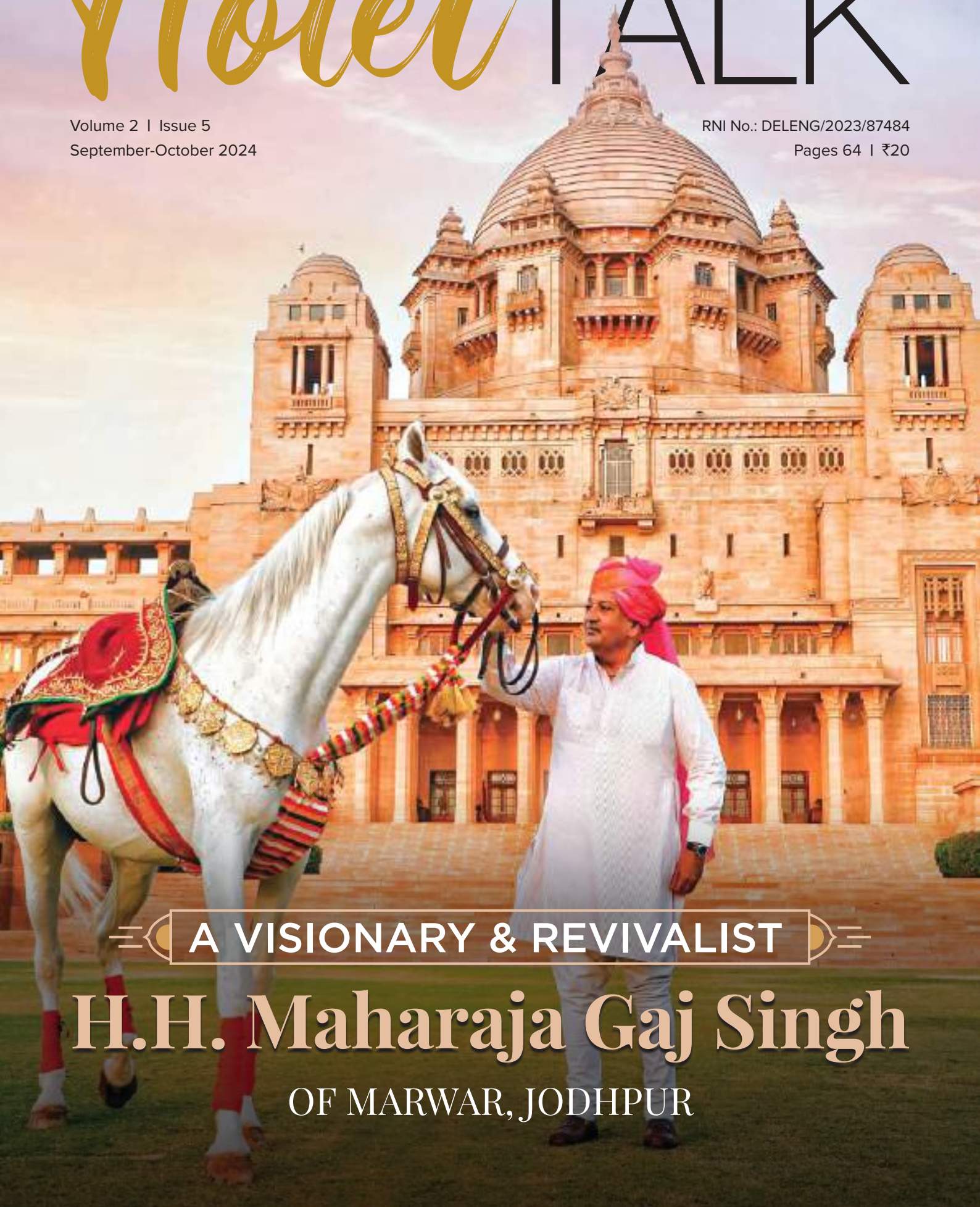


# Hotel TALK

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≡ ≡ A VISIONARY & REVIVALIST ≡ ≡

**H.H. Maharaja Gaj Singh**  
OF MARWAR, JODHPUR

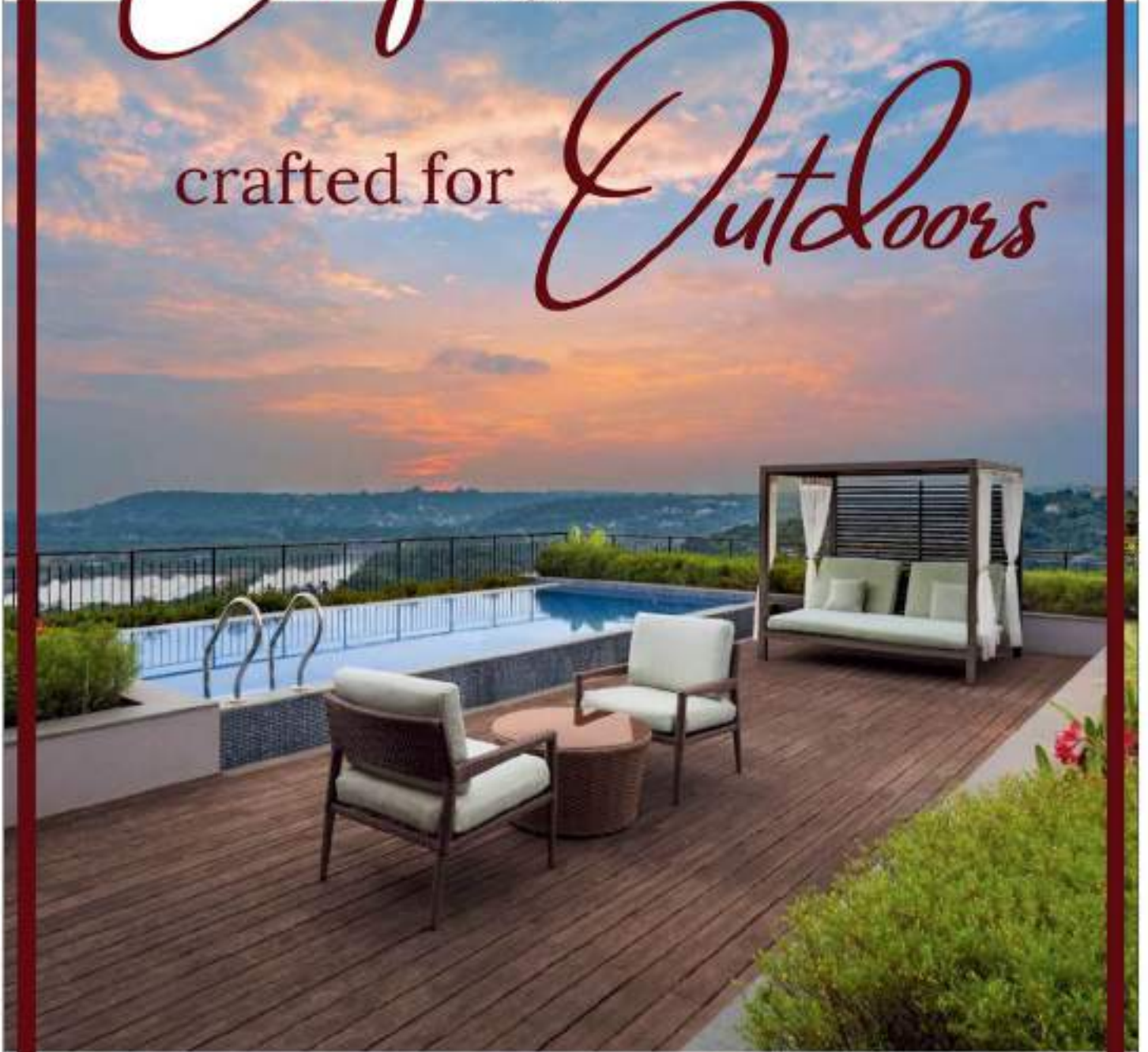


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# Hotel sector sees growth surge



At the outset I would like to acknowledge that it was indeed a pleasure engaging with His Highness Maharaja **Gaj Singh** of Marwar, Jodhpur and getting an insight into his achievements ranging from hospitality, conservation of heritage assets, restoration, rural regeneration, water, environment, health and education and if all this was not enough, his role as a diplomat—an amazing array of activity which only very few would have the ability to execute. I am sure you will enjoy reading the article about him, featured in this issue.

The hospitality business continues to see vibrancy and growth. The numbers are positive and the growth rate is estimated to top 10%. While domestic travel remains the big contributor, it is heartening to see some improvement in inbound leisure which is a key

66

*It is great to see hotels adopting a targeted marketing approach using big data capability and Artificial Intelligence to scale business.”*

business segment. It is great to see hotels adopting a targeted marketing approach using big data capability and Artificial Intelligence to scale business.

I have in the past emphasised the need to adopt sustainable processes and exercise complete restraint on consumption of natural resources, including food. We are once again entering the time of the year which is brimming with weddings and festivities. It is also the time when hotels can showcase their commitment to the environment by taking responsible measures to eradicate food wastage. We at *HotelTalk* would be happy to publish initiatives taken through innovative methodology by hotels and success achieved in this regard.

Dear readers, I do hope you enjoy reading our magazine and look forward to receiving your feedback.

Cheers,  
**Sunil Ghadiok**



# Contents

Cover picture credit  
His Highness Maharaja Gaj Singh of Jodhpur  
and Mehrangarh Museum Trust

Picture credit: His Highness Maharaja Gaj Singh of Jodhpur and Mehrangarh Museum Trust



# 12

## Restoring glory to timeless tales

A visionary and revivalist, H.H. Maharaja Gaj Singh of Marwar, has been exceptional in bringing Indian heritage experience to both domestic and global traveller

# 20

## RHG holds firm on expansion strategy

Nikhil Sharma, MD and Area Senior VP, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group outlines the company's strategy to meet evolving needs of Indian traveller and rising demand for branded stays globally



## 28 Gen Z and Alpha set to dominate luxury market

Today's luxury travellers place emphasis on holistic wellness experiences that address full spectrum of well-being, says Candice D'Cruz, Vice President, Luxury Brands, Asia Pacific, Hilton Luxury Brands



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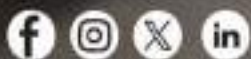


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## 34 Integrating global aesthetics into local projects

Changing the way forward MADE INDIA's innovative approach brings architecture and design directly to the customer



## 42

## Redefining hospitality: Impact of new innovations

Exhibitors at IHE 2024 showcased cutting-edge, cost-effective solutions tailored to the evolving needs of the hospitality industry

## 48 Elevating performance with direct booking strategies

As hotels strive to bridge digital divide with their guests, demand for innovative direct booking technologies is on the rise



## Innovative approaches fuel hotel revenue growth

To excel in today's dynamic landscape, hotels must anticipate guest needs and leverage strategies to enhance satisfaction

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# Breathing life into history

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**H.H. Maharaja Gaj Singh** of Marwar, Jodhpur, is no stranger to the world of hospitality. A visionary and revivalist, his contribution has been exceptional in bringing Indian heritage experience to both domestic and global travellers. In conversation with **Sunil Ghadiok**, Consulting Editor of *HotelTalk*, he speaks about his journey so far and his plans ahead.





**Q: Sir, you have built an enormous organisation of great significance, both in terms of business value and the preservation of tradition and history. Could you throw some light on this tremendous achievement?**

**A:** When I returned to India from England, I realised that my foremost duty was to preserve and conserve historic properties and to stay connected with the people of Marwar. The first 10 years were dedicated to restructuring,

creating companies, establishing trusts, engaging in legal battles, and so on. I felt it was better to engage directly with people through institutions, create trusts, foundations, and work with NGOs, rather than get involved in divisive politics, and that is what I have been doing. With a clear vision, we identified the needs and opportunities in diverse areas such as heritage conservation, restoration and museum, rural regeneration, water, environment, health and education, and set up charitable









organisations to address the needs. All these fields have been close to my heart.

I believe work is always interesting if you put your heart and soul into it and that if it positively impacts peoples' lives.

**Q: Your role in establishing and leading Indian Heritage Hotels Association (IHHA) has been phenomenal. I am sure that reviving heritage hotels and promoting heritage tourism was no easy task. Could you tell us about your successes and failures along the way, as well as the role of the government and other stakeholders? Do you feel this mammoth effort has paid off?**

**A:** When I returned to India, countless heritage properties in India had fallen into ruins. This spurred me to harness the potential of our heritage, inspired by Europe's example, with the aim of not only preserving our monuments and culture but also boosting tourism, garnering global interest, and creating employment opportunities.

Umair Bhawan Palace was built to be an official residence; it was not intended to be just a private family residence. As an official residence, it was meant for entertainment, hospitality, and traditional cultural events. This made it well-suited to becoming a hotel,

which I believed was the best course of action. As a young man, I returned with ideas to contribute to Jodhpur, and by the time I had established the organisation for this purpose, I was presented with a different opportunity—to become a diplomat. Before leaving for Trinidad, I signed an agreement with one of the leading hotel companies, ITC Welcomgroup, to operate the palace hotel. With professional management, it has grown ever since.

The IHHA was established in 1990 to address the need for a separate and independent classification for heritage hotels, with the goal of making heritage buildings productive and boosting tourism in India. We should take pride in the beauty of our diverse cultures and heritage across India, which is the USP of our nation. The government heeded to our request, and heritage hotels received their own distinct classification.



*When I returned to India after years abroad, many heritage properties were in ruins, inspiring me to harness their potential.*

**Q: Converting old buildings into beautiful hotels is no mean task, especially given the support needed to deliver quality services. Have you always been deeply involved in your own properties in this regard? What key fundamentals did you keep in mind when directing your development team?**

**A:** My interest in heritage blossomed in Britain, where I saw the passion for preserving history. It was amazing to see how the Europeans protected war-ravaged monuments, which motivated me to care for our own rich cultural heritage. I had already discussed with the professional hotel management group the importance of maintaining originality, while ensuring everything is functional and clean. Hotels should always be honest about what they can offer. For anyone looking to manage a successful hotel, service and honesty are the





most important factors, which our current Taj Management group has embraced. I tell every new Manager that Umaid Bhawan is not just a hotel; it is a palace and my home and the residents should feel they are my guests.

As someone deeply rooted in the heritage of Jodhpur, I have witnessed first-hand the transformative power of preserving our legacy through hospitality. India boasts a rich portfolio of heritage assets, from opulent palaces to majestic forts. Today, these sites are experiencing a remarkable revival; from ancient forts and grand palaces to unique hunting lodges, traditional mansions, and even stepwells, historic sites are being reborn, offering unique experiences. Moreover, the growing impact of heritage tourism has proved that we do not need to rely on or imitate the West; rather, we can create authentic experiences for visitors, deeply immersed in our own history and culture that will stay with them long after they return home.

**Q: Sir, your efforts in sustainability and environmental protection as well as your work in water conservation have been commendable. Could you tell us more about these projects? What are your thoughts on the conflict between sustainability and luxury tourism?**

**A:** The erstwhile royal family of Marwar has always prioritised the needs of its people. Continuing this tradition, I decided to establish a foundation focused on augmenting the water supply for both people and animals and conserving water for future needs. Hence, I founded the Jal Bhagirathi Foundation in 2002. The organisation works to regenerate traditional water harvesting systems with community leadership and institutional support, aiming to balance environmental capacities with people's needs, especially in ensuring access to safe drinking water.

In addition to Jal Bhagirathi's work in about 500 villages of rural Marwar, my trust,



“

*Mehrangarh and Ahhichatragarh Fort, both managed by Mehrangarh Museum Trust, are outstanding examples of conservation and restoration work. ”*

the Mehrangarh Museum Trust is involved in the conservation and restoration of traditional stepwells in Jodhpur. As the Rajasthan State Convenor of the Indian National Trust for Art and Culture Heritage (INTACH), we have engaged our INTACH Jodhpur Chapter in this effort. The chapter is actively involved in reviving these stepwells and restoring them to their original form. We have also worked in various villages of Marwar through the Maharaja Hanwant Singhji Charitable Trust, providing assistance in sustainable farming and

reviving traditional water systems with the help of the villagers.

I do not see any conflict between heritage tourism and sustainability. We are always conscious to look for sustainable options to provide the appropriate level of luxury for our guests, and they appreciate that. Nowadays, people are aware and prefer sustainable, environment friendly options. I believe that being in harmony with nature and local culture is the greatest form of luxury.

**Q: Sir, you have several hotels in your organisation's portfolio, and I am sure you have a team of professionals managing the operations. However, do you engage at some level to monitor the management of these assets? Also, do your hotels make it a rule to hire, train, and support local talent?**

**A:** Our hospitality enterprises, which comprise our private residences have evolved over the last 50 years. They are managed by us, with the assistance of professional management companies. You will be pleased to know that most of our team members are locals who have advanced into management positions. We, as a family, are all directly involved at different levels—my daughter is the CEO and I am the Chairman, with my wife, son and daughter-in-law as Directors.



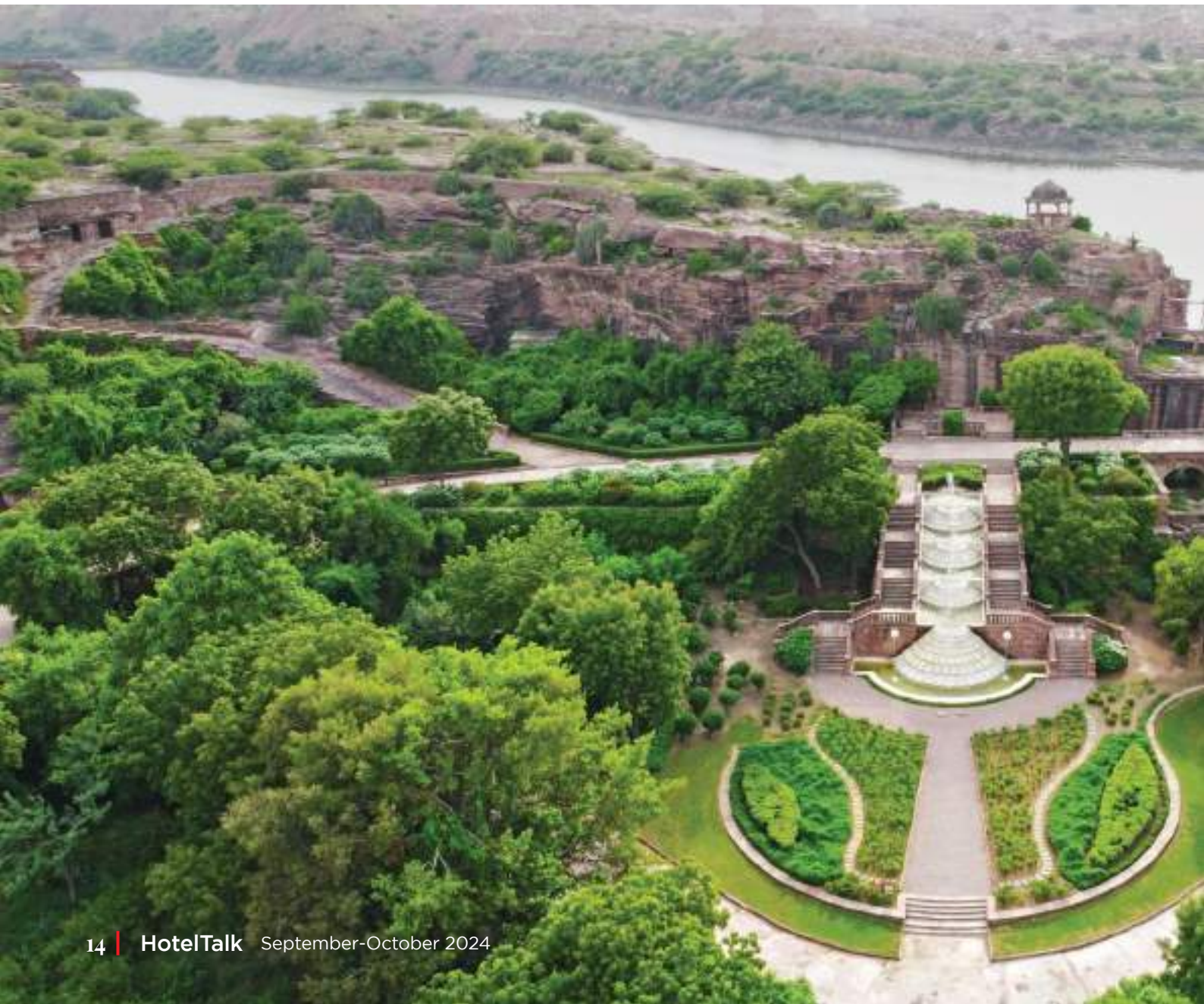


**Q: Sir, you are involved in philanthropic activities. Could you tell us about your organisation's work in various areas such as medical facilities, rural development, empowerment through education and establishment of education and sporting facilities?**

**A:** We established the Mehrangarh Museum Trust in 1972 in order to bring the fort alive for our visitors. We provided nearly 15,000 items from our personal collection to the trust to create a museum within the Mehrangarh Fort. Today, the Mehrangarh Fort attracts more than one million domestic visitors and over 100,000 foreign visitors a year. Mehrangarh Fort in Jodhpur and Ahhichatragarh Fort in Nagaur, both managed by the Mehrangarh Museum Trust, are outstanding examples of conservation and restoration work in the country, which have

been acknowledged by UNESCO with awards of distinction and excellence.

In the field of girls' education, we founded the Rajmata Krishna Kumari Girls' Public School in Jodhpur, the Rajmata Krishna Kumari Girls' Hostel in Desuri, and the Rajmata Krishna Kumari Girls' Education Centre at Mohan Kanwar Hostel in Keru. In health and medical care, we established the Rajdadisa Hospital in Jodhpur, the Indian Head Injury Foundation, and the Yuvraj Shivraj Singhji Neuro Rehab and Trauma Centre. We also founded H.H. Maharaja Hanwant Singhji Charitable Trust for rural regeneration and development. To ensure access to safe drinking water, incorporating both traditional and contemporary knowledge systems of water management, we founded the Jal Bhagirathi Foundation. Through our Jodhpur Polo and







Equestrian Institute, we promote Jodhpur's equestrian traditions by organising a month-long Polo Season in December and an Marwari Horse Show organised by the All India Marwari Horse Society in the first week of February.

Each of my foundations is an independent entity with its own Board of Trustees, managed by a dedicated group of professionals. All are constantly at work, striving to improve the lives of the people of Marwar, particularly in Jodhpur.

“

*For anyone looking to manage a successful hotel, service and honesty are the most important factors.*”

**Q: Sir, your achievements have been many and your life so full of activity. Do you manage to find time for your family, especially now as you are a grandfather? I am sure you enjoy that more than anything else. Lastly, would you like to share any future plans you have made?**

**A:** I absolutely enjoy spending time with my grandchildren. I teach them the philosophy of 'Aapnaayat', just as I was taught about 'oneness' with the people of Marwar, its region, culture, and people. I tell them, as I told my children, that 'Our future depends on our contribution and connection with the people and our land—Marwar, Jodhpur'. As for my future plans, I am deeply concerned about the breakdown of our city's infrastructure and the neglect of heritage structures and town planning. I regularly meet with the administration and government to discuss these issues and identify areas where more thought, effort, planning, legislation, and implementation are needed. I participate in numerous social and public meetings and am fortunate that people place their trust in me. I strive to meet their expectations, but I must admit that achieving positive outcomes is a slow and complex task, achievable only through the will of the people in a democracy like ours. Therefore, I will continue to work on strengthening public opinion to safeguard our heritage and environment.

HT



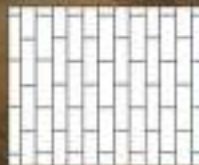
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# Brand expansion RHG remains hawkish

**Nikhil Sharma**, MD and Area Senior VP, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group (RHG), outlines the company's strategy to meet evolving needs of Indian travellers and rising demand for internationally branded accommodations.

WORDS BY LIPLA NEGI



**Q: What is your long-term positioning strategy. Are you planning to expand your premier brand, 'Radisson Collection'?**

**A:** Radisson Hotel Group's strategy focuses on leveraging our diverse portfolio to serve various consumer segments in key locations. By capitalising on domestic travel demand, especially in spiritual tourism, and enhancing offerings for bleisure travellers, we aim to expand our presence beyond tier II and III cities into emerging markets across India. With increasing internet penetration, rising

spending capacity, and a growing appetite for travel, the market is ready for this expansion. We aim to position ourselves as the largest international operator by being a first mover in multiple underserved locations in the country.

Our luxury lifestyle brand, Radisson Collection, embodies our commitment to setting new standards in luxury hospitality with its unique blend of local character and modern design. For instance, the Radisson Collection Hotel & Spa, Riverfront Srinagar, combines Kashmiri artistry with contemporary elegance. We have signed another Radisson





Collection Hotel in Hyderabad set for Q2 of 2026 and plan to open four to five more hotels in the next five years.

**Q: Which emerging markets are you looking to target, and which brands in your portfolio do you believe will disrupt these markets?**

**A:** We have always focused on tier II and III cities, recognising their significant growth potential and the rising demand for internationally branded accommodations. Around 50 per cent of our properties are

in these emerging markets, enabling us as with the first-mover advantage. Some of our recent signings include Vrindavan, Patna, Uttarakhand, and Nathdwara. Our commitment is further demonstrated by the recent signing of 10 hotels in just four days, including new and underexplored regions. We aim to open a new hotel every 20 days with a focus on tier II and III cities, working towards making our properties accessible within a two to three hour drive across India.

Our India-specific brand and extension such as Park Inn and Suites by Radisson and Radisson Individual Retreats are well-positioned to disrupt these markets. Park Inn and Suites by Radisson meets the needs of business and leisure travellers with modern, accessible amenities, while Radisson



*By enhancing offerings for leisure travellers, we aim to expand our presence beyond tier II and III cities into emerging markets across India.”*





*Radisson Collection Hotel in Hyderabad is set for second quarter of 2026 and we plan to open four to five more hotels in next five years.”*

Individual Retreats offers unique, culturally authentic experiences for spiritual and cultural travellers. Our expansion into offbeat destinations such as Kumbhalgarh, Karjat, and Gopalpur reflects a keen understanding of evolving traveller preferences, with a growing demand for unique experiences and natural retreats, capitalising on emerging trends in the Indian hospitality market.

**Q: Sustainability is possibly the biggest concern facing industries such as hospitality and hotels. How**

**do you plan to make this a focal point for your organisation and implement measurable initiatives?**

**A:** At Radisson Hotel Group, sustainability is a foundational aspect of our business strategy, guided by our Think People, Planet, and Community principles. We are committed to achieving a net zero carbon footprint by 2050, with goals validated by the Science Based Targets initiative and adherence to the Glasgow Declaration. Our measures to enhance energy efficiency include deploying energy-efficient lighting, optimising heating and cooling systems, and utilising smart technologies. We are accelerating our transition to renewable energy through on-site generation and strategic partnerships, aiming to halve our carbon footprint by 2030.

Our sustainability efforts extend to creating eco-friendly guest experiences, such as 100 per cent carbon-neutral events, EV charging stations, and eliminating single-use plastics. Initiatives such as ‘Soap for Hope’, ‘Linen for Life’, and ‘Flush Me Not’ highlight our commitment to repurposing resources and minimising waste.



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*We aim to open a new hotel every 20 days with a strategic focus on tier II and III cities.”*

quickly equip new hires with the necessary competencies. Leveraging technology to optimise recruitment and operations, along with offering competitive pay and flexible work arrangements, can attract talent from other sectors and ease the pressure on understaffed teams. Fostering a positive work culture that values diversity, inclusion, and employee well-being will help retain



We also prioritise education with our Leading and Living Responsible Business training programme, available in 20 languages. In 2024, we are focusing on enhancing energy efficiency, expanding renewable energy use, promoting sustainable travel and meetings, and collaborating with industry partners to make a significant positive impact on the environment and communities.

**Q: In your opinion, how can the industry overcome the issue of skill shortage in the short and long-term?**

**A:** In the short-term, the industry can focus on rethinking recruitment by prioritising attitude and potential over specific skills, allowing for rapid onboarding of adaptable candidates. Accelerated training programmes, such as the ones offered by Radisson Academy, can

talent. In the long-term, developing a robust talent pipeline through partnerships with educational institutions will ensure a steady flow of skilled graduates into the industry.

**Q: The Radisson Academy celebrated its 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. Is skill development also offered to your partners? Are there plans to align with the government's skill development initiatives?**

**A:** Our programmes are designed to enhance skills and support career growth, creating a productive learning environment. While we are focusing on providing bespoke training opportunities within the Radisson Academy, we are open to exploring collaborations with government skill development programmes soon in the future.





# Fagor expands its reach across the South Indian market

Fagor Professional, part of the Onnera Group and a proud member of the Mondragon Corporation, is a globally recognized leader in the food service equipment industry. With 100% Spanish roots and a legacy spanning 64 years, Fagor has built a reputation for delivering high-quality solutions through its seven factories and extensive network of global offices and partners.

**Johnson Koshy**, Regional Head for Business Development, highlights Fagor's rapid expansion in South India. Under his guidance, Fagor is advancing in key cities like Hyderabad, Bangalore, and Chennai, setting new standards with innovative technology.



## How is Fagor Professional driving growth in South India?

Fagor is actively expanding in key South Indian cities like Hyderabad, Bangalore, Chennai, Coimbatore, and Cochin. Our comprehensive range of advanced kitchen equipment, including IKORE combi ovens and smart dishwashers, provides modern solutions for evolving kitchen needs. By integrating cutting-edge technology with local expertise, Fagor enhances efficiency and performance, establishing itself as a leading partner in the region.

## What is Fagor's role in the ongoing kitchen revolution in South India?

As South India transitions to smart, technology-driven kitchens, Fagor is at the forefront of this revolution. Our innovative products, such as the IKORE range of combi ovens and smart dishwashers, are designed to meet the demands of modern food service environments. We are committed to building long-term relationships across various sectors, including hotels, corporate kitchens, and restaurants, with exceptional support and innovative solutions.

## Can you highlight some of Fagor's recent activities and milestones in South India?

Fagor has showcased its products at major industry events like AAHAR 2023 and 2024, the India Horeca Expo in Coimbatore 2024,

and WOH Bangalore 2024. These events, along with numerous customer engagements, have reinforced Fagor's status as a preferred brand for regional projects and retail markets. With a vision to establish 7 experience centers, 7 showrooms, 10 service associations, 3 spare parts centers, and 2 stock points by Q4 2024, Fagor is leaving no space for another brand choice.

## How does Fagor Professional support its customers in South India?

Fagor is dedicated to providing exceptional support through a comprehensive network of service centers and showrooms. We have conducted eight demos of our combi ovens at customer sites, with many more planned. Our goal is to ensure that clients receive timely service, innovative solutions, and support tailored to their specific needs.



# ADR on rise in major cities

In Q2 2024, the hospitality sector saw 4.8% RevPAR increase due to higher ADR, despite 15.9% drop from Q1.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

In second quarter of 2024, the hospitality sector experienced year-on-year growth due to an increase in average daily rate (ADR), resulting in a 4.8 per cent rise in RevPAR. However, summer vacations and reduced corporate travel led to a 15.9 per cent decrease in RevPAR growth compared to Q1 2024, as per JLL's Hotel Momentum India (HMI) Q2 2024 report.

“Backed by strong performance of hotels across India, we continue to see investors moving money in this sector. There is strong momentum on both greenfield developments and operating assets across business and leisure markets. Although the summer season has brought down corporate room night demand in second quarter of 2024, the sector continued to demonstrate growth in ADR compared to Q2 2023,” **Jaideep Dang**, Managing Director, Hotels and Hospitality Group, India, JLL, said.

Goa's ADR slightly declined, but other markets such as Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Chennai experienced significant growth in ADR and RevPAR, with Hyderabad showing the most improvement. Occupancy levels remained stable, and ADR levels increased, except for Goa.

In Q2 2024, 82 branded hotel signings were made, with a total of 9,732 rooms, with 15 being conversions



*We continue to see investors moving money in the hotel sector.”*



**Jaideep Dang**  
Managing Director  
Hotels and Hospitality  
Group, India, JLL



Source: STR

from other hotels. As many as 50 hotels opened with 3,755 rooms, with 90 per cent located in tier II and III cities such as Udaipur, Thane, Mysuru, and Tirupati.

Hyderabad-led the RevPAR growth with an 11.9 per cent increase over second quarter of last year, followed by Delhi and Bengaluru with year-on-year growth of 11.8 and 10.4 per cent, the report stated.





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# Govt commitment fuels tourism development

The Union Minister of Tourism highlights the sector's role in driving India's economic growth, aiming to become the third largest by 2031.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

**Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, Union Minister of Culture and Tourism, emphasising the tourism sector's role in driving the country's economy, said, "Tourism has the potential to contribute to India's goal of becoming the third largest economy by 2031. India has all the resources to present a world-class tourism sector."

He said tourism, as the largest employment generator after agriculture, offers diverse opportunities. "We are witnessing diversity and new business opportunities in this sector," he pointed out.

The minister highlighted India was on track to become a resolute destination and emphasised the role of MICE in achieving the goal. "Progress and development in this field are crucial, and everyone involved plays a crucial role, especially in bridging the gaps," Shekhawat said.

The ministry is advancing its mission to enhance the tourism sector by collaborating with



**Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**  
Union Minister of Tourism

central ministries, states, and industry stakeholders to improve infrastructure, products, and connectivity. Key initiatives include Swadesh Darshan 2.0, which focuses on sustainable tourism across 57 destinations with a budget of ₹644 crore. The 'Challenge-Based Destination Development' sub-scheme targets 42 destinations in various categories. The PRASHAD Scheme aims to upgrade pilgrimage site infrastructure, while the Incredible India Tourist Facilitator

“

*Tourism has potential to contribute to India's goal of becoming third-largest economy by 2031.”*

Certification Programme trains local professionals. Additionally, 53 new tourism routes have been added under the RCS-UDAN for improved connectivity.

Lauding the central government's efforts, Shekhawat said, "It is committed to promoting the tourism and hospitality sectors. The recent World Heritage Committee meeting was organised 40 days after the new government took office and was attended by representatives from 170 countries," he said.

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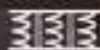
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# Collaborations create **unique** experiences

Atlantis The Royal exemplifies how integrating designer brand partnerships and offering bespoke experiences can set luxury resort apart.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

**A**t Atlantis The Royal, the selection of designer partnerships is as strategic as it is luxurious. The collaboration with high-end brands such as Louis Vuitton and Dolce & Gabbana at Cloud 22 infinity pool is not merely about brand presence; it is a choice aimed at enhancing guest experiences and ensuring the resort stands out as a unique destination. These collaborations are curated to align with the resort's ethos of luxury and exclusivity, creating memorable experiences that resonate with travellers.

The architectural ethos of Atlantis The Royal is an homage to the spirit of the Arabian desert's Bedouins, known for their resourcefulness and

hospitality. This is reflected in the resort's design, which celebrates the element of water. Water is integrated into aesthetic features as well as functional designs, guiding guests through their journey at the resort. Each design element, from the lobby's 'Droplets' sculpture to the 'Deluge' water elevators, showcases the resort's commitment to a thematic experience.

Emphasising the importance of personalisation in luxury hospitality, **Kyp Charalambous**, VP, Sales, Atlantis Dubai, said, "Our colleagues provide a service that is hyper-personalised, something so special that it has to be experienced to be believed." This attention to detail extends beyond traditional



amenities, with the resort offering 24x7 services that anticipate guest needs before they arise.

The resort's visionary approach includes focus on sustainability, technological advancements, and cultural authenticity, forecast to be the defining trends in luxury



**Kyp Charalambous**  
Vice President, Sales,  
Atlantis Dubai

“

*Indian hoteliers can boost appeal by integrating designer brand partnerships, as is demonstrated by Atlantis The Royal, thereby attracting luxury travellers.”*





hospitality. The integration of bespoke solutions tailored to individual preferences is a cornerstone of their service philosophy, ensuring that luxury is not experienced, but

is personal and reflective of each guest's unique desires.

For Indian hoteliers, the lessons from Atlantis The Royal are clear. The integration of designer brand partnerships can enhance a

property's appeal to luxury travellers. The focus on creating bespoke and personalised experiences that go beyond traditional amenities is crucial in meeting the evolving expectations of discerning guests.

Since the hospitality industry in India continues to grow and adapt, properties that can blend luxury, innovation, and personalisation are likely to taste success. By taking cue from Atlantis The Royal, Indian hotels can elevate their offerings and create memorable experiences for their guests.

In an industry where excellence is the norm, it is ability to surprise and delight that sets properties apart. Charalambous and Atlantis The Royal demonstrate that the future of luxury hospitality lies not only in opulent surroundings but also in creating unique, personalised experiences for guests from across the globe. HT



# Gen Z & Alpha to rule luxury market





Today's luxury travellers are placing emphasis on holistic wellness experiences that address full spectrum of well-being, says **Candice D'Cruz**, Vice President, Luxury Brands, Asia Pacific, Hilton Luxury Brands.

WORDS BY DR. SHEHARA RIZLY

**Q: Could you share some of the new trends, which you see in terms of the luxury market?**

**A:** We have recorded an uptick in demand for more wellness-centric experiences from luxury travellers. Many of the travellers are looking into holistic wellness approaches to nourish the mind, body and soul. There is also a growing appetite for alternative therapies with an emphasis on longevity. In response to this, Hilton Luxury offers several services, including

Tri Hita Karana Journey at LXR Umana Bali to help our travellers achieve their wellness goals.

Art and culture are essential to the hospitality industry, enriching guest experiences that resonate with the local community. Conrad Art Encounters highlight the connection between art, design, and the unique locales of our Conrad hotels.

The 'NoLo' cocktail movement is growing at a rapid pace. This is driven by the younger generation's focus on mindful

“

*The 'NoLo' cocktail movement is rapidly growing, driven by the younger generation's focus on mindful consumption and wellness-centric practices.”*



consumption and wellness-centric practices. In response, we are innovating with new drinks for our hotels and resorts—Manhattan Bar at Conrad Singapore Orchard offers zero-proof and zero-waste cocktails.

Finally, on the F&B scene, luxury hotels partner with well-known brands to elevate their offerings and achieve wider recognition. At the Waldorf Astoria Shanghai on the Bund, Chef Jason Liu of the Michelin-starred Ling Long restaurant recently collaborated with Shake Shack to celebrate their fifth anniversary. Together, they created two fine dining-inspired items—Ling Long Shack Burger and Ling Long Oolong Shake.

**Q: Can we compare the luxury markets in Asia-Pacific region and Middle East? What makes them different or similar?**

**A:** Hilton's 2024 Trends Report highlights that 77 per cent of Asian travellers are motivated



by self-discovery and a desire to explore their cultural and ancestral heritage through travel. Concurrently, the global luxury market reached €1.5 trillion in 2023, with Southeast Asia projected by Bain & Company to emerge as a leading growth centre for luxury brands among emerging regions. This growth is underpinned by an increasing number of Ultra-High-Net-Worth Individuals (UHNWIs), with Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia, identified in Knight Frank's Wealth Report as among the top 10 fastest-growing UHNWI markets.

“

*Looking ahead, millennials, Gen Z, and Gen Alpha are poised to drive 80% of luxury purchases by 2030.”*

Looking ahead, millennials, Gen Z, and Gen Alpha are poised to drive 80 per cent of luxury purchases by 2030, with the latter two generations increasing their spending power three times faster than previous generations. The luxury hospitality markets in Asia-Pacific and Middle East regions' aim to provide high-end, personalised experiences, but differ

in market maturity, tourist demographics, architectural styles, and specific offerings. Asia-Pacific region leverages its diverse natural landscapes and rich cultural heritage, while the Middle East emphasises opulence, grand design, and urban luxury.

**Q: What are the key sustainability challenges in the luxury segment?**

**A:** Sustainability in hospitality has evolved from a trend to a guest expectation. Hotels must now demonstrate commitment to environmental and social responsibility, moving beyond token gestures. This includes strategies to minimise ecological footprint, support local communities, and enhance guest and destination well-being. By doing so, hotels can foster deeper connections with environmentally conscious guests and contribute to a more sustainable future for the industry.

**Q: Have criteria for luxury spaces changed from pre-Covid to post Covid?**

**A:** Travel is now among the top five expenses for luxury travellers. With readily available information, guests research and have higher expectations upon arrival. This shift includes a demand for immersive storytelling and personalised experiences, requiring hotels to maintain active social presences and engage in personalised communication before they arrive.

The experiential aspect of hospitality is now crucial. Hotels must include comprehensive





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wellness initiatives that offer fulfillment and self-reflection. Awards and recognitions, once optional, are now essential for building a hotel's credibility and reputation in this evolving landscape. Hotels must innovate their Food & Beverage offerings consistently to engage guests' senses and create dining experiences that go beyond the traditional settings. For example, the Conrad Singapore Orchard's Edible Garden Walk incorporates native flora into their afternoon tea, offering an immersive, multi-sensory experience.

**Q: Private luxury and ultra-luxury are crucial in all regions. What are the key factors the industry is focusing on?**

**A:** In luxury hospitality, hyper-personalisation and authenticity are crucial. Our brands engage directly with customers to tailor every aspect of their experience, creating a sense of belonging akin to a personal residence. Today, loyalty depends on personalised treatment and recognition than on brand prestige. To deliver these levels of hyper-personalisation, we have special roles such as personal concierges for that 'extra' human touch.

Ultra-luxury travel prioritises exclusive, off-the-beaten-path locations and private, residential-style hotels. This focus on personalisation aims to exceed guests' expectations, as seen in Hilton's collaboration with small luxury hotels and the addition of NoMad hotels to its luxury portfolio.





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# Bringing global design to local projects



Changing the way forward, MADE INDIA's innovative approach brings architecture and design directly to the customer.

WORDS BY **HT BUREAU**

**I**n a nation where architectural expertise is scarce and access to world-class design has long been limited to a privileged few, MADE INDIA is poised to democratise the essence of home-building.

“Our goal is to restore the joy of living in beautiful homes and experiencing well-designed public spaces, empowering people through thoughtfully planned surroundings and outstanding design,” said **Dhruv Raj Singh**, Co-founder, MADE

INDIA, a product born out of his own architectural challenges.

“There are around 60,000 registered practicing architects in India, in a nation of 1.4 billion people. Let that sink in,” Singh said.

With India's middle-class segment likely to represent 60 per cent of the country by 2047, as per Think-Tank PRICE 360, the demand for the building of homes is increasing, especially in tier II and III towns cities in India.

“There is a movement back to land and lifestyle, as opposed to desire to live in apartment complexes,” Singh said, who points out rural urbanisation has been the core driver behind the platform he is building along with Co-founder **Oliva Sartogo** and Directors **Deepak Gawhlot** and **Shivina Kumari**.

Founded in Jaipur, MADE INDIA aims to revolutionise the way potential homeowners access





architecture. Through a platform that hosts top architects from around the world, the product will give any plot-owner in India access to a pre-set catalogue of plans along with a battery of engineering solutions that enables the building of a home anywhere in the country, with world-class specifications.

“We have top architects working in tandem with some of the foremost engineers and designers in the nation, who have created homes where form and function work harmoniously together,” Singh said,

“

*Cultural urbanisation has led to the development of technological processes implemented in the team’s products*



emphasising that affordability and a pocket-friendly price point are core to the product’s mission.

While definitely tailored for Bharat—where all plans are Vastu optimised and a dedicated Vastu Shastra team and priest are available to work on plots developed by the MADE INDIA team—the business is not just for individual plot-owners.

Composed of five business units—Ghar Development, Ghar Banao, Ghar Culture, Ghar Play, and Ghar Intelligence—MADE INDIA supports real estate developers and hotel owners by transforming their concepts and brand identities into tangible projects.

Ghar Development opens opportunities for real estate



developers, hoteliers, and landowners looking to either enhance existing projects or enter the market for affordable, functional, and beautiful luxury spaces.

MADE INDIA offers hoteliers the opportunity to collaborate with leading international interior designers, architects, and well-known luxury brands to create exclusive hotel projects. The curated offerings will add value and introduce a unique luxury element to their projects.

Internationally renowned Tokyo-based **Sou Fujimoto** of Sou Fujimoto Architects is one of the major architects whose plans are being onboarded for development of a new colony, reducing the architectural costs, while increasing the value of the project.

Singh spoke about Prem Sarovar, an exclusive 79-plot housing colony under development in Jaipur. By incorporating the architectural plans of Norwegian **Erlend Blakstad Haffner**, a well-known principle of CHAP, the colony sold out in three days, with homeowners even pushing

“

*MADE INDIA offers hoteliers opportunity to collaborate with top global interior designers, architects, and luxury brands to create hotel projects*

secondary sales by the third day. “It provides the Indian consumer access to leading architects,” Singh said. “And who can ignore the architectural form that will then be executed as an additional benefit?” he added.

Ghar Banao focuses on providing plot-owners with a product allowing them to hit the ground with their home-build. Each purchase includes between 500 and 1,500 architectural and engineering drawings—owners can take to their own builder. There is also an option to customise each purchase as a service from

MADE INDIA. Ghar Culture allows the team to tailor architecture-based products and services for designing museums, public spaces, schools and health facilities.

Ghar Play, on the other hand, is a gaming product designed to engage customers through life-simulation games focused on homes and building.

And then there is Ghar Intelligence, a data unit collating research on the Indian building segment, including guidelines on local building materials, practices and techniques. “We have conducted detailed research to understand the



needs of the India consumer and the functional aspects of an Indian home,” Sartogo said. “Core Vastu principles are incorporated into each architectural plan we offer. If a plan does not meet these criteria, it is returned for further development,” he remarked.

Cultural urbanisation has led to the development of technological processes implemented in the team’s products. The use of AI is integral for gauging client preferences and providing quicker recommendations, saving customers time in finding what they want on the platform. AI supports financial savings by streamlining material sourcing and ensuring exact specifications are shipped directly, cutting out middlemen, and saving time and money for the end consumer.

So, what excites Sartogo the most about MADE INDIA’s future? “The fact that we are creating and opening access to the beauty of architectural form and function to a population in India that may have never had this kind of access before.”

HT



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## Reviving a luxurious experience

Mementos Jaipur's architectural design, deeply rooted in Rajasthan's history and traditions, immerses hotel guests in the state's renowned hospitality.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

**I**TC's Hotel Group has announced the opening of Mementos by ITC Hotels Jaipur, the second property under the Mementos brand, following the debut of Mementos Udaipur. Spanning over eight acres of beautiful landscape, Mementos Jaipur epitomises luxury and elegance, offering an exquisite hospitality experience.

**Anil Chadha**, CEO, ITC Hotels, said, "We are on an impressive growth trajectory and are delighted to offer a variety of hospitality solutions in Rajasthan, one of India's most popular tourist attractions. Mementos Jaipur mirrors the luxury and majesty of this historical destination. This property will also offer some of ITC Hotels signature F&B selections along with our service excellence."


The property boasts 64 beautifully designed suites and villas, surrounded by meticulously maintained gardens and serene water bodies, including a *bawdi* (traditional stepwell).



**Anil Chadha**  
CEO, ITC Hotels

These accommodations come in various configurations, such as Deluxe, Premium, and Royal Villas, each equipped with contemporary amenities to ensure a lavish stay.

Culinary excellence is a cornerstone of the Mementos experience. The property houses 'Kebabs & Kurries', an Indian restaurant that promises to tantalise the taste buds with authentic flavours. Additionally, the all-day dining restaurant, Amber Pavilion, offers a diverse menu catering to global palate.

As part of ITC's commitment to sustainability, Mementos Jaipur joins the ranks of ITC Rajputana as a LEED Platinum certified hotel, showcasing the brand's dedication to environmental responsibility. 





# Hike in agents' commission rates

**Puneet Chhatwal** announced a 25% hike in commission rates for agents to highlight IHCL's duty to foster collaborations with the agent fraternity.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

In a landmark move, **Puneet Chhatwal**, Managing Director & CEO, Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL), has announced a 25 per cent increase in commission rates to the agents elevating the standard rate from 10 to 12.5 per cent.

Emphasising the importance of working together to build a competitive advantage in the hospitality sector, Chhatwal said the boost in commission rates was intended to enhance the earning potential of the agents and strengthen their role in promoting IHCL's portfolio of hotels.

In a significant move aimed at strengthening partnerships within the industry, he underscored IHCL's commitment to fostering collaborations with the agent fraternity. Chhatwal's key message at the IATO convention was the

announcement of new measures designed to benefit travel agents. These measures are as follows:

**Revised rate structures:** IHCL will offer rates inclusive of breakfast, moving from an American Plan to a

Continental Plan basis. This change is aimed at simplifying booking processes and providing value to agents and clients.

**Flexible cancellation policies:**

To align with the flexibility offered by online travel agents, IHCL will now allow cancellations of FIT within 48 hours for business hotels and seven days for leisure and palace properties.

**Exclusive travel discounts:**

Agents will receive a 25 per cent discount on the best available rates for personal travel to any IHCL property worldwide.

**Enhanced promotion of inbound tourism:** IHCL will invest Rs 20 crore during the next three years to support global travel events and promote inbound tourism. This includes hosting international exhibitions to attract foreign visitors to the country.

HT



**Puneet Chhatwal**  
MD & CEO  
Indian Hotels Company  
Limited (IHCL)

“Boost in commission rates was to enhance potential of the agents and fortify their role in promoting IHCL's portfolio of hotels.”

# First party-data Goldmine for hoteliers

In the post-cookie world, one must know how to leverage first-party data and AI to take the guest's experience a notch higher. **Parvinder Singh Dhillon**, Managing Director, CIN Universe, shares how adopting these tools can drive direct bookings.



**A**s the Founder of CIN Universe, India's largest Mar-Tech company serving the hospitality industry, I have spent over a decade helping hotels across the country harness the power of technology to enhance guest experiences and optimise their operations. At CIN Universe, we manage over 500 hotels, providing cutting-edge solutions that blend marketing and technology to drive growth and efficiency. Our team of more than 70 experts is dedicated to creating innovative products that cater to the evolving needs of the hospitality industry.

The hospitality industry is on the cusp of a significant shift as third-party cookies, once a cornerstone of digital marketing, are being phased out by major technology players such as Google. For hoteliers, this change poses both challenges and opportunities. The reliance on third-party data to target potential guests and personalise experiences is becoming obsolete, making it more critical than ever for hotels to harness the power of first-party data. But how can hotels effectively gather and utilise this





data? The answer lies in the integration of AI-driven strategies and innovative technologies.

### First-party data in post-cookie world

As cookies disappear, first-party data—information that hotels collect directly from their guests and website visitors—becomes invaluable. This data includes everything from booking preferences to past stays, guest feedback, and interactions with the hotel's digital platforms. Unlike third-party data, first-party data is accurate, relevant, and directly tied to the guest's relationship with the hotel. It allows hoteliers to build a rich, nuanced understanding

of their guests, which can be leveraged to personalise experiences and drive loyalty.

### AI-driven personalisation

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming the way hotels can utilise first-party data. By analysing patterns in guest behaviour, AI can help hoteliers create hyper-personalised experiences that resonate with each guest. For instance, AI can identify, which amenities or services a guest is likely to enjoy based on their previous stays, or even predict when a guest is likely to book their next visit, enabling hotels to send timely and relevant offers and also drives higher engagement and revenue for the hotel.



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*Absence of granular data represents a major pain point for hoteliers, as it hinders their ability to understand guest preferences and address potential barriers to booking*

### Third-party booking engines

In the current scenario, many hotels rely on third-party booking engines that lack API integration, which limits their ability to collect detailed data. These booking engines often do not share critical information, such as whether a guest selected a particular rate plan or room

category, but then decided not to complete the booking. This absence of granular data represents a major pain point for the hoteliers, as it hinders their ability to understand the guest preferences and address potential barriers to booking.

### Integrating AI with booking engines

The true power of AI and first-party data comes to life when integrated with the hotel's booking engine and loyalty programme. By implementing Booking Engine APIs, hotels can track the guest's journey at every step—whether they are a loyalty programme member or a new visitor. For example, if a guest selects a specific room category or rate plan, but does not complete the booking, the system can capture this information. This allows the hotel to follow up with targeted marketing campaigns, aimed at re-engaging the guest and ultimately increasing conversion rates.

### Direct bookings to boost revenue

Direct bookings are more valuable than ever, especially in a landscape where third-party commissions can significantly cut into profit margins. By leveraging first-party data and AI, hotels can create a seamless, engaging experience that encourages direct bookings. This not only improves the guest experience but also boosts the hotel's bottom line by reducing dependency on OTAs.

### Data & AI to drive future

As the hospitality industry adapts to the post-cookie era, the importance of first-party data cannot be overstated. Hoteliers who embrace AI-driven personalisation and integrate their booking engines with robust data collection tools will be well-positioned to thrive in this new hospitality landscape. While the challenges of a cookie-less world are real, they also present a unique opportunity for hotels to forge deeper, more meaningful connections with their guests and foster long-lasting loyalty. HT

*(The views expressed are solely of the author. The publication may or may not subscribe to the same)*





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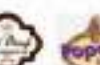


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# Pioneering change innovations reshaping hospitality



Exhibitors at IHE 2024 showcased cutting-edge, cost-effective solutions tailored to evolving needs of hospitality industry.

WORDS BY AMITA PANDEY

The 7<sup>th</sup> edition of India International Hospitality Expo (IHE 2024) has once again cemented its status as a cornerstone event for the hospitality sector. This year's expo has attracted over 1,000 exhibitors and more than 20,000 B2B buyers from luxury hotels, resorts, homestays, restaurants, cloud kitchens, and the F&B sector. The event buzzed with excitement as exhibitors showcased cutting-edge innovations and trendsetting solutions, poised to transform guest experiences and redefine industry standards.

In exclusive conversation with the exhibitors, *HotelTalk* came across their latest innovations, trends, and advancements, which are helping the hospitality sector to elevate the guest experiences.





**Mohit Sharma**  
CEO, Romio  
Technologies

The feedback from the IHE Expo was overwhelmingly positive. Clients were impressed with how our point-of-sale and self-ordering machines integrated smoothly into their existing hotel systems. They appreciated the ease of use of our solutions, which significantly enhance operational efficiency and guest satisfaction. The rising demand for contactless solutions and AI-driven analytics aligns perfectly with our offerings. This alignment reinforces our position as a front runner in advancing the hotel industry's technological landscape. The intuitive design of our systems allows both guests and hotel staff to navigate them with minimal training, streamlining processes and improving the overall experience.



**Uday Pratap Singh**  
Assistant General  
Manager, Ozone  
Overseas

The hotel industry has a significant demand for architectural hardware, including automatic doors, drawer slides, wardrobe fittings, shower enclosures, glass partition systems, hotel safes and locks. With growing demand for shower partitions, we will expand our offerings to provide end-to-end solutions, including glass and installation. Our LEED platinum-certified manufacturing unit in Ghiloth, Rajasthan, reflects our commitment to 'Make in India' initiative. With state-of-the-art technology, including laser CNC cutting machines, salt spray testing machines, and BIFMA-certified equipment, the facility operates with zero liquid discharge, setting a new benchmark for eco-friendly manufacturing practices.



**Kamal M Shah**  
Partner, King  
Metal Works

Established in 1970, we are a Mumbai-based manufacturer and exporter of stainless-steel utensils. Our product range includes over 3,500 items, such as kitchenware, barware, tableware, and bakeware, which we export to 70 countries. Additionally, we have been serving the Indian hospitality industry for the past 10 to 12 years. We continue to innovate within each product category to assist hoteliers, chefs, and buyers. The King Metal Works distinguishes itself by conducting annealing during every step of the manufacturing process in order to prevent cracking in stainless steel. This additional step sets us apart from local vendors who often neglect it.



**Vipul Jain**  
Director  
Melange India

Melange offers a comprehensive range of hotel supplies, including guest room essentials, tabletop items, banquet furniture, live cooking stations, kitchen equipment, among others. We provide end-to-end solutions for all hotel amenities. We utilise guest feedback through our R&D process to continually improve our product designs and to regularly introduce new products. We aim to launch three to four new products every six months to keep pace with the hospitality industry. Sustainability is crucial for us, but budget constraints often limit our options. Despite these challenges, we strive to offer sustainable solutions that enhance the guest experience.



**Sohani Sachdeva**  
Director,  
Operations, Haks

Pertaining to experiential elevation, Haks recently launched the Haks Experience Center in Naraina, Delhi, where one can experience products first hand. This interactive centre allows chefs to use our equipment before making a purchase, addressing a gap in the market. Currently, the Asian cuisine trend is growing in India, creating a need for affordable, high-quality Asian cooking equipment. We introduced our Hakswok Asian range to meet this demand, which includes rock burners, duck roasters, dimsum steamers, shungfa steamers, and stock pot burners. Our unique offering is the Hakswok Teppanyaki plate, a smokeless and odourless griddle plate that can be used in front-of-house live cooking experiences.



**Archit Gupta**  
Managing Director,  
King Koil

We are a leading provider of hospitality mattresses, known for our high-quality materials, American mattress technology, and durable construction. We use only the finest materials, including pure foam and high-quality springs, and craft our mattresses with advanced international machinery. Our products are widely used by top hotel chains worldwide and have a proven track record of lasting 10 years or more. Many of our customers have been repeat buyers for seven to eight years. We continually innovate and test new technologies, including various springs and foam combinations, and update our models every two years based on our findings and feedback received from the clients.



*This year's expo has attracted over 1,000 exhibitors and more than 20,000 B2B buyers from luxury hotels, resorts, homestays, restaurants, cloud kitchens, and F&B sector. The event buzzed with excitement as exhibitors showcased cutting-edge innovations*



**YK Mehta**  
CEO, Mehta  
Furnishers

At the IHE Expo, we received a positive response from both new and old visitors. The discussions were encouraging, constructive, and practical. Mehta Furnishers earned accolades from top hotel brands at the expo. We are known for quality, durability, and functional aesthetics, all delivered on time. Starting as a cane furniture company, we have diversified into range of products, including wood, metal, hotel accessories, and various other projects over the years. For us, revenue generation is achieved through delivering high-quality products, and we believe that a successful sale is one that satisfies the client's needs and preferences ensuring continued partnerships.



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# IoT brings smarter solutions to hotels

IoT-powered Building Management Systems in hotels boost sustainability and operational efficiency through central control of important systems like HVAC, lighting and security in both common areas and guest rooms.

WORDS BY **DR. RINI**

The rise of Internet of Things (IoT) has allowed from traditional manual operations, typically distributed across a property, to more automated and remote management capabilities that deliver superior performance and efficiency. The hospitality sector stands to benefit significantly from such IoT enabled solutions, achieving greater strides in sustainability and operational efficiency. Many well-known global brands like BuildTrack, ABB, Honeywell and Schneider Electric to name a few

have pioneered solutions that use IoT technologies to enable solutions for the hospitality industry.

### **IoT powered BMS for hotels**

IoT-powered Building Management Systems (BMS) enables comprehensive monitoring and control of essential systems within a hotel, including HVAC, lighting, water management, safety, and more.

### **Enhanced energy efficiency**

IoT-enabled BMS are able to



optimise energy and water usage. They achieve this by providing single point central control of all energy consuming devices so that they can be effectively shut down when not used or based on schedules. Better water management is enabled by automated triggering of pumps based on tank levels.

### **Upgraded occupant comfort**

Guestroom comfort can be improved through IoT-enabled room control room for lighting and HVAC, through an app and keypads. Auto-shutdown of ACs when rooms are unoccupied enables both sustainability and better economics.

### **Modernised maintenance**

IoT systems allow remote and real-time alerts, enabling hotel facility staff to respond promptly to asset malfunctions. This approach minimises downtime, reduces repair costs, and enhances operational efficiency.

### **Improved safety and security**

Real-time monitoring of actual room occupancy allows for improved response in emergencies. Panic buttons in rooms connected to BMS systems allows greater security for guests. HT

### **About the author**

*Dr. Rini holds a PhD in Marketing Management from UBS, Panjab University (PU). She has several publications and presentations at international conferences, and has served corporations like Vodafone, Reliance Communications and TATA Teleservices.*



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# Direct booking strategies driving success

Hotels make efforts to bridge the digital divide with their guests to enhance experiences and leverage technology in every aspect of their travel.

WORDS BY CHARMAINE FERNZ

In a competitive travel market, Indian travellers are increasingly seeking the best deals for their vacations. Despite the rise of online booking engines, direct hotel bookings remain popular, with recent reports showing a preference for direct reservations. As hotels invest in advanced technologies to bridge the gap with guests, direct booking technology is surging in demand. This article explores how hotels are using to drive direct booking, enhance guest experiences, and leverage technology for greater success.

## Measures of success

Direct bookings are reservations made with the hotel through a website, app or telephone. The advantage of direct bookings is that they are commission free and also offer additional benefits as well. **Sarbendra Sarkar**, Founder and Chairman, Cygnett Hotels & Resorts, said the success of a direct first-booking approach is determined by an increase in direct bookings on the hotel's website and social media traffic, digital marketing, and online advertising. Loyalty programmes help gauge the strategy's strength. Measuring success involves tracking

indicators such as conversion rate and customer satisfaction. In-house analysis, Google Analytics, and technology play a vital role in achieving financial efficiency, customer satisfaction, and sustained booking growth. "Our popular instant loyalty programmes help us gauge the strength of our direct booking strategy," Sarkar added.

**Rayan Aranha**, VP, Hospitality, Brigade Group, emphasises the importance of tracking the shift in bookings from third-party online travel agencies (OTAs) to direct channels and assessing the long-term value of repeat guests .



**Sarbendra Sarkar**  
Founder & Chairman  
Cygnett Hotels & Resorts



*Our popular instant loyalty programmes help us gauge the strength of our direct booking strategy."*







“

*We maintain competitive pricing, ensuring rate parity and offering exclusive packages to incentivise direct bookings.”*

**Rayan Aranha**, VP, Hospitality, Brigade Group

Evaluating the ROI of direct booking campaigns is crucial, leading to cost savings and enhanced brand value through metrics such as social media mentions. “We regularly monitor our channel mix to understand the shift from OTAs to direct channels. We track the long-term value of repeat guests, as fostering direct bookings strengthens relationships, - translating into increased loyalty and future stays,” he explained.

Expressing similar sentiments, **Kavita Thapa**, Cluster Director,

Sales, Sayaji Hotels, said, “We establish KPIs related to booking history and numbers. These could include metrics such as conversion rates of direct bookings, average revenue per booking, repeat booking rates, and customer lifetime value. We use this data to refine our marketing strategies and enhance service offerings.”

#### **Managing channels**

Modern traveller seeks personalisation in every aspect of

their travel, including hotel bookings. They adopt a direct first-booking approach, which allows hotels to connect with guests on a personalised level. While online travel agencies and direct bookings complement each other, direct bookings through targeted marketing campaigns and guest loyalty programmes are also vital. “We ensure competitive pricing across all channels, including direct and OTA platforms. To incentivise direct bookings, we maintain rate parity and offer exclusive packages



**Kavita Thapa**  
Cluster Director, Sales  
Sayaji Hotels



*By using guest data, our hotels tailor email campaigns and offer targeted loyalty programme benefits.”*

on our direct sites.” Sarkar said direct bookings account for 9 to 10 per cent of all bookings. “We rely on booking engine (BE) for booking conversion methodology to increase direct bookings. This rate ranges from 5 to 15 per cent, lower than the visitor to BE conversion rate. We use an exit message strategy to retain users who are about to leave our website. This message grabs attention with personalised offers, encouraging direct bookings,” he explained.

Cygnett’s focus on using homegrown technology and white-

label applications to maintain rate parity, keeping the price difference between direct channels and OTAs around 5 per cent, he said.

Thapa said that approximately 18 per cent of bookings come from OTAs, while the remaining come from direct channels. Revenue Management Systems (RMS) are used for price comparison, ensuring price parity across all channels to avoid undercutting by OTAs. This effectively emphasises customers’ demands and expectations and yields good result.

**Tech plus investments**

“Every hotel is focused on using innovative methods to grow their business, with advancing technology playing a key role. Sayaji Hotels is expanding and investing in developing mobile apps and sophisticated websites, with stress on easy booking processes, personalised offers, and seamless user experiences,” Thapa added. Personalisation is Aranha’s mantra across all digital touchpoints, including the website and mobile app. “By using guest data, our hotels tailor email campaigns, personalise website content, and offer targeted loyalty programme benefits, which help build stronger guest relationships and encourage direct bookings,” he added. AI-powered chatbots on hotel websites provide 24x7 support.

According to Sarkar, technological advancements and digitisation help enhance guest experiences. This includes developing technology platforms such as property management system, customer relationship management, booking engines, and mobile-friendly websites and apps.







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INSP20D	230VAC 50HZ	500	296x370x75mm	Inbuilt	275x350mm	Inbuilt	4.5Kg
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## Experts tackle hotel sales' future trends



HSMAI India hosted Commercial Roundtable and Power-Up Event, focusing on MICE, hospitality sales transformation and hotel sales landscape.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

**H**SMAI India conducted the Commercial Roundtable and Power-Up Event at the Holiday Inn in Aerocity, New Delhi, drawing senior hoteliers and industry experts for a day of meaningful discussions and strategic insights.

The event commenced with a roundtable session focused on the latest trends and challenges within the MICE segment. Industry leaders shared their experiences and strategies for navigating the complexities of these dynamic sectors, highlighting emerging trends and addressing key obstacles faced by hospitality professionals today.

A standout feature of the event was the Power-Up session titled 'Transforming Hospitality Sales', presented by **Varun Sharma** in which he interacted with **Ritika Gupta**, VP, Corporate Sales, IHCL, in a question-answer format. Sharma's questions allowed Gupta to share her invaluable insights and expertise, providing the audience with practical strategies for enhancing hospitality sales.







Rajat Wahi, Senior Advisor



*Event commenced with roundtable session focused on latest trends and challenges within the MICE segment*

The event also featured a panel discussion on 'Navigating the Evolving Landscape of Hotel Sales in India', moderated by **CS Ramachandran**. The panel included speakers such as **Priyanka Ahluwalia**, GM, Sales & Operations, The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group; **Vikram Berry**, Area Brand and Content Marketing Director, Radisson Hotel Group; and **Saurabh Bhargava**, AVP, National Sales North, IHCL. The discussion provided diverse perspectives and insights into the future of hotel sales in India.

The Commercial Roundtable and Power-Up Event provided a valuable platform for networking, allowing attendees to connect with peers and industry leaders. HT

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## Lighter, compact cocktail maker

The Barsys 360 is an at-home mixology system that combines entertainment and cocktail making, offering a new interactive experience. Available in Midnight Black and Polar White, this arc-shaped cocktail maker is lighter and compact. It is an evolution of Barsys' existing product line, enhancing home entertaining.



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## Perfect glasses for wine lovers

Lucaris has launched its MUSE collection in India, a blend of modern luxury and innovative design. The collection includes five distinct glasses, Bordeaux, Burgundy, Cabernet, Chardonnay, and Sparkling, each crafted from premium crystal, enhancing the visual appeal and adding a touch of luxury to the wine experience.

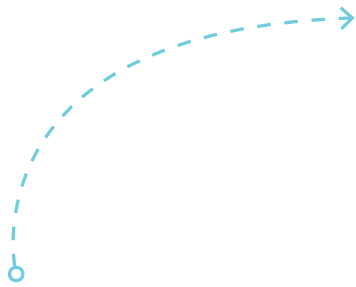


## Simplicity meets contemporary living

The Cora Collection is a minimalist and functional design brand that embodies simplicity, functionality, and quality. The brand offers products that resonate with contemporary living, blending premium materials with classic design principles. From sleek trays to versatile organisers, the collection aims to enhance lives and interactions with the surroundings.







## Outdoor luxury redefined

Weavecraft's latest collection combines modern innovation with refined elegance, featuring sculptured outdoor lighting, accessories, art objects and retractable roofs. The collection is made from materials such as wicker, resin, wood, ropes, straps and terracotta. It also offers customisation options with wide choice of colours and a new selection of outdoor rugs.



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# Creative strategies steer hotel revenue

To excel in today's dynamic landscape, hotels must anticipate guest needs and leverage strategies to enhance satisfaction.

WORDS BY HIMANSHU KALA

In today's dynamic landscape, hotels must innovate to stay ahead, using creativity and strategy to elevate services and create memorable experiences that resonate with modern travellers and brands.

Here are some key strategies the Director of Rooms can use to drive revenue and improve guest satisfaction:

- **Local sightseeing packages:** Curated local sightseeing packages let guests explore beyond the hotel, offering enriching experiences that highlight the region's culture and heritage through partnerships with tour operators
- **Relevance to environmental, social and governance:** In today's environmentally conscious era, hotels must commit to sustainability and

“

*Eco-friendly practices and ethical initiatives align with guest values*



**Himanshu Kala**  
Director, Rooms, Bengaluru  
Marriott Hotel Whitefield

social responsibility. Eco-friendly practices, community support, and ethical initiatives align with guest values and boost brand reputation

- **Culinary promotions:** Food is the key to the guest experience, and culinary promotions can entice taste buds, while boosting revenue
- **Digital experiences:** Embracing technology will help to meet tech-savvy travellers' expectations and demands.

Mobile check-in, keyless entry, and in-room tablets enhance convenience and ensure a seamless guest experience

- **Community engagements and CSR:** Engaging with local community and supporting meaningful motives fosters goodwill and good rapport among guests.

HT

*(The views expressed are solely of the author. The publication may or may not subscribe to the same)*



# One for soulful escapes



Vikram Cotah  
CEO  
GRT Hotels  
& Resorts

A fitness enthusiast, **Vikram Cotah**, enjoys embarking on self-rewarding journeys that transcend mere destinations.

WORDS BY LIPLA NEGI

**Q: A book that influenced your career journey...**

**A:** *Whale Done* by Ken Blanchard. It influenced our employee engagement in GRT hotels

**Q: Your favourite holiday destination...**

**A:** Icy strait point along the route of Alaskan Cruise

**Q: Your last holiday was...**

**A:** My most recent holiday in the Canadian Rockies—Banff national parks, Jasper and Yoho and national park and the many lakes.

**Q: A journey that was more rewarding than the destination....**

**A:** My experience in a Ayurveda resort in Kerala. The journey of discovering Ayurveda as a wellbeing concept was very rewarding than the destination

**Q: One change that you would like to bring to your industry...**

**A:** More women to work in the industry. Recent research shows that only 22

per cent of workforce are women in the world.

**Q: A hospitality trend that you would like to bring back....**

**A:** Every room guest is met by the general manager at least once during the stay.

**Q: How do you maintain your energy and fitness levels...**

**A:** I do cross fit functional training and run 10K races.

**Q: Your travel essentials...**

**A:** An iPad, noise cancellation air pods, 50 SPF sun screen, sun glasses, running shoes, mobile, chargers and swimming shorts.

**Q: Describe yourself as a traveller...**

**A:** I am a curious traveller who becomes a local during the travel to experience the local cuisine, culture and make friends in the location.

**Q: One advice that you would like to give to young hoteliers...**

**A:** Be passionate about what you do every day and be leaders even if you do not have titles yet. **HT**

# Movements



**Anmol Ahluwalia**  
Area Director  
Operations and GM  
Taj Mahal, New Delhi

Dr. Anmol Ahluwalia has been appointed as the Area Director, Operations and General Manager of Taj Mahal, New Delhi. Dr. Ahluwalia will oversee operations at Ambassador, New Delhi, IHCL SeleQtions, The Connaught, New Delhi - IHCL SeleQtions, and Soulinaire. He is widely recognised for his leadership.



**Sachin Malhotra**  
General Manager  
Kochi Marriott Hotel

Sachin Malhotra has been appointed as the new General Manager of Kochi Marriott Hotel. With 24 years of experience in hospitality, Malhotra has a track record in F&B, events planning, and revenue management. He has held leadership roles at Fairfield by Marriott Lucknow and Accor, among others.



**Debanjan Kundu**  
Director, Sales  
and Marketing  
Shangri-La Bengaluru

Debanjan Kundu has joined as the Director, Sales and Marketing of Shangri-La Bengaluru. With a background in hospitality operations and management, Kundu has held various positions at luxury hotels in Hyderabad and Bengaluru. He has also held the position of Senior Director, Sales, India, Amadeus.



**Saurav Basak**  
Director, Sales  
Hyatt Centric  
Ballygunge Kolkata

Saurav Basak has been appointed as the new Director, Sales, Hyatt Centric Ballygunge Kolkata. With 13 years of experience in managing accounts, room sales and catering, Basak will oversee sales budgets, monitor expenses, maintain sales volume and selling price, and monitor competitor activities.



**Ankita Bhawsinka**  
Director, Marketing  
Communications, JW  
Marriott Mumbai Juhu

Ankita Bhawsinka has been appointed as the Director, Marketing Communications, JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu. She has a wealth of experience, having worked as the Cluster Senior Marketing Communications Manager at Marriott International, Pune. Bhawsinka has overseen four properties, including The Ritz-Carlton Pune.



**Rutuja Patil**  
Account Director,  
Leisure Sales, India  
Atlantis Resorts

Rutuja Patil has been appointed as the new Account Director, Leisure Sales, India, Atlantis Resorts. She brings extensive experience to her new role. Patil, who previously held the position of Sales Manager, Leisure Sales in the UK and Scandinavia, is known for her impactful commercial strategies.



**Milan Semwal**  
Head Chef, Chao  
Chinese Bistro, Holiday  
Inn Jaipur City Centre

Milan Semwal has been appointed as the Head Chef at Chao Chinese Bistro of Holiday Inn Jaipur City Centre. Semwal will enhance the dining experience at the hotel's restaurant through his extensive expertise. The newly appointed Head Chef has developed his skills by working various hotels in the country and globally.



**Ranjitha Alva**  
Spa Manager, Four  
Seasons Hotel Bengaluru

Ranjitha Alva has joined as the new Spa Manager of Four Seasons Hotel Bengaluru. She has over 20 years of experience in wellness and spa management. In her new role, she will oversee wellness and spa operations, ensuring the guests receive experiences and maintaining high standards of service and operational efficiency.



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