

HOTELS & RESTAURANTS INDIA

fhrai magazine

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A MONTHLY ON HOSPITALITY TRADE

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THE CURTAIN RISES ON FHRAI'S 55TH ANNUAL CONVENTION



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President's Note



Dear Members and Stakeholders,

It is with immense pride and optimism that I reach out to you through this edition of the FHRAI magazine. As we approach our much-anticipated 55th FHRAI Annual Convention, I am delighted to share that this year's event is poised to be one of the most impactful gatherings in our association's history. The convention will bring together an extraordinary confluence of government dignitaries, policy makers, global leaders and stalwarts of the hospitality and tourism industry.

The enthusiastic response we have received from both the Government and the private sector stands as a testament to the growing recognition of hospitality as one of India's most promising engines of economic growth. Central Government Ministries and State governments, industry partners, thought leaders and innovators are joining hands with us to make this convention a definitive platform for charting the future of our sector. From deliberations on tourism development and global branding to discussions on technology adoption and sustainability, the sessions promise to address every critical facet of our evolving landscape. I warmly encourage all members to participate wholeheartedly and benefit from the wealth of knowledge, networking and opportunities in abundance that await.

FHRAI has remained steadfast in its role as the collective voice of the hospitality fraternity, ensuring that the concerns and aspirations of our members are heard at the highest levels of Government. In continuation of this mission, we recently submitted a significant representation to Hon'ble Finance Minister Smt **Nirmala Sitharaman**, the GST Council Members and State Finance Ministers on issues pivotal to the growth and competitiveness of our industry.

The representation proposed for rationalisation of GST by introducing a uniform rate of 5 percent with Input Tax Credit (ITC) benefits across all hospitality and tourism-related services along with delinking of GST on Food &

Beverage (F&B) services from room tariffs, regularisation of past GST payments on an "as is" basis and enhancing the threshold limit for hotel room tariffs attracting 18 percent GST from ₹7,500 to ₹15,000.

These recommendations reflect FHRAI's tireless efforts to ensure that the hospitality industry receives the policy support it deserves. At a time when global tourism is expanding and India is steadily emerging as a preferred destination, it is imperative that our tax and regulatory frameworks evolve in line with market realities. We firmly believe that positive action on these requests will pave the way for stronger growth, greater competitiveness and enhanced resilience for our sector.



These recommendations reflect FHRAI's tireless efforts to ensure that the hospitality industry receives the policy support it deserves."

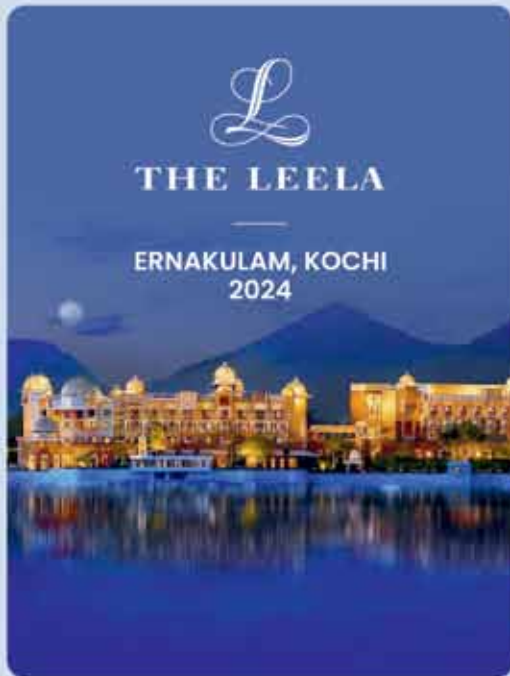
I take this opportunity to sincerely thank all our members, partners and well-wishers for their continued support to FHRAI. Your contributions empower us to amplify the voice of hospitality and create platforms such as the Annual Convention, where collaboration and advocacy transform into meaningful progress.

I look forward to welcoming you to what promises to be a landmark gathering for the Indian hospitality industry. Together, let us continue to strive for excellence, resilience and global leadership.

Warm regards,
K Syama Raju
President, FHRAI

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The FHRAI Annual Convention is geared up to create a powerful platform, connecting policymakers, industry visionaries and investors shaping hospitality's tomorrow.



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Vikram Cotah shares small green steps, from discarding plastic bottles to sourcing locally, can have huge economic impacts.



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New engines for hospitality growth

East and Northeast India emerge as epicentres of hospitality boom, driven by improved connectivity & expansion by major hotels.

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Bengaluru lights up as 55th FHRAI Annual Convention kicks off

The FHRAI Annual Convention is set to create a powerful platform, connecting policymakers, industry visionaries and investors shaping hospitality's tomorrow.

 DDP Bureau

Grounded in the thought-provoking theme, "FutureScape 2047: Redefining Hospitality for a New India," the 55th FHRAI Annual Convention, from 18–20 September 2025, opens in Bengaluru, setting the stage

for a power-packed three-day exchange of ideas, insights and strategies shaping the future of India's hospitality sector.

The landmark event is expected to be graced by **Rajnath Singh**, Defence Minister, Government of India and **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, Minister for Tourism, Government of India. Adding further stature,

the convention will host an eminent line-up of distinguished dignitaries, including **Siddaramaiah**, Chief Minister of Karnataka; **K Ram Mohan Naidu**, Minister of Civil Aviation, Government of India; **DK Shivakumar**, Deputy Chief Minister of Karnataka; **MB Patil**, Minister for Large and Medium Industries, Government of Karnataka; **V Vidyavathi**,



The event brings policymakers and industry stakeholders together to address key challenges and drive collaborative growth in the hospitality sector

IAS, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism and **Suman Billa**, IAS, Additional Secretary & Director General, Ministry of Tourism.

The association stated, "We look forward to your active participation in this landmark event, which promises to be a unique confluence of ideas, leadership and industry innovation." □



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Minister of Civil Aviation
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Shri DK Shivakumar
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Ms V Vidyavathi
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Shri Suman Billa
Additional Secretary & Director General, Ministry of
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Celebrating the spirit of hospitality, stakeholders unite to drive innovation and define the industry's next chapter.



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SANJAY SETHI

MD & CEO, Chalet Hotels Limited

To be a part of FHRAI's 55th annual convention is both an honour and a privilege. This gathering of the finest minds, leaders and visionaries from across our industry serves as a crucible where ideas are exchanged, collaborations are forged and the future of hospitality is celebrated. We look forward to engaging with fellow industry leaders. Our sincere gratitude to FHRAI for curating this remarkable convention and for the steadfast dedication to advancing and elevating the hospitality industry in India.

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NIKHIL SHARMA

Managing Director and Chief Operating Officer, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group

On behalf of Radisson Hotel Group, it is a pleasure to be part of the 55th FHRAI Annual Convention. Hospitality for us is about creating moments that matter, combining comfort and care in every guest experience. This year's theme, FutureScape 2047, perfectly reflects our vision, blending global standards with India's warmth and culture. As travel evolves, guests seek more than just a stay. They seek meaningful, memorable experiences. We congratulate FHRAI for bringing the industry together on this platform and look forward to shaping the future of hospitality together.



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ZUBIN SAXENA

Senior Vice President & Regional Head, Hilton-South Asia



For over a century, Hilton has been a global symbol of hospitality, redefining service, comfort and innovation across the world. Guided by the belief that hospitality has the power to connect people, create opportunities and inspire change, our journey continues to set new benchmarks for the industry. The 55th Annual Convention of FHRAI mirrors this philosophy. More than just a platform, it is a movement where ideas are shared, partnerships are built and the future of Indian hospitality is shaped. Hilton is proud to be a part of this remarkable convention, and warmly invites you to join us in this collective effort to strengthen our industry. As we look ahead, Hilton remains committed to advancing sustainability, elevating guest experiences and leading with vision. Together with FHRAI, we look forward to paving the way for a future defined by resilience, excellence and innovation.

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DR BLOSSOM KOCHHAR

Founder and Chairperson, Blossom Kochhar Group of Companies



Wellness is no longer a luxury but a way of life. And when woven into hospitality, it creates experiences that touch the heart and the soul. I am excited to witness how this year's convention, under the visionary theme, FutureScape 2047, is embracing innovation, sustainability and soulful service.

”

“

MANAV THADANI

Founder and Chairman, Hotelivate



We are a global hospitality consulting firm with offices in India, Singapore, Bangkok, Jakarta and Dubai, offering services across different spectrums of the hospitality sector. I have been associated with FHRAI now for over 30 years, and we are extremely pleased to be part of its 55th Annual Convention. It is a celebration of that very spirit, bringing together the brightest minds, boldest ideas and the collective vision of our industry. It is a space where knowledge is shared, collaborations are formed and the future of Indian hospitality is shaped. We extend our heartfelt thanks to FHRAI for providing this platform to the industry and for their unwavering commitment to the growth and excellence of the hospitality sector. We are proud to stand alongside industry leaders in shaping a stronger and more sustainable future.

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Inbound leisure needs urgent fixing

While India's domestic and business travel soar, **Suman Billa** cautions leisure inbound is quietly shrinking, raising questions for the industry's future.



Janice Alyosius

India's tourism is at a crossroads — widening imbalance of inbound and outbound markets. **Suman Billa**, Additional Secretary and Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, addressed the grim realities confronting Indian tourism. He noted that India's tourism is on a robust growth path, but cracks are surfacing, particularly in leisure inbound.

Widening gap

India receives about 20 million inbound tourists. However, when diaspora and non-leisure segments are excluded, leisure tourism shrinks to just 6–6.5 million. That is a concerning for a country of India's size. In contrast, outbound tourism tells a different story. India sends out 27–28 million travellers annually, spending nearly as much overseas as inbound generate for the country. "Through our inbound, we earn about ₹3 lakh crore in foreign exchange. But our

outbound is rising faster than inbound, which should be a source of great worry," Billa warned.

Supply crunch

Demand is outstripping supply. India has just 1.8 lakh branded hotel rooms and 1.5 million unbranded rooms — less than a third of what is needed. "When a leisure traveller looks at several options, India is one of them. Therefore, the experience, pricing and infrastructure must be great. At this point, we are not delivering consistently," Billa admitted.

Domestic travel, however, is booming. Visits jumped from 2.5 billion to nearly 3 billion. Even after applying filters, 470 million Indians travel for leisure, business or shopping within the country. Domestic and business segments are thriving but leisure inbound is stagnating.

Policy actions

To curb the situation, Billa outlined a few urgent policy priorities:

- Rebuild leisure inbound from Europe and the US



SUMAN BILLA

Additional Secretary and
Director General, Ministry of
Tourism, Government of India

"If we create the right policy impetus, private equity and global capital will flow in."

- Capture growth from Asia-Pacific and the Middle East
- Diversify beyond diaspora travellers
- Track earnings in USD, not just INR, to avoid inflated growth perception
- Boost capacity—India needs three times the current number of hotel rooms

The scale of investment is massive — close to ₹10 lakh crore (10 trillion). But Billa remains optimistic, asserting, "If we create the right policy impetus, private equity and global capital will flow in." □



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Indian hospitality industry Strategies and opportunities

From tech innovation to personalisation, **Souvagya Mohapatra** shares the best practices to stay ahead in the ever-evolving landscape of hospitality.



DDP Bureau

The future of India's hospitality industry is poised for significant growth, driven by a booming domestic tourism market, expansion into tier II and III cities and a rise in demand for experiential and wellness travel. The key trends that are shaping the industry include aggressive technology adoption for personalised guest experiences, increased government support for tourism infrastructure, a growing focus on responsible practices and the diversification of niche segments like MICE and experiential tourism. Challenges remain, but the hospitality industry is well-positioned to capitalise on these emerging opportunities to become a global leader.

The Indian hospitality industry is a vibrant and diverse sector that has witnessed significant growth. However, the industry is still struggling with a unique set of challenges that can hinder its progress and growth. To thrive in this competitive landscape, businesses need to adapt and find effective solutions tailored to their specific obstacles.



SOUVAGYA MOHAPATRA

Managing Director (India, Nepal, Bhutan & Sri Lanka), Atmosphere Hotels and Resorts

Tackling challenges

One of the primary challenges is the fluctuation in demand, which is often influenced by seasonality, economic conditions and changing consumer preferences. To



Hotels must craft dynamic pricing models and invest in data analytics to predict demand patterns more accurately

tackle this, hotel operators can implement dynamic pricing models and invest in data analytics to predict demand patterns more accurately. Additionally, diversifying offerings and creating seasonal packages can attract a wider range of guests throughout the year.

Another critical issue is managing operational costs, which can escalate due to rising wages, increased utility rates and maintenance expenses. To mitigate these costs, hospitality businesses can adopt innovative technology solutions such as energy-efficient systems and automated management tools. By streamlining operations, hotels can enhance efficiency and reduce overhead expenditures.

Additionally, guest experience plays a crucial role in driving repeat business and positive word-of-mouth. With the rising expectations of travellers, ensuring high levels of service can be challenging. Training staff to deliver exceptional service, leveraging customer feedback and personalising guest experiences can create lasting impressions.

Safety and health standards have also come to the forefront, especially in light of recent global events. Establishing rigorous hygiene protocols and transparent communication with guests regarding safety measures can build trust. Incorporating technology like contactless check-in and digital menus can further enhance safety and convenience.

Lastly, navigating the complex regulatory environment in India can be daunting for hospitality businesses. Engaging with industry associations and maintaining a proactive approach to compliance can help businesses avoid potential pitfalls.

While the Indian hospitality industry faces distinct challenges, there are numerous strategies that can be employed to overcome them. By leveraging technology, focusing on guest experience, managing

★ Exemplary achievements

As the Managing Director of Atmosphere Hotels and Resorts, Souvagya Mohapatra is currently working towards the expansion project of the Atmosphere Hotels and Resorts in India, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. He has actively contributed for over 33 years to the development of the hospitality and tourism industry. Besides, he has been associated with various reputed organisations, including Odisha State Tourism Promotion Council, FHRAI, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry and the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India.



costs effectively and staying compliant with regulations, businesses can position themselves for sustained success in a rapidly evolving market.

Key strategies and trends

As the industry continues to grow, embracing change and innovation will be vital for overcoming challenges and seizing new opportunities. To ensure success, hotels and restaurants must adopt best practices and

can optimise operations. Mobile check-ins, contactless payments and the use of data analytics enable staff to focus on guest satisfaction instead of administrative tasks.

Employee training and development: Investing in regular team training ensures that employees are well-equipped to provide excellent service. Not only does this improve guest interactions, but it also promotes employee retention. Training programmes should cover everything from customer service skills to the latest health and safety protocols.

Personalisation: Today's guests expect a personalised experience. Utilising customer relationship management (CRM) tools allows establishments to gather and analyse guest data, offering tailored recommendations and services.

Sustainable practices: With growing environmental awareness, hotels are increasingly implementing sustainable practices. This includes using locally sourced ingredients, minimising food waste and employing energy-efficient appliances. Not only do these practices appeal to eco-conscious guests, but they also reduce operating costs.

Focus on creating memorable experiences that not only drive repeat business but also generate positive word-of-mouth marketing

embrace innovations that enhance guest experience, streamline operations and drive profitability. Following are some of the key strategies and emerging trends that are reshaping the industry.

Technology integration: From property management systems (PMS) to point-of-sale (POS) systems, integrating technology

Diverse culinary options: To cater to a wide range of dietary preferences and restrictions, offering diverse menu options is essential. This includes plant-based dishes, gluten-free alternatives and allergen-friendly choices. Collaborating with local chefs to create unique, seasonal menus can also draw in guests.

Social media presence: A robust online presence is vital for attracting new guests. Engaging with customers through social media platforms, showcasing food and ambiance, and encouraging online reviews can significantly boost visibility.

Loyalty programmes: Implementing loyalty programmes encourages repeat business. Offering incentives such as discounts, complimentary services or exclusive access to events can foster a sense of community and affinity among guests.

Management strategies

In the ever-evolving world of hospitality, effective leadership and management strategies are crucial for achieving success and delivering exceptional guest experiences. Following are some key strategies that can help leaders thrive in this dynamic industry.

Cultivate a strong company culture: Leaders should prioritise creating a positive and inclusive environment where employees feel valued and engaged. This can be achieved by encouraging open communication and recognising achievements.

Invest in employee training: Implement regular training sessions to ensure that staff is well-versed in customer service excellence, operational procedures and industry trends.

Embrace technology: Incorporating technology into operations can significantly streamline processes and enhance guest experiences. Leaders should leverage tools such as property management systems, online booking platforms and customer relationship management software to improve efficiency and personalise service.

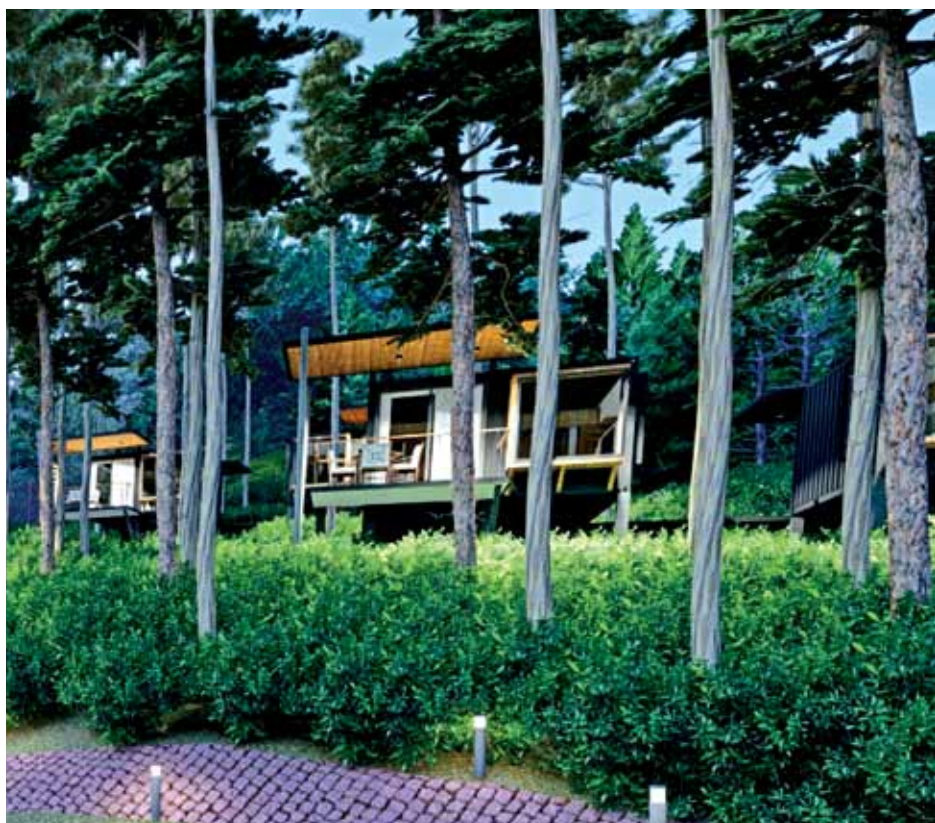
Focus on guest experience: Customer satisfaction should be at the forefront of all management strategies. Leaders need to consistently assess and improve the guest experience by gathering feedback and implementing necessary changes.

Develop strong communication skills: Effective communication is essential in hospitality management. Leaders should cultivate strong communication skills to articulate their vision clearly, provide constructive feedback and foster collaboration.

Nurture relationships with stakeholders: Building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders, such as suppliers, partners and the local community, can enhance operational success. Leaders should engage with stakeholders through networking events, partnerships and community involvement to foster loyalty and support.

Positive prospects

The future of the Indian hospitality industry is bright, filled with opportunities for innovation, growth and adaptation. By embracing sustainability, technology, culinary creativity and a focus on wellness, the industry can not only meet the evolving needs of travellers but also contribute positively to the cultural and economic landscape of India. As we move ahead, these perspectives will guide us in shaping a hospitality sector that is not just about providing service, but about creating memorable experiences that resonate with the heart of every traveller. □





GST overhaul brings some respite for the sector

Weeks after FHRAI's appeal to the Union Finance Minister seeking GST reforms, the govt approves the next-gen GST framework to drive India's hospitality growth.

 DDP Bureau

The consistent efforts of FHRAI have finally borne fruit. In the 56th meeting of the GST Council, chaired by the Union Finance Minister **Nirmala Sitharaman**, the next-gen GST framework was approved to accelerate India's economic growth. Just weeks ahead of the council meeting, FHRAI had made a strong representation to the Union Finance Minister and Chairperson, GST Council, urging the rationalisation of GST in the tourism and hospitality sector

to boost competitiveness and align with India's Vision 2047. The association highlighted that it would act as a catalyst for the sector's growth, aligning with the Government's Vision 2047 and positioning India as a global tourism powerhouse.

Earlier, FHRAI lauded the GST reforms announced by the Prime Minister on 15 August 2025, reflecting the Government's commitment to strengthening India's tax regime and ensuring long-term growth.

VAT rates in Asian countries

Tourism is a significant source of tax revenue and foreign exchange

earnings with massive potential to expand. However, India's current GST rates make the tourism sector less competitive in comparison to its global peers. Asian destinations such as Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore have adopted lower tax regimes, attracting larger tourist inflows. On the contrary, India faces an inherent disadvantage due to its higher GST structure.

Tourism for Viksit Bharat 2047

As India prepares to emerge as a developed economy by 2047, tourism certainly needs to play a critical role in shaping our global standing.



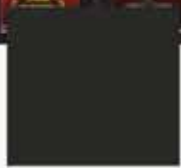
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NIRMALA SITHARAMAN

Union Finance Minister and
Chairperson, GST Council



“India’s current GST rates make the tourism sector less competitive in comparison to its global peers.”

It contributes not only to the socio-economic growth but also to cultural and heritage preservation, soft power diplomacy and inclusive development. Rationalisation of GST will act as a catalyst for this sector’s growth, aligning with the Government’s Vision 2047 and positioning India as a global tourism powerhouse.

On behalf of the tourism industry, FHRAI submitted the following

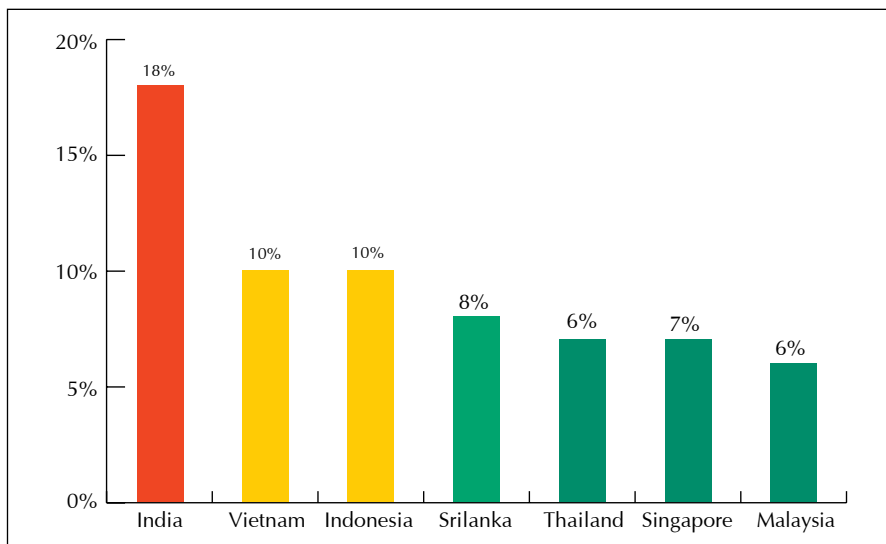
recommendations for the active consideration of the GST Council.

Uniform 5 per cent GST: A uniform GST rate of 5 per cent with Input Tax Credit (ITC) benefits on all hospitality and tourism related services including restaurants, outdoor/indoor catering and allied services, will simplify tax compliance, boost affordability for both domestic and global travellers, and bring India at par with competing tourism markets.

Delinking of GST: Doing away with the current practice of linking of GST on F&B services with the hotel room tariff will facilitate the growth of hospitality sector as this linkage causes revenue loss and operational inefficiencies to the hotels.

Regularise past GST payment: The industry had been facing issues due to the linking of F&B rates to room charges and the confusion of “Value of Services Received” and “Declared Tariff.” However, the clarifications and the changes introduced in the GST rates for hotel and restaurant services in the 55th GST Council Meeting were a welcome step. These confusions and ambiguity have led to issuance of demand notices to hotels across the country by the GST department. Hence, the government should consider regularising payment of GST during the past period on an ‘as is basis,’ which has a precedent in other services.

Further, FHRAI noted, “These measures will significantly contribute to enhancing Ease of Doing Business in the tourism sector and enable the industry to realise its full potential.”



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GST cut brings relief, ITC raises concerns

While welcoming the govt's decision to cut GST from 12% to 5%, **Pradeep Shetty** also flags serious concerns about the removal of ITC benefits.



 DDP Bureau

Following the recommendations of the 56th GST Council Meeting, the government approved a reduction of GST from 12 percent to 5 percent on hotel accommodation with a room tariff of up to ₹7,500 per night without inputs tax credit (ITC). The revised rates will take effect from September 22.

Pradeep Shetty, Spokesperson, HRAWI, stated, "The reduction of GST to 5 percent on hotel accommodation services with room rates up to ₹7,500 per night is a welcome move. It significantly improves our competitiveness with other Asian tourist destinations and will boost both domestic and inbound tourism. We also applaud the Government's decision to reduce GST rates on essential input materials and food items, including the reduction on cakes, pastries and namkeens sold



at standalone bakeries. This will make these items more affordable for consumers."

He further expressed concerns, saying, "It is disheartening to see that the Input Tax Credit (ITC) benefits have been withdrawn for this 5 per cent GST slab. A GST regime

"A GST regime without ITC defeats the very purpose of the new tax system."

without ITC defeats the very purpose of the new tax system, as it cascades taxes and creates embedded costs." He cautioned that this would give rise to new complexities and severely impact businesses with high operational costs, such as rentals and brand management fees.

He also appealed to the government to restore ITC benefits to ensure the long-term health and competitiveness of the industry. He added, "We eagerly await clarification on the 'specified premises' notification to fully understand the implications of delinking F&B services from room tariffs." □

Reinforcing food safety standards

HRAWI conducted a FoSTaC programme in Pune, equipping 25 professionals with key food safety and hygiene practices.



DDP Bureau

HRAWI has conducted its latest Food Safety Supervisor Training in Advance Catering

(FoSTaC) on 26 August in Pune. The session, attended by 25 hospitality professionals, covered essential topics including food handling, hygiene, sanitation and waste management.

The training programme was conducted by **Praveen Andrews** of Parikshan, where participants gained valuable practical insight to strengthen best practices and

food safety measures within their establishments.

The training programme was inaugurated by Andrews, along with eminent industry leaders including **Nitin Ramdas Nighot**, Tamanna Hotels; **Sukhen Sunil Debnath**, 1000 Oaks Volga Hospitality; **Pankaj Shivaji Shinde**, Doubletree by Hilton; **Chef Supratim Das**, Amanora The Fern Hotels & Club; **Utkarsha Prashant Kale**, Amanora The Fern hotels & Club and **Chef Siddeshwar Prasad Shukla**, Lemon Tree Premier.

So far, HRAWI has successfully trained 3,632 professionals through its FoSTaC training programmes. □



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HRANI leads the way in food safety awareness with knowledge-driven session



PRITHA TRIPATHI

Director Growth & Strategy
Precision Audit Services (OPC)

The Hotel and Restaurant Association Northern India (HRANI) recently organised a knowledge-driven session focusing on FSSAI Compliance, Audits and Hygiene Rating to spread awareness on food safety regulations in the hospitality sector.

The session was led by Pritha Tripathi, Precision Audit Services (OPC), Amritsar, and former Scientist at FSSAI, who shared practical insights on key compliance requirements. The discussion covered menu labelling norms-including the mandatory display of calorific values, serving sizes, allergen information-

and veg/non-veg logos on menu cards and boards-as well as the need for establishments to prominently display their FSSAI licenses.

Attendees were also informed about the mandatory QR code system, enabling customers to instantly register food safety and hygiene-related complaints through a mobile application. These measures are designed to enhance customer trust and bring greater accountability to the sector.

With this initiative, HRANI reaffirmed its commitment to capacity building, regulatory awareness and fostering a culture of food safety across the hospitality sector. □



SURENDRA KUMAR JAISWAL

President, HRANI

“HRANI has always played a pivotal role in guiding and supporting its members on compliance and regulatory updates. Through such knowledge sessions, we continue to empower the industry with the right information, ensuring that hospitality establishments not only meet statutory requirements but also uphold the highest benchmarks of safety and service excellence.”



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IHCL unlocks the midscale code

Under its 'Accelerate 2030' vision, IHCL is turbocharging its mid-segment portfolio, setting the stage for the next chapter of expansion and market dominance.



Lipla Negi

Nothing is 'too ambitious' in the professional playbook of **Puneet Chhatwal**, Managing Director and CEO, Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL). A leader who believes in action over rhetoric, Chhatwal lives by a simple mantra, "We promise, we deliver." With 2030 in sight, the Indian hospitality giant has set an au-

dacious yet calculated goal — to scale to 700 hotels, a milestone that not only reflects the company's growth trajectory but also resonates with India's booming tourism potential. Drawing parallels between India's economy — poised to become the third largest in the world by 2030 and IHCL's ambitious 'Accelerate 2030' strategy, Chhatwal sees a shared destination: as India is poised to clock a projected 6.5 per cent GDP growth, both IHCL and India are

racing towards the same finish line — defining a new era of global hospitality leadership.

On the brink of tourism boom

Calling tourism one of India's biggest 'soft powers,' Chhatwal explained, "For a long time, tourism has been a key growth catalyst, but we have not yet unlocked its full potential. It is not just about GDP contribution or job creation, tourism carries an influence, a soft power for





PUNEET CHHATWAL

Managing Director & CEO, Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL)

Recent partnerships have catapulted IHCL's portfolio to over 550 hotels

the country, that we believe can be utilised far more effectively in the coming years."

Combine this with India's rapid infrastructure growth — from highways and trains to airports — and

the future of the sector looks brighter than ever. According to Chhatwal, this is a big boost for both domestic and inbound travel. "The investment the government has made over the last seven years has been phenomenal," he said. Adding to that is a new wave of discretionary consumption, especially among younger Indians who are now at the helm of travel decisions. "The doubling of highways, trains and airports strongly supports the demand," he noted.

Chhatwal, who has closely tracked the surge in branded hotels, sees domestic demand far outpacing supply. "Ten years ago, India had just 1,00,000 branded hotel rooms. Today, we are at 2,00,000 rooms but to put that into perspective, that is still less than Dubai and Singapore combined, and even less than one state in the US. That is the size of the opportunity."

It is this gap that fuels IHCL's Accelerate 2030 vision. Chhatwal predicted the next phase of growth will come twice as fast. "What took India ten years to double — from 1,00,000 to 2,00,000 — will take half the time to get to 3,00,000. The runway for growth is massive, and we are just getting started."

Ginger: A transformative force

Turning resilience into market dominance, IHCL, under Puneet Chhatwal's leadership, is now sharpening its focus on the mid-segment of India's hospitality sector. Backed by the robust growth trajectory of Ginger — its midscale, value-oriented brand, HCL is strategically expanding its footprint in a category that has witnessed the fastest acceleration in demand post-pandemic. By capitalising on shifting travel trends and rising demand from tier II and III cities, the company aims to consolidate its position as the dominant player in midscale segment, which is one of hospitality's fastest-growing and most competitive segments.

From being India's largest hospitality company to emerging as one of its strongest, IHCL is charting an ambitious path of scale, size and synergies. In line with its five-year road map 'Accelerate 2030', IHCL recently entered into a strategic partnership to acquire a controlling stake in ANK Hotels and Pride Hospitality, while also signing a distribution agreement with Brij Hospitality. By bringing the decades old hospitality expertise of these companies into its fold — whose promoters belong to the



Clarks Hotels family — IHCL gains a definitive competitive edge in the increasingly competitive midscale segment. With this decisive move, IHCL has catapulted its portfolio to over 550 hotels.

Over the next few months, these hotels will be integrated operationally and migrated to IHCL's brand-scape, predominantly under the Ginger brand, among others. "Furthering IHCL's leading presence in the mid-scale segment with the successful transformation of Ginger, this partnership doubles our portfolio with 240+ hotels addressing the growing needs of the aspirational travellers," explained Chhatwal. These hotels are on a capital light arrangement of management contracts and select operating leases. ANK Hotels and Pride Hospitality have a portfolio of 135 hotels in the midscale segment spread across 110 locations. ▣



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Theme hotels: Catalyst for experiential travel boom



FHRAI urges the MoT for theme hotels with clear policy guidelines to transform destinations into experiential travel hubs and reap economic gains.

 DDP Bureau

To meet the increasing demand for immersive and authentic experiences, FHRAI has proposed the development of theme-based hotels to the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. These hotels would serve as significant catalysts for change, transforming destinations into hubs for experiential travel. They will al-

low travellers to engage with specific themes, such as historical, cultural, environmental, adventure or fantasy-based experiences, thereby enhancing their overall travel enjoyment.

Remarkably, India's tourism industry is undergoing a major shift as travellers today seek unique, immersive and authentic experiences rather than just luxury. This has given rise to theme-based and experiential hotels, which transform a simple stay into a journey of discovery, learn-

ing and cultural immersion. Besides, India's diverse geography, rich culture and heritage assets provide the perfect foundation for these hotels to flourish.

The association highlighted that these hotels, located near mountains, rivers, forests and coastal areas, can directly promote experiential tourism by serving as gateways to activities such as trekking, river rafting, paragliding, surfing, desert safaris, wildlife expeditions, cultural trails

and wellness retreats. For instance, mountain lodges in hill stations may be designed with a mountaineering theme while coastal resorts may focus on water sports. Such properties not only attract experience-seeking travellers but also encourage longer tourist stays.

To boost theme-based hotels and properties, FHRAI put forward the following suggestions:

Policy framework: The creation of a detailed policy framework that can accelerate the growth of the hotel industry and attract both domestic and foreign tourists. There should be a clear national and state-level policy framework to encourage theme-based hospitality projects, especially in experiential tourism destinations. This could include single-window clearance for experiential tourism projects and public-private partnerships for the development of theme-based properties.

Environmental clearances with safety priority: Many experiential tourism destinations are ecological-

By sourcing locally and employing local talent, theme-based hotels promote rural livelihoods and enhance the cultural identity of the destination

ly sensitive, so theme-based hotels should adhere to strict sustainability norms. Guidelines should strictly include the use of eco-friendly materials, renewable energy and low-impact waste management. The clearance process should encourage safe operations, striking a right balance between development and conservation. A simple but robust environmental clearance process will ensure that that the projects meet safety standards without unnecessary procedural hassles.

Cultural and economic Impact: Apart from offering unique experiences, theme-based hotels also highlight the importance of local heritage, art and cuisine, such as stays in old palaces, Kerala Ayurveda retreats or tribal-themed eco-lodges. By sourcing locally and employing local talent, these hotels can promote rural livelihoods and enhance the cultural identity of the destination.

Catalyst for experiential tourism

Experiential tourism is not only about participation, immersion and engagement rather it is more towards feeling the essence of culture. Theme-based hotels directly foster this by:

Storytelling & cultural immersion:

Hotels built around a heritage, art or mythology theme (e.g., palaces in Rajasthan, Vedic village resorts in Kerala) immerse tourists in living traditions. Guests do not just 'stay,' they experience history, crafts, cuisine and rituals firsthand.

Learning through experience: A wildlife-themed lodge near Ran-





thambore offers safaris, ecological walks and conservation workshops.

Wellness-themed resorts: Ayurvedic or wellness-themed resorts in Kerala provide authentic learning on yoga, Ayurveda and sustainable living. These become educational encounters, not just leisure.

Destination differentiation: A theme hotel enhances the identity of a place creating a unique pull factor beyond standard hospitality.

Community engagement: Many theme-based hotels integrate local artisans, performers and chefs. This supports livelihoods and builds authentic experiences for tourists.

Examples in India

DATA Resort, Lonavala: Military-themed, adventure-focused, guided by ex-special forces.

Glamp Eco Stays, Manali: Geodesic domes at 2600m, sustainable luxury with panoramic Himalayan views.

Villa Shanti, Puducherry: Culinary heritage hotel in the old French Town, sourcing local produce.

Palace Hotels, Rajasthan: Adaptive reuse of forts and havelis into heritage luxury.

Everest Base Camp, Mussoorie: Luxury tents with trekking, archery and fine dining amid forests.

Global parallels

Eco Camp Patagonia, Chile: Pioneer

A clear national and state-level policy framework should be implemented to encourage theme-based hospitality projects

For example:

- Rajasthan’s palace hotels signify heritage tourism
- Houseboat resorts in Kerala promotes backwater tourism
- Bollywood-themed hotels in Mumbai recognises pop culture tourism.



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Why theme-based hotels

Destination differentiation: Make destinations stand out. For example, Rajasthan embeds royal living and Kerala gives a serenity to Ayurveda wellness.

Cultural & heritage preservation:

Incentivise reuse of heritage properties and revive local crafts, traditions and cuisine.

Economic multiplier: Generate employment for artisans, guides, chefs, performers and farmers.

Tourist behaviour benefits: Encourage longer stays, higher spending, repeat visits and attract niche, high-spending travellers.

Responsible tourism: Many prefer eco-friendly construction, better waste management and use of renewable energy.

Theme-based hotels are not just accommodations but destination-makers. They drive experiential tourism, aligning India with global travel trends. "Timely policy support will allow India to position itself as a world leader in experiential and sustainable tourism, leveraging theme-based hotels as a powerful catalyst," FHRAI noted. ▣



FSCAI leads India's foodservice revolution

Rajesh Chowdhury, Founder, Food Service Consultants Association of India, is at the forefront to modernise and empower India's foodservice ecosystem.



India's food services industry is entering a decade of aggressive expansion, with experts projecting the market to nearly double from ₹5.5 trillion today to ₹9 trillion by 2030. This growth is driven by rising disposable incomes, a digitally empowered young consumer base and evolving dining habits that prioritise speed, convenience and variety.

Recognising these shifts early, **Rajesh Chowdhury**, a seasoned industry veteran with over three

decades of experience, identified the need to guide food businesses through this transformation. His vision is to empower entrepreneurs, consultants and manufacturers to harness technology, optimise operations and drive sustainable growth.

Driving this agenda forward, he founded the Food Service Consultants Association of India (FSCAI), which now plays a pivotal role in shaping the sector's future. As a professional body, FSCAI brings together experts to exchange knowledge, set benchmarks and establish best practices. Its mission is clear — to support food operators and equip-

“As a professional body, FSCAI brings together experts to exchange knowledge, set benchmarks and establish best practices.”

ment manufacturers, promote ethical business conduct and raise technical standards across the industry. In collaboration with government agencies, educational institutions and global partners, FSCAI also champions food safety, hygiene, sustainability and innovation, ensuring India's food services ecosystem evolves in line with global standards.

A result-oriented sales leader, Chowdhury has a proven track record in heading sales and business development for two leading US multinational companies across India and the subcontinent. He has successfully managed large-scale events, including GOPIO (Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin), served as the lead coordinator for the Golden Peacock National Quality Awards and organised the prestigious Mission to Japan corporate initiative in association with Komatsu Career Creations. He also serves on the Board of Advisors for the Indo Exposition Mart, Greater Noida, and is the Founder-Director of two premier industry associations — the International Hospitality Sales Professionals Forum and the Food Service Professionals Forum. □

RAJESH CHOWDHURY

Founder & Director, Food Service Consultants Association of India



FutureScape 2047: Shaping the next era of Indian hospitality

As the industry moves into Hospitality 4.0, the 55th FHRAI Annual Convention will explore 'FutureScape 2047,' envisioning future-forward strategies for hospitality.

Hospitality on the cusp of a new era: HRANI



Creating an ecosystem that combines personalisation, intelligence and flexibility.”



SURENDRA K JAISWAL
President
HRANI

The 55th Annual Convention of the FHRAI will be held from 18–20 September 2025 in Bengaluru. This convention is a landmark platform where the entire hospitality and restaurant industry comes together to share ideas, build connections and shape the future of Indian hospitality. The theme of this year's convention, "FutureScape 2047: Redefining Hospitality for a New India," aligns with India's vision of a US\$ 3 trillion tourism economy as the nation prepares to celebrate 100 years of independence. It calls on us to reflect on the evolving nature of global travel, the growing demand for sustainability and the transformative role technology plays in shaping the hospitality industry.

Looking ahead to 2047, we are on the cusp of major changes. The industry is moving into Hospitality 4.0 — a new way of designing, delivering and experiencing hospitality. This is not just about advanced digital tools, but about creating an ecosystem that combines personalisation, intelligence and flexibility. Smart hotels, AI-driven services, sustainable practices and cultural experiences are becoming central to the journey forward.

Even as technology advances, the heart of hospitality remains the human touch. Our challenge is to balance innovation with warmth and efficiency with care. Today's traveller is not only looking for convenience but also meaningful, authentic and sustainable experiences. Here lies India's strength — our rich culture, diverse landscapes and the timeless value of "Atithi Devo Bhava" make us uniquely positioned to lead the world in this evolving landscape.

This convention is more than a platform for discussion; it is a catalyst for action. Here, we will chart roadmaps for the future, foster partnerships and turn ideas into reality. It is an opportunity to align policy with practice, innovation with inclusivity and growth with responsibility. □

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JIMMY SHAW

President
HRAWI

It is with immense pride and a deep sense of responsibility that I extend a warm welcome to all delegates, industry leaders, policymakers and visionaries to the 55th Annual Convention of FHRAI. This year's theme, "FutureScape 2047: Redefining Hospitality for a New India," could not be more timely or transformative. As we stand at the crossroads of tradition and innovation, the convention serves as a pivotal platform to envision, engage and execute strategies that will shape the next era of Indian hospitality. The convention is expected to be attended by delegates from India and abroad, including leading hoteliers, industry leaders and key stakeholders from across the tourism and hospitality ecosystem.

By 2047, India will mark 100 years of independence and our industry is poised to be a cornerstone of the nation's socio-economic fabric. The concept of Hospitality 4.0 is no longer a distant idea but an urgent reality that will be a blend of technology, sustainability and human-centric service to create experiences that are seamless, personalised and profoundly impactful. From AI-driven guest interactions to zero-carbon footprints, from regenerative tourism to hyper-local cultural storytelling, the future demands that we rethink, reimagine and reinvent.

The convention is not just about discussions; it is about actionable foresight. We will delve into critical themes that will explore the power of digital transformation to enhance operational efficiency while retaining the warmth of Indian hospitality. It will serve as a platform to deliberate on the role that sustainability will play in attracting the conscious traveller of tomorrow and about how policy frameworks can evolve to support innovation and investment in tier II and III markets. More importantly, it will also provide solutions for skill development to prepare our workforce for the hospitality landscape of 2047.

FHRAI and HRAWI have always believed in collaboration as the catalyst for change. Over the duration of the convention, we will share insights, celebrate best practices and forge partnerships that will define the future. We are honoured to host leaders from the government, global hospitality brands, tech pioneers and culinary artists — all united by a common vision to position India as the world's most welcoming and forward-looking destination. □



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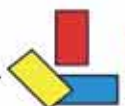
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Innovate to align with Viksit Bharat 2047: HRAEI



SUDESH PODDAR
President
HRAEI

“

Technology is not just a tool; it is an enabler of transformation.”

FHRAI is hosting its 55th Annual Convention in Bengaluru, with the theme “FutureScape 2047: Redefining Hospitality for a New India.” The theme of this year’s convention reflects the need to reimagine and transform the sector to align with the aspirations of Viksit Bharat 2047 and achieve a US\$ 3 trillion tourism economy. Innovation, sustainability, digitalisation and skill development will be the key drivers that redefine the future of Indian hospitality, making it more resilient, dynamic and globally relevant.

This convention is more than just an industry event – it is a forum to exchange knowledge, explore new opportunities and collectively envision the future of Indian hospitality as we march towards 2047. It highlights the need for the industry to innovate, adapt and lead in an era shaped by technological advancements, sustainable development and evolving guest expectations.

Hospitality 4.0: Navigating the tech revolution

The Hospitality 4.0 solution is specifically designed to address manpower, efficiency and enhance the guest experience. It does not matter if it is villas at an exclusive beach resort, suites in a premium hotel or rooms in budget hotels, upon adoption they will see a significant improvement in their daily operations.

Rise of smart hotels: From voice-controlled assistants that offer local insights to connected devices that allow guests to order room service with a simple voice

command, the smart hotel experience is all about personalisation and convenience.

Immersive experiences: Guests can use Augmented Reality (AR) to explore a hotel’s amenities, take virtual tours of tourist attractions or even visualise how different room configurations would look before making a choice.

Contactless solutions: From digital check-ins and mobile room keys to QR code menus and touchless payments, guests are enjoying a safer and more streamlined experience.

Hyper-personalisation: Hoteliers can harness AI to analyse guest data and preferences, enabling them to craft tailor-made experiences – from suggesting personalised itineraries to curating in-room amenities.

Sustainable stays: Tech plays a crucial role in achieving eco-friendly goals, such as energy-efficient smart thermostats that learn guests’ preferences to reduce wastage, to apps that help guests offset their carbon footprint from travel.

In this era of Hospitality 4.0, technology is not just a tool – it is an enabler of transformation. It empowers the hospitality industry to create richer, more memorable guest experiences. □



LUCARIS

Spearheading India's cocktail renaissance



Raising the bar of craftsmanship and sophistication, Lucaris's lead-free crystal glassware is crafting its legacy in India's premium cocktail & wine market.

 DDP Bureau

A well-designed glass can enhance one's sensory experience, enhancing every sip. Beyond their opulent design, Lucaris's lead-free crystal glassware offers an immersive tasting experience. What sets them apart is the blend of German precision and Asian craftsmanship, allowing them to cater to a diverse clientele, including emerging premium hotels, fine-casual dining bars, restaurant owners and premium urban explorers.

Aesthetic appeal

The right glassware can significantly elevate the cocktail and wine experience by accentuating aromas, flavours and visual appeal. Indian consumers are increasingly recognising this, driven by the rise of premium wines and craft cocktails. In response to the trend, **Viraj Sawant**, Wine Sommelier, Lucaris Brand Influencer, and Founder of InACan Cocktails and Indian School of Beverages, said, "Lucaris' collections, such as RIMS for cocktails and Desire for wine, are designed in collaboration

with experts to ensure each drink is enjoyed at its best." These thoughtfully crafted collections reinforce the importance of glassware in premium drinking experiences.

Making an impact


Brands like Lucaris are making world-class glassware more accessible, empowering mixologists and bartenders to compete globally without compromising quality or design. According to Wine Sommelier, Columnist and Lucaris Brand Influencer **Magandeeep Singh**, by elevating the visual appeal and sensory impact of beverages, Lucaris helps bars increase their premium quotient and, in turn, profitability. "The brand's award-winning collections, including RIMS, Desire, The Elements and GRAN, are co-designed with sommeliers and mixologists to match evolving drinking trends," **Sawant** added. By giving access to their functional and beautifully designed glassware, Lucaris empowers bars to deliver memorable experiences that elevate India's modern bar culture.

Gaining Ground

India's beverage and bar culture is

Lucaris empowers mixologists and bartenders to compete on a global level without compromising quality or design

expected to continue evolving, with a growing focus on premiumisation, innovation and experiential drinking. Consumers will increasingly seek unique and memorable experiences, driving bars and restaurants to innovate their offerings. **Viraj** highlighted, "Overall, brand experience is something that is essential for establishments to create an immersive experience that reflects their brand identity, values and personality."

On an optimistic note, **Singh** stressed, "Lucaris will continue to play a vital role in this growth by providing premium glassware that supports the art of storytelling, helping bars and restaurants craft cohesive brand experiences through every detail, from glassware to service." 



Big gains in mid market no global alliances in sight

Buoyed by the potential of home-grown hotels, **Arjun Baljee** sees a unique advantage to flourish in the mid-segment market.



Lipla Negi

While many drift with the current, it is the daring few who sail against it and steer success their way! In an age where alliances are currency, Royal Orchid Hotels is doubling down on independence. With a firm belief in its home-grown strength, **Arjun Baljee** believes that being one of the last standing India hotel brands gives them a distinct edge in the mid-segment market. “If you look at this segment specifically, most Indian brands have been acquired or absorbed. Ferns is now with Marriott, Sarovar hotels is owned by Louvre. That leaves very few Indian hotel brands of scale that are still Indian-owned and Indian-run,” he said. Indeed, it is a unique space to occupy when most global chains are aggressively expanding in India through strategic alliances.

Realigning for results

With a focused restructuring strategy, the Bengaluru-based hospitality group is positioning itself as one of the few remaining Indian-owned players in the mid to upper mid-scale space. “Last year, we decided to segment our portfolio across five brands,” Baljee said, “One (RE:GEN:TA) is already well-established, another (ICONIQA) is currently being launched, two sub-brands (RE:GEN:TA Z and RE:GEN:TA: Place) are gaining strong momentum, and a fifth (Crestoria) —targeted at leisure and experiential travel—is in the pipeline.”

Baljee recognised that hospitality is entering a new era, driven by the evolving preferences of Gen Z travellers. As the lines between business and leisure blur, hotels are no longer just destinations—they are becoming seamless extensions of a modern, fluid lifestyle, and that is exactly how he has envisioned his latest brand Iconica, a 291-key category defin-



ARJUN BALJEE
President
Royal Orchid Hotels

“We are at a topline of around ₹350 crore and targeting ₹500 crore in revenue in the near term.”

ing hotel in Mumbai, both in scale and vision.

Crestoria, on the other hand, is envisioned as a collection of such storied, character-rich hotels across the country – properties that carry emotional and historical significance, and that require a different kind of operational mindset. “There are hotels within our current portfolio that are perfect candidates to be elevated into the Crestoria collection,” he added. “But these cannot be run like standard business or leisure hotels. They demand a different kind of management bandwidth. They need love. They need to be treated with respect—for their heritage, architecture and location.”

Holding the reigns

Having his next milestones in clear sight, he noted that Royal Orchid is already within striking distance of ₹100 crore in EBITDA, having closed at ₹96.8 crore. “Right now, we are at a topline of around ₹350 crore. Mumbai alone should add another ₹100 crore and stabilise somewhere between ₹120–140 crore. Add to that the upcoming flexi-lease hotels, and we are realistically targeting ₹500 crore in revenue in the near term.”

Despite the apparent consolidation trend, Royal Orchid has no immediate plans to align with a foreign partner. “We are attractive to many international players given our



scale and footprint,” Baljee admitted, “But everything comes down to our long-term strategic intent. We know where we are headed, and right now, that path does not involve giving up control.”

As a publicly listed company, he reiterated that Royal Orchid’s core

commitment remains to its shareholders. “Our job is to create long-term value,” he said. “That does not mean we have ruled anything out. But it also does not mean we are actively seeking anything. For now, our focus is on evolving our business and growing it sustainably.” □





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Purpose-driven strategy to drive guest loyalty

Moving beyond conventional rewards, the LaLiT Loyalty Programme empowers its guests to create a positive social impact.



DDP Bureau

The LaLiT Suri Hospitality Group has launched its transformative new loyalty initiative, 'The LaLiT Loyalty Programme.' This thoughtfully designed programme aims to recognise, reward and celebrate its guests with tangible benefits, personalised experiences and the opportunity to give back to society.

The LaLiT Loyalty Programme features four distinctive tiers, such as Blue, Silver, Gold and Platinum. The programme offers members a flexible ecosystem to earn, redeem or donate points. Inspired by global best practices, it allows members to accumulate points for spends across The LaLiT's participating hotels, palaces and resorts. From indulgent stays and signature dining at award-winning restaurants like Baluchi and



DR JYOTSNA SURI

Chairperson and Managing Director, The LaLiT Suri Hospitality Group

OKO, to rejuvenating rituals at Spiceology, members earn points across their journey with ease.

Building deeper connections

The LaLiT Loyalty goes beyond tra-

ditional loyalty offerings. It introduces a purpose-driven dimension, empowering members to make a real impact. Through a meaningful partnership with Points for Good, members can donate their points to support over 18 NGOs and 40 verified causes, ranging from child education, tree plantation and skill-

The programme, in partnership with Points for Good, allows members to donate their points and support over 18 NGOs

building for marginalised communities to LGBTQIA+ empowerment and environmental sustainability.

"At The LaLiT, we believe hospitality is not just about service, it is about building meaningful relationships. The LaLiT Loyalty Programme is our way of showing gratitude to our guests and building a deeper, more meaningful connection with them. It is a celebration of trust, shared values and mutual expectations," said **Dr Jyotsna Suri**, Chairperson and Managing Director, The LaLiT Suri Hospitality Group.

This initiative reinforces The LaLiT's long-standing commitment to inclusion, equity, and conscious hospitality and nurtures emotional loyalty by inviting guests to become co-creators of positive change. □





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Future is hybrid

AI with human touch

While AI empowers hotel ops with personalised services, **Gaurav Singh** stresses the critical role of human connections in creating memorable guest experiences.



DDP Bureau

How is Chalet Hotels integrating digital innovations like Artificial Intelligence (AI), facial recognition and mobile-first platforms into its guest journey, especially at the check-in stage?

We are in the process of introducing AI-based technologies across multiple hotels in our portfolio. This ranges from deploying AI for guest interactions and customer service to creating a seamless, mobile-first check-in experience that reduces wait times and enhances convenience. In parallel, we are also leveraging AI to optimise our Building Management Systems (BMS), ensuring smarter energy use and more efficient hotel operations.

Do you envision a future with lobby-less hotels and fully automated stays becoming the new normal in your portfolio?

At Chalet Hotels, we see technology as a powerful enabler — mobile check-ins, digital keys, AI concierge and smart room controls are all innovations that can enhance convenience and efficiency. However, we do not believe lobby-less and fully automated hotels will become the norm in India anytime soon. Hospitality here is deeply rooted in human connection and the warmth of a welcome or a personal interaction at the front desk cannot be replaced by machines.

We also remain conscious of the employment opportunities our industry provides. For us, the future lies in a hybrid model — where smart



GAURAV SINGH
Chief Operating Officer
Chalet Hotels Limited

technologies streamline operations, but the essence of service and personal engagement continues to define the guest experience.





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How is Chalet Hotels using AI beyond chatbots — perhaps for demand forecasting or guest sentiment analysis?"

At Chalet, we are constantly enhancing our asset management and operational capabilities. A key focus is on ensuring the efficient use of energy, water and other resources through AI-powered BMS solutions, which we are actively implementing. From a guest experience perspective, AI for us goes far beyond chatbots — it is about creating more intuitive and effective guest journeys. By anticipating our guests' needs, we aim to offer them the right product at the right value, thereby making their stay both seamless and personalised.

How do you ensure data-driven personalisation does not cross the line into overreach? What safeguards are in place to protect guest privacy?

We have the utmost regard for our guests' privacy and strictly comply with all applicable data protection laws. Any communication with our guests is always based on their consent, and we make it a point to keep it relevant, meaningful and only when necessary. At the same time, we have robust safeguards in place to ensure

“The warmth of a welcome or a personal interaction at the front desk cannot be replaced by machines.”

that personal data is handled responsibly and securely. Our approach to personalisation is therefore about enhancing the guest experience without ever compromising trust.

In what ways has digitalisation contributed to revenue growth — be it through dynamic pricing, upselling, or increased direct bookings? Are there measurable gains you are seeing already across your portfolio?

Digitalisation has been a key driver of revenue optimisation across our portfolio, enabled by advanced revenue management systems and AI-driven tools. We have strengthened dynamic pricing and demand forecasting, ensuring better yield management and higher occupan-

cies. Digital platforms have also enabled more targeted upselling — from room upgrades to F&B experiences — driving incremental revenue growth.

While the gains vary across properties, we are already seeing measurable improvements in RevPAR and contribution from direct channels. Going forward, we see digitalisation as not just a revenue lever, but also a way to deepen guest engagement and satisfaction, delivering more personalised experiences.

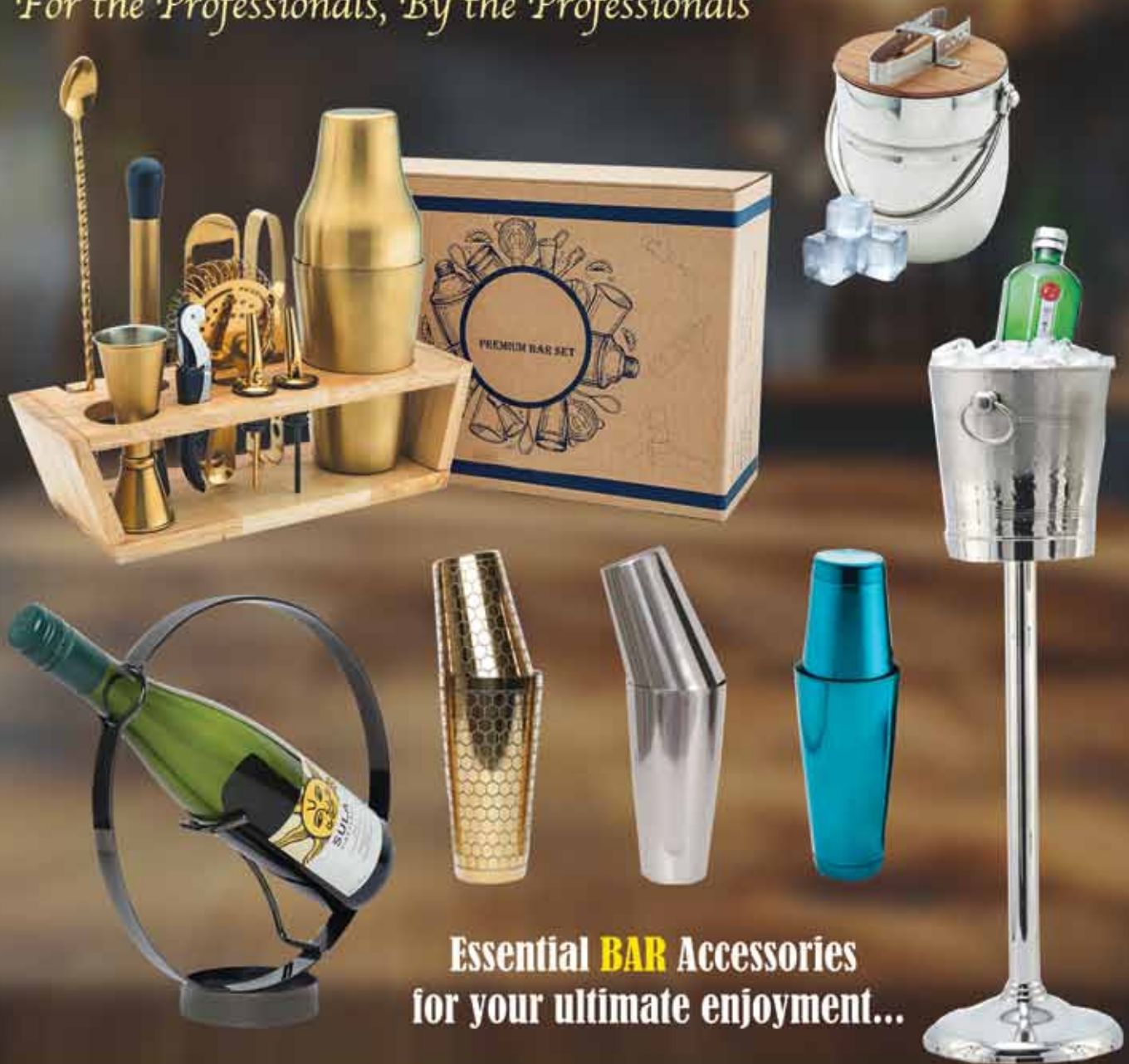
If you were to imagine the hotel room of 2030, how would it differ from today in terms of digital touchpoints?

By 2030, hotel rooms will be far more intelligent and adaptive. Guests could walk in to find the lights, temperature and even coffee set exactly to their preferences, with spaces that shift easily between work, social and rest modes. Sustainability will be seamlessly built in through smart sensors that optimise energy use. At Chalet Hotels, we see this future as a balance — where digital innovation enhances convenience and personalisation, while the warmth of human service continues to define true hospitality. □

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GRT's green journey yields profit with purpose

Staying true to its commitment, **Vikram Cotah** shares small green steps, from discarding plastic bottles to sourcing locally, can have huge economic impacts.



DDP Bureau

When **Vikram Cotah** decided to eliminate plastic bottles across all 22 GRT Hotels properties, it was not about PR. It was about principle and profitability. "The board was happiest," he said, referring to the ₹1.2 crore saved in just 12 months after the switch to

in-house alkaline water. The ripple effects were immediate — reduced landfill waste, enhanced guest experience and measurable cost savings.

Going the extra mile

But that was just the start. Cotah led a set of initiatives anchored in the World Travel and Tourism Council's Hotel Sustainability Basics. From recycling water and cutting power use to replacing mini toiletries with refill-

able, paraben-free alternatives, the group has gone above and beyond to fulfil its commitment to sustainability. Roughly 70 per cent of resort staff is hired locally and all GRT hotel hotels are now pet-friendly and smoke-free. The average Air Quality Index (AQI) inside their hotels is between 25 and 30, even when Delhi hits an AQI of 600-mark.

The company has also invested in regenerative practices. In Kodai-



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kanal, where forest land was cleared for a new resort, the timber was re-used to build rooms. Today, 23 bird species have returned to the area, Cotah said noting that this circular thinking pays off.

Nurturing hyper-local sourcing

GRT's hyper-local food philosophy is notable for its focus on sourcing ingredients that are within a 50 km radius, offsetting carbon emissions tied to long-distance sourcing. At their Thanjavur property, they have a chef, who is a farmer, and guests leave with hand-packed vegetables from the hotel's kitchen garden, turning a simple stay into a memory.

GRT's push into sustainability does not limit to internal operations, it extends to guest-facing innovations too. Each property now offers "Great Meetings," a carbon-neutral MICE initiative that offsets emissions through afforestation. "We calculate the carbon footprint of your event and plant trees accordingly," Cotah explained. "You walk in for a meeting and walk out knowing you have contributed to the planet."

Even their breakfast offering termed the 'Great Sunshine Breakfast' is part of the offset model. Ingredients are not just local, but hyper-local, sourced within 50 kilometres.



VIKRAM COTAH
CEO
GRT Hotels & Resorts

"If the government can offer capital subsidies for green hotels, it will accelerate adoption industry-wide."

"We serve global recipes using local produce," he quipped.

What stands out for GRT is the emotional connection formed with guests. Cotah recalled a guest who

teared up after being gifted fresh vegetables grown onsite in Thanjavur. "She said it reminded her of going back to her mother's home," he said. "That is the kind of hospitality we believe in — one rooted in memory, not marketing."

Leading change

Flagging the importance of policy reform, Cotah shared, "We are actively pushing for sustainability incentives to be part of the Union Budget. If the government can offer capital subsidies for green hotels, it will accelerate adoption industry-wide."

Cotah also urged the industry to stop waiting for regulation and instead lead the transformation. "Sustainability is not a cost; it is an investment," he emphasised pointing to higher guest satisfaction, stronger brand loyalty and growing interest from ESG-focused investors.

He also mentioned that his book, *The Great Butterfly Effect*, launched recently by the Union Tourism Minister, captures GRT's journey and offers a practical sustainability road-map for Indian hoteliers.

"Leave a legacy," he said. "Tomorrow's guests are not just looking for a bed, they are looking for a belief system. Are you ready to be part of that change?" ❑



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A dialogue between tradition and modernity

With the addition of 96 luxury keys, the Taj Mahal Lucknow is poised to establish a strong foothold in one of India's most vibrant cultural & business hubs.



DDP Bureau

The Taj Mahal Hotel Lucknow is set to expand with 96 luxury keys within a built-up area of approximately 100,000 sq ft, designed as a seamless continuation of the existing five-star hotel. Located at Vipin Khand, the project is a thoughtful architectural intervention that extends the legacy of one of the city's most iconic hospitality landmarks.

Overlooking the Ambedkar Memorial Park and the Gomti Nagar Riverfront, the extension draws from the established architectural grammar of the existing hotel — classical in proportion, restrained in ornamentation and deeply contextual. The project is being undertaken by CP Kukreja Architects.

Harmonious dialogue

Suma Venkatesh, Executive Vice President, Real Estate & Development, The Indian Hotels Company (Taj Group of Hotels), said, "At Taj,

every new chapter is about deepening our legacy while responding to the evolving aspirations of our guests. The expansion of Taj Mahal Hotel Lucknow is a testament to that philosophy — an architectural dialogue between past and present, rooted in the city's heritage yet designed for tomorrow."

Architectural language

The built form is composed with clear axial logic and symmetry, reinforcing spatial coherence. The façade is articulated through a rhythmic interplay of arched openings, rectilinear windows and corniced parapets, echoing the timeless elegance of Indo-classical architecture.

Internally, the guest room blocks are aligned to maximise orientation towards landscaped courtyards and gardens, with circulation corridors kept intentionally simple to reinforce clarity of movement and spatial hierarchy. The architectural language is one of quiet luxury, celebrating material tactility, natural light and scale modulation. □



SUMA VENKATESH

Executive VP, Real Estate & Development, The Indian Hotels Company (Taj Group of Hotels)

"Every new chapter is about deepening our legacy while responding to the evolving aspirations of our guests."



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Sustainability beyond basics

Emphasising a collective responsibility, **Ganeshram Iyer** avers that hotels and guests must tread the path of sustainability together and make meaningful contributions.



DDP Bureau

In today's world, sustainability has moved from being an optional initiative to becoming a fundamental expectation from travellers. More guests are seeking experiences that align with their values. They want to know that the places they stay are not only offering comfort but are also mindful of the planet. While basic practices like reducing single-use plastics, conserving energy and managing waste remain important, we believe true sustainability must go beyond the obvious. It is about rethinking the way we operate, the way we engage and the value we create — not just for our guests, but also for our community and the ecosystems around us.

Local engagement

One of the areas closest to our heart is responsible sourcing. Our hotel works closely with local farmers and

suppliers to ensure that the produce we use is fresh, seasonal and sustainable. By doing this, we reduce our carbon footprint while also supporting regional livelihoods. Guests can truly taste the difference in our food, which reflects the richness of Mysuru and its surroundings.

Smart water conservation

Another critical area for us is water stewardship. The hospitality industry consumes a significant amount of water, and we are determined to do our part in using it responsibly. At ibis Styles Mysuru, we have implemented systems such as smart metering, water recycling and rainwater harvesting. These measures allow us to conserve water effectively while still ensuring a seamless and comfortable stay for our guests.

Shared responsibility

We believe that sustainability cannot be achieved by the hotel alone — it is a shared journey. That is why we



GANESHRAM IYER

Hotel Manager
ibis Styles Mysuru

“It is about rethinking the way we operate, the way we engage and the value we create.”

encourage our guests to participate in small yet meaningful ways, whether it is choosing digital check-ins, reusing amenities or simply being conscious about resource use during their stay. Our vision is simple — to redefine hospitality where style, comfort and responsibility come together. Sustainability is not an afterthought — it is at the very core of everything we do. ■



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A grand celebration of India's culinary heritage

At the launch of his latest book, 'Romance of the Indian Curry,' **Chef Davinder Kumar** shares the book delves into the rich and diverse culinary legacy of India.



DDP Bureau

The culinary world came together for an evening of flavours, stories and celebration at the launch of *Romance of the Indian Curry*, authored by the renowned **Chef Davinder Kumar**, Vice President – F&B, Le Méridien New Delhi, and President of the Indian Culinary Forum. Hosted at Le Méridien, New Delhi, in collaboration with Shubhi Publications, the event brought together leading voices from gastronomy, hospitality and culture.

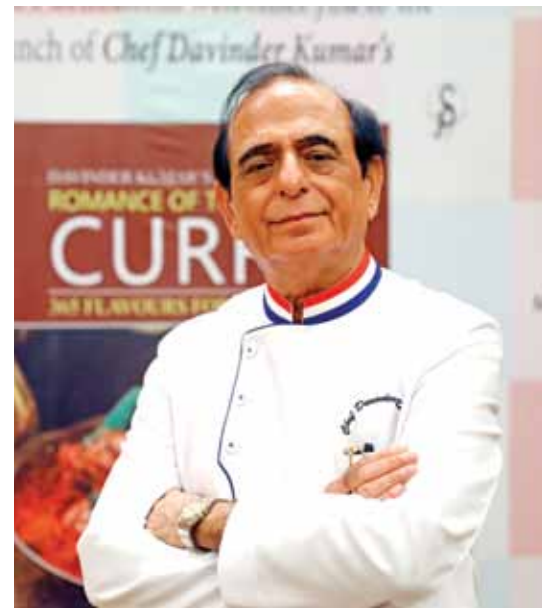
Culinary treasures

The highlight of the evening was the presence of **Amitabh Kant**, former CEO of NITI Aayog and India's G20 Sherpa, who unveiled the book

alongside Chef Devender Kumar. Praising the author and his work, Kant said, "Chef Davinder Kumar's genius lies in creating a book that lets you experience the joy of Indian cuisine every single day of the year. With 365 recipes, *Romance of the Indian Curry* is not just a culinary collection but a celebration of India's diverse food heritage."

Chef Kumar said, "This book is my way of honouring India's extraordinary culinary traditions.

"Inspiring the next generation of chefs to innovate and carry our flavours to the global stage."



It reflects my passion for preserving our heritage while inspiring the next generation of chefs to innovate and carry our flavours to the global stage."

The launch was graced by an esteemed gathering of industry stalwarts and cultural icons, including **Pratibha Prahla**d (celebrated Bharatanatyam exponent and Padma Shri awardee), **Tarun Thakral** (visionary hotelier and Executive Director, Le Méridien New Delhi) and several distinguished guests.

Diverse perspectives

A special panel discussion followed, featuring culinary experts **Dr Pushpesh Pant**, **Rocky Mohan**, **Gautam Anand**, **Kamal Kant Pant**, **Anooshi Vishal** and **Chef Vinit Manocha**, who shared in-depth insights into India's food heritage, contemporary dining and the evolving culture of gastronomy. □



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Taking the wellness concept to new heights

From a world-class fitness to advanced recovery therapies, Shangri-La Eros New Delhi's wellness club offers holistic solutions that promote deep healing.



DDP Bureau

Located in the heart of the capital, Shangri-La Eros New Delhi is home to the Wellness Club, tucked away on the lower ground level. The newly reimagined Wellness Club redefines urban well-being with its expansive 27,000 sq ft sanctuary. Designed as a retreat, it offers over 4,000 sq ft of world-class fitness space, accessible 24/7, alongside advanced recovery therapies including red Light Treatment, Normatec Compression and a calming Hydrothermal Zone.

With air purification systems ensuring AQI-controlled interiors and a plastic-free ethos, the Wellness Club seamlessly blends conscious luxury with modern wellness. Designed by Stickman Tribe in Dubai, the club

reveals an urban oasis, with gilded details and reflective surfaces that add a touch of grandeur.

Premium amenities

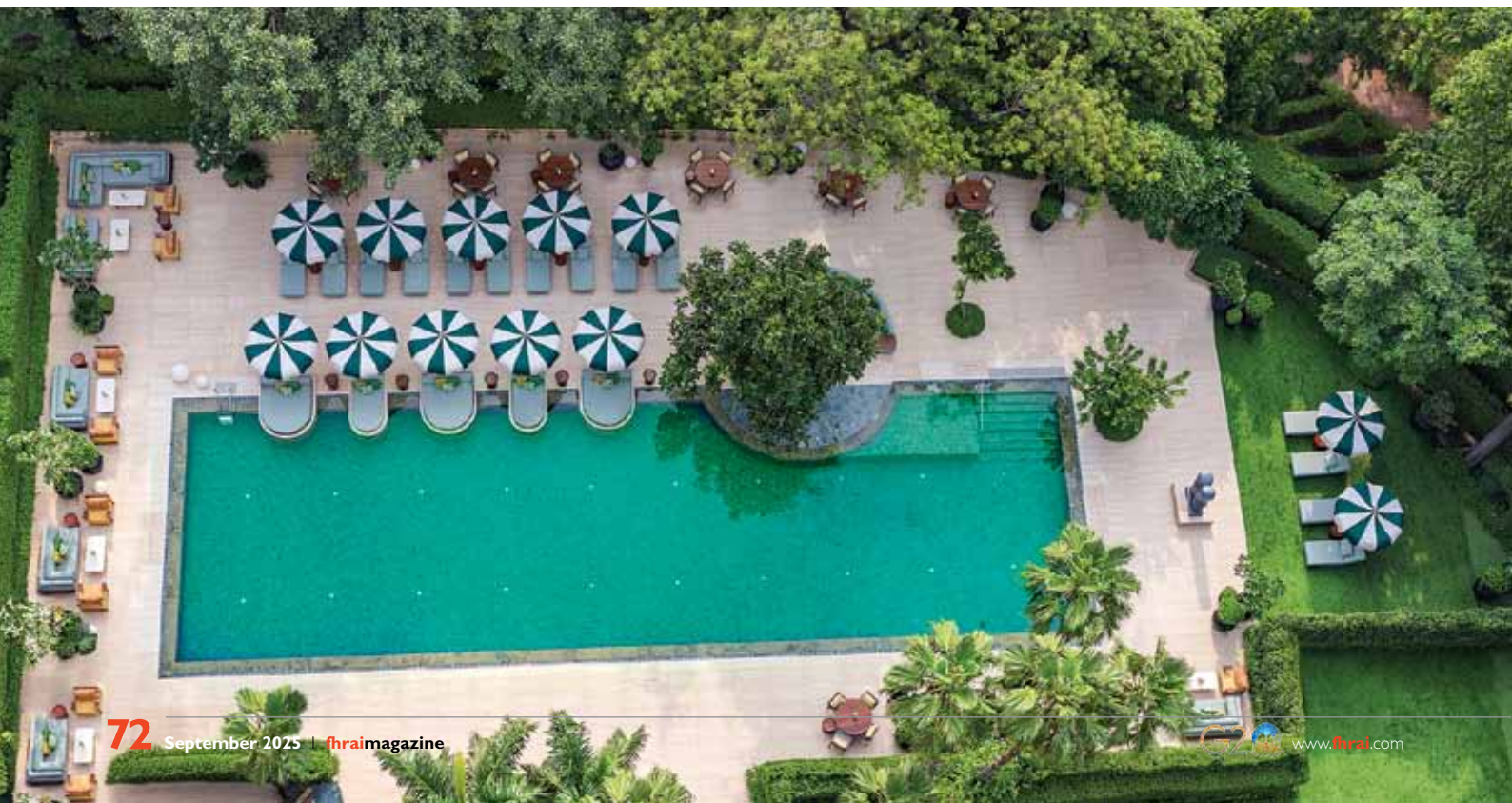
The club features a variety of state-of-the-art facilities. The 4054 sq ft gym is meticulously designed to inspire peak performance, equipped with industry-leading machines like Jacob's Ladder, Skill Run Parachute and Body Roll Shape.

The spa services offer a fusion of ancient Asian and contemporary wellness expertise, with each experience carefully curated to restore equilibrium and vitality. Their luxurious unisex salon offers an extensive range of skincare and grooming services, seamlessly blending advanced techniques with indulgent care.

Besides, the Wellness Club provides advanced recovery therapies

"The newly reimagined Wellness Club redefines urban well-being with its expansive 27,000 sq ft sanctuary."

designed to restore and rejuvenate. Guests can experience the Hypervolt Pro 2 for deep muscle relief, the Normatec 3 with dynamic air compression for enhanced warm-up and recovery and Red-Light Therapy panels that promote healing. The retreat also has Hydrothermal Zone, which is ideal for deep rejuvenation with specialised hydrothermal therapies. □



HPMF, FSCAI join forces to spur procurement excellence

In a pivotal step, HPMF signs an MoU with FSCAI, reinforcing their commitment to strengthening insight sharing & best procurement practices in the industry.



DDP Bureau

The Hospitality Purchasing Managers' Forum (HPMF), the premier professional organisation dedicated to procurement excellence in the hospitality sector and the Food Service Consultants Association of India (FSCAI), the leading body representing food service consultants across India, have officially signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish a strategic partnership.

The collaboration aims to drive best practices, knowledge sharing, sustainability initiatives, skill development and joint industry projects

tainable and cost-effective practices in hospitality. Besides, they will support each other's events, conferences and initiatives.

Nitin Nagrale, Founder and General Secretary, HPMF, said, "This partnership marks a significant milestone in our journey to elevate procurement practices in the hospitality industry. By joining hands with FSCAI, we aim to combine our strengths to drive innovation, efficiency and sustainability while enhancing the skills of professionals across the sector. Together, we will create new benchmarks of excellence for the Indian hospitality industry."

Rajesh Chowdhury, Founder & Director, FSCAI, "There was no as-

sociation in India that existed before FSCAI. So, we had our challenges to make people realise that they will benefit immensely by coming together."

Time frame

The MoU will remain in effect for a period of three years, during which both organisations will work closely to achieve the shared objectives and contribute to the growth of the Indian hospitality and food service sector. □

For more info, email us at: info@fscai.org
Visit: www.fscai.org

"By joining hands with FSCAI, we aim to combine our strengths to drive innovation, efficiency and sustainability."

that will benefit the Indian hospitality sector. In addition, it ensures that their objectives and practices are aligned with global standards.

Key responsibilities

Through this MoU, HPMF and FSCAI will conduct joint training programmes, workshops and industry seminars and share expertise in procurement and food service consultancy. They will collaborate on research papers, white papers, and industry reports and promote sus-





Hotels emerge as a hotspot for corporate events

As in-house facilities become more costly for corporates, hotels capitalise the rising demand for versatile boardroom spaces that are both efficient and cost-effective.



Lipla Negi

In today's dynamic corporate landscape, the way businesses conduct meetings and conferences is undergoing a significant transformation. Companies are increasingly moving away from hosting events within their own premises and are instead seeking specialised venues that can provide comprehensive solutions. With rising demand for flexible, fully-equipped spaces, hotels are becoming the preferred destination for conferences and residential meetings, besides offsite events. Traditionally, many companies used to maintain in-house facilities

for their conferences, events and annual meetings.

However, maintaining dedicated spaces year-round for a handful of events has proven costly and inefficient. "Earlier, corporates invested in creating conference spaces within their offices, but if you are using them only 30 times a year, the maintenance is not justified. Instead, companies now prefer to collaborate with hotels offering end-to-end solutions. It is practical, cost-effective and far more convenient," explained **Akshay Gupta**, Executive Director, Tivoli Hospitality Group.

Small is the new big

Alongside big-ticket corporate events

requiring 100+ rooms, a 200-seater conference hall and curated dining or R&R activities, there is a parallel surge in demand for smaller, high-volume conferences. These typically involve 10–12 intimate meetings per month, often for leadership teams, training programmes, brainstorming sessions and internal reviews. This trend has created a new opportunity for hotels to design spaces that offer versatility and efficiency, accommodating both large gatherings and smaller, more personalised sessions.

The Tivoli, New Delhi has concentrated on building a conferencing ecosystem to tap into the growing need for more efficient yet static boardroom spaces. Its dedicated

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AKSHAY GUPTA
Executive Director
Tivoli Hospitality Group

meeting infrastructure has a boardroom for all sizes, whether it is a meeting for four, 50 or more. For international conferences, this five-star property offers high-speed internet access and secretarial support. The smaller cubicles for interviews and one-on-one discussions along with

“For meeting of every size, companies now prefer to collaborate with hotels offering end-to-end solutions.”

multiple boardroom seating for 8 to 20 people. “From boardrooms for focused deliberations to ballrooms for larger conferences, complemented by a diverse F&B spread — from pool-side cafes and bars to all-day dining — the integrated spaces make team building and networking seamless,” said Gupta.

Personalised solutions

Like every great transformation, the Tivoli now speaks the language of luxury and experiential hospitality. It elevates its legacy of delivering im-

peccable celebrations to a new level. Responding to the rising demand for larger-than-life decor, a global culinary palette and celebrations designed to feel like the event of the century, the property has reimagined itself into an all-equipped resort-style destination. At its heart are five state-of-the-art banquet halls, each crafted to deliver unforgettable experiences.

Among its signature venues are Oakwood, Oyster Greens, Emperor’s Court and the strikingly unconventional NTB (Not the Banquet). While the first three offer colossal, elegant spaces for grand festivities, NTB introduces a fresh, uber-cool twist — a high-energy party hub with a New York Times Square vibe, designed to set the stage for corporate soirees and stylish social gatherings unlike any other. From intimate gatherings of 15 to magnificent galas hosting up to 3,000 guests, the Tivoli ensures every scale of celebration feels seamless and spectacular. ▣





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INSP20D	230VAC 50HZ	500	296x370x75mm	Inbuilt	275x350mm	Inbuilt	4.5Kg
INS2BRA	230VAC 50HZ	1000	800X400X100mm	Inbuilt	787X387mm	Inbuilt	9.700Kg
INS3BRA	230VAC 50HZ	1500	1200X500X82mm	Inbuilt	1205X505mm	Inbuilt	25.338Kg

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Wellness rides the bleisure wave

For time-strapped business travellers navigating packed calendars and multiple time zones, hotels are rethinking wellness through compact, high-impact treatments.



Lipla Negi

For today's corporate travellers, packed schedules and long-haul flights are the norm. As a result, efficiency and recovery have become key expectations — with a growing demand for wellness offerings that help alleviate stress, ease muscular tension and most importantly improve sleep quality. Recognising this, hotels are evolving into wellness sanctuaries, offering more than just a bed and breakfast. Spa services and wellness-focused treatments are now decisive

factors in hotel preference for many business guests.

Jazzy Nepram, Director, Chi, The Spa at Shangri-La Bengaluru, noted a rising trend in compact, restorative treatments tailored for busy professionals. "Short-duration therapies like stress-relieving neck and back massages, express facials, deep tissue massages and hot stone rituals are especially popular among business travellers," she shared.

She highlighted Shirodhara, a therapy known for reducing stress and supporting circadian rhythm restoration, as an example of how ancient wellness practices are gaining

relevance in modern business travel. "These treatments are designed to release tension, calm the nervous system and promote deep, restful sleep, which we believe is the first and most essential step toward true rejuvenation," she explained.

Bleisure boost

While leisure travellers have always been steady, bleisure is strongly driving this demand currently. "With 'bleisure' and 'workation' trends on the rise, corporate guests are increasingly turning to spa treatments as part of their recovery and performance routine," affirmed Nepram.

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Wellness is no longer an indulgence but essential. “At present, our most engaged segments include our regular hotel guests, health club members who seek post-workout therapies, cabin crew and corporate professionals, particularly from industries like real estate and engineering. This group values treatments that help them unwind, realign physically and reset mentally between demanding schedules,” she stated.

Mental reset on menu

The curation of spa menu today is largely guest-led and insight-driven. “We pay close attention to feedback, especially from our frequent business travellers. Their needs often revolve around fatigue recovery, posture-related tension and mental reset,” stressed Nepram.

With guests managing demanding schedules and the physical stamina required for high-performance roles, therapies that support muscle recovery, enhance circulation, and

improve sleep quality are in high demand. “With these factors in mind, we design targeted, time-efficient treatments that deliver measurable benefits within a shorter timeframe,” she added.

All new treatments go through a careful process of internal testing, therapist training and ingredient selection before being added to our menu. “We curate some oil blends in consultation with our regular guests which have proven to be satisfying. We also adjust spa hours when needed to accommodate business travellers with late arrivals or early starts, ensuring they do not miss out on rest and recovery,” she shared.

Unwind on priority

In today’s hyper-connected world, unplugging completely is not always feasible — especially for business travellers. To address this, spas are increasingly curating short-duration treatments that deliver holistic results without requiring to spend



JAZZY NEPRAM

Director of Chi, The Spa at
Shangri-La Bengaluru

“Our most engaged segments include our regular hotel guests, health club members and corporate professionals.”

hours in the spa. “Tailored wellness solutions for our corporate guests and long-stay travellers include flexible massage bundles with value-added add-ons on bulk purchases, as well as express treatment packages designed to fit packed schedules,” said Nepram.

Hotels are also enhancing their appeal through memberships and loyalty programmes that include exclusive wellness benefits and priority access for corporate clients. “At our Health Club, both short-term and long-term members enjoy spa privileges such as extended massage durations and preferential booking slots. In addition, many of our business guests are members of Shangri-La Circle, our global loyalty programme,” she explained.

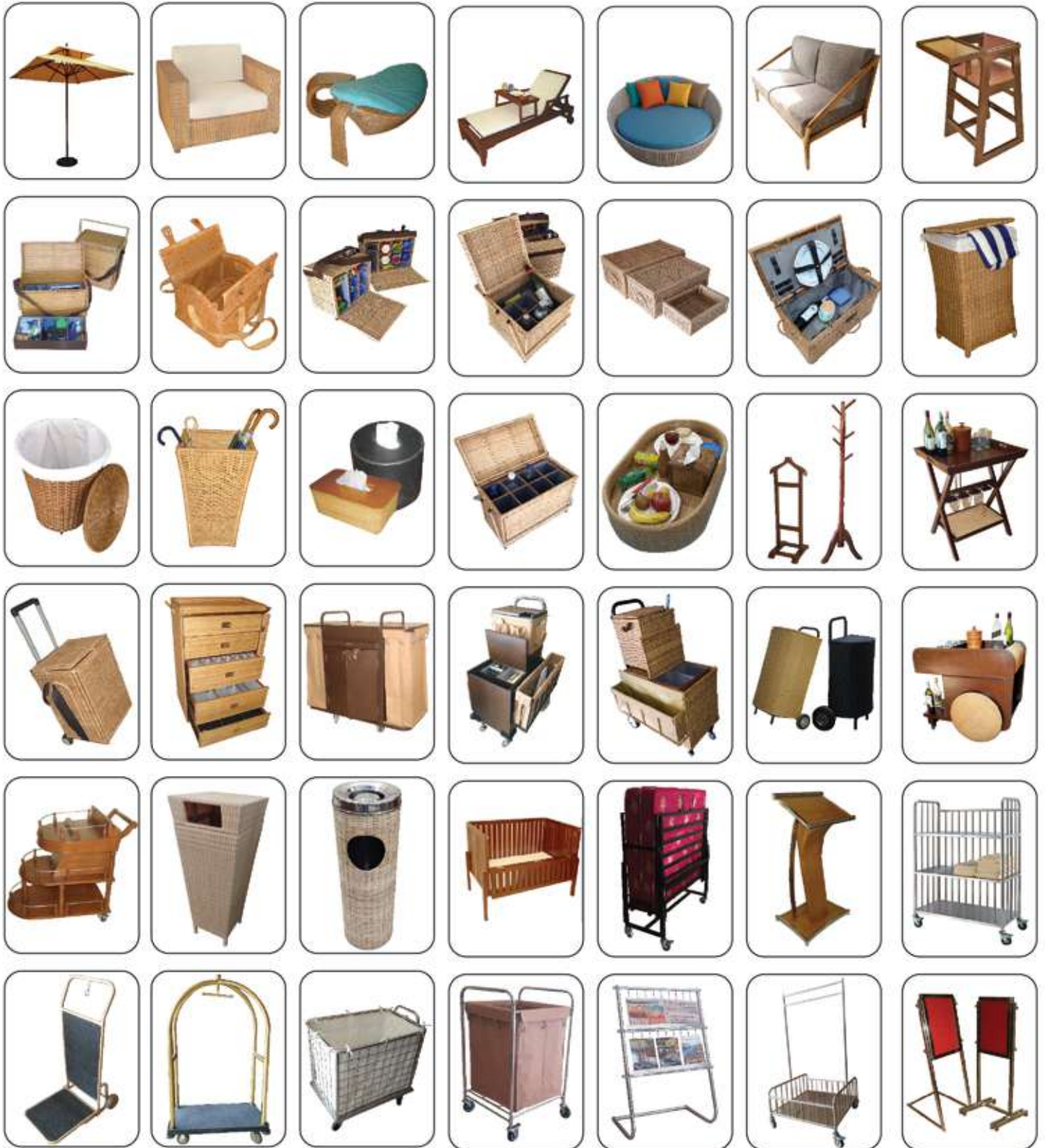
Members earn points on every eligible dollar spent, which can be redeemed across all Shangri-La properties worldwide — not only for stays and dining, but also for spa services and purchases on the brand’s global e-store. □



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A testament to operational efficiency

Shveta Sharma says their smart distribution system helps hoteliers with actionable insights, augmenting a strong presence across both direct and indirect channels.



Hotel-Spider has been known for simplifying hotel distribution. What new product features are in the pipeline to further enhance the platform?

At Hotel-Spider, we are focused on continuous innovation. In the pipeline are enhanced AI-driven channel optimisation tools, advanced analytics dashboards and seamless integrations with Property Management System (PMS) and payment solutions. We are also expanding mobile-first features, empowering hoteliers to manage distribution, bookings and reporting from anywhere. The goal is to give hotels more control, speed and accuracy in how they distribute inventory and rates across channels.

With hotels demanding real-time connectivity and channel optimisation, how does your technology stay ahead of evolving trends?

Our technology is built around re-

liability, speed and precision. We as Swiss-engineered provide true real-time, two-way connectivity that ensures rates, inventory and restrictions are instantly updated across all channels, minimising errors and overbookings. By continuously upgrading our API connections and monitoring industry trends, we make sure our partners always stay ahead with the fastest, most dependable channel connectivity in the market.

How do you measure success for your clients — is it higher occupancy, brand visibility or better margins?

Success is never one-dimensional. It is about a balanced scorecard higher occupancy, optimised RevPAR, improved profitability and enhanced visibility across both online travel agencies (OTAs) and direct channels. We measure success by tailoring key performance indicators (KPIs) to each client's growth strategy and ensuring our platform helps them achieve those goals.

What is your five-year vision for Hotel-Spider in terms of innovation and market positioning?

In the next five years, Hotel-Spider's vision in India is to become the go-to technology partner for hotels of every size — from independent boutique properties to large chains. India's hospitality market is undergoing rapid digital transformation, and we see huge opportunities in helping hotels shift from manual processes to smart, integrated distribution systems.

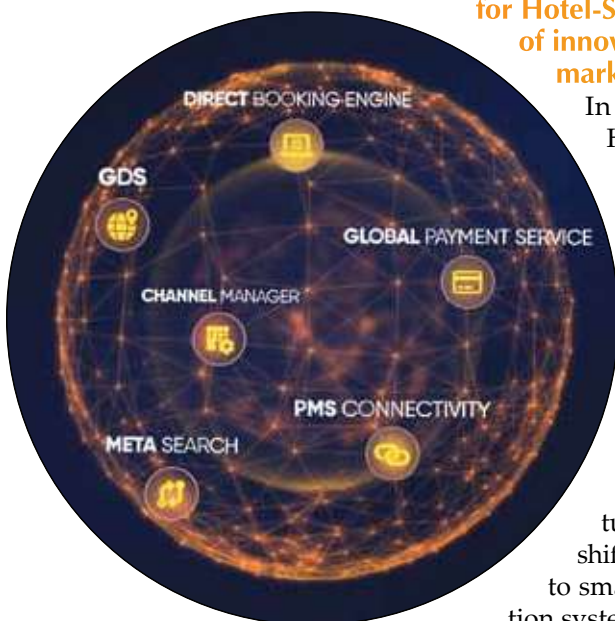


SHVETA SHARMA
COO
Hotel-Spider (India)

"The goal is to give hotels more control, speed and accuracy."

The hospitality tech landscape is evolving rapidly with super apps, OTAs and direct bookings. How does Hotel-Spider see itself shaping this ecosystem?

We do not position ourselves against OTAs or super apps — instead, we act as the strategic enabler for hotels. Our role is to help properties distribute intelligently, ensuring the right balance between third-party platforms and direct booking channels. We equip hotels with the tools for data-driven decisions, channel parity and performance insights, so they can optimise presence on OTAs while also building stronger direct relationships with guests. □





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East & Northeast India: New growth engines

East and Northeast India emerge as new epicentres of India's hospitality boom, driven by improved connectivity & aggressive expansion by major hotel chains.

 Sakshi Singh

With rising disposable incomes, Indian hospitality has been on an unprecedented growth trajectory for the last one decade. Hotels and luxury resorts

have been mushrooming across the country from Tirunelveli in the South to Bhubaneswar in the North. In the past decade over 70,000 rooms have been added to the overall inventory. While every region has witnessed rapid addition, the momentum was relatively weak in the broader eastern region. But not anymore! East-

ern and northeastern states like West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, Assam, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh have emerged as the new growth engine of the hospitality industry. Organised players like Indian Hotels, Radisson, Marriott and Cygnett Hotels are planning aggressive expansion in the region.



Driving forces

Stakeholders and industry veterans point to a number of factors for the recent momentum seen in the eastern and northeastern regions. A plethora of connectivity projects, underserved market, rise of experiential travel and emergence of new tourism hotspots has firmly put the region into focus. "There is a strong demand for eco-tourism experiences in East and Northeast India. Travellers are looking to get closer to nature. Destinations like Majuli Island and Loktak Lake are driving visitors seeking nature experiences," said **Sarbendra Sarkar**, Founder & MD, Cygnett Hotels & Resorts.

The Indian Hotels Co Ltd recently announced plans to open 15 new hotels primarily in east and northeast India in partnership with the Ambuja Neotia Group. It will lead to the addition of over 1000 rooms across brands

like Taj, SeleQtions and Tree of Life. Similarly, Radisson has announced new properties in Puri, Ranchi, Deoghar and Siliguri.

Spiritual and cultural tourism has become the primary driver of domestic tourism in the last two years, and the eastern and northeastern region has joined the bandwagon recently. Puri, Deoghar, Guwahati and even Digha are seeing a surge in the number of guest check-ins driven by temple tourism. On the other hand, cultural events like Ziro Music Festival in Arunachal Pradesh and the Hornbill Festival in Nagaland have emerged as tourism magnets for the northeastern region. "

Guests are increasingly drawn to cultural immersion, wellness and nature-based activities, from tea tourism in Darjeeling to monastery visits in Sikkim and treks in Arunachal Pradesh," stressed **Sumit**



SARBENDRA SARKAR

Founder & MD
Cygnett Hotels & Resorts

"Destinations like Majuli Island and Loktak Lake are driving visitors seeking nature experiences."

Mitruka, Founder & CEO, Summit Hotels & Resorts. This change has been supported by major infrastructure improvements and better air connectivity. Ten new airports have been added in the Northeast over the past decade, with Donyi Polo Airport in Itanagar becoming a gateway to Arunachal Pradesh. Highway construction has accelerated too, with nearly 10,000 km of national highways built across the region since 2014. Under the UDAN scheme, smaller cities now have direct flights linking them to Kolkata, Delhi and Guwahati, while the government has also set a target to connect all northeastern capitals by rail before 2030. These projects are not just easing tourist movement but also giving confidence to hotel operators to plan large pipelines.

Emerging destinations

The momentum is most visible in emerging destinations that are drawing both travellers and brands. Shillong, Cherrapunji, Ziro, Tawang, Majuli, Dawki and Dzukou Valley are on expansion maps of multiple chains.





SUMIT MITRUKA

Founder & CEO
Summit Hotels & Resorts



HOIHNU HAUZEL

Founder
Northeast Odyssey

“Guests are increasingly drawn to cultural immersion, wellness and nature-based activities.”

“These areas are gaining visibility for their natural beauty, cultural experiences and improved connectivity, creating opportunities for thoughtfully designed hospitality projects,” Mitruka added. In Odisha, Puri and Konark are adding branded keys

“Preserve the region’s unique essence through low-impact, community-oriented development.”

for the first time, and Radisson is already establishing a presence there. For travellers, itineraries that earlier stopped at Bhubaneswar are extending to temple and beach circuits. For hotel brands, new destinations are becoming commercially viable.

Beyond leisure

Alongside leisure, segments like weddings, business and MICE are strengthening the case further. Guwahati has become the primary MICE hub for the Northeast, while Siliguri is now attracting events given its strategic location as a gateway to Sikkim, Bhutan and North Bengal. Religious travel continues to drive volume in places like Deoghar and Puri. At the same time, cultural events such as the Ziro and Hornbill festivals are bringing in a younger demographic, including international backpackers. **Hoihnu Hauzel**, Founder, Northeast Odyssey, pointed out that the growing interest must be handled carefully. “Over-tourism is not the way forward. The goal is to preserve the region’s unique essence through low-impact, community-oriented development that respects cultural and environmental integrity.”

Investment plans

IHCL has committed around ₹2,500 crore to build 30 hotels in the Northeast by 2030. In 2022, Marriott International had announced five new hotels across Deoghar, Ranchi, Asansol and Maithon with a local partner. The numbers reflect the momentum — tourist arrivals in Meghalaya jumped from 10 lakh in





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DR SUBORNO BOSE

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“Supported by air connectivity under UDAN and state-level tourism funds, it is a visible renaissance.”

2022 to over 16 lakh in 2024, while RevPAR across India grew 10.7 per cent last year, with East India benefiting disproportionately from the new wave. “Tourist arrivals in Meghalaya alone surged by more than 55 per cent between 2022 and 2024, while brands like IHCL and Radisson are committing thousands of crores to new hotels across the region,” affirmed **Dr Suborno Bose**, Chairman, IIHM. “Supported by air connectivity under UDAN and state-level tourism funds, this is no longer just potential, it is a visible renaissance.”

Sustainable growth

According to Sarkar, branded supply in the region is still inadequate and catching up will take time. Demand is expanding faster than organised rooms can keep pace with. This supply gap is why chains across categories, from budget to luxury, are announcing multiple projects simultaneously. The diversity of demand also makes the region attractive — eco-tourism, temple circuits, cultural festivals, weddings

and business travel are all growing together. Yet, the growth will come with responsibilities. Hauzel’s caution is echoed by others who believe sustainable development has to be at the core of hospitality in the North-east. Boutique formats, homestays and properties designed with local materials and practices are being favoured by both investors and travellers. The rising interest in indigenous food and wellness tourism further supports models that are rooted in community participation.

East and Northeast India represent not just an expansion frontier but also a test case for how India manages the balance between growth and sustainability. The region has moved from being a peripheral market to a central one, with global brands, domestic chains and local entrepreneurs all aligned in their focus. As Dr Bose put in, new investments and government policy are all pointing in one direction, the sunrise of hospitality in the eastern horizon is no longer distant, it is here. ▣



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Shri Vishnu Deo Sai
Hon. Chief Minister, Chhattisgarh

Kurdar Hill Eco Resort
Bilaspur



How hotels can cash in on employee wellbeing

Wellness initiatives in hospitality are not just a temporary trend but a strategic investment that can yield long-term rewards for both employees and hotels.



 Somya Deep

How is a hotel's success intrinsically linked to the well-being of its employees? Only happy and engaged employees can provide better service quality, leading to increased guest satisfaction and revenue growth.

A study by Deloitte reported that engaged employees are 87 percent more likely to deliver excellent customer service, resulting in a 20 percent increase in revenue per available room for hotels.

However, beneath the luxury facade of hospitality, the industry grapples with unique challenges. Employees are often subject to long

working hours, irregular shifts and constant guest interaction, taking a heavy toll on their morale and productivity. Thus, investing in human capital and their wellbeing is not just a moral obligation but a strategic advantage for hotels.

Wellness-centric initiatives

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Open-door policy

Open and transparent communication is a powerful tool in a high-pressure environment, as it can reduce workplace stress and enhance job satisfaction. Without clear communication, employee morale can plummet and operations can take a hit, which can impact the guest experiences. **Milan Mookerjee**, Vice President, Human Resources, Atmosphere Core, said, “We ensure an open-door approach for all and create interesting communication forums. Our daily Culture Byte emphasises our values to the entire team and encourages discussions through ideas and experiences.” For effective communication, listening and understanding are equally important. He added that from the senior most offices of the organisation all the way through, empathetic listening is also encouraged, practiced and shared by all.”

To strengthen open dialogue, Macarius stressed the importance of bridging any potential communication gaps. He shared, “We maintain an open-door policy and conduct

“Our leadership team fosters a culture that values personal time and ensures that workloads remain manageable.”

a supportive work culture is more important than ever, fostering employee engagement. While the concept of work-life balance can be subjective, hotels are making a concerted effort to address it. **Rahoool Macarius**, Market Managing Director, Eurasia, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, shared, “Our leadership team fosters a culture that values personal time and ensures that workloads remain manageable, enabling our employees to succeed both professionally and personally. To help recharge, we offer various wellness initiatives.”

Hoteliers are now increasingly recognising the importance of employee well-being, implementing various activities to make the hotel staff feel motivated, valued and refreshed. Highlighting their initiatives, **Meenakshi Prabhakar**, Director, Human Resources, The Leela Ambience Gurugram, shared, “We provide rejuvenation spaces like a rest area, gym, recreation zone and bunker room. Fun and engaging activities are regularly hosted

“Under our ‘Refresh’ programme, we prioritise our associates’ physical and mental well-being.”

to uplift morale and team spirit.” Additionally, the property fosters work-life harmony by celebrating



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MILAN MOOKERJEE

Vice President, Human Resources,
Atmosphere Core

“We ensure an open-door approach for all and create interesting communication forums.”

regular check-ins between managers and their teams. We promote transparency through performance

reviews, team meetings and one-on-one conversations.”

The Leela Ambience Gurugram establishes communication channels through innovative strategies that boost workplace trust and invigorate employee morale.

Prabhakar highlighted, “Our Fresh Eyes forum gathers feedback from new joiners. The GM’s Round Table allows direct dialogue with leadership. Monthly Department Communication Cascade meetings enable open feedback exchange. The Leela Listens survey drives improvements based on associate input. Suggestion boxes offer anonymous feedback options.” These initiatives help create a transparent, collaborative environment built on trust and two-way communication.

Call to action

The demanding nature of work in hospitality can have serious effects on the mental and physical health of employees, leading to high turnover rates. In the event of a physical or mental health emergency, Macarius noted that they offer comprehensive support through their ‘Employee Assistance Programmes.’ Wyndham

Hotels & Resorts provide confidential counselling and assistance to employees. Besides, their leadership team is trained to offer emotional support and help employees access necessary resources during difficult times, ensuring that they feel fully supported both personally and professionally.

Echoing the same concerns for the employee well-being, Prabhakar underscored their Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), which become not just a benefit but a strategic necessity. He emphasised, “Under our ‘Refresh’ strategy, we prioritise associates’ physical and mental well-being. A licensed psychologist visits twice a week for mental health support. Our 24/7 nursing clinic and scheduled doctor visits ensure timely care, with a doctor-on-call service available round-the-clock.”

Mookerjee added, “Physical emergencies are dealt with immediately, through in-house doctors who are available 24/7. We look at mental health as an important area of focus. Hence, leave calendars are closely monitored through annual paid leaves as well as Rest and Rejuvenation (R&R) leaves.” □





For the Stay

Hilton

Setting new benchmarks for mountain hospitality

With the launch of luxury mountain retreat in Lamahatta, Summit Hotels & Resorts reinforces its role as a serious player in India's premium hospitality landscape.



DDP Bureau

Summit Hotels & Resorts, one of Eastern India's leading hospitality brands, has announced the opening of Summit Enigma Resort & Spa in Lamahatta, a luxury mountain retreat set to redefine high-altitude hospitality. Strategically located just 22 kilometers from Darjeeling town and within easy reach of Tiger Hill and the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, the resort offers a rare combination of accessibility and tranquillity.

With this launch, Summit Hotels & Resorts strengthens its position as

a serious player in India's premium hospitality landscape, reinforcing its mission to blend luxury, sustainability and authentic local experiences across its growing portfolio.

Resort amenities

With unobstructed views of the entire Kanchenjunga range, the property features 16 rooms designed to showcase nature's grandeur, including intimate premium rooms and spacious balcony rooms.

The resort emphasises wellness and sustainability as cornerstones of its philosophy. The signature Meta Spa introduces therapies inspired by the region, complemented by steam

and sauna facilities, and a Kanchenjunga-facing Jacuzzi that blends luxury with natural immersion.

Dining at the in-house CloudSong Restaurant celebrates the bounty of the mountains with farm-to-table menus and locally sourced produce.

Prime location

Beyond luxury, Summit Enigma offers an immersive cultural connection. Guests can walk to nearby farms, experience sustainable mountain agriculture and interact with local communities. Further, the resort's strategic location enhances its appeal. While Darjeeling offers the bustle of a celebrated hill station, Lamahatta



Every view and detail reflects the mystery and beauty of the Himalayas

provides a peaceful alternative, close enough to access iconic attractions. .

"Enigma is more than just a property launch; it is Summit's boldest interpretation of mountain hospitality to date. We have created a retreat where every moment, every view and every detail reflects the mystery and beauty of the Himalayas," said **Sumit Mitraka**, CEO and Founder, Summit Hotels & Resorts. □

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Experiential hospitality with colonial vibes

The newly launched Marli Hill Bungalow by CGH Earth Saha is a heritage retreat designed for guests seeking immersive experiences with mindful luxury.



DDP Bureau

CGH Earth Saha, a collection of handpicked escapes, has announced the launch of Marli Hill Bungalow, a residence with colonial accents set in the Nilgiri hills of Ooty. This six-room bungalow merges history, art and nature, offering a serene experience for travellers.

The bungalow offers a secluded and exclusive getaway, tucked

away from the public gaze and immersed in the embrace of nature. It allows guests to explore the charm of a bygone era and the region's cultural heritage.

Key features

The bungalow features six well-appointed rooms, each adorned with antique furniture, handpicked artworks, wooden floors and textiles inspired by the local communities of the Nilgiris. With its thoughtful convergence of colonial and contem-

porary accents, Marli Hill Bungalow stands as a tranquil refuge in the Nilgiris.

The property has an expansive dining area, where guests gather for meals that are as much a celebration of heritage as they are of flavour. The culinary experience pays homage to the Nilgiris' rich cultural tapestry—bringing together traditional Tamil fare and British-Raj cuisine, all thoughtfully prepared by in-house chefs using fresh, locally sourced ingredients.





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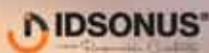


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“It is a rare kind of getaway, ideal for families, couples or solo travellers seeking reflection and an experience beyond the conventional.”

Unique appeal

What truly sets a stay at Marli Hill apart are the people who bring it to life — warm and welcoming. Their heartfelt hospitality transforms the experience into deeply personal.

George Joseph, Vice President – Operations, CGH Earth, said, “As part of our Saha collection, an ensemble of handpicked villas and bungalows, Marli Hill represents everything we stand for: authenticity, sensitivity to place and meaningful experiences. Saha properties are designed for multi-generational family holidays, friends travelling with families, couples and even solo travellers looking for something more personal and non-hotel-like.”

He further added, “Every holiday with CGH Earth Saha brings together unique experiences from the destina-



tion itself. At Marli Hill, our intent was to bring forth the soul of place and give guests one of the quaintest yet enriching portals to explore Ooty. Though set in the very heart of the town, it feels wonderfully removed, offering quiet luxury and a deep sense of connection. It is a rare kind of getaway, ideal for families, couples or solo travellers seeking reflection and an experience beyond the conventional.”

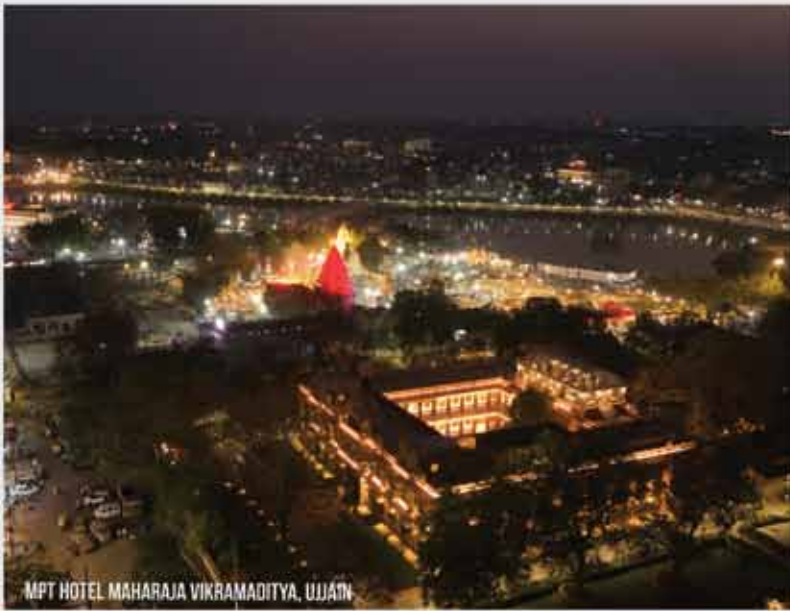
Strategic location

Just 9 km away from the bungalow, Doddabetta Peak offers views of the

Nilgiris, while the Botanical Garden, Rose Garden and Ooty Lake provide scenic escapes. Nearby attractions such as the Thread Garden, Wax Museum, Pykara Waterfalls and Wenlock Downs, showcase the region’s natural and cultural richness. A ride on the UNESCO-listed Nilgiri Mountain Railway adds a nostalgic touch, with stops at Dolphin’s Nose and Droog Fort.

Marli Hill Bungalow draws guests seeking a soulful escape in heritage and mindful luxury — hallmarks of CGH Earth’s signature approach to experiential hospitality. □





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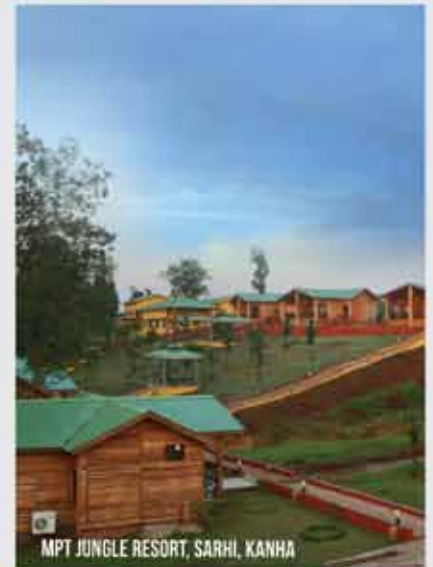


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Modern luxury ▶

Golden Reflections by GRAFF pays tribute to the timeless beauty of gold, a finish that is more than aesthetic — it is a visual language. A universal symbol of prestige, gold is also a metaphor for inner light and authenticity, GRAFF interprets it using materials, advanced surface treatments and aesthetic vision.



◀ Stylish & comfortable

The Aurelia Sofa by Perna Mohan Design Studio is crafted with a deep, low-slung profile for a relaxed yet sophisticated presence. Its structured silhouette is softened by plush cushioning, while the textured upholstery adds visual depth and tactile richness. Perfectly proportioned for modern hospitality spaces, it is a statement in comfort and craftsmanship.

Nature-centric design ►

The latest “Escapade with Nature” collection by Intent Made Studio, extends across living, lounge and dining spaces, offering furniture and accents. Each piece has been developed in close collaboration with artisans, ensuring that craftsmanship and technique remain integral to its contemporary expression. “We looked closely at everything, from the lofty folds of a mountain peak to the delicate textures on a fox-nut leaf,” said Swetha Raju, Founder and Principal Designer, Intent Made Studio.



◀ Timeless artistry

The Great Eastern Home has announced the launch of a new collectible series: handcrafted ceramic bookends that blend sculptural elegance with thoughtful storytelling. The collection explores how smaller design objects can hold immense artistic and cultural weight. Each bookend serves not only as a functional accessory but also as a miniature sculpture rooted in symbolism, form and craftsmanship.

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Movements



Kiran Andicot
Senior Vice President,
Marriott International

Marriott International has appointed Kiran Andicot as Senior Vice President, to lead its South Asia region. He will now oversee both operations and development across Marriott International's South Asia portfolio. Andicot will align growth with operating performance, deepen owner partnerships and accelerate conversions.



Manish Dayya
General Manager, Pullman and
Novotel New Delhi Aerocity

Pullman and Novotel New Delhi Aerocity has appointed Manish Dayya as its General Manager. With a career spanning over 27 years in the hospitality industry, Dayya brings expertise in leading India's luxury and premium hotels while driving performance across operations, sustainability and guest experience.



Naveen Pandey
General Manager, Ramada by
Wyndham Varanasi Katesar

Ramada by Wyndham Varanasi Katesar has appointed Naveen Pandey as its General Manager. In this role, Pandey will lead over-all hotel operations, manage staff performance and spearhead initiatives in sales, marketing and guest services. He brings a wealth of expertise to the role, with a strong background in hospitality.



Mohd Salman
Hotel Manager
Vivanta Goa, Miramar

The Indian Hotels Company (IHCL) has appointed Mohd Salman as Hotel Manager at Vivanta Goa, Miramar. He joined IHCL in 2014 and has since built a career defined by dedication and service excellence. Known for his ability to develop and empower teams, he combines strategic thinking with a calm demeanour.



Kumar Saurabh
General Manager, Fortune
Landmark, Ahmedabad

Fortune Hotels has appointed Kumar Saurabh as General Manager of Fortune Landmark Ahmedabad. With over 18 years of experience, Saurabh brings operational expertise, strategic vision and leadership acumen to his new role. He will oversee the hotel's operations, focusing on driving the property's overall performance and growth.



Siddharth Joshi
Hotel Manager,
Four Points by Sheraton Nashik

Four Points by Sheraton Nashik has appointed Siddharth Joshi as Hotel Manager. Bringing 23 years of expertise across operations, events, sales and marketing, Joshi in his new role will lead hotel operations, focussing on guest experience and team development. He will also manage the brand's presence in Nashik.

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