hospitality careers to today’s students. To attract young talent, we must address the industry’s perception, particularly the long hours and demanding nature of the work.” She

suggested to change this perception, we need a collaborative effort between industry and academia. We should focus on developing comprehensive training programmes that equip students with the necessary skills to succeed.

Challenges and solutions

While practical exposure is beneficial, the industry must take into account the constraints of the academic calendar **Dr Satvir Singh**, Director (Studies), NCHMCT, said, “Our current three-year bachelor’s degree programme includes a 16-week industrial training period after the first year. However, given the diverse departments within a hotel, such as the main kitchen, specialised kitchens, and bakery, a week-long exposure to each department may not be sufficient. We must explore ways

to increase the duration of industrial training, possibly through a one-month specialisation programme after the first year."

Roma Kumar, Founder, Focus Eduverse, pointed out that awareness about the industry is limited, even among students from elite schools. This is often due to a lack of exposure and understanding of the diverse career opportunities within the hospitality industry. In addition, misconceptions exist about the industry, such as long hours and limited career growth.

Talent acquisition and retention

To attract and retain talent, we need to involve industry leaders and



RAAJIT AKHILESH SHETH

Associate Director, L&D
The Leela Palaces, Hotels & Resorts

alumni in impactful marketing campaigns that highlight exciting career opportunities in hospitality. **Raajit**

Akhilesh Sheth, Associate Director, Learning & Development, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, explained, "Personal outreach, storytelling, and sharing experiences are powerful tools to actively engage with students and inspire them to consider a career in hospitality." He further stated that to address the ongoing challenge of attrition, we must offer innovative and rewarding career paths beyond traditional roles.

Raja Sadhukhan, Principal, IHM Kolkata, said, "Millennials and Gen Z, in particular, value work-life balance, flexibility, and recognition. Creating a supportive and nurturing work environment is essential to attract and retain these younger generations." Industry professionals play a vital role in mentoring the next generation. By working together, educational institutions can produce well-rounded graduates who are ready to succeed in the ever-evolving hospitality industry. □

"Personal outreach, storytelling, and sharing experiences are powerful tools to inspire students to consider a career in hospitality"

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Trends shaping hospitality in 2025

Nikhil Sharma stresses that travellers are prioritising personalised and meaningful experiences with emphasis on health, cultural immersion, and sustainable values.



Somya Deep

Trends are taking over today's world. For selling your product from hotel rooms to fine dining, staying in loop with trends is non-negotiable. To stay ahead of the curve, Radisson Hotel Group is on the lookout for key trends dominating in 2025. **Nikhil Sharma**, Managing Director and Area Senior Vice President, Radisson Hotel Group, South Asia, said, "In 2025, travellers will continue seeking eco-friendly stays, offbeat destinations, immersive cultural and spiritual experiences, and wellness-centric offerings that prioritise health and relaxation."



NIKHIL SHARMA

MD and Area Senior Vice President,
Radisson Hotel Group, South Asia

Personalisation reigns

Customisation remains a key driver of guest satisfaction as modern travellers value tailored experiences. This shift also aligns with the rise of experiential travel, where guests look to connect meaningfully with local cultures, cuisines, and communities in a personalised setup.

Sharma shared, "The demand for one-size-fits-all services is for meaningful and memorable experiences giving way to tailored offerings and connecting guests with unique aspects of their destination."

Eco-friendly practices

Extravagant, non-sustainable luxury is becoming less relevant as guests prioritise eco-conscious travel and responsible practices. Sharma highlighted, "Modern travellers are in-

creasingly seeking luxurious experiences that align with environmental values, favouring comfort that is both thoughtful and sustainable." The industry is adapting by integrating green technologies and promoting practices that emphasise environmental stewardship without compromising quality.

Rise of bleisure

The classic business travel is experiencing a decline with the continued rise of virtual meetings and hybrid

Travellers seek meaningful experiences that connect them with local cultures, cuisines, and communities.

work models. "Bleisure travel is gaining prominence, as travellers look for spaces that balance productivity with relaxation. This trend reflects the growing demand for flexibility and deeper connections to local cultures, paving the way for hospitality," Sharma averred. ▣



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Heritage Village Resort & Spa, based in South Goa, has undergone transformation, blending modern comforts with Goa's rich cultural heritage. The extensive renovations have elevated the property to a premium upscale boutique resort, offering a reimagined experience of luxury and relaxation.

The upgrades at the resort include Aruna Spa and Wellness Center, Aruna Salon, and a brand-new swimming pool. The resort's accommodations and public spaces have been fully refurbished, along with a new lounge. Besides, it also introduced two dining destinations. Bonita offers modern European and global cuisine. Mama Miso elevates pan-Asian dining, showcasing authentic flavours that capture the essence of Asian gastronomy.

Heritage Village Resort & Spa, Manesar, has also undergone extensive renovations to enhance its offerings and elevate the guest experience. For two seasons, from May 2023 to

Heritage Village Resorts & Spa in Goa and Manesar have undergone extensive renovations to enhance comfort and luxury and elevate guest experience.



September 2024, the resort has embarked on a comprehensive overhaul of several key areas, bringing modern sophistication while retaining its signature traditional charm.

The resort's expansive lobby exudes luxury and opulence. The intricate architectural details, reminis-

The intricate architectural details of the resort capture the essence of regal Havelis and opulence



cent of regal Havelis, set an inviting tone for the royal escape ahead. The renovations span multiple spaces, including the Sabha Banquet Hall, inner porch, and reception desk. The resort's renowned Utsav Banquet Hall has been redesigned with traditional Haveli-inspired interiors.

The resort now boasts a state-of-the-art swimming pool area with a surface flow design and blue lapis lazuli-coloured tiles. Additionally, 80 rooms have been comprehensively renovated, along with the extensive landscaping of the gardens. □

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Digital detox

New-age luxury in hospitality

In response to growing demand for personal well-being, hoteliers craft unique experiences poised to set new standards in hospitality.



DDP Bureau

Is digital detox travel becoming a new luxury in the hospitality industry? In today's hyper-connected world, we are constantly bombarded with an overwhelming amount of information and notifications, leading to decreased overall productivity and well-being.

As a result, the hospitality industry is witnessing a growing trend of digital detox travel, where travellers prioritise their personal wellbeing by seeking distraction-free experiences. Global search interest for "digital detox retreat" has increased by 50 per cent in the past year.

Fast-evolving trend: Key developments

To capitalise on the rising trend of digital detox travel, hotels and resorts have come up with new marketing strategies incorporating a variety of digital detox-related offerings, targeting wellness-conscious travellers. These offerings help guests disconnect from the digital world and reconnect with themselves and nature.

TreeHouse Hotels & Resorts, in collaboration with Avika MindHealth, has introduced Aura, a virtual reality wellness experience, in Goa. JW Marriott Bengaluru offers locally produced and wellness-focused culinary experiences that promote health and sustainability. They have also



LALIT MUNDKUR

General Manager
Fort Jadhavgad Pune

**ERIKA RATHI**

Director
Namaste Dwaar Resort



incorporated initiatives, such as a pilates studio, customised yoga classes, and outdoor activities like walks in Cubbon Park, fostering a holistic experience.

Today hotels and travel companies have crafted a variety of activities designed to help guests disconnect from the digital world and reconnect with themselves and nature. Fort JadhavGadh, based in Pune, also launched a programme, 'Disconnect to Reconnect,' offering various activities, from nature walks around the fort to pottery workshops along with stays in Chavani tents with minimal distractions, board games, and live folk performances.

digital-free activities for guests and staff. They have preserved the natural landscape around their hotels, making a space for guests to connect with themselves.

Uptake of digital detox experiences

Given the rising demand in recent years, digital detox practices are expected to stay rather than be a temporary trend in the hospitality industry. They are taking on a new dimension in hospitality, as travel-

The demand for digital detox vacations will increase as people become aware of the negative effects of constant connectivity

Historically, Lotus Eco Beach Resort has embraced a strict no-technology policy, offering experiences that help guests disconnect from the outside world. Namaste Dwaar provides curated experiences such as guided meditation, yoga, herbal garden tours, and mindfulness workshops. They also feature a wellness centre to support a tech-free environment.

Roseate Hotels & Resorts focuses on creating serene environments and organising





lers are increasingly prioritising wellness and mindfulness amid a constantly connected world.

There has been a significant uptick in guest satisfaction since the launch of digital detox experiences. “Many guests appreciate the experiences, as they allow them to disconnect and just be present in the moment.” **Lalit Mundkur**, General Manager, Fort JadhavGadh Pune, noted, adding, “As a result, we have seen an increase in repeat visitors.”

Echoing a similar view, **Erika Rathi**, Director, Namaste Dwaar Resort, said that their resort is witnessing an increased number of repeat visitors who return specifically for the rejuvenating effects of a tech-free retreat. These returning guests often refer friends and family, contributing to their growing digital detox segment.

While the concept of digital detox is gaining traction, it is still a niche market. “Very honestly, the percentage is still low, and the category of people who prefer digital detox is smaller in comparison,” admitted **Bharat Biswal**, General Manager, Lotus Eco Beach Resort. He added that as people become more aware of the benefits of digital detox, the demand for these types of retreats is likely to grow.

Demographics of digital detox travellers

Travellers looking for digital detox experiences come from a diverse range of backgrounds. Each seeks a rejuvenating escape to regain control of their lives and overall well-being. **Kush Kapoor**, CEO, Roseate Hotels & Resorts, said guests seeking digital detox primarily fall within 25 to 45 age brackets. These guests include young



BHARAT BISWAL

General Manager
Lotus Eco Beach Resort

As people become more aware of the benefits of digital detox, the demand is likely to grow

professionals, entrepreneurs, and wellness enthusiasts, who value quality time away from screens.

Ajay Mehtani, Partner, TreeHouse Hotels & Resorts, shared, “Our digital detox guests typically fall within the 24-45 age bracket. These individuals are often from





“Even a six-month-old baby can become screen-addicted from the pervasive influence of technology,” Biswal said.

Rise in demand

In response to the growing demand for tech-free vacations, hotel brands have been exploring innovative ways to craft personalised wellness programmes. Mehtani stressed that the demand for digital detox vacations will continue to rise as people seek balance amidst increasing technological pervasiveness.

With an increased focus on mental, physical, and emotional well-being, Sinha predicted a broader range of wellness experiences, such as mindfulness courses, outdoor excursions, and personalised wellness journeys, would gain popularity.

Rathi highlighted the increasing popularity of digital detox vacations, stating, “The demand for digital detox vacations will continue to grow as more people become aware of the negative effects of constant connectivity.” Digital detox is not just a passing trend; therefore, it is imperative to integrate it into the core services of the tourism industry.

On a positive note, Kapoor emphasised that the demand for detox vacations will continue to grow and evolve in coming years, driven by a growing desire for wellness. ■



AJAY MEHTANI

Partner, TreeHouse
Hotels & Resorts

high-stress job profiles seeking an escape from the technology-driven world. They prefer destinations with natural beauty.”

“Our wellness-seeking guests are usually aged between 30 and 50 and look for experiences that prioritise well-being,” **Gaurav Sinha**, Hotel Manager, JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru, added.

Today, digital detox is a need across all age groups. Children too are facing the brunt of uncontrolled use of digital devices.



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Hotel design plugs into immersive experiences

From calming open spaces to wellness facilities, the growing demand for holistic experiences prompts hotels to rethink their design strategies for next-gen travellers.

 **Lipla Negi**

Rome was not built in a day, and neither is a hotel. Turning a hotel into the 'it' destination for travellers requires careful planning and thoughtful execution. A key element

in this process is design, which plays a crucial role in shaping its unique appeal and enhancing its brand value. As travel demand continues to rise, hotels around the world are evolving their designs and interiors to create not just a comfortable stay, but an immersive journey and destination experience within their walls.

Gone are the days when a hotel stay was merely about a bed, breakfast, and other basic conveniences. Today's travellers—especially the younger generation—seek more than just comfort and convenience; they are in pursuit of spaces that reflect their values, enhance their well-being, and offer lasting memories. As a result, the interior design of a hotel



PRATITI RAJPAL
General Manager
Ronil Goa



HARISH GOPALAKRISHNAN
General Manager
The Westin Goa

“More than just aesthetics, the design promotes wellness and enhances comfort.”

ilities. This aligns with the growing demand for spaces that rejuvenate and support well-being,” he stated. At The Westin Goa, the philosophy of blending contemporary elegance with the vibrant tropical essence of the region is evident in every corner of the property. The lobby sets the tone with its expansive layout, bright seating, and curated art pieces that reflect the local culture.

Spaces reimagined

Gopalakrishnan shared that design is not only about looks but also about comfort, wellness, and connecting with the local environment. Every

element, from furniture to layout, communicates the hotel’s personality and influences guest choices. The Westin Goa’s guest rooms, with their soft colour palettes, signature Heavenly Beds and Baths, and premium amenities, emphasise rejuvenation and relaxation. Wellness is seamlessly integrated into the design, with spaces like the Heavenly Spa, a serene escape in earthy tones, and the Westin WORKOUT Fitness Studio, which provides a sleek, motivational environment. The pool-side rooms, designed to offer both indoor comfort and outdoor leisure, further enhance the guest experience by fostering a sense of tranquillity and well-being.

For **Manju Sharma**, Managing Director, Jaypee Hotels & Resorts, every texture, colour, and layout choice is a deliberate effort to inspire connection and foster memorable moments, transforming spaces into living expressions of hospitality in-

or resort plays a key role in shaping the guest experience.

Wellness-centric design

Post-pandemic, travel has become a balancing act—an opportunity to recharge and explore while prioritising well-being. “Travellers are now seeking experiences that resonate with their individuality and lifestyle. For Gen Z, X, and Alpha, it has shifted from a luxury to an essential part of their lives,” **Pratiti Rajpal**, General Manager, Ronil Goa, a JdV by Hyatt Hotel, said, noting that immersive experiences and meaningful connections to local culture are among the top priorities for these generations.

Harish Gopalakrishnan, General Manager, The Westin Goa, pointed out that hotel interiors are no longer just about aesthetics. “More than just aesthetics, the design promotes wellness and enhances comfort through features like calming lighting, sound-proofing, and wellness-focused fa-





MANJU SHARMA
Managing Director
Jaypee Hotels & Resorts

“Travellers increasingly seek holistic experiences, so we have crafted interiors that elevate every touchpoint.”

novation. To enhance its appeal to the new generation, the brand has embraced a design philosophy that harmoniously blends modern elegance with subtle cultural nuances. She explained, “Travellers increas-

ingly seek holistic experiences, we have crafted interiors elevating every touchpoint, from the tranquil ambience of our wellness areas to dining spaces where Indian cuisine is reimagined with contemporary flair.”

Crafting brand identity

The interiors of a resort are an extension of its brand identity, emphasising sustainability and luxury in equal measure. “Every detail, from the use of repurposed materials to the integration of organic design elements, reinforces our identity as a forest-inspired, eco-luxury resort,”

Ayu Tripathi, Director, Aahana Resort, shared. She further added that guests at Aahana are not just visiting a hotel—they are being enveloped in an experience that feels authentic, genuine, and in complete harmony with the environment. “We have added spacious outdoor gazebos to encourage people to spend more time outside while enjoying the beauty of the surroundings,” Tripathi said. Additionally, the rooms are designed to flood with natural sunlight, and materials like glass, wood, and stone are used to create a sense of harmony between the indoors and nature.

Hotel design plays a crucial role in defining a brand identity and set-



AYU TRIPATHI
Director
Aahana Resort

ting it apart in a competitive market. Gopalakrishnan explained, “Every element, from furniture to layout, reflects the hotel’s personality and influences guest choices. Younger generations are drawn to visually striking spaces that align with their style and are social media-ready, making interiors a key element of brand communication.”

Beyond establishing the identity and connection of the brand, modern design aesthetics are also evolving to help new-age guests strike a balance between nature and technological innovation, wellness and adventure, and, most importantly, the outward and inward journey. □



Nex-gen kitchen tech Game changer for F&B

Razi Haider discusses high-tech kitchen solutions can significantly reduce energy and operational costs while achieving sustainable targets.



How ITW is helping hotel kitchens adopt energy-efficient warewash innovations to reduce operational costs while maintaining hygiene standards?

Costs are staying high for water, chemical products, and especially for electricity. In these challenging times, it is a relief that technology can help reduce electricity, water, and chemical consumption while still ensuring washing hygienically.

Our HOBART undercounter dishwashers come with cutlery premium function. It can save up to 60 per cent of water and reduce energy demand.

How are zero-waste kitchens reshaping sustainability goals in the hotel industry?

Zero-waste kitchens are trans-



RAZI HAIDER

Country Manager (India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal), ITW India (FEG Division)

forming sustainability goals in the industry by aligning with eco-conscious consumer demands. The concept emphasises inventory management, waste management tracking systems, and circular resource management. They not only align with sustainability goals but also position as leaders in the green hospitality movement.



How does your advanced cooking technology help chefs balance nutrition, taste, and energy efficiency?

ITW's advanced cooking technology is designed to empower chefs with tools that enhance their ability to create nutritious, flavourful meals while maximising energy efficiency. Thanks to the combination of pressure cooking and dry steam, HOBART Pressure steam cooker (GTP) delivers the best cooking results. The GTP saves time, electricity, and water compared to conventional cooking devices.

What new ideas and innovations are you focussing on to pioneer food technology in the F&B sector?

ITW Food Equipment Group is focusing on innovative technologies that enhance efficiency, sustainability, and customer satisfaction while meeting evolving market demands. We are developing smart and con-

ITW's advanced cooking tech equips chefs with tools to create nutritious, flavourful meals while maximising energy efficiency

nected equipment, green technology, and integrated monitoring systems. ITW is advancing energy-efficient appliances, such as Energy Star-certified dishwashers. □



How hotels are capitalising on multi-gen travel

With emerging trend of multi-gen travel, hoteliers are compelled to redesign their offerings to address comfort and practical needs of diverse age groups.

 **Somya Deep**

The growing popularity of multi-generational trips, where multiple generations of a family travel together, is not only increasing but also creating new demand in the market. This growth is driven by geographically dispersed family members seeking opportunities for meaningful bonding rather than typical holidays.

According to a survey by Agoda, close to 34 per cent plan to travel with family in 2025. As the trend

gains momentum, it indicates that it is more than a one-season trend. To maintain a competitive edge in the hospitality industry, hotels are now leveraging innovative approaches to bridge generational gaps and target this niche market.

Family-friendly accommodations

The most important aspect of multi-generational family travel is finding the right rooms and accommodations balancing everyone's needs. With a thoughtful approach, hoteliers are now adapting their offerings to travellers' needs by designing more family-friendly rooms and

amenities. **Gaurav Mudgal**, Managing Partner & Vice President, Commercials, Aamaghati Wildlife Resort, said, "We design our accommodations with multigenerational families in mind, offering spacious, eco-luxury rooms that ensure comfort for all ages. Our large suites and interconnected rooms allow families to stay close while maintaining personal space."

Space, comfort, and convenience are essential when traveling with family. To meet this growing demand, properties are making significant investments to enhance their offerings. **Nishant Taneja**, Head,

**GAURAV MUDGAL**

Managing Partner & VP, Commercials
Aamaghati Wildlife Resort

“We design our accommodations with multigenerational families in mind, offering spacious luxury rooms ensuring comfort for all ages.”

Marketing, Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort, shared, “We prioritise creating memorable experiences for families traveling across generations. Our resort offers spacious accommodations, including multi-bedroom suites, to ensure everyone stays close yet comfortable.”

Tailoring diverse needs

Families rejoice in togetherness and look forward to having shared experiences. Indian households often love to play games when with family. To offer shared experiences, hotel owners offer activities that appeal to the entire family. **Krinal Thaker**, Manager Head, Evoke Experiences, shared, “We ensure that every family member, from grandparents to children, feels engaged and pampered. To cater to diverse interests, we offer activities, such as adventure pursuits like Skyzilla, ziplining, ATV rides, and a clubhouse for relaxation. In the evenings, we host bonfires with live guitar music, perfect for friends and family to bond. Our special kids’ area is designed to keep young minds engaged and entertained with various activities.”

For families seeking enriching and educational journeys, eco-friendly destinations are recommended highlighting natural beauty and cultural heritage. **Rikant Pittie**, Co-founder, EaseMyTrip, said, “Our initiatives, such as Explore Bharat, offer a wide range of options, enabling families to choose destinations that resonate with their preferences. Easy Darshan, on the other hand, showcases India’s rich cultural diversity and spiritual experiences, making it perfect for multigenerational groups.”

Understanding the unique needs of multigenerational travellers is cru-

**NISHANT TANEJA**

Head, Marketing
Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort

“We prioritise creating memorable experiences for families traveling across generations.”

cial. **Jitendra Thakur**, Director, F&B, Courtyard by Marriott Pune Chakan, explained that they offer a variety of options, from kid-friendly activities and play zones to relaxing spaces like Nilaya Spa for adults and seniors to unwind. Thakur added, “Our kids’ club provides interactive indoor games, arts-crafts, and workshops to keep children entertained while parents unwind. Families can enjoy



**KRINAL THAKER**

Manager Head
Evoke Experiences

**RIKANT PITTIE**

Co-founder
EaseMyTrip

**JITENDRA THAKUR**

Director, F&B, Courtyard by
Marriott Pune Chakan

outdoor adventures like nature walks or time at the swimming pool, gym, yoga sessions, and SPA treatments.”

Skillfully crafted packages

Aamaghathi Wildlife Resort offers thoughtfully curated family packages that feature guided safaris in the Ranthambore National Park, traditional Rajasthani dining experiences, and wellness activities. Mudgal stated, “Families can participate in eco-conscious initiatives such as tree planting and learning about local flora and fauna. They offer customised itineraries to balance adventure and leisure, ensuring grandparents enjoy serene activities while children engage in interactive experiences, such as storytelling sessions about the rich

history of Ranthambore.” Addressing the unique challenges of travelling to remote locations like the Rann of Kutch, Gujarat, Thaker, pointed out, “Our packages are designed to meet both comfort and practical needs. At Rann Utsav-The Tent City, we take care of essentials like arranging milk for children, ensuring the all the basics are always available despite an area’s remoteness.”

Inclusive approach

Creating an inclusive experience for every family member, from the youngest to the eldest, involves careful consideration of various factors. Mudgal claimed, “Senior guests appreciate our wheelchair-friendly pathways, peaceful reading nooks,

and rejuvenating spa therapies, while younger visitors are drawn to the dedicated play area and supervised adventure zones.”

Taneja said, “To cater to families with young children, we offer baby sitting services and baby-proofed furniture upon request. In addition, we prioritise accessibility throughout our property, ensuring seamless mobility for seniors and individuals with disabilities.”

For families traveling with young children, we prioritise hotels that provide baby-proofed furniture, cribs, and baby cots to ensure safety. For elderly guests or with mobility challenges, we collaborate with hotels that offer enhanced accessibility features, Pittie highlighted. □



Ode to grandeur

With a holistic approach to luxury, The Tivoli sets its sights on the high-end segment of Delhi's hospitality landscape.



Renowned for its expertise in curating extravagant weddings, Tivoli Group makes an entry into the hospitality sector with the launch of The Tivoli, its flagship five-star luxury hotel in the heart of Delhi. The hotel boasts 132 meticulously designed rooms, including a luxurious Presidential Suite, a Junior Suite, and 130 premium accommodations, setting a new standard in luxury and elegance.

Catering to the diverse needs of the capital's vibrant market, The Tivoli offers bespoke packages, including group bookings, airport transfers, and personalised itineraries for weddings, MICE and more. "We are bringing together every aspect of luxury under one roof—from grand weddings and luxurious accommodations to CSR initiatives, wellness retreats, and exclusive celebrations. This property reflects our vision of delivering a holistic, unforgettable hospitality experience," said **Akshay Gupta**, Executive Director, Tivoli Group.



Perfectly suited for destination weddings, corporate events, and luxury retreats, The Tivoli features five state-of-the-art banquet halls and three expansive outdoor lawns, accommodating events of all sizes—from intimate gatherings of 15 to lavish celebrations of up to 3,000 guests. Besides, it features four state-of-the-art dining venues—Zunn,

Blue Grotto, Aria and Trafalgar's – offering culinary artistry and an immersive dining experience.

Positioning itself as a lifestyle destination, the hotel also boasts of a wellness center, where guests can indulge in bespoke spa therapies or rejuvenate at the fully equipped fitness facility and outdoor pool with private cabanas.



Responding to the demand for integrated venues, our flagship hotel is a testament to the city's evolving luxury landscape

"Responding to the demand for integrated venues, the hotel offers a seamless blend of world-class accommodation and versatile celebration spaces," Gupta shared. □

India's hospitality revenues to grow by 7-9% in FY25

Driven by sustained demand for domestic tourism, MICE events, and increasing AARs, ICRA forecasts significant growth for Indian hospitality.



DDP Bureau

The revenues of the Indian hospitality industry are expected to grow by 7-9 per cent YoY in FY2025 and 6-8 per cent YoY in FY2026, over the high base of FY2024, ICRA said. ICRA es-

timates premium hotel occupancy to rise to 72-74 per cent in FY2026 from 70-72 per cent in FY2025. The average room rates (ARRs) for premium hotels are estimated to increase by 8 per cent YoY to ₹7,800-8,000 in FY2025 and subsequently improve further to ₹8,000-8,400 in FY2026. This solid growth is primarily driven

by sustained domestic leisure travel, demand from meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE), including weddings, and business travel. ICRA anticipates this trend to continue over the next 9-12 months.

ICRA's sample set, comprising 13 large hotel companies, is expected to report strong operating margins of



AARs for premium hotels are projected to increase to ₹7,800-8,000 in FY25 and improve further to ₹8,000-8,400 in FY26.

31-33 per cent for FY2025 and FY2025, against 33 per cent for FY2024 and 20-22 per cent pre-COVID.

“Demand is expected to remain strong across markets in Q4 FY2025 and FY2026 as underlying drivers remain healthy. Hotel-specific metrics would, however, depend on location, competition, and other property-related dynamics,” stated **Vinutaa S**, Vice President and Sector Head, Corporate Ratings, ICRA.

Domestic tourism would be the prime driver, with foreign tourist arrivals (FTA) improvement depending on the global macro-economic environment. Mumbai and NCR, being gateway cities, are likely to report occupancy north of 75 per cent for full-year FY2025 and FY2026, benefitting from transient passengers, business travellers, and MICE events.

As per the report, AARs are likely to witness healthy YoY increase in FY2025 and FY2026 across markets. This sharp rise in AARs of premium hotels will result in spillover of demand to mid-scale hotels.

The demand outlook over the medium term remains healthy, supported by improved infrastructure and air connectivity, favourable demographics, and anticipated growth in large-scale MICE events. “The healthy demand uptick has resulted in a pick-up in supply an-

nouncements and commencement of deferred projects in the last 24-30 months. Several global brands have made their entry into India. However, supply, which is expected to grow at a CAGR of 4.5-5 per cent at least until FY26, would lag demand,” Vinutaa explained. She further said, “A large part of the new supply is through management contracts and operating leases. Land availability issues currently constrain supply addition in the premium micro-markets in metros and larger cities.” □



Movements



Puneet Dutta
Chief Operating Officer
GRT Hotels & Resorts

GRT Hotels & Resorts has appointed Puneet Dutta as the new Chief Operating Officer. Dutta will oversee the brand's operations, which encompasses 22 hotels and resorts in India. Besides, Dutta will spearhead the group's expansion strategy, while focusing on strengthening their presence in key markets.



Ashish Tomar
General Manager
Fern Hotels & Resorts

The Fern Hotels & Resorts has appointed Ashish Tomar as the General Manager of Business Development. He will be spearheading the company's hotel acquisition and development initiatives. His focus will be on expanding the company's national footprint by leading innovative hotel projects.



Subhro Mukhopadhyay
General Manager, Aralea Beach
Resort, Stonewood Premier

Stonewood Premier has appointed Subhro Mukhopadhyay as the General Manager of Aralea Beach Resort, Morjim, North Goa. With over 22 years of experience, Mukhopadhyay's appointment is expected to further strengthen Aralea Beach Resort's position as a leading hospitality destination in Goa.



Vikram Sood
Director of Rooms
Shangri-La Eros New Delhi

Shangri-La Eros New Delhi has appointed Vikram Sood as the Director of Rooms. He will spearhead comprehensive room division management, encompassing guest services, operational excellence, and team performance. He will focus on refining service protocols and implementing cutting-edge guest experience innovations.



Rohit Saini
Cluster Sustainability Manager
Fairmont and Raffles Jaipur

Rohit Saini has been appointed as the new Cluster Sustainability Manager of Fairmont and Raffles Jaipur. On his new role, Saini said, "I am honoured to join Fairmont and Raffles Jaipur. Together, we will ensure these properties serve as benchmarks for sustainable luxury in the hospitality industry."



Chef Thanakit Sangjan
Thai MasterChef, Spectra
The Leela Ambience Gurugram

The Leela Ambience Gurugram Hotel & Residences has appointed Chef Thanakit Sangjan as the new Thai MasterChef at Spectra. In his new role, Chef Sangjan will be responsible for introducing authentic Thai cuisine across all areas of the hotel, including in-room dining, brunches, and even creating innovative Thai snacks for the bar.

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Hotels and Resorts



Ashish Jakhanwala
Chairman, MD & CEO
SAMHI Hotels



Atul Chordia
Chairman
Panchshil Realty



Arun K. Saraf
Chairman and MD
Juniper Hotels



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Chief Operating Officer
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Best Western Hotels



Barbara Muckermann
Chief Operating Officer
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Behzad Kharas
Chairman and MD
BNK Group



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Group President,
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Founder
MakeMyTrip



Dillip Rajakarier
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& CEO Minor Hotels



Dimitris Manikis
President - Europe,
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Dr Jyotsna Suri
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The Lalit Suri
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Gautam Birudavolu
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Haitham Mattar
Managing Director, ME, Africa &
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Jatin Khanna
Chief Executive Officer
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Kevin Goh
Chief Executive Officer
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Nikhil Sharma
Managing Director & Area SVP
Radisson Hotel Group



Nitin Chhatwal
Managing Director
Shrem Infrastructure



Pooja Ray
Managing Director,
Mayfair Hotels & Resorts



Ranju Alex
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Ritesh Agarwal
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Sébastien Bazin
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Shahid Balwa
Vice Chairman & MD
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Shruti Shibulal
Director and CEO
The Tamara Leisure
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Shwetank Singh
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Suhail Kannampilly
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Concept Hospitality



Vibhas Prasad
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Vikram Lalvani
Managing Director & CEO
Sterling Holiday Resorts



Vikram Oberoi
Chief Executive Officer & MD
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