

HOSPITALITY[®] Talk



INDIA IS A
**RESILIENT
MARKET**

Mark Willis
CEO-IMETA Region, Accor

Maharashtra

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Gaining ground

Double-digit growth is anticipated in global market, primarily due to businesses reorganising their operations and recovering from COVID-19 impact, which had previously resulted in stringent restrictions.

Centara teams up with Thai Vietjet

As part of its expanding airline partnership network, which currently includes Singapore Airlines and Thai Airways, Centara Hotels & Resorts has announced a collaboration with Thai Vietjet. The collaboration takes place at a time when Thailand has eased its admission requirements for international visitors. Under the Centara x Thai Vietjet promotion, guests will receive a 19 per cent discount when logged in as a CentaraThe1 member. Travellers who are not yet members of Centara's loyalty programme can sign up for free in less than a minute and immediately start enjoying benefits and earning points.



RHG bolsters revenue strategy

Radisson Hotel Group (RHG) has launched new strategic revenue targets to capitalise on the increase in demand and adapt to consumers' new booking patterns. The group's revenue optimisation initiatives place RHG in a prime position to leverage technological innovation and respond to market conditions. RHG reinforces its commitment to revenue management innovation by expanding its unique centre of excellence, The Club by Radisson Hotel Group. Already present in over 30 countries, The Club redefines what future revenue management will look like.

Hyatt Place hotel debuts in Montreal

Hyatt Hotels Corporation has announced the opening of Hyatt Place Montreal Downtown, Montreal's first Hyatt Place hotel. The hotel is located near the renowned Village, one of Montreal's most diverse and colourful neighbourhoods, and minutes from the Quartier des Spectacles. It features intuitive design, a relaxed atmosphere, and convenient amenities sought after by business and leisure travellers alike. Montreal's largest metro station, Berri-UQAM, is connected to the hotel, providing easy access to the Palais des Congrès and many other attractions.



IHG Hotels & Resorts launches voco brand in Japan

IHG Hotels & Resorts will launch its popular voco Hotels brand in Japan for the first time following the signing of a management agreement with NTT Urban Development Corporation that will see it open the flagship voco Osaka Central in 2023. With a new brand comes a flagship opening, and the 191-room voco Osaka Central will bring a fresh and reliably different offering to Osaka's accommodation landscape in 2023. The property will also be a good fit for sustainability-conscious guests, with the hotel's 'tread light' philosophy meaning it is committed to looking after the planet with the same care it looks after guests.



BWH Hotel Group continues expansion in Middle East

BWH Hotel Group is expanding its presence in the Middle East as travel continues its resurgence in the region and worldwide. The expansion is part of the brand's larger effort to thoughtfully grow its footprint in key destinations across the globe, providing the unique offerings and experiences today's travellers and developers are seeking. The group has experienced significant momentum in recent years, evolving into a global hospitality powerhouse with 18 distinctive brands across every chain scale segment, from luxury to economy. As part of the ME expansion, BWH Hotel Group announced plans to open four hotels in the region in 2022.



Marriott launches \$50 mn initiative

At the 44th Annual NYU International Hospitality Investment Conference, Marriott International announced the launch of “Marriott’s Bridging the Gap,” a multi-year, US \$50 million development programme that aims to address the barriers to entry that historically underrepresented groups face in owning and developing hotels in the US and Canada. In developing the programme, Marriott tapped into the company’s development and franchising teams as well as current and potential hotel owners and franchisees. Marriott will offer financial and other incentives to qualified historically underrepresented owners and franchisees that will have a controlling equity interest in select branded projects. The incentives will apply to franchise applications submitted after 1 June 2022.

Hilton sees 80.5% rise in RevPAR in Q1

Hilton Worldwide Holdings, Inc., recorded a net income of US \$211 million. Adjusted EBITDA was US \$448 million. RevPAR increased 80.5 per cent on a currency-neutral basis when compared to the same period in 2021. System-wide comparable RevPAR was down 17 per cent against the same period in 2019. By 31 March 2022, Hilton’s development pipeline had grown to more than 410,000 rooms. Hilton’s system added 13,200 rooms in Q1, contributing to 7,800 net additional rooms during the period, which represented 5 per cent net unit growth from 31 March 2021. In May 2022, the company declared a quarterly cash dividend of US \$0.15 per share.



GIC & APG to invest in The Student Hotel

The Student Hotel (TSH), APG, Aermont Capital, Charlie MacGregor, and GIC have reached an agreement as part of which GIC and APG will acquire a substantial stake in TSH and commit to invest to fuel further expansion for the hybrid hospitality leader, subject to customary regulatory approvals. The transaction values TSH, including assets currently under development, at €2.1 billion. The deal sees APG and founder Charlie MacGregor increase their current stake in TSH. APG first invested in TSH in 2015. MacGregor and Aermont Capital entered into business in 2014 after MacGregor opened the first The Student Hotel in 2012. GIC now joins as a new investor.

Investors and operators to prioritise ESG aspects of hotel investments: JLL

Investors in APAC hotels will increasingly make investments based on sustainability aspects as expectations from shareholders and ambitious net carbon zero targets assigned by governments influence decision-making. Approximately 75 per cent of investors surveyed by JLL identified environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors as important when deploying capital, despite Asia-Pacific’s hotel sector lagging behind other regions in the adoption of sustainability practices. According to JLL analysis, both investors and operators will place a higher priority on ESG aspects of hotel investment to help secure funding for asset purchases or redevelopment. Given that the majority of the global investors are headquartered in Europe and the US, where they face strict requirements from institutions and governments, APAC’s hotel sector is not immune from scrutiny and will require more defined ESG strategies to meet both investor and consumer demands.



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Back to business

As travellers resume their travels with restored confidence, the hotel businesses have steadily advanced. With new openings, partnerships, and industry events, India's hotel industry has bolstered its rebound.

5th edition of IHE slated in August

The India International Hospitality Expo (IHE) will have its fifth edition on 3-6 August 2022, with the highlight being a one-day conference for the bakery and confectionary, *mithai*, and *namkeen* sectors. A Franchise Forum will be a key new feature of this conference, where businesses considering franchising as a means of expanding their business may network with potential partners. This activity will be hosted in Greater Noida, Delhi-NCR, at the India Expo Mart & Centre. A focused activity with hotel and restaurant purchase managers on the food and hospitality products being created by the MSME sector in the North-East is planned.



NILE Hospitality enters Udaipur

With Bhairavgarh Palace, Udaipur, NILE Hospitality enters boutique hotel market. The property will be a unique location where guests will witness a living embodiment of Rajasthan's culture, passion, and hospitality. Outdoor dining, terrace suites with private swimming pools, two landscaped lawns, a spa and beauty salon, all with unmatched panoramic views of the Aravalli hills and the serene beauty of Udaipur, will be available at the property. It is also an ideal setting for a wedding venue. "We are happy to join Pooja Mountview Resorts Pvt. Ltd., on this journey," said **Vikram Singh Chauhan**, Founder & CEO, NILE Hospitality.

Lexicon IHM signs MoU with Sarovar

Sarovar Hotels' leadership team, led by Executive Chairman Anil Madhok, will look at providing aspiring professionals with an opportunity to upskill via a series of specialist hospitality courses led by the Sarovar Hotels team. "We look forward to giving the students the right platform in terms of internships, mentorship, and industry exposure," says **Jatin Khanna**, CEO, Sarovar Hotels. "This collaboration will provide students with great insights into the industry and inspire them," says **Nasir Shaikh**, Group CEO, The Lexicon Group of Institutes, MultiFit, and EduCrack.



Alain Ducasse inaugurates Indian École Ducasse campus

Alain Ducasse, founder of École Ducasse and the world's most awarded Michelin-star chef, visited India to inaugurate the first École Ducasse campus in the country. The campus is located at the Indian School of Hospitality (ISH), Gurugram, founded by hospitality veteran Dilip Puri. Alain's visit will strengthen the partnership between ISH and École Ducasse, both part of Sommet Education's global network of schools. Culinary programmes taught at École Ducasse in India include undergraduate degree programmes, diplomas, and certificate courses. The 75,000 sq. ft., campus houses cutting-edge amenities.



7th edition of Global Hospitality Conclave held in Delhi



The 7th Global Hospitality Conclave was recently held at The Oberoi, New Delhi. The event took place after a two-year hiatus. This year's conclave focused on Business in a World Between Orders, Permanent Changes After COVID-19, Empowering Your Business, and Digital Disruption to examine and debate the way ahead in the current environment in the travel and tourism sectors. Guest speakers from across industries, as well as Oberoi alumni, presented their expertise and knowledge in these areas. This edition of the GHC opening keynote was addressed by diplomat and former Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon, and featured the participation of entrepreneur Sanjeev Bhikchandani, Founder, InfoEdge, on Empowering Your Business.



B.Sc. Culinary Arts programme offered at VMSIHE in Goa

The VM Salgaocar Institute of International Hospitality Education (VMSIHE), Goa, has announced the initiation of a globally accepted, highly personalised, and hands-on programme—the B.Sc. Culinary Arts. The immersive and practically-oriented three-year degree programme is set to commence with much gusto in August 2022. “This programme offers in-depth exposure to diverse cuisines and gastronomic intricacies by renowned Indian and international faculty with rich teaching and industry experience. The modern amenities and support services enable students to establish and evolve their very own culinary concept.

KARE & Courtyard by Marriott sign MoU

The Kalasalingam Academy of Research and Education (KARE) and Courtyard by Marriott Chennai have signed an MoU to augment the experience of hospitality education and training while also bridging the gap between academia and industry. **Dr. Sridharan**, Chancellor, KARE, said, “This will give our students a bright future, especially those from the rural parts, giving them exposure with this internationally acclaimed organisation; to work on their skill-set via training, learning techniques through real-life occurrences.” **Sanjeev Mandal**, GM, Courtyard by Marriott Chennai, said, “We are proud to be associated with the institution to identify talents in the deep parts of the city.”



IHG breaches 6K hotels milestone

IHG announces partnerships with major sports and entertainment events as part of its celebration of having 6,000 operating hotels. The 6,000 Club features the expansive reach of IHG's 17 brands by showcasing a selection of newly opened properties from its iconic portfolio. In the months ahead, the hotels in the 6,000 Club will surprise a few lucky guests with 6,000 IHG One Rewards points to mark the event. IHG CEO, **Keith Barr**, says, “Our new partnerships will connect more of our IHG One Rewards members with memorable moments, as travel continues to return. With over 1,800 hotels in our pipeline, I am looking forward to IHG's next chapter of growth and to celebrating plenty more milestones to come.”

THE ECO-WAKENING WORLD



Customers expect businesses to adhere to eco-friendly practices. Greenware's founder, **Aditya Rajesh Daga**, saw this emerging demand and developed with his team high-quality compostable gloves.

Brand purpose—a reason to exist other than to make money—has been gaining traction. Based on the latest research, we now know that ignoring sustainability in business is no longer acceptable or intelligent. People themselves drive this “Eco-wakening”. Customers expect companies to commit to sustainable practices. **Aditya Rajesh Daga**, Founder of Greenware, realised this emerging need; his team developed premium-quality compostable gloves. Incorporating these gloves into the business will save the environment. These gloves are made organically and will take less than a year to degrade, unlike traditional plastic gloves that take thousands of years. One can quickly trash these gloves and forget the rest. So what do businesses need to do?



ADITYA RAJESH DAGA
Founder, Greenware



Economist Intelligence Unit found a remarkable 71 per cent increase in global online searches for sustainable items in the last five years. Therefore, the message is loud and clear.

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Greenware gloves will lower the cost of waste management. The time to worry about trash has long since passed with the existence of the perfect solution.

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HEAR THE VOICE


Today, people do want to live life sustainably. The

“ The ‘Eco-waken’ people want businesses to follow an eco-friendly approach ”



India is a RESILIENT MARKET

We are expecting to add six new properties to network, two of which will debut in leading two-tier markets within India, shares **Mark Willis**, CEO, India, Middle East, Africa, and Turkey for Accor.

 **Lipla Negi**

Every disruption comes with its own set of changes. And a global disruption like the pandemic has not just changed but transformed the hospitality business. Change is driving growth, creativity and innovation at Accor. “As we speak, we have 26 properties (5,146 keys) more properties in the pipeline. Over the next 24 months, we are expecting to add six new properties to the network,” shares Mark Willis, Chief Executive Officer, India, Middle East, Africa, and Turkey for Accor. Accor currently operates 55 properties across India and South Asia with 10,306 keys.

According to him, India is a “very resilient market” which is showing strong signs of recovery. Accor received a successful response for Raffles Udaipur last year, while its mid-scale and economy brands—Novotel and Ibis—continue to maintain a high brand recall. As the brand continues to strengthen its portfolio in the country, Willis gives an insight into the new, advanced, and immersive world of Accor, where sustainability and hospitality go hand-in-hand.

MID-SCALE AND ECONOMY BRANDS IN SPOTLIGHT

We are constantly looking at opportunities to continue our expansion in the Indian market, across all segments and brands. Our mid-scale and economy brands, Novotel and Ibis, have an extremely high brand recall in India and a strong focus on the meetings and conventions market, as well as the wedding and social market.

The Novotel network, with 21 operational hotels, forms the largest network of mid-scale hotels in the country, with hotels in key cities such as

“ Novotel network, with 21 operational hotels, forms largest mid-scale hotels network in India ”

Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai, Goa, and Hyderabad. We will also continue to look for the right partners as we expand our luxury brands such as Raffles, Fairmont, and Sofitel, after the successful response we received for Raffles Udaipur last year.

EXPANSION AND PARTNERSHIP

Over the next 24 months, we are expecting to add six new properties to the network in the region, two of which will debut in leading two-tier markets within India—Novotel Bhubaneswar Janpath Road and Novotel Jodhpur ITI Circle.

We will also continue to expand our Ibis and Ibis Styles brands in partnership with InterGlobe Hotels by adding three more hotels in the next two years to the existing portfolio of 20 hotels.





Accor currently operates 55 properties across India and South Asia with 10,306 keys.

DOMESTIC TRAVEL REMAINS KEY

We believe domestic travel will yet again be a crucial driving force for not just Indian tourism, but markets all across the globe. With evolving guidelines still in place for international travel, domestic travel will be leading the charge in meeting the business and leisure staycation, workcation, and small MICE demands for top leisure destinations. Travellers are now looking for meaningful experiences under one roof to create deeper connections with their loved ones, the environment,

“ We have been seeing positive demand pickup in MICE and corporate business ”

and our hotels, especially in the leisure destinations that are currently in demand.

THE BOOM OF BLEISURE

We have definitely seen a change in travel requirements and patterns since the beginning of COVID-19. As we now come out of travel restrictions and regulations, we are starting to see that companies are starting to resume their in-person meetings and events (while still maintaining our ALLSAFE Standards). These gatherings are smaller in format and not as frequent, which reduces the requirements for corporate travel. Alongside the above, we have also seen an increase in travel being used to combine both business and pleasure (bleisure) by staying in a hotel or serviced apartment with loved ones and continuing to work remotely for their work. As a result of this, we are seeing an increase in demand for long-stay accommodation across the country.

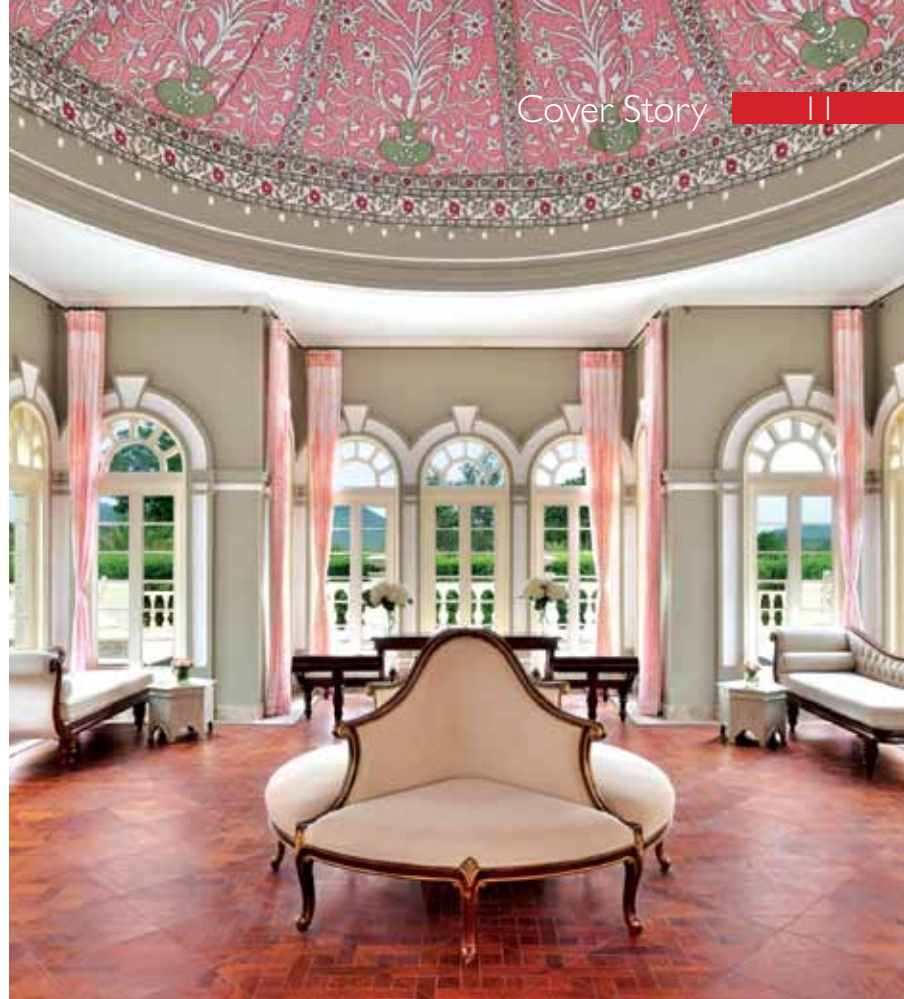
CUSTOMISATION IS THE FOCAL POINT

Since the beginning of 2022, we have seen a positive increase in MICE and corporate business throughout the region. We are confident this will continue in Q2 and Q3 as most businesses are gathering their teams for small events or meetings, including team building activities and strategic planning meetings, among others. To meet the new types of meeting requirements, Accor offers a variety of customised packages with flexible booking and cancellation policies. Additionally, we collaborated with Microsoft to launch ALL CONNECT, a new hybrid meeting concept that enables guests around the world to adapt to the new ways of working that are supported by Microsoft Teams.

WEDDINGS GO HYBRID

The pandemic has brought many changes with it in the hospitality industry, especially for weddings. Novotel,





one of Accor's brands, conceptualised "Vivaah by Novotel" for contemporary virtual weddings, a concept that extends a hybrid approach to the festivities, while offering an array of customised and flexible packages.

Also, we have seen an impressive recovery and a substantial uptick in bookings, which was primarily driven by leisure travel, and are very optimistic about the market for the coming months. As a result of the leisure demand, we launched our Summer Offer, which gives the members of ALL-Accor Live Limitless up to 30 per cent off in hotels across India, the Middle East, Africa, and Turkey.

ALL ABOUT 'POSITIVE HOSPITALITY'

At Accor, sustainability is at the core of what we do, and a lot of conscious effort is being made to ensure that our operations are managed with responsibility. With this collaborative approach to sustainable innovation as our main focus, we recently launched the Planet 21 – Acting Here programme that endeavours to act for "positive hospitality".

The programme is structured around six pillars: engaging our guests in a sustainable experience, co-innovating with our partners to open up new horizons, working hand-in-hand with local communities for a positive impact, acting as an inclusive company for our people, moving towards carbon neutral buildings, and striving for zero waste and healthy, sustainable food.

Aside from the ongoing efforts, Accor's main goal for this year is to remove all disposable plastic from our hotels globally by the end of 2022.

COLLABORATION FUELS NEW IDEAS

During the pandemic, what helped us significantly was being able to bring out the entrepreneurial spirit within our teams and having our confidence in them while they tried new ideas, which also meant taking new risks. Our General Managers and teams took a collaborative

“ **Accor's main goal for this year is to remove all disposable plastic from our hotels globally by the end of 2022** ”

approach, ensuring open communication and sharing best practices. Their grit and determination to succeed allowed them to be creative and come up with innovative ways of doing business. This gave birth to new concepts and products, be it dark kitchens for food and beverage delivery, virtual weddings, travelling with pets, workation in our facilities, and virtual concerts.

TECHNOLOGY TAKES LEAD

India is a very resilient market that is showing encouraging signs of recovery. We are confident that our industry will bounce back to full recovery soon. Touchless hospitality and innovation brought in by technological advancements have made operations more cost-effective and enhanced the guest experience. There is a lot of potential in this particular area to redefine hospitality and travel.





(L-R): Jyothi Varma, Industry Influencer; Gaurav Shekhar Nagwekar, Head-Corporate Travel & Logistics, Reliance Industries; Devendra Saraiya, Dir.-Procurement & Travel, Deloitte Shared Services India; Ritam Saha, Mgr.-Passenger & Cargo Services, India, Nepal, & Bhutan, IATA; Pratima Badhwar, Head of Commercial-India & South Asia, Accor; GB Srithar, Regional Dir.-IMEASA Region, STB; and Mritunjaya Chandra Mohan, Sr. Mgr.-Corporate Travel, Palo Alto Networks.

Two-day M!CE Travel Show, which recently took place in Pune, intended to stimulate market by fostering synergies between corporate buyers and sellers of travel products and services.



Hazel Jain

M!CE TRAVEL SHOW

A ROARING SUCCESS

The seventh edition of the M!CE Travel Show 2022 concluded successfully in Pune recently by enabling more than 1,100 meetings between exhibitors and corporate buyers from across India under one roof. The two-day B2B tabletop event saw 23 exhibitors meet and interact with 45 key corporate buyers on 23-24 April 2022. Organised by DDP Exhibitions, the exclusive M!CE event plans to replicate this in other cities in India soon. Singapore Tourism Board, Oman Air, Oman Convention Bureau, and Shangri-La were among the key exhibitors, as were some luxury Indian hotel brands such as Ananta Hotels & Resorts and Truly India Camps & Safaris. The event also witnessed a serious panel discussion on sustainable business travel on the first day, where panellists opined on the possibilities of reducing carbon emissions while travelling and what entities such as destinations, airlines, hotels, and corporates can do towards this goal.

Moderated by Mritunjaya Chandra Mohan, Senior Manager-Corporate Travel, Palo Alto Networks, an expert on sustainability, the panellists included GB Srithar, Regional Director-India, Middle East, and South Asia, Singapore Tourism Board; Pratima Badhwar, Head of Commercial-India and South Asia, Accor; Ritam Saha, Manager, Passenger and Cargo Services-India, Nepal, and Bhutan, International Air Transport Association (IATA); Gaurav Shekhar Nagwekar, Head



GB SRITHAR
Regional Director-India
Middle East, and
South Asia
Singapore Tourism Board

“ For
Singapore,
sustainability
has been on the
minds of our
leadership ”

(Corporate Travel & Logistics), Reliance Industries; and Devendra Saraiya, Director-Procurement and Travel, Deloitte Shared Services India.

Introducing the topic was industry influencer **Jyothi Varma**. She said, “Sustainable travel is a very relevant and important topic today. Everyone is worried about how to go about being sustainable. It is about the environment, it is about recycling and reducing our carbon footprint as a corporate wherever we can.”

Kicking off the discussion, the moderator of the session, **Mritunjaya Chandra Mohan**, said that sustainability has become a buzzword today. “The pandemic gave an opportunity to many corporate companies to rethink about the environment and sustainability, apart from the safety of employees and overall travel costs,” he said. He shared results of a survey saying that 36.2 per cent of corporates out of the 316 global travel buyers say that the commitment to sustainability has increased once the intensity of the pandemic subsided. However, 14.9 per cent of them say that their company does not have carbon reduction targets and does not expect to implement them, which means that they are still not ready to touch this topic.

Leading the conversation to hotels, Mohan added that a lot of big hotel chains have been working on becoming eco-certified and green hotels, which





is now a necessity. Sharing initiatives from Accor, **Pratima Badhwar** said, “Nowadays every hotel chain has its own sustainability goal. And every hotel has to run its operations as a business unit. At Accor, we have taken up this initiative early on. We launched a project for it in 2005 or so. Cut to now, that initiative is called Planet 2021. We have a target of a net carbon zero footprint by 2050. We even have a Global Chief Sustainability Officer who looks after this.”

WHAT ARE CORPORATES DOING?

Sharing some details about what Deloitte India as a corporate is doing towards this, **Devendra Saraiya** said, “There are two parts to sustainability. One is that you just want to create brand value for your company, and the other part is that you are actually helping the cause. We are considering sustainability initiatives at Deloitte India, and travel is the largest contributor of emissions.”

Sharing some insights on what Reliance as a corporate has been witnessing of late, **Gaurav Shekhar Nagwekar** said, “There was a recent study conducted that mentioned how corporate travel is going to evolve. Interestingly, it mentioned that 20 per cent of corporate travellers do not want to come back, specifically from the IT sector. The other 20 per cent of the sector—which is pharmaceuticals, banking, and the like—never

GOOD TO KNOW

The event saw a serious panel discussion on sustainable business travel on the first day, where panellists discussed the possibilities of reducing carbon emissions while travelling and what entities such as destinations, airlines, hotels, and corporates can do towards this goal.

left. The remaining 60 per cent are in a dilemma and are not sure if they want to have MICE movements. These are the facts on the ground. For Reliance, we are also looking at mitigating our carbon footprint. With immediate effect, we have tightened travel restrictions and will investigate how and which departments should actually travel. Secondly, we want to move to accommodation options that have sustainability goals. This does not just include star hotels. I have some disagreement about air travel being one of the largest reasons for emissions. I believe it is the ground transportation, especially when we speak about India.”

WALKING THE TALK

Sharing ideas about how a destination can do its bit towards this goal, **GB Srithar** underlined what Singapore is doing in this area. He said, “It is a huge challenge. It is such a serious, necessary, existential topic of the hour. Thankfully, for Singapore, it has been on the minds of our leadership, both political and public and private sector partnerships. Singapore is the only country in the world to have a net zero vehicle growth rate as of yet.”

Ritam Saha said, “What IATA and its member airlines have done today is that we have adopted a mission called Fly Net Zero and it is targeted at reducing carbon emissions to zero by the year 2050.”

Wedding TRAVEL SHOW

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When hospitality embraces wellness

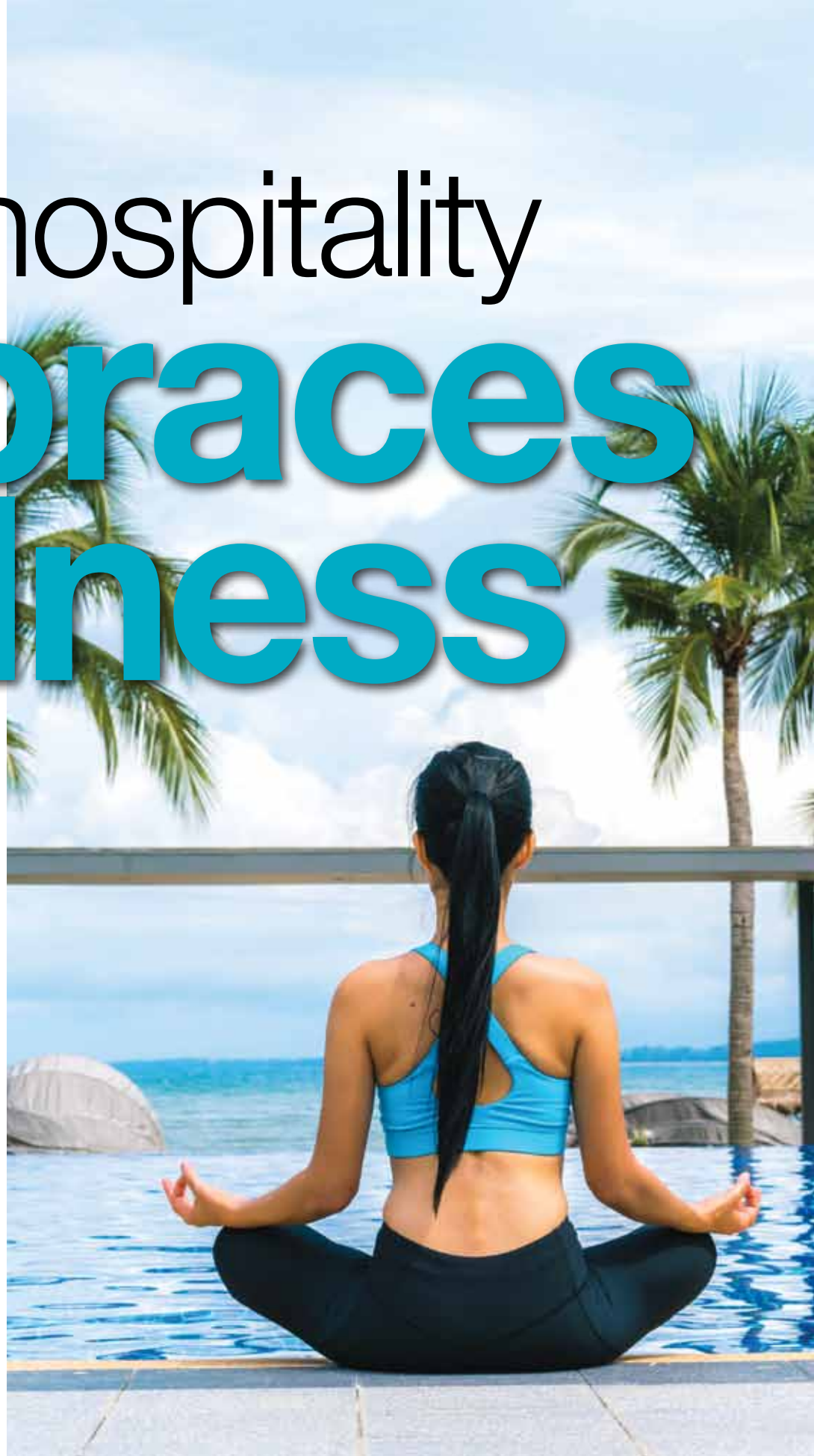
India is known for its ancient wellness practices around the world, especially after Covid-19 cases subsided, where people are discovering a new sense of staying healthy and adopting a natural way of life. Properties and wellness retreats across India offer unique and new therapies and treatments, which are their signature.

 **Nisha Verma**

Hotels, resorts, and wellness retreats across India are offering a range of therapies and programmes from not only India but around the world for both inbound and domestic travellers. Some of these treatments and therapies are worth trying.

ADDRESSING HORMONAL HEALTH

Indian wellness is synonymous with Ananda in the Himalayas, which is famous worldwide for its wellness programmes. However, sharing one of their unique therapies, **Mahesh Natarajan**, Chief Operations Officer, Ananda in the Himalayas, says, “The Ananda Rebalance programme has been designed to address hormonal health, both for menopause in women as well as changes in testosterone and other hormonal changes in men. The uniqueness of the programme lies in its application of traditional Chinese medicine techniques to accurately diagnose the underlying body imbalances leading to the disruption in hormonal systems and its integration of various traditional Oriental therapies such as acupuncture, cupping, moxibustion, Tibetan Kuu Nye, Kundalini and Japanese Shiatsu. Phases such as menopause are also an emotional roller coaster for women, including symptoms of sadness, irritability, anxiety, and mood changes. Ananda now offers emotional healing and



therapy spearheaded by holistic experts drawing from the fields of clinical psychology, energy therapy, hypnosis, and NLP, which blend seamlessly into the programme to address emotional stress caused primarily by these hormonal imbalances.”

HIMALAYAN WELLNESS

Situated amidst the picturesque Himalayas, The Khyber Spa by L'OCCITANE, located within the The Khyber Himalayan Resort & Spa, provides an experience of Provence in Gulmarg along with stunning views, shares **Vinit Chhabra**, General Manager, The Khyber Himalayan Resort & Spa, Gulmarg, UT J&K. “With three single treatment rooms and two couple suites,



PUNEET DHAWAN
Senior Vice President-Operations
Accor

“ Holistic personalised therapies are thoughtfully created through consultations with guests at Raffles Spa ”



RAJESH RAJPUROHIT
General Manager
Radisson Blu Resort
Dharamshala

“ We have introduced series of wellness and nature-centric engagement activities for guests ”

each with its own private steam chamber, it is a place to unwind and be pampered, be it after an exhilarating ski session, or a leisurely walk in the dense woods or meadows, or at the beginning of your day. The Spa brings to life the invigorating climate of Gulmarg. Be it spring, summer, autumn or winter, guests can choose from a repertoire of signature treatments, specially crafted with home grown seasonal flora combined with original L'OCCITANE products and pure water from the springs in the Himalayas.”

DESERT ROSE

Emotional wellbeing is an integral pillar of the Raffles Udaipur, claims **Puneet Dhawan**, Senior Vice

President-Operations, Accor. “At the Raffles Spa, an impeccable blend of healing techniques takes guests on a revitalising journey of emotional well-being and provides a unique space for rejuvenation of the mind, body, and soul. An element of the uniqueness of the Raffles Spa lies in its personalised wellness offerings. Holistic personalised therapies are thoughtfully created through consultations with the guests at the Raffles Spa, to remedy any imbalances in the life-forces or doshas, while taking you on a journey of true relaxation,” shares Dhawan.



INVIGORATING ALL SENSES

Jitendra Varshney, Director-Spa & Wellness, Six Senses Fort Barwara, claims that they believe in extensive Ayurvedic and personalised wellness programmes based on the preventative principles of Eastern medicine and result-oriented Western influences. “Transcendent Sound Journey is a 60-minute treatment and is offered in our sacred meditation hall using different sizes of crystal and metal singing bowls, an ocean sound drum, and a gong. The healing sounds of the gong and singing bowls reverberate in your innermost self. It provides you with an opportunity to experience your true and limitless nature.”



YOGA AMIDST MOUNTAINS

Rajesh Rajpurohit, General Manager, Radisson Blu Resort Dharamshala, shares that they have introduced a series of wellness as well as nature-centric engagement activities for resident guests to elevate the entire stay experience. “Guided group yoga sessions are organised by the poolside every morning. The scenic backdrop of the Kangra Valley, the fresh mountain breeze, and gentle yoga stretches set the tone for an active yet relaxing day of exploration ahead in Dharamshala,” he elaborates.

PROMOTIONS AND B2B ENGAGEMENTS

When it comes to spreading the word about these unique therapies and treatments, hotels are adopting various methods. “Ananda has been building awareness of these unique offerings through educational workshops to travel partners and our guests in residence, supplemented by direct communication and social media. The hugely positive response that our clients have shown post the introduction of this programme has been amplified by word of mouth and references to their respective networks. Ananda’s team of doctors is available for online consultations. All Ananda’s wellness programmes are available for travel trade in India and internationally. Ananda engages with travel channel partners on a regular basis through in-person meetings, mailers, education via product training sessions, as well as wellness orientations at the retreat,” shares Natarajan.

Chhabra reveals that they work closely with the travel trade community to promote The Khyber. “Other than the traditional marketing activities like print ad campaigns and using social media to build our brand, we use public relations very effectively to promote the property. And as we are promoting Gulmarg as a year-round destination, we have special packages for various seasons as well as special interest packages



**JITENDRA
VARSHNEY**
Director-Spa & Wellness
Six Senses Fort Barwara

“ We are engaging with the travel trade, which most of the time is done by our corporate sales and marketing team ”

based on adventure sports, honeymoons, romance, and long weekends, among others. We also participate in international and regional trade fairs and exhibitions to promote our hotel.”

On the other hand, Rajpurohit shares, “The group yoga sessions, along with a host of other engagement activities, are offered at no additional charge to all our in-house guests. We actively highlight and promote these through our social media channels to create awareness amongst prospective guests. The sales team also includes details on the activities of their sales pitching to B2B partners.”

At Six Senses Fort Barwara, it has been integrated as a welcome ritual for the guests arriving at the hotel. As Varshney shares, “All the treatments and activities undertaken at the Six Senses Spas begin and finish with a spa specialist striking the singing bowls. The practice piques the guest’s interest, resulting in them immersing themselves in a full session of sound journey. We have complimentary group sessions for in-house guests. It is a part of our daily wellness activities in the resort where any in-house guest can come and enjoy the group session. The practice is being promoted across the website as well as social media as part of the brand’s commitment to well-being. We are also engaging with the travel trade, which most of the time is done by our corporate sales and marketing team.”

Dhawan reveals that they have specially curated the Royal Escape Package to amalgamate the couple’s spa therapy with other unique Raffles Udaipur experiences. “It is distributed widely to our ALL.com member base through e-cards, HNI club member bases, social media, affiliate marketing efforts, and strategic influencer engagement programmes. Also, we frequently engage with our travel trade associates and brand friends for the same,” he reveals.

Maharashtra hotels one step closer to **INDUSTRY STATUS**

Maharashtra government takes first step towards bringing non-classified hotels under the purview of 'industry status' by forming a committee to oversee certification process.

 **Lipla Negi**

In a move to bolster the hospitality sector in the state, the Maharashtra government has now begun an official procedure for non-classified hotels to avail industrial concessions. Under this procedure, the Maharashtra Tourism expert committee will inspect the hotels and assess them on a number of criteria set by the government. The hotels can submit their applications for an inspection by the expert committee, and upon fulfilling the criteria set by the state government's committee, can qualify for industrial concessions. While the government resolution (GR) on this was issued last year, the committee is now actively inviting applications from non-classified hotels across the state to qualify for available taxes and charges at industrial rates. Speaking about the process for accreditation, **Dr. Dhananjay D Sawalkar**, Jt. Director, Directorate of Tourism (DoT), Government of Maharashtra, says, "We are giving five kinds of benefits to the hoteliers – electricity duty, water charges, property tax, non-agriculture tax, and development charges. So far, we have received 600 applications from various hotels and will now start physically inspecting these hotels to check if they meet the basic minimum parameters set by our expert committee. The certificate to avail 'industrial rates' will be accorded only after a hotel is able to meet all parameters clearly listed on the website. In case any hotel is not able to qualify, we will allow time to work upon the weak areas so that the hotel is fully able to comply with the parameters."

There are a total of 50 parameters in the Maharashtra tourism minimum eligibility criteria list for industry



DR. DHANANJAY D SAWALKAR
Joint Director
Directorate of Tourism
Govt. of Maharashtra

“ Certificate to avail 'industrial rates' will be accorded only after a hotel is able to meet all parameters ”

status, which includes areas such as guest rooms, bathrooms, guest service, safety and security, kitchen and food, public area, hotel staff, code of conduct for safe tourism, and facilities for differently-abled guests. There is also a list of (non-mandatory) additional features, which includes parameters such as conference facilities, business centres, F&B outlets, sewage treatment plants, and rainwater harvesting, among others. The certification process by the DoT, Maharashtra is firmly grounded in the endeavour to help the industry recover faster. The hospitality sector has been the hardest hit by the global pandemic, which brought the tourism industry to a complete standstill and left many hotels debt-ridden and scores of hospitality professionals jobless. The certification process for industry status will help hotels avail tariffs and duties on electricity, water, property, development, and non-agricultural taxes at industrial rates. The hotels have been paying all these charges and taxes at commercial rates till now.

To encourage sustainable practices and promote conscious tourism, "the parameters for green hotel certification are listed separately", he says. Whether economic or luxury, a hotel needs to meet the 43 parameters in order to receive the certificate of an eco-friendly hotel. He dubbed it a move that would strengthen the hotel industry in the future. He concludes, "The difference between the commercial rates and industrial rates is about 40 per cent. We hope that, in the long run, hoteliers will extend the benefit to the guests, which in turn will help in increasing the tourist footfall in the state."



A sustainable turn for hospitality

Sustainable tourism requires a sensitive approach towards details and matters, and adaptations need to be made along the way to deepen ESG impact, opines **Gaurav Pokhariyal**, Senior Vice President and Global Head-Human Resources, IHCL.

Sustainability is a highly circulated term these days. The huge upheaval caused by COVID-19 widened the diversity gap, with millions losing livelihoods across the globe. The threat from climate change has been visible across all geographies at different times. The UN body, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), in its latest report, has sounded the warning to reduce carbon burdens. So, in that sense, sustainability now implies making a meaningful impact for all—people, profits, and the planet. After the huge losses caused by the pandemic lockdowns, there is a greater need to build back faster, but there is also an increasing realisation that the path ahead has to be sustainable, or else all our development gains will get eroded by climate impact.

“ We need visionary ideas, not patchwork solutions, to make a difference ”

When developing a long-term strategy, we must select causes that have a natural affinity with our business. For hospitality, for instance, it works very well to take the lead in matters like an anti-littering campaign in the vicinity or to involve local talent in handicrafts and artefacts. Such causes fit both the SEBI mandate for an ESG overview and the enterprise strategy. In the long run, it will be taking up causes that are sustainable.

BEING RELEVANT TO SOCIETY

Being contextual and relevant and acting as conscious members of society are the most important aspects of sustainability. We need visionary ideas, not patchwork solutions, to make a difference. Much before ESG or CSR became corporate jargon, Tata Steel had shown the way by taking care of local communities

around factory locations in Jamshedpur. Due to low barriers to entry, tourism is the single largest employer in the world, with 334 million people employed directly and a million skilled and unskilled workers employed indirectly. Women account for 54 per cent of employment in the sector, compared to 39 per cent for the global economy. In India, hospitality and tourism are pillars of development, employing 10 per cent of the workforce directly and millions indirectly contributing towards 8 per cent of the GDP. During the pandemic, hospitality showed its empathetic side by rolling up the carpets and the chandeliers and making way for COVID-19 ICUs and many such initiatives.

Sustainable tourism necessitates a sensitive approach to details and matters, as well as adjustments along the way to deepen ESG impact. Taking care of local communities, especially women and unskilled members, and empowering them with skill-building activities ensures sustainable practices.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Energy shortages and climate change are two main challenges the world is facing today. As per reports, tourism contributes around 5 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, and the figure is likely to grow by 130 per cent by 2035. The energy we use must come from renewable resources like wind and solar. We can use energy-efficient technology for cooling and heating, ventilation, and lighting. At the same time, by being energy-efficient, hotels can keep such costs low as well as reduce their environmental impact. However, like with other digital applications, energy-efficient technologies are changing rapidly, and one must keep abreast of the latest technologies to suit budgets and for greater impact.

For newer hotels, energy can be factored in at the design stage, and there are many ways eco-conscious architects and building experts are designing LEED and Energy Star, among others, certified buildings that reduce energy costs by taking the right decisions at the very start of a project.



**GAURAV
POKHARIYAL**
Senior Vice President &
Global Head-HR
IHCL

“ Future
of sustainable
tourism is
regenerative,
inclusive, and
conscious of
societal and
environmental
impact ”



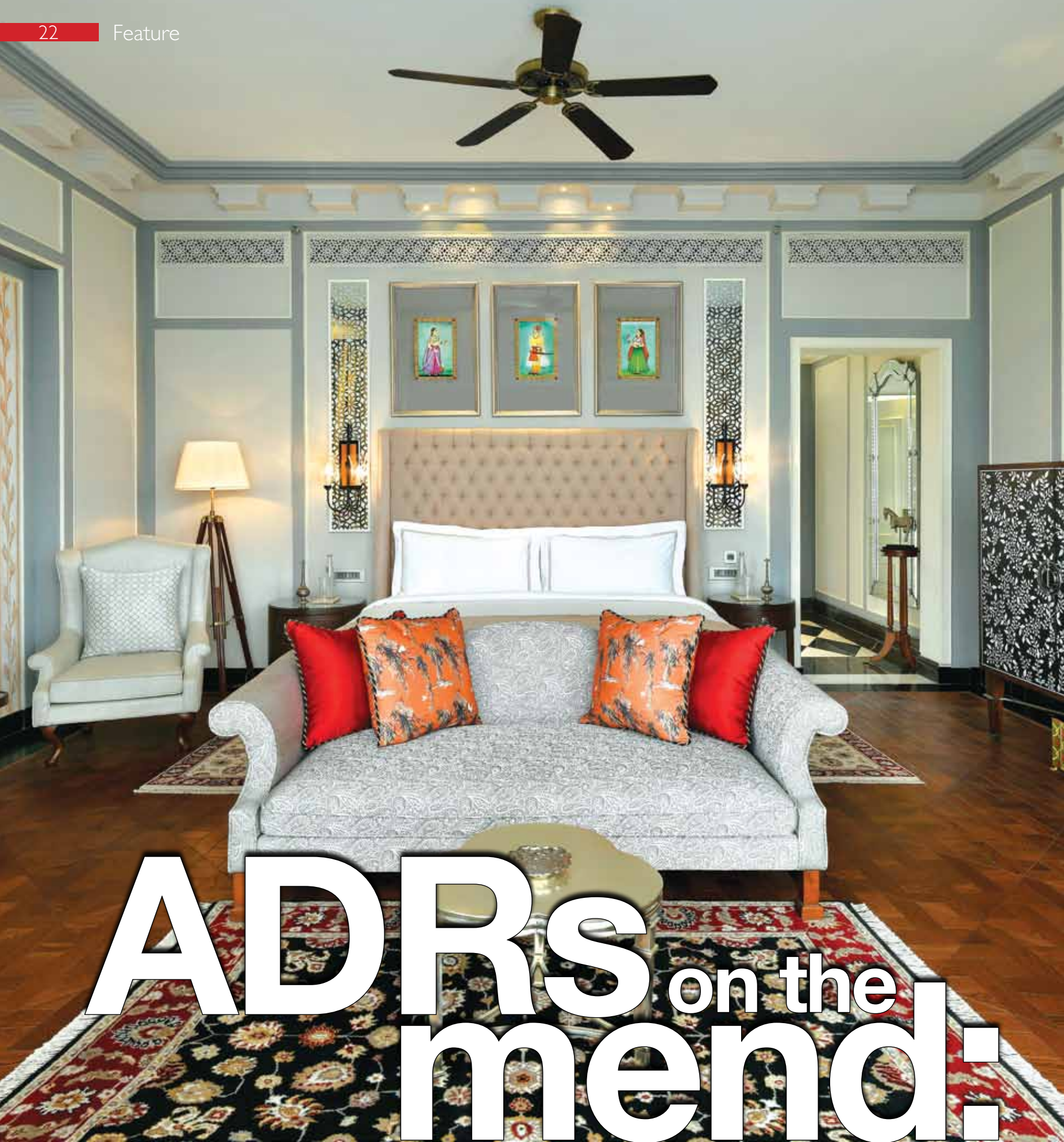
Over 80 per cent of hotels today are either unbranded or standalone, medium or small, and they have a huge opportunity in energy efficiency. Since this is the largest and fastest growing segment of hotels in the country, they need better technical expertise and financial support in order to design, build, operate, and upgrade energy efficiency.

WIDE-RANGING IMPACT

The future of sustainable tourism is regenerative, inclusive, and conscious of societal and environmental impact. Increasingly, people are becoming more aware of the environmental impact of the choices they make. By focussing on vendors belonging to the marginalised community, small-scale farmers and women's self-help groups, by involving them in the supply chain, by rewilding or greening efforts, by leading by example on cleanliness and hygiene, by measuring food portions and reducing wastage and plastics, hospitality's sustainable efforts can be wide-ranging and offer lasting benefits.

To be truly successful in all such initiatives, it is important to set clear tasks and objectives beforehand, so that all stakeholders are aligned with the goals. It is also important to put in place metrics to gauge whether progress is on track and to plug loopholes wherever needed. Ultimately, business, the environment, and local communities all must thrive. Sustainable practices offer the perfect recipe for success and for staying relevant.





ADRs on the mend:

SUMMER 2022

Hoteliers throughout the country are optimistic about the rise in ADR as they prepare for outstanding growth. The upswing will be more robust than what was previously observed until the pandemic hit the industry hard two years ago.

 Nisha Verma

April is usually a low travel period in India and not a usual high occupancy period for hotels either. However, while recovery from the Omicron wave continues, India's hotel industry surpassed pre-pandemic figures in occupancy and average daily rate (ADR) for three consecutive days (16-18) during the second week of April, revealed STR recently.

"Thus, 16-18 April were the first days of 2022 with both occupancy and ADR above 2019 levels in India. When using a running seven-day average, occupancy and ADR have been above 90 per cent of pre-pandemic comparables since late-March. On Monday, 18 April, India recorded its highest ADR index of the year at 106 per cent of the 2019 comparable. Occupancy surpassed pre-pandemic levels earlier in the year, reaching as high as 109 per cent of the corresponding 2019 level on 25 March," stated STR.

Even RateGain, as part of its monthly PULSE report, revealed that April saw the same number of bookings being made as March, inching closer to pre-pandemic levels. March usually has higher bookings across the country than in April. According to the report, the average daily rate at which rooms were available was 105 per cent higher in Mumbai and 62 per cent higher in Delhi when compared to the previous month. In fact, this scenario only got better in May, and ADRs are only increasing in the summer.

FROM HORSE'S MOUTH

Hotels, both chain brands and individual properties, have seen this ADR rise for a variety of reasons. **Zubin Saxena**, MD and Vice President-Operations, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, shares, "The ease of mobility restrictions backed by pent-up demand has translated into increased summer travel. We are recording healthy ADRs and occupancy rates across our portfolio of 108 hotels in India for both leisure and business. Our key markets, such as Delhi NCR, Mumbai, and leisure destinations, including Lonavala, Dharamshala, Mussoorie, and Shimla, are driving recovery for us. We are optimistic for a robust season ahead."

Echoing the similar views, **Abinash Manghani**, Chief Executive Officer, WelcomHeritage, says, "The ADR levels have not just recovered to 2019 levels, but in fact improved by 22 per cent in 2021-22 as compared to 2019-20. The leisure destinations of WelcomHeritage have fared very well, with forays into newer leisure destinations such as Jawai in Rajasthan and Shimla in Himachal Pradesh increasing the ADR levels. Favourable factors in market conditions also facilitated a sharp rebound in leisure, weddings, some MICE, as well as some SME business travel, when operations were permitted. High demand for our hotels allowed for rate propensity and resulted in huge gains for these destinations. We have also witnessed frequent extended stays and work-from-home means that resort cottages, villas, and suites become offices, classrooms, and homes for many."

For **Pratima Badhwar**, Chief Commercial Officer, India & South Asia, Accor, the start of the summer season was also accompanied by a rise in ADR. "ADRs for our



ZUBIN SAXENA
MD & VP-Operations,
South Asia
Radisson Hotel Group

“ We are recording healthy ADRs and occupancy rates across all of our 108 hotels in India ”



ARIF PATEL
Regional VP-Sales &
Marketing
Hyatt India

“ We are positive about long-term recovery and expect ADRs to reach 2019 levels in future ”

hotels have been growing month-on-month this year so far. April has been a phenomenal month for us, as we have managed to close April ADRs above 2019 April levels as well, which is a strong indication of business recovery," she shares.

Arif Patel, Regional Vice President-Sales & Marketing, Hyatt India, also says that the hospitality sector in India has bounced back quickly. "We are seeing an increase in bookings at all our hotels at Hyatt. The occupancy rate for the period of 1 March to 27 March this year was 69 per cent, a substantial improvement over February, which witnessed 56 per cent occupancy. While the ADR for April 2022 was 14 per cent higher than April 2019 levels, the year to date (YTD) 2022 ADR is only 8 per cent lower than the ADR for 2019. This was mainly due to the impact of the third wave in the month of January. We are positive about the long-term recovery and expect the ADRs to reach 2019 levels in the coming months," he says.

As an individual property, Claridges too has shown the same growth. **Himanshu Kumar**, Hotel Manager, The Claridges, New Delhi, says, "We are trending at around 80 per cent of the pre-COVID-19 ADR numbers. This is currently ahead of the market conditions at large. In my opinion, the 2019 levels will first be achieved by the luxury and upper upscale segments of hotels by the end of this year. This is because they have always been the preferred hotels for the foreign clientele, which will subsequently improve the ADR and occupancy levels. As the rates go up for this segment, there will be a ripple effect on other segments of hotels."

Rakshit Sharma, Chief Executive Officer, Rester Hotels & Resorts, shares, "Hotel occupancies continue to rise with corporate travel returning alongside leisure travel. Room tariffs have gone back to their pre-pandemic level. I believe this year we will exceed revenues of 2019 by 10-15 per cent, should there be no pandemic."

DRIVING GROWTH

The reasons behind this growth are many. For Accor, says Badhwar, "Corporate demand is leading the way in terms of recovery, along with an increase in MICE queries. Our business hotels across the country are seeing the corporate mix increase."

Manghani explains, "The domestic segment with revenge tourism is leading the recovery. Recovery from the second wave has been far quicker than the first, with fewer restrictions and better awareness and planning; recovery from the third wave appears even more rapid. The domestic segment has been by-and-large undeterred by any flight restrictions within the country since road connectivity is now pretty good, leading to new markets for regional destinations. The importance of staycations and short holidays is reflected in the continued lead of weekend demand."

According to Saxena, leisure travel will continue to lead the industry towards recovery. However, what will solidify this trend is embedding consumer trust by consistently ensuring reliability in terms of safety and hygiene. "We are also noticing a strong boost from MICE across our

hotels. Weddings and socials as a segment continue to support our hotels in tier 1 and 2 cities. We believe that the fundamentals of the industry and its leadership are robust, and we are well on our way to bullish growth in the coming months.”

Patel also attributes the growth to leisure travel. “Recovery in the Indian market has picked up pace and is being driven mostly by leisure travel. Even as major cities see an uptick in travel, we foresee resorts and leisure destinations at driveable distances from these cities registering high levels of occupancy and bookings. With international travel having opened up, the MICE segment has started to pick up as well, and we could well witness its peak in 2022, returning to and exceeding the pre-pandemic demand for this vertical. Local destinations for weddings have become a growing preference in India too. This sector has particularly seen tremendous traction, and we have witnessed a steady increase in the number of queries and bookings for weddings all year long in 2021, and the first quarter of 2022 as well,” he claims.

Kumar says it is a mixed bag, including leisure, trade, and various other segments. “The retail segment continues to lead the way. Given that we have entered the hot summer months, I do not foresee international guests coming. After the retail segment, we have seen some large movements in a few of the social, military, education, religious, and fraternal groups (SMERF) and MICE segments. We continue to witness some numbers in terms of travel trade, but there has been some activity and optimism for the winter months of 2022,” he adds. Sharma also says, “The rise in bookings is being mostly seen for leisure stays and MICE events, as well as weddings.”

MANAGING DEMAND

Hotels, too, are leaving no stone unturned to meet this demand in the best possible manner. Manghani shares, “At WelcomHeritage, we have been quick to adapt our offerings and practices to the evolving expectations of the potential domestic traveller. Weddings were an added boost for resorts, and enticing staycation packages in city hotels were crafted. Flexibility was key to guest bookings, and we have been sensitive to prices too. This agility has played a tremendous role in our business growth and plans. Over the last year, the spectrum of WelcomHeritage expanded beyond the typical destinations of Kasauli, Srinagar, Shimla, Manali, Mussoorie, Nainital, Coorg, and Rajasthan.”

Patel adds, “At Hyatt in India, we are focussing more on our leisure segment to enhance luxury travel. We foresee a healthy growth of leisure properties going forward; Hyatt Regency Dehradun and Hyatt Regency Jaipur Mansarovar are good examples of this. Moreover, travel has become extremely experiential and educational—it is about experiencing the authenticity of a destination, and that is exactly what our luxury hotels will offer—a real and true experience of the destination in its best form. Each of our leisure hotels will have an enhanced approach to personalisation, meaningful connections, family-friendly activities and creating memorable experiences. Currently, we have



**PRATIMA
BADHWAR**
Chief Commercial
Officer-India &
South Asia
Accor

“ April has been phenomenal for us, as we have managed to close ADRs above 2019 April levels ”



**ABINASH
MANGHANI**
CEO
WelcomHeritage

“ ADR levels have not just recovered to 2019 levels, but improved by 22% in 2021-22 as compared to 2019-20 ”



eight leisure hotels in India, and we aim to double our leisure footprint by 2024. Of the 24 openings slated for the next three years, a third will be focused on leisure and cultural destinations. This will add an additional dimension to our distribution.”

PLANS AHEAD

Sharing their growth plans, Patel informs, “The launch of Hyatt Centric Janakpuri New Delhi is our second launch after the recent opening of Hyatt Regency Dehradun earlier this year. With these two additions, we now have 7,531 rooms across 34 Hyatt hotels in India. In 2022,



we plan to open nine more hotels across various brands that will cater to the needs of both leisure and business travellers. With over 24 executed deals for hotels, we plan to expand our brand footprint in India by eyeing more than 70 per cent growth, adding over 3,800 keys with more than 50 hotels in our portfolio in India by 2023. This is happening for the first time in the history of Hyatt in India. The Hyatt Regency brand continues to drive the group's growth in India and will enter two new regions with the Hyatt Regency Jaipur Mansarovar and Hyatt Regency Trivandrum. We also plan to grow the Hyatt Place brand further. The new hotels which



RAKSHIT SHARMA
CEO
Rester Hotels & Resorts

“Occupancies rise with corporate travel returning alongside leisure travel”

are planned for this year under the Hyatt Place brand will see Hyatt entering five new regions with Hyatt Place Bodh Gaya, Hyatt Place Goa Candolim, Hyatt Place Vijayawada, Hyatt Place Jaipur Malviya Nagar, and Hyatt Place Bharuch. Currently, we have eight distinct brands in the country—Andaz, Alila, Hyatt, Hyatt Centric, Hyatt Place, Hyatt Regency, Grand Hyatt, and Park Hyatt. We are focused on introducing brands to destinations where guests are currently travelling or would like to travel. The aim is to ensure a multi-brand presence across cities such as Delhi, Gurugram (Gurgaon), Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Pune and Goa.”

Saxena shared that in 2021, they will open 12 hotels. “We are working towards replicating this performance in 2022 also. This year, we have successfully opened three hotels across India, with more hotels and resorts in the pipeline. With a robust pipeline of 12–15 hotel signings and 10–12 hotel openings every year, we are looking at exceptional growth momentum in India. Our focus areas include strengthening our network presence in the country by introducing hotels across tier 3, 4, and 5 cities; and new brands such as Radisson RED and our recently launched brand extension, Radisson Individual Retreats. Our journey on the road to recovery is supported by the group's focus on leisure and domestic travel,” he says.

Even WelcomHeritage is on an expansion drive. “We are planning to continue the brand's expansion within the country with three planned openings in 2022, including WelcomHeritage Azora, Fort Kochi; WelcomHeritage Ayatana, Ooty; and WelcomHeritage Parv Vilas, Kasauli Hills, Solan. When operational, these properties will add 101 keys to the existing inventory of 944 keys,” claims Manghani. He adds, “While the focus on domestic travellers remains undeterred, our prime revenue generator pre-COVID-19, the inbound market, is already showing a promising comeback. We are looking to achieve 30-40 per cent of our revenues from this segment in 2022, as opposed to the pre-pandemic levels of 80 per cent.”



HIMANSHU KUMAR
Hotel Manager
The Claridges,
New Delhi

“We are trending at around 80% pre-COVID-19 ADRs. This is ahead of market conditions”

For Accor, says Badhwar, “Our future pipeline is robust, currently comprising 16 properties across a number of brands including Raffles, Fairmont, Novotel, and Ibis, which will bring more than 1,600 rooms to our portfolio.” Claridges, on the other hand, is not looking at expanding the portfolio. “We are not opening any new hotels at The Claridges. However, we have spent a lot of time redeveloping our existing hotels. The Claridges New Delhi already has a new lobby, and we have also relaunched the Pickwick restaurant. We are on the verge of launching our redesigned rooms in the hotel. In the coming months, we will renovate all the rooms and restaurants. Our other hotel, The Claridges Nabha Residence, is also earmarked to go through the redevelopment.”

Sharma shares that the new openings at Rester Hotels & Resorts include properties at Jim Corbett, Hyderabad–Gachibowli & Hi Tech City, Jodhpur, Mumbai, and Kota across all three brands, i.e., Resort, Select, and Xpress.

ON THE THRESHOLD OF DIGITAL RENAISSANCE

COVID-19 crisis is leaving innovation in its wake by way of next-generation technology, transforming hospitality operations and marketing as well as reshaping customer experience.

The world is now experiencing the fourth industrial revolution, a period marked by emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, virtual reality (VR), the Internet of Things (IoT), and fifth-generation (5G) wireless technology. Hence, technology is becoming all the more prevalent in people's lives. It is now being integrated into the day to day operations of a hotel. As hotels begin to reopen and strive toward full occupancy, technology is now more important than at any other moment in history, and is set to play a vital role in recovery of the industry.

There is no denying the fact that the yearning to travel is as strong as ever after two years of quarantine. The question is no more whether people want to travel, but rather how they want to travel. They increasingly prefer self-service to having to wait to be served, with tech-enabled convenience anticipated at every stage. From online planning and booking to contactless check-in and a digital concierge available 24x7, the hospitality digital revolution is quickly advancing due to the demands of today's technodexterous, hygiene-conscious travellers. These disruptive shifts in the industry have resulted from both the pandemic and modern scientific breakthroughs. COVID-19-era security measures have dramatically altered the way hotels function, with an increased need for contactless services. As the cases of the ongoing pandemic are subsiding, smart capabilities and offerings that were once regarded as add-ons to the visitor experience will fast become essential.

Mehul Sharma, Founder & CEO, Signum Hotels & Resorts, asserts, "Technology is advancing at a faster pace and, at present, it plays a vital role in practically every industry. Hospitality is no exception to this. From a budget hotel to a global chain, there is no doubt that hotel technology increases revenue. Further, its impact on the industry has also changed the way hotels run their businesses. Travellers, in this era, are now more inclined towards services that are tech-driven, simple, and deliver personalised experiences. These changing needs and wants of travellers are defining the way hotels operate."



**REUBEN
KATARIA**
General Manager
The Leela Bhartiya City
Bengaluru

“ The
property employs
cutting-edge
technology to
reduce its carbon
footprint, easing
the burden on
cost centres ”

INDIA FOLLOWS 'TECH' SUIT

The Indian hospitality sector has been slow to jump on the bandwagon, putting cutting-edge technological advancements on the backburner for years due to the costs involved. Before the ongoing pandemic, a few properties in the country introduced smart tech features in rooms, but the examples were few and far between. Most hotel rooms still followed the standard practices using age-old tech in rooms. Only a few had started applying advanced room features such as motion sensors, primarily to reduce costs and increase their sustainability quotient. Things have now changed drastically in the last year. Hoteliers were forced to adopt technological innovations to survive during the pandemic and some of them have realised that tech-driven changes are here to stay.

Jai Chugh, General Manager, DoubleTree by Hilton Gurugram Baani Square, jumping on the technology bandwagon, observes, "The new age of technology is playing a substantial role in empowering hotels to enhance guest experiences. In fact, recent times have shown how technology has helped many hospitality businesses sail through challenging times during the pandemic. Hence, adapting to technology that appeals to customers in this highly competitive industry is the need of the hour, and we are leaving no stone unturned in utilising the latest innovations to enhance our services. The use of technology in the hospitality industry has great relevance. It not only helps ease staff workload and makes processes faster, but also reduces costs, saves time, improves revenue generation, and





most importantly, enhances the guest experience. At DoubleTree by Hilton Gurugram Baani Square, we have embraced various technologies that facilitate convenience for our guests and team members.”

Reuben Kataria, General Manager, The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru, shares, “Situated amid the lush greenery of Bhartiya City, The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru uses state-of-the-art technology to redefine guest experiences and maintain an environmentally conscious approach. Enhanced guest experiences at the hotel include television screens with Chromecast devices that are implemented for a select category of services. The property ensures to minimise electricity consumption through LED-based lighting with a low dimming system that reduces the voltage consumption and cuts electricity costs. We are also launching a mobile application for guests that will enable wireless and secure access to the rooms, amongst other lateral uses. All applications in use for the outlets on the property are centrally hosted on a self-hosted cloud.”

TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION IS RISING...

A Stayntouch/NYU Tisch Center of Hospitality report found that 81.7 per cent of hoteliers polled used or planned to use at least one new technology during the pandemic. The use of smart technology in hotels is not a new notion in the world. In recent years, brands such as Marriott, Hilton, Accor, and others have been experimenting with their own mobile applications, smart room features, and other technology advancements, including chatbots, voice support, and automation, at their properties. Meanwhile, some brands have pushed



JAI CHUGH
General Manager
DoubleTree by Hilton
Gurugram Baani
Square

“ We are leaving no stone unturned in utilising the latest innovations to enhance our services ”

things further by using robots as porters and butlers for room service, giving guests a futuristic experience. Because customer expectations and demands are always evolving, being au courant with them is important in the context of COVID-19. Some of the key trends are:

Contactless payment systems: Despite extensive inoculation, many individuals are still unwilling to reserve a hotel room because of COVID-19 dread. This feature is at the forefront of developments to make guests feel more at ease when staying in hotels. Contactless technology is easily compatible with loyalty programmes, in addition to expediting payments and enhancing the consumer experience.

Mobile check-in: Hoteliers and their visitors both benefit from mobile check-in. The ability to check in through a mobile app minimises the requirement for a large welcome desk. This will also alleviate the need for customers to spend time at the front desk, which is important for business travellers and families with small children. And now that COVID-19 may become a lasting part of our lives, smartphone check-in is key for reducing face-to-face interaction.

Concierge apps: Guests may use concierge applications to schedule their whole stay from their smartphones. Concierge applications can integrate chatbots to make the visitor experience more engaging and customised, in addition to recommending restaurants, attractions, and activities in the surrounding region. In-room tablets stocked with concierge applications and other useful

information have replaced room service menus and brochures in several hotels.

Advanced Wi-Fi: As more visitors work remotely, stream content, make video chats, and play online games, hotels will need to forgo the user-pay paradigm and supply appropriate bandwidth. Wi-Fi6 is an emerging Wi-Fi technology that can be up to 30 per cent quicker than the present system. Wi-Fi6 may also be utilised in hotel rooms for better-performing smart gadgets. Near-field communication (NFC) is also being used in hotels. NFC technology may relieve Wi-Fi networks of part of their load and is excellent for mobile check-in and keyless admission.

Voice control: This is also gaining traction. This could include everything from smart speakers in hotel rooms that allow for the management of various in-room equipment to automated order processing in restaurants and cafés that eliminates the need for customers to wait for staff to take their orders. As a result, it is worthwhile to take the time to fully use this opportunity.

Digital conference facilities: With more companies offering work-from-home alternatives and more people pursuing freelancing jobs and becoming digital nomads, the appetite for tech lounges and other co-working spaces has skyrocketed. Hotels will have to provide technologically furnished conference rooms for business gatherings to compete in today's tech-savvy market. In the post-Zoom meeting world, out-of-date audiovisual equipment will not suffice.

Robotics: One of the most intriguing technological advances in housekeeping is the deployment of robotics. The ongoing pandemic has turned the concept of deploying robotics from a curiosity to a very pragmatic one. Robots can deliver room service and clean rooms without touching them, lowering the risk of COVID-19 spreading.

VR and AR: Virtual reality shows 360-degree views of rooms and other hotel services to potential customers. AR allows guests to change their surroundings, such as transforming a backdrop into a forest, a beachfront scene, or even interstellar space. Adoption of these technologies can be fundamental in persuading guests to choose one hotel over another.

Big data: Data collection has exploded in nearly every industry, but it can be leveraged to great use by the hospitality industry to deliver more personalised experiences. Travel agencies, for example, may use it to provide insightful travel suggestions based on age, gender, budget, prior travel destinations, and so on. Big data helps companies in the sector to detect trends that can be utilised for revenue management. This helps executives to develop more data-driven pricing plans and acquire a better knowledge of current financial performance and the external forces that affect it.

...BUT NOT WITHOUT CHALLENGES

While realising the revolutionary aspects of digital technologies, there are a number of new challenges



MEHUL SHARMA
Founder & CEO
Signum Hotels
& Resorts

“ Hotel software products make process guest-friendly, which key for bringing in more business ”

that hospitality professionals must consider when adopting them, including security, privacy, costs, and the importance of human touch.

In every business, including hospitality, security is a major concern when it comes to digitalisation. Because digital technologies such as AI and IoT are so interconnected, they are vulnerable to hackers. Furthermore, the widespread connectivity of diverse gadgets exposes digital networks to risk. Another key consideration is privacy, as personalised services rely on digital technology to store and monitor guest preferences and behaviour. Customers are becoming more conscious of their data privacy, and any data breach might result in a catastrophe in the hotel industry. As a result, a transparent, stringent, and unambiguous privacy policy is required, stating what data can be gathered and shared, as well as who owns the data.

Another barrier is the high expense of implementing these digital technologies. Small firms may need to make considerable initial expenditures to incorporate digital technology into their everyday operations. Hence, it is becoming increasingly important for hoteliers to determine which digital technologies will benefit them the most. The dichotomy between digital convenience and in-person experience is the final point to consider. Customers prefer customer-staff connections in hospitality, notably in fine dining. Such contact may be reduced by voice assistants and other digital transformations. Therefore, finding a balance between digital ease and in-person experiences is imperative for hospitality firms.

THE ROAD AHEAD

After momentous two years in history, the hospitality industry cannot expect a return to normal. COVID-19 has expedited the digital transformation of the hospitality industry with unimaginable speed, forcing many hospitality practitioners to adopt digital technologies that would otherwise not be adopted so quickly. Hence, digital transformation in the industry is more significant than ever, and it is time for businesses to embrace this change. Even smaller hotels can make simple changes to gain an edge over businesses that are not using advanced systems. If hospitality companies are going to keep up, technology will be paramount.



Junction for learning and exchanging ideas

Happy Hotelier Club (HHC) conducted its fourth offline meeting at The Surya, New Delhi in May with a structured agenda. The meeting was attended by HHC members and guests, along with brand partners.





◀ LOUIS SAILER

**Senior Executive Vice President
The Imperial New Delhi**
Sailer enjoys international recognition for his commitment to offering an high standard of service across all companies' front and back of house operations. He has managed and operated some of the finest hotels and has turned around global luxury brands.



◀ VINEET MISHRA

**Cluster General Manager
Accor India**
Mishra has been appointed as CGM of Pullman & Novotel New Delhi Aerocity, along with Novotel & Ibis Bengaluru Outer Ring Road and Novotel & Ibis Chennai. He will take on an elevated leadership role, taking charge of leading the overall operations.

▶ ATUL UPADHYAY

**Senior Vice President
Pride Group of Hotels**
Upadhyay has been elevated to the post of Senior Vice President of the group. In his new role, he will continue to oversee the entire operations of the group, spearhead strategic partnerships, and drive the company's expansion plans.



▶ VIPIN KHATTAR

**General Manager
JW Marriott New Delhi**
Khattar will enhance and solidify the stellar performance of the hotel in the Aerocity sector and the Delhi market. One of his key priorities would be to enrich the strong culture of exceptional JW Treatment for the hotel's guests.



◀ MATHIEU HELLEC

**General Manager
Anantara Maia Seychelles Villas**
Hellec joined the team in 2018 prior to the property's rebranding from Maia Luxury Resort & Spa in 2020. Before joining the resort, he was GM of Tropical Store Limited. Hailing from France, he has a bachelor's degree in hospitality and tourism from Lycée Hôtelier.



◀ RAJESH KUMAR GUPTA

**General Manager
Sarovar Premiere Jaipur**
Gupta was earlier associated with Nile Hospitality, where he won awards for the hotel and created a strong social media footprint on the major SM platforms. He aims to bring innovation and operational excellence with his fresh outlook to his current hotel.



▶ REMANK GOEL

**Director of Sales
Crowne Plaza Greater Noida**
Goel will manage a robust sales team and work towards building stronger relationships with multiple segments and channels. He will lead the hotel's sales strategy to strengthen the hotel's position as the market leader in the luxury hotel landscape.



▶ NELSON GOMES

**Marketing & Experience
Manager, InterContinental
Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort**
In his new role, Gomes will be responsible for strengthening the brand communication strategy, including ideation and implementation of digital marketing strategies to enhance engagement at the property.



◀ SHAHNAAZ ANJUM

**F&B Manager
The Leela Bhartiya City BLR**
Anjum is a strategic business leader in managing overall F&B operations and has been in the industry for close to 13 years. She will handle all aspects related to the F&B division thereby focusing on delivering quality guest experiences and relationships.



◀ AJIT KUMAR

**Director of F&B
The Clarks Hotels & Resorts**
Kumar has more than 18 years of experience in the hospitality and tourism sectors, chiefly in the field of F&B. He will be heading the F&B department and will be responsible for managing uniformity in the food section across Clarks properties.



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