

Hotel TALK

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**MIDSCALE
BOOM**
in tier II,
III cities
**Greesh
Bindra**

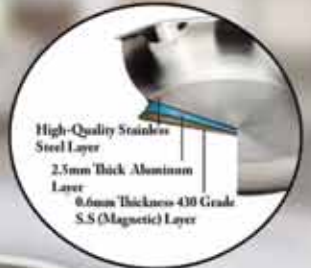
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Unearthing potential of tier II & III cities



India has once again demonstrated to the world, its power and resolve to host mega events at an unprecedented scale by showcasing the Maha Kumbh Mela. The UP government brought together space managers and created temporary cities with infrastructure to accommodate millions of visitors, including makeshift hospitals, sanitation systems and transportation networks, to name a few. The scale of security arrangements to secure such a large gathering would have been a mammoth effort in itself. The very success of this grand event has showcased the ability of a new India which does not shy away from such enormous challenges. A salute to the central and state governments for their pivotal role, as well as private enterprises that played a coordinated support function.

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A far-sighted thinking by the centre, when they focussed on infrastructure—the rest has begun to fall in place.”

On the growth front, it is heartening to see global and domestic hotel brands entering tier II and tier III markets. This is clearly a result of economic growth and development in areas once considered secondary and tertiary zones, given little importance. Definitely a far-sighted thinking by the centre, when they focussed on infrastructure —the rest has begun to fall in place.

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Cheers,
Sunil Ghadiok

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India hotel sector performance (December 2024)



Mumbai leads hotel occupancy rate

Indian hotel industry experiences strong performance, with occupancy rates registering above 80% in key markets.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

According to HVS Anarock’s monthly industry update for January 2025, the nationwide hotel occupancy rates in December 2024 experienced steady year-on-year growth, aligning closely with pre-COVID levels for the same period. Maintaining consistent

demand growth, key cities like Mumbai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, and Kochi achieved occupancy levels above 80 percent, indicating a growing demand for accommodation.

Mumbai recorded the highest occupancy at 81 to 83 per cent while Kochi led the year-on-year

growth with an impressive increase of five to seven percentage points.

On the other hand, Chandigarh and Hyderabad were the only markets that saw year-on-year declines in occupancy rates in the range of two to five percentage points.

On the average room rates (ARR) front, hotel rates maintained their upward momentum, though the pace of year-on-year growth has begun to stabilise. Average rates spiked across all key markets, except for Goa, where rates saw slight growth compared to the previous year.

Despite this, Goa continued to command and register the highest average rate in the country, exceeding ₹14,000.

Kochi saw substantial growth in ARR, emerging as a standout performer, recording the highest YoY growth in average rates, driven by robust demand in the market. HT

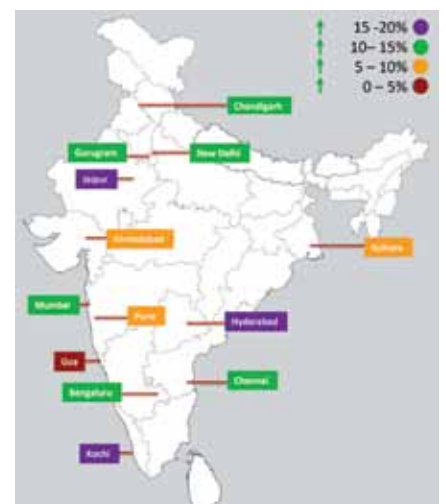


Average rates spiked across all key markets, except for Goa experiencing slight growth compared to the previous year

Occupancy trends across key Indian markets (Y-o-Y growth: December 2024)



ARR trends across key Indian markets (Y-o-Y growth: December 2024)





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ANANTARA

marks the beginning of Minor Hotels' ambitious
vision to open 50 properties in India,

& ART OF

showcasing its hospitality excellence,
says **Puneet Dhawan**.

LUXURY

WORDS BY LIPLA NEGI





Q: Minor Hotels plans to open 50 properties in India over the next ten years. What is your blueprint for achieving this goal?

A: Anantara Jewel Bagh Jaipur is the first of the 50 new openings we target within the next ten years. We are in various stages of discussions with partners nationwide and are humbled by the overwhelming interest and enthusiasm shown in our brands.

Destination creation has been instrumental to Minor Hotels' global strategy and will be critical to our presence in India. India has many untapped tourism hotspots, and we are aiming to create new destinations that appeal to domestic and international tourists.

We will focus on emerging destinations with demand for premium and luxury hospitality with our Anantara, Avani and NH Collection brands. There are many up-and-coming cities in urban locations, especially in Southern India. There are also tier II and tier III cities that could be a fit for our select NH brand.

We are not limiting ourselves to cities, either. Our Anantara Jewel Bagh Jaipur brand is well-suited for luxury resorts and wilderness lodges in southern hill towns and the northern Himalayas.



Puneet Dhawan
Head of Asia, Minor Hotels



“Introducing visa-free travel for select markets will make India far more accessible.”

Q: While domestic tourism continues to grow, inbound tourism still lags behind. In your opinion, what steps could be taken to revive India’s inbound numbers?

A: To bridge this gap and position India as a leading tourism hub, we must scale up promotional efforts, as the current ₹30 million global tourism budget is far too low for a country aiming to achieve its Vision 2047 of nearly US\$1 trillion in hotel industry contributions to GDP. More targeted campaigns and marketings tailored to luxury, adventure, heritage, and wellness travellers could help India attract high-value visitors. Additionally, simplifying the e-visa process or introducing visa-free travel for select markets, following the example of Sri Lanka and Thailand, will make India far more accessible. Besides, strengthening collaboration between the central and state governments is crucial to developing world-class tourism infrastructure, ensuring better visitor facilities, conserving heritage sites, and enhancing connectivity to lesser-known destinations. At the same time, expanding direct international flight connectivity, particularly beyond the major metros, will help spread tourism’s economic benefits across the country.

Q: What are the key challenges facing India’s growing luxury market, and where do you see the opportunities?

Despite its rich heritage and cultural depth, India has a notable gap in experiential luxury properties. We see a tremendous opportunity to bridge this by introducing world-class luxury experiences honouring the country’s history, revitalising legacy properties such as forts and palaces into exceptional destinations. With its expertise in seamlessly blending heritage with contemporary luxury, Anantara is uniquely positioned to bring these stories behind the landmarks to a global audience.

At the same time, India’s youthful population, where the median age hovers around 30, signals a growing demand for vibrant, lifestyle-driven hospitality. With its playful and energetic approach, Avani is perfectly suited to this evolving market, creating dynamic spaces that resonate with a new generation of travellers.

India’s deep-rooted connection to wellness, as the birthplace of Ayurveda, further presents an unparalleled opportunity. Minor Hotels’ globally acclaimed wellness offerings, exemplified by Anantara Spa, align naturally with this tradition, providing spaces where guests can



We have had a very strong wedding season this year. We have been nearly booked out since opening in November, hosting more than 30 weddings in three months. Guests who chose Anantara Jewel Bagh Jaipur have highlighted how our venues' architecture and design capture the core essence of Rajasthan's past. The hotel's spaces provide many options for large-scale events, with venues accommodating up to 1,100 guests outdoors and 300 guests indoors.

We also have exquisite spaces for more intimate celebrations, like the Rang Mahal, which features elaborate murals depicting the history of the Maharajas. Also working in our favour is Anantara Jewel Bagh Jaipur's proximity to the airport, which is just 30 minutes away. The location appeals to event organisers looking to



"Today, Indian hotel owners seek partners who appreciate local nuances."

reconnect with holistic practices in their place of origin. Additionally, the country's vast wildlife potential remains largely untapped. Leveraging our expertise from the Elewana Collection in Africa and the success of Anantara and Avani in nature-focused destinations, Minor Hotels is well-equipped to create immersive wildlife experiences that balance luxury and conservation.

Finally, as Indian hotel owners seek partners who appreciate local nuances rather than enforcing rigid, standardised models. Minor Hotels' philosophy of "thinking global, speaking local" ensures we can meet these evolving expectations, offering the flexibility and cultural understanding that set us apart.

Q: Anantara Jewel Bagh Jaipur recently debuted in India. What is your target audience and how you are reaching them?

A: There are two approaches for us to consider — independent travellers and MICE guests.



host functions and conferences in Jaipur because of its easy access to the Pink City.

Outside of wedding season and events, we also need to create a compelling proposition for individual guests. Anantara Jewel Bagh Jaipur's grand design and intricate decoration offers a window into a bygone era, speaking to the area's past and immersing our guests in the destination. We provide a range of on and off-property activities, attracting guests to experience the authentic side of Rajasthan, beyond Jaipur's typical attractions, like private safari and heritage excursions or discover the region's culinary heritage by joining our chef on a spice market tour. We have had received encouraging feedback from guests, especially those who have stayed at an Anantara property elsewhere in the world, many are

excited to have Anantara's authentic luxury experience closer to home in India.

Q: How do you plan to carve out a unique niche in Rajasthan's highly competitive wedding market?

A: Anantara Jewel Bagh Jaipur aims to provide our guests with an immersive and authentic experience of Rajasthan, which is true to Anantara's positioning. Our wedding services offer a blend of classic grandeur and opulence and contemporary comforts against the traditional Rajasthani backdrop. The range of venues and flexibility allows us to cater to various indoor and outdoor functions. Our location is also an advantage, providing a serene escape while giving guests seamless access to Jaipur's historical and cultural wonders.

HT



Mid-scale boom: Comeback story

Greesh Bindra shares insight into the overall trends driving the hotel industry, role of brand positioning and market expansion.

WORDS BY **HT BUREAU**

Q: Tell us about the performance of the hotel industry in India in 2024.

A: The Indian hotel industry in the year 2024 displayed high occupancy rates, higher average room rates (ARR), and a significant increase in RevPAR, showing a strong recovery from the pandemic slump. This positive trend was driven by increased domestic and international travel, with occupancy levels approaching pre-pandemic highs, especially in tier II and tier III cities.

The room demand per day was about 30 per cent more than in 2019 and the number of airline passengers surpassed 400 million, contributing to the growth in occupancy levels in



Greesh Bindra
Executive Vice President
The Surya New Delhi

India. Significantly lower debt levels across the main ownership groups indicate higher investment and acquisition potential with lower risk. Amongst the highest ADRs, Udaipur had a significant advantage with an ADR of ₹15946 followed by Mumbai at ₹11500, Goa at ₹10900, and Delhi at ₹10300. Overall, the hotel sector in India in 2024 demonstrated a dynamic environment, striking a balance between significant expansion and emerging challenges.

Q: Is there a need to rethink strategy with foreign leisure arrival at the national level?

A: Domestic tourism together with inbound tourism has emerged as



a key driver of economic growth. In 2024, India recorded foreign tourist arrivals of 9.66 million which accounted for foreign exchange earnings of ₹2,77,842 crores with a growth of 19.8 per cent. As per the data furnished by state/UT governments and other information available with the Ministry of Tourism, there were 2509 million domestic tourist visits all over the country during the year. However, while domestic travel has flourished, foreign leisure arrivals have yet to reach pre-pandemic levels. The diverse cultural and historical attractions of India remain a draw, but factors such as global economic conditions, visa policies, and geopolitical stability impacted inbound travel.

Q: How is the growth of MICE segment important for hotels?

A: Meetings, incentives, conferences, and trade shows make up the MICE industry, which is fuelled by

“*The Union Budget 2025 brings promising reforms to boost India’s hospitality and tourism sectors.*”

growing corporate event planning and business travel. According to Coherent Market Insights, the Indian MICE market is expected to reach US\$10.52 billion by 2030, with a compound annual growth rate of 18 per cent. This expansion has helped maintain the ARR of the leading hospitality companies. With the growth of the MICE market, this

contribution is anticipated to increase significantly and is extremely important for the hotel business.

Q: Is luxury the way forward or betting on mid-scale hotels in tier I and tier II cities?

A: In 2025, the Indian hospitality sector is expected to generate US\$281.83 billion. Increased international investment and a robust domestic travel sector are driving this expansion. My bet would be for both the segments, the mid-scale and luxury hotel markets are expected to expand this year. Luxury hospitality will always have its place, particularly in urban centres and leisure destinations. However, the mid-scale segment is witnessing rapid expansion in tier II and tier III cities, driven by increasing corporate travel and aspirational consumers. The future lies in a diversified approach—hotels must cater to both luxury and mid-market travellers with distinct brand positioning.

Q: What is your take on the Union Budget 2025? Is it a hit or a miss this time?

A: The Union Budget 2025 brings promising reforms to boost India's hospitality and tourism sectors. With initiatives like expanding the UDAN scheme and promoting regional cuisines, the budget aims to enhance connectivity and encourage growth. Public-private partnerships will play a crucial role in creating world-class tourist destinations that can compete on a global scale.

The focus on spiritual tourism, particularly the promotion of Buddhist tourism, is another significant step. The 'Heal in India' initiative aims to strengthen India's position as a global medical tourism hub. The finance minister's promise to streamline e-visa facilities for certain foreign tourist groups to bolster foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) in the country also paints a brighter future for the inbound segment.

Q: What are the benefits and challenges associated with staying with your own brand?

A: Staying with our own brand in this fast-moving environment means making strategic choices that focus on brand authenticity,



“

In 2025, the Indian hospitality sector to generate US\$281.83 billion.”

personalised experiences, effective use of technology, and clear market differentiation. The main advantage we have is that we can focus on niche markets that larger hotel chains often overlook. Whether it is inbound travellers, wellness tourists, or luxury seekers, we can tailor our offerings to cater to the segments as per the requirements. However, the major challenges sometimes are brand recognition, loyalty programmes, and large-scale marketing budgets that favour global players.

HT





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Curated exclusivity

Timeless legacy

Beyond opulence, meaningful and immersive experiences are crucial for luxury hotels to woo modern travellers, says **Rohit Arora**.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU



Q: How do you see the growth and future of The Park New Delhi in this ever-evolving business environment?

A: The Park New Delhi has always been a pioneer in redefining luxury, seamlessly blending innovation, design, and top-notch hospitality. As the industry evolves, we continue to grow while staying true to our legacy, focusing on three key pillars—guest experience, sustainability, and digital transformation. We believe in creating personalised, memorable stays with thoughtful services, beautifully designed spaces, and curated dining experiences for our guests.

Sustainability is integral to our ethos, with initiatives like sourcing local ingredients,

eliminating single-use plastics, and adopting energy-efficient solutions. We balance luxury with responsibility, making sustainability a core business value.

We are at the forefront of digital transformation, enhancing operational efficiency and guest experiences. With an integrated enterprise resource planning (ERP) and guest management system (GMS), we elevate digital engagement at every stage—offering a connected, personalised experience from booking to post-stay.

Q: Could you specifically pinpoint areas that set you apart within your competitive set?

A: Luxury goes beyond opulence—it is about offering meaningful, immersive, and personalised experiences. What sets us apart is our ability to cater to a diverse spectrum of luxury, from all-inclusive indulgence to accessible elegance.

As pioneers of luxury boutique hospitality in India, our flagship brand, The Park, has redefined personalised service and innovative design. This legacy is further elevated by The Park Collection, which curates exceptional stays in unique locales. Our commitment to premium luxury is exemplified by heritage properties like Ran Baas in Patiala and Lotus Palace in Chettinad, where history and modern comforts blend seamlessly. In the upper midscale segment, our brands—Zone by The Park, Zone Connect, and Stop by Zone, focus on vibrant design and flexible spaces. What truly differentiates us in the premium luxury space is our focus on experiential luxury.

Q: As the demand for business and leisure travel rises, how do you plan to cater to the needs of travellers?

A: The shift towards business and leisure travel or bleisure is reshaping guest expectations. At The Park, we have strategically evolved to meet the changing needs. Our goal is to ensure that guests can transition effortlessly between work and relaxation.

A key aspect of our approach is personalisation and immersive experiences. Modern travellers want more than just a place to stay—they seek curated, meaningful experiences. We cater to this by offering bespoke itineraries, tailored in-room services, and flexible workspaces that allow guests to maximise



“

We balance luxury with responsibility, making sustainability a core business value.”

Rohit Arora

VP, North & Goa Operations and
Head of Leisure Sales, ASPHL



efficiency while enjoying a uniquely crafted stay. From energy-efficient technologies to local community engagement, we ensure that luxury and sustainability go hand in hand.

Q: What steps have you taken to keep attrition rate within manageable levels?

A: Retaining top talent is a priority for us, and we focus on three key areas—growth, well-being, and recognition. We invest in continuous learning, leadership development, and career progression, ensuring that employees see a long-term future with us. Regular training

foster a culture of recognition and inclusivity, celebrating achievements, encouraging internal promotions, and maintaining an open-door policy for transparency.

Q: What efforts has your organisation made to improve sustainable practices?

A: Sustainability is at the heart of our operations. Our approach focuses on energy efficiency, water conservation, waste management, and responsible sourcing. Our measures to enhance energy efficiency include deploying energy-efficient lighting, heating and cooling systems, and smart technologies. Our commitment to sourcing local and organic produce has minimised our carbon footprint while supporting regional communities.



We are at the forefront of harnessing digital innovations, enhancing operational efficiency and guest experiences

programmes, cross-functional exposure, and mentorship opportunities help them enhance their skills and grow within the organisation. Employee well-being is equally important—we offer wellness programmes, mental health support, and flexible work arrangements where possible. Besides, we also

Q: What are the key priorities for successfully operating this ambitious project ‘Ran Baas the Palace?’

A: Ran Baas, originally the royal guesthouse within the 18th century Qila Mubarak, is meticulously restored to offer guests an authentic taste of regal Punjabi heritage, seamlessly blended with contemporary comforts. Operationally, we ensure that every detail reflects the palace’s regal heritage, from curated décor to bespoke hospitality. On the marketing front, we position Ran Baas as a destination for higher-income groups, luxury seekers, history enthusiasts, and event planners. Through targeted digital campaigns, influencer collaborations, and bespoke travel partnerships, we reach the right audience.





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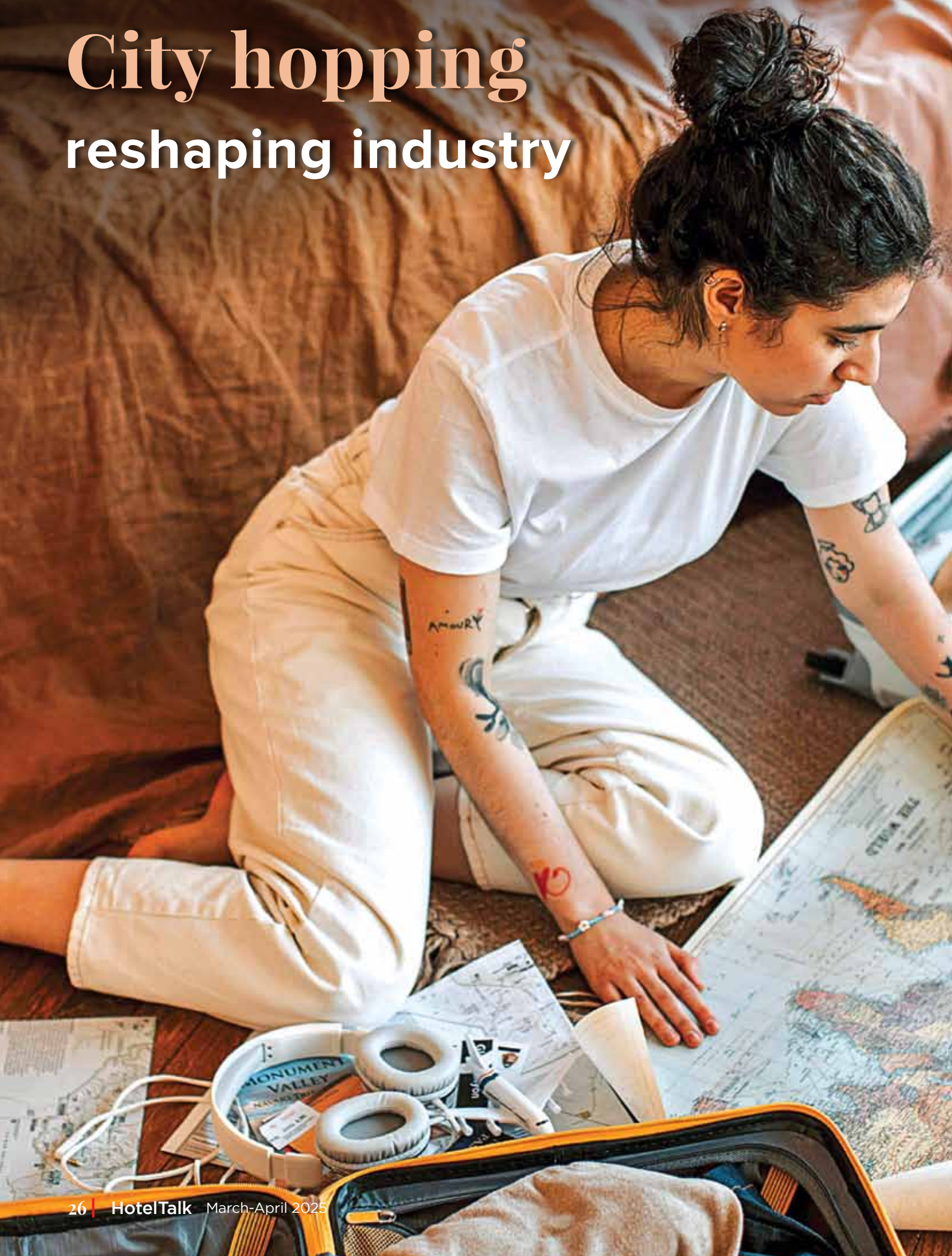



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City hopping reshaping industry



A close-up photograph of a person's hands packing a suitcase. The suitcase is open, revealing a brown hat, a blue jacket, and other items. The person is wearing a red shirt and has a tattoo on their arm. A map is spread out on the floor next to the suitcase. The background shows a wooden floor and a white wall.

As city-hopping travellers seek diverse experiences across multi-destinations, hotels are redesigning their offerings to adapt to evolving expectations.

WORDS BY SOMYA DEEP

The hospitality landscape is rapidly evolving, influenced largely by the preferences and expectations of Gen Z and millennials. Beyond new destinations and traditional sightseeing, these generations are increasingly seeking art and architecture design, local culture, heritage, food, and people for a deeper sense of connection across multi-destinations.

“

City hoppers are aged between 25 to 40 years seeking value-driven getaways that offer rich cultural experiences

As a result, the concept of ‘city hopping’ is gaining momentum among these travellers. It allows them to explore multiple cities in a single trip, especially in regions with well-connected transportation systems. The conventional practice of a single-city vacation with limited options no longer resonates with interests of these new-age travellers.

Understanding the demographics

The trend of city-hopping is especially popular among Gen Z and millennials, who prefer to take shorter trips to multiple cities rather than limiting themselves to just one city per trip. Explaining why these generations prefer city-



hopping travel, **Ajay K Bakaya**, Chairman, Sarovar Hotels and Director, Louvre Hotels India, shared, “City hoppers are primarily aged between 25 to 40 years. They are digitally savvy, value-driven, and seek quick getaways that offer rich cultural experiences.”

Vikas Ahluwalia, General Manager and Head, Zone by The Park Hotels, added, “City hoppers are a dynamic bunch, typically between 27 to 37 years, who work hard and party harder. They love getaways to destinations that are two to three hours away. They seek experiences that seamlessly blend relaxation and a buzzing social scene.”

City hoppers are modern explorers who seek adventure and

varied experiences. They favour flexible itineraries that combine natural beauty, local cuisine, and unique activities, shared **Rahul Janve**, General Manager, Courtyard by Marriott Mahabaleshwar. He affirmed they prefer digital convenience and social media-worthy experiences that allow them to document their journey.

Adapting to new needs

City hoppers often crave culturally immersive experiences, tastes of regional specialties, and connection with local identity and architecture. To cater to shifting expectations, Bakaya said that the hotel brand created an authentic local feel by integrating locally inspired

architecture, regional art displays, and a cultural décor in their property design. Their curated experiences, such as the Ganga Aarti in Haridwar, guided tour of Mahabodhi temple in Bodh Gaya, and traditional culinary offerings, allow guests to immerse themselves in the local culture.

Besides, collaborating with local artisans and communities to provide unique workshops and activities, ensures guests experience the true essence of each destination. Ahluwalia highlighted that their culinary teams offer an exciting mix of flavours—local specialties and experimental menus that keep things fresh and unexpected. He added, “Whether it is food, design, or entertainment, our teams create



Ajay K Bakaya

Chairman, Sarovar Hotels and Director, Louvre Hotels India



Vikas Ahluwalia

General Manager and Head Zone by The Park Hotels



Rahul Janve

General Manager, Courtyard by Marriott Mahabaleshwar

spaces that speak to the ever-evolving preferences of new-age travellers.”

One growing trend is the incorporation of regional art, textiles, and architectural elements, creating a true sense of place. “Our ibis Styles Goa Vagator incorporates design and art elements inspired by the vibrant Goan culture, offering a deeper connection to the local community,” said **JB Singh**, President and CEO, InterGlobe Hotels, adding, “Our hotel showcases curated art pieces that are inspired by the unique character of the city.”

Appeal of diversity

From food to feel, embedding the diversity of India in the property becomes an important aspect for hoteliers. Catering to diverse interests through a blend of local and global experiences, Bakaya shared, “Our restaurants offer a wide range of cuisines from traditional Indian delicacies to global dishes that are tailored to the tastes of



JB Singh
President and CEO,
InterGlobe Hotels

modern travellers. We also curate personalised experiences based on guest feedback.”

Effective strategies are essential to provide diverse experiences for travellers. Janve said, “We provide a mix of experiences, from serene nature walks and farm visits to wellness therapies, ensuring every traveller finds something that resonates with their interests.”

Beyond dining services, Singh stated that they also focus on thoughtfully designed spaces and amenities, such as a lively bar for relaxation, a curated mini library for book enthusiasts, and a music station, helping to cater to the diverse interests of today’s travellers

Cost & value

As city hoppers seek economical adventures and cost-effective travel, hoteliers firmly focus on critical elements such as affordability and value. Janve emphasised, “We offer a range of smartly priced packages, seasonal discounts, and flexible stay options, making it easier for budget-conscious travellers.”

For the mid-market hotel segment, Singh revealed that InterGlobe is developing properties for travellers who seek fair value. “Our focus remains on delivering world-class hospitality experiences while maintaining affordability and quality,” Singh said.

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Hospitality's temple run

As Maha Kumbh weaves new narrative in spiritual tourism, hotels are flocking to holy cities to strengthen their brands and boost revenue.

WORDS BY LIPLA NEGI



As millions of devotees and spiritual seekers from around the world took a holy dip in the Triveni Sangam—the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, the dynamics and economics of spiritual tourism in India experienced nothing short of a ‘rebirth’. From celebrities to devoted pilgrims, the Maha Kumbh has redefined the future of spiritual tourism in India, setting it on an upward trajectory. It has highlighted India’s often-overlooked strength in spiritual tourism, transforming it into a sustainable and ever-growing revenue stream. “Events like the Maha Kumbh Mela have led to a 21.4 per cent rise in spiritual tourism visa applications to India,



India’s spiritual tourism is expected to grow at 16 per cent CAGR between FY2024 and FY2030

indicating a growing interest among both domestic and international travellers,” said **Arjun Baljee**, President, Royal Orchid Hotels.

Recognising the burgeoning demand, both international and domestic hotel chains are increasingly focusing on spiritual destinations. **Mandeep S Lamba**, President and CEO (South Asia), HVS ANAROCK, explained, “As of early 2024, there were approximately 5,700 branded hotel keys across major religious destinations, with an additional 4,700 keys expected to be added over the next four to five years. Notably, in the calendar year 2024 alone, of the over 45,000 branded keys signed, nearly 18 per cent were in religious destinations, taking the total pipeline for these locations to a significantly higher number.” Spiritual tourism in India is expected to grow at 16 per cent CAGR between FY2024 and FY2030. According to Lamba, this surge is driven by travellers seeking authentic and immersive experiences, coupled



Arjun Baljee
President
Royal Orchid Hotels

with enhanced connectivity and infrastructure developments.

A leap of faith

While the spiritual heritage of India has always been a significant contributor towards tourism, in recent times, an increase in interest in emerging spiritual circuits has been observed. “Post-pandemic, there has been a surge in travellers prioritising introspection and



Rahul Gupta
Project Head
Eyak Venture

reconnection with culture, making India a favoured destination. Key steps to further enhance this segment include improving infrastructure at spiritual sites, enhancing accessibility through better transportation networks, and creating globally competitive promotional campaigns,” highlighted **Rahul Gupta**, Project Head, Eyak Venture.

As yoga, meditation, and wellness continue to gain global



traction, India's offerings resonate strongly with travellers seeking a holistic and immersive journey. The hospitality sector is crucial in realising this potential by providing world-class accommodations that blend modern comforts with local traditions. "Developing immersive experiences like meditation retreats, spiritual tours, and wellness packages can significantly enhance visitor satisfaction. Embracing eco-friendly practices while engaging local communities in these efforts will preserve the authenticity of spiritual tourism and contribute to its socio-economic impact," suggested Gupta.

To capitalise on this opportunity, the hospitality sector must go beyond conventional stays and curate immersive experiences that reflect India's spiritual essence. These could include yoga and meditation retreats, Ayurvedic wellness programmes, and guided spiritual journeys too. "Integrating wellness and



Samir MC
Managing Director
Fortune Hotels

personalised immersive experiences can enhance the appeal with cultural authenticity and technology at the core," asserted **Samir MC**, Managing Director, Fortune Hotels, adding, "Collaborations with religious institutions and tourism boards, along with enhanced connectivity and infrastructure, will drive accessibility and seasonal footfall.

Expanding spiritual horizons

While timeless pilgrimage sites like Tirupati, Haridwar, Amritsar, Vaishno Devi, Varanasi, and Shirdi continue to draw devotees, comparatively lesser frequented and emerging circuits such as Ayodhya, Dwaraka, Vrindavan, Nashik, and Bodhgaya, that offer a blend of heritage, wellness, and immersive experiences are also the sought-after places today. "A lot of it is owing to the government's push for development of such pilgrimage places," added Samir, "We have already inked operating agreements to open hotels in many new as well as prevalent destinations like Ayodhya, Rishikesh, Shirdi, Deoghar, among others. Besides these, we are in discussions to close hotel deals in other key locations and temple towns in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu."

In addition, hotel brands are also setting their sights on the 'wedding



segment,' as more couples picking religious destinations to tie the knot. "Our expansion strategy includes upcoming properties in Tirupati and Khatu Shyamji, among others, that are designed to meet the needs of spiritual travellers along with the rise in weddings events in these spiritual locations. We are obviously looking out for suitable opportunities. The Regenta Evolife Tented Camp was a first for us at Prayagraj, which has seen some incredible feedback from guests," shared Baljee.

Beyond conventional offerings

Maha Kumbh also highlighted the growing demand for luxury experiences at spiritual destinations. Historically, devotees sought basic facilities, but today, luxury travellers

demand premium accommodations that match international standards. Gupta explained, "They seek a blend of comfort, privacy, and curated spiritual experiences, reflecting the growing experiential travel trend. Eyak Ventures has responded to this shift by offering luxury tents with en-suite bathrooms, air conditioning, fine dining, and personalised services. These offerings especially appeal to inbound travellers who value high-quality hospitality while exploring India's spiritual heritage. The average cost of these tents ranges between ₹10,000 to ₹35,000 per night, depending on the amenities and services provided." Hotels are also offering curated services like meditation zones, healthy cuisine options, guided temple visits, and



Inbound travellers value high-quality hospitality while exploring India's spiritual heritage



concierge service and assistance for pilgrimage planning.

Challenges and opportunities

While India's deep-rooted spiritual heritage and evolving hospitality landscape present immense opportunities, there are some challenges that need to be addressed such as maintaining the environmental sanctity of the spiritual site, proper visit arrangements to avoid overcrowding, and maintaining cleanliness and service quality. "Limited transport options, inadequate infrastructure, lack of sustainable growth, and above all paucity of quality and safe accommodation options still pose a problem in some regions, which as India works its way through it, we will see progress," stated Samir. However, Maha Kumbh is setting new benchmarks, boosting India to solidify its status as a leading global hub for spiritual tourism. HT

Maximising ROE

Walking the tightrope

Nikhil Shah asserts that well-executed strategy is crucial to curbing project delays and cost overruns and achieving strong revenue.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

The hotel industry is often viewed as a high-reward venture, particularly when properties achieve impressive EBITDA margins of around 40 per cent. However, strong operating margins alone do not always translate to a robust return on equity (ROE). Many hotel investments struggle to deliver ROEs above 10 per cent, primarily due to poorly managed development costs and project delays. These delays, often caused by regulatory hurdles,

funding challenges, or construction inefficiencies, can significantly impact the financial viability of a project. To ensure a profitable and sustainable hotel investment, strategic planning, cost management, and proactive risk mitigation are critical from the very beginning of a project.

The table below provides a clear breakdown of hotel brand classifications, cost per key (excluding land and financing). It can be easily referenced for planning and budgeting purposes.

Brand classification	Size (Sqm)	Cost / Key - Rs Cr
Luxury	45 - 75	1.8 Cr - 3.5 Cr +
Upper Upscale	36 - 75	1.5 Cr - 2.5 Cr +
Upscale	33 - 38	90 L - 1.5 Cr
Upper Midscale	20 - 32	60 L - 100 L
Midscale	17 - 23	40 L - 60 L
Economy	12 - 19	30 L - 45 L



Nikhil Shah
CFA & Senior Director,
Hospitality, Capital Markets
& Investment Services

“

While location remains crucial for a hotel’s success, controlling construction costs is equally vital for achieving returns

Location vs. development costs

While location remains a cornerstone of a hotel's success, controlling construction costs and timelines is equally vital for achieving healthy returns. First-time hotel owners, often driven by the desire to create luxurious and grandiose properties, frequently underestimate development expenses and the complexities of project execution. This miscalculation can lead to long-term financial strain, undermining the investment's potential.

To avoid these pitfalls and maximise ROE, hotel developers

must focus on several key factors during the planning and development phases:

- **Navigating GST's impact:** Goods and Services Tax (GST) is a critical yet often overlooked factor in hotel development. GST affects construction, procurement, and operational expenses, and failing to account for it can inflate costs by up to 20 per cent. Therefore, incorporating GST into the budgeting process ensures accurate financial forecasting and prevents unexpected cost escalations of hotel development.
- **Managing interest costs:** Interest expenses during the construction phase can significantly impact the overall project budget. In some cases, Interest During Construction (IDC) can account for 20 per cent to 30 percent of the total project cost, especially if the project spans 7 to 10 years. Delays in completion only exacerbate this issue, making efficient project management and realistic timelines essential to keeping costs in check.
- **Securing land approvals early:** Land approvals are a



common bottleneck in hotel projects, often causing significant delays. Legal disputes, unclear land titles, and resistance from local communities can stall progress for years. Ensuring all necessary approvals are in place before breaking ground can save time, reduce complications, and prevent costly setbacks.

- **Planning for soft opening costs:** The pre-launch phase of a hotel requires substantial investment. Soft opening costs include staff training, marketing, and trial operations. For example, hiring a General Manager (GM) months in advance adds to salary expenses, which must be factored into the pre-opening budget. Proper planning for these costs

ensures a smoother transition to full operations.

- **Estimating operational supplies:** Underestimating operational costs and initial supply expenses is a common mistake. These include essential supplies, furnishings, and operational systems. Overlooking these expenses can increase costs

by up to 5 per cent and create cash flow challenges during the initial operational phase.

- **Investing in technology infra:** In today's digital era, technology is a cornerstone of efficient hotel operations. Property management systems, booking platforms, and security systems are no longer optional—they are essential.



By prioritising cost management, hotel developers can turn their vision into high-performing assets



Neglecting these investments can hinder operational efficiency and guest satisfaction. Including technology costs in the development budget ensures the property remains competitive and future-ready.

Project delay challenges

Hotel projects in India often face delays due to a variety of factors, including regulatory hurdles, funding challenges, and construction inefficiencies. For instance, delays in obtaining environmental clearances, fire safety approvals, or municipal permits can extend project timelines by years. Additionally, labour shortages, design complexities, and unforeseen financial constraints can further slow progress.

While established hotel brands with strong reputations can often weather these delays without significant damage to their public image, the financial impact can be substantial. Extended construction timelines increase interest costs during construction (IDC), which can account for 20 per cent to 30 percent of the total project cost. Delays also push back the hotel's revenue-generating potential, reducing the overall return on investment.

For new or lesser-known brands, delays can pose an even greater risk, as they may lack the brand equity



between controlling construction costs, optimising operational efficiency, and managing project timelines. Thoughtful planning, strategic decision-making, and meticulous attention to detail from the outset are the keys to creating a profitable and sustainable hotel asset. By focusing on these critical factors, hotel owners can unlock the full potential of their investments and deliver strong returns for years to come.

In an industry where margins and returns are closely scrutinised, a well-executed strategy is the ultimate differentiator. By prioritising cost management, operational excellence, and proactive risk mitigation, hotel developers can turn their vision into a thriving, high-performing asset—even in the face of unforeseen delays. **HT**

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

to maintain investor confidence. Transparent communication, meticulous planning, and proactive risk management are essential to mitigating these challenges.

Avoiding budget shortfalls

Many hotel projects face setbacks due to inadequate cost planning and analysis. A comprehensive financial plan that accounts for

all development and operational expenses is crucial to preventing budget overruns and delays. By doing so, hotel owners can achieve a healthier ROE, making their assets more attractive to investors.

Path to sustainable profitability

Maximising ROE in the hotel industry requires a delicate balance

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How family-run hotel has conquered the world

Testament to power of independent hospitality, Su Gologone has gained international recognition offering valuable lessons for Indian standalone hotels.

WORDS BY DEVIKA JEET



In the heart of Sardinia's rugged countryside, lies Su Gologone Hotel—an independent hospitality marvel that has successfully blended culture, creativity, and experiential travel into an offering that attracts international tourists, including Indian travellers, in large numbers.

Owned and designed by the visionary **Giovanna Palimodde**, Su Gologone is more than just a hotel—it is an immersive journey into the rich traditions and landscapes of Sardinia. With only 70 rooms spread across 20 acres, it is a shining example of how a boutique, standalone property can deliver a world-class experience while celebrating local heritage. Indian hoteliers can draw inspiration from this unique model to transform their own properties into sought-after destinations. Su Gologone has gained international recognition as a celebrity-favoured destination.

A-listers such as **Beyoncé**, **Madonna**, **Richard Gere**, **Katy Perry**, and **Orlando Bloom** have all stayed at the property, drawn by its exclusivity and authenticity. With customised experiences, private villas with infinity pools, and an intimate ambiance, the hotel serves as a case study in creating high-end exclusivity without compromising on heritage. “Famous guests come here for privacy, authenticity, and the chance to connect with something real,” said Palimodde. She added, “They do not want just luxury; they want an experience that resonates.”



One of Su Gologone's most remarkable features is its workforce—80 per cent of the hotel's staff are women. Palimodde believes in fostering an environment where women are empowered to take leadership roles in hospitality. "Our hotel is like a big family, and our female staff brings warmth, dedication and unparalleled attention to detail," she shared. This commitment to gender inclusivity not only creates a nurturing work environment but also enhances the guest experience, as visitors feel a strong sense of hospitality rooted in care and authenticity.

Interestingly, Su Gologone has successfully hosted Indian weddings as well, showcasing its ability to blend Sardinian traditions with Indian cultural grandeur. "Indian weddings bring such an explosion of colour and joy. We love blending Sardinian hospitality with Indian traditions to create something magical," Palimodde noted. HT



Indian weddings bring such an explosion of colour and joy."



Giovanna Palimodde, Owner, Su Gologone

Su Gologone does not merely offer a stay—it offers a beautiful journey into Sardinian culture, creativity, and wellness. Guests can participate in over 50 different curated experiences, from pottery and embroidery workshops to painting courses and wine tastings. "The hotel is designed to be a living, breathing part of Sardinia's history and culture. Every corner of Su Gologone is a piece of art, an invitation to experience something truly authentic," said Palimodde. The hotel also provides a range of outdoor and fun activities, including guided treks, kayaking and sunset rooftop aperitivos.

Gastronomy is a central theme at Su Gologone, with food experiences crafted around traditional Sardinian fare. The hotel's restaurant boasts a unique menu, inspired by the longevity diet of Sardinia's famed Blue Zone inhabitants. Guests are treated to a variety of authentic dishes made from locally sourced ingredients, including handmade pasta, stewed goat with wild herbs and sautéed wild vegetables. "Our food is a reflection of the land and its people," explained Palimodde, noting, "Guests come here not just to eat but to taste history, to understand the flavours that have nourished Sardinians for generations."





Are next-gen kitchens boosting efficiency?

With AI & automation emerging as innovative solutions, smart hotel kitchens are redefining boundaries of operational efficiency, leading to cost benefits.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

Is tech innovation augmenting your hotel operations? With the increasing adoption of artificial intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), and automation, smart kitchen equipment is revolutionising the landscape of hotel kitchens. According to a survey, 67 per cent of restaurant operators reported that smart kitchen appliances reduce operational costs by 20 per cent or more.

Besides streamlining workflows, these innovations enhance food safety and hygiene, enabling hotels to meet the highest standards of food safety and cleanliness practices. They ensure significant operational efficiency and cost savings.

Optimising food safety

Intelligent technology is enabling kitchens in the



of kitchen tools with minimal human intervention. “Automated cleaning cycles help maintain consistent hygiene standards while saving time and resources,” said Haider, adding that achieving perfect hygiene in the hospitality and food service industry is non-negotiable.

Gaurav Mittal, CEO & Director, Antarctica Equipment stressed the significance of advanced refrigeration systems and their precise temperature controls. Explaining the benefits of smart systems, he said, “Blast chillers and shock freezers extend shelf life and reduce waste. Smart thermometers and cooking devices ensure precise cooking temperatures, reducing foodborne illness risks. UV sterilisation and robotic cleaners, enhance hygiene, while touchless faucets and dispensers minimise cross-contamination.” Mittal further informed that smart inventory systems track food entry, expiry dates, and FIFO processes, optimising supply management. Block technology ensures traceability,



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



Gaurav Mittal
CEO & Director
Antarctica Equipment



AI and IoT-enabled smart monitoring systems enable real-time tracking of temperature and humidity, thereby enhancing food safety

hospitality space to achieve new levels of food safety, hygiene, and storage. These digital innovations are significantly reducing contamination by limiting human contact. **Razi Haider**, Country Manager (India, Sri Lanka and Nepal), ITW India (FEG Division), said, “In terms of food safety, AI and IoT-enabled monitoring systems are essential, facilitating real-time tracking of temperature and humidity.”

Automation is pioneering in the hygiene practices of kitchen. For instance, advanced ware washing equipment ensures thorough cleaning

to verify ingredient sources and safety in real-time.

Tech-enabled cost-reduction

Technology is a game changer in reducing labour and operational costs. Tools like robotic slicers, peelers, and AI-powered equipment can handle repetitive tasks, minimising manual labour.

Shailendra Singh, Corporate Chef, Pride Group of Hotels, averred, “Tech saves time and ensures quality. Besides, advanced sanitation systems streamline the cleaning process and reduce labour-intensive tasks.”

Yashwant Sopne, Executive Chef, Sayaji Hotels Pune, added, “Data analytics can optimise cleaning schedules, reducing unnecessary cleaning and labour. It can also provide insights into operational efficiency, enabling data-driven decisions to reduce costs.”

When it comes to food production, automated machines can perform repetitive tasks more efficiently than humans. Advanced software is used to streamline supply chain processes and reduce the likelihood of surplus or shortage, ultimately saving costs. **Suresh Baabu**, Executive Chef,

Kochi Marriott said, “Implementing tech scanners and vision recognition systems ensures consistent quality control without the need of extensive manual inspection. Technologies that monitor safety standards help ensure compliance with health regulations with minimal intervention, which significantly reduce the need for frequent audits.” This helps combat intensive manual labour, resulting in significant cost savings.

Powering sustainability goals

Smart kitchens can significantly boost sustainability in hotels by leveraging technology to optimise energy use, reduce waste, and improve resource efficiency. Singh said, “Sustainability is at the heart of our kitchen operations. Our property leads by example with its biogas plant which repurposes waste into energy, supporting a self-sufficient

kitchen. We follow eco-friendly practices with an Organic Waste Converter (OWC) machine that processes food waste into fertilizer for the hotel’s landscaping. These initiatives align with our commitment to sustainability while enhancing operational efficiency.”

Highlighting how to minimise energy consumption, Sopne recommended the integration of smart lighting and HVAC systems that adjust to occupancy and usage patterns, enabling low energy consumption. Besides, water-saving technologies such as low-flow faucets, greywater reuse systems, and advanced water filtration systems can reduce water waste. Sopne claimed, “Smart kitchens can optimise menu planning to incorporate local and seasonal ingredients, reducing transportation emissions. Automated recycling systems can optimise waste

sorting and recycling and reduce landfill waste.”

Delving into how smart kitchens in hotels can significantly contribute to sustainability, Baabu emphasised smart appliances such as energy-efficient stoves, ovens, and refrigerators are equipped with sensors and timers that can help conserve energy while maintaining performance. Inventory management systems can monitor food stock levels and predict usage patterns, preventing over-ordering and reduce food waste. Baabu added, “Smart kitchens in hotels can not only elevate their operational efficiency but also demonstrate a commitment to environmental stewardship.”

Path forward

Innovation and flexibility are crucial aspects to redefining the future of hotel kitchens. Hotels need to ensure



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Smart kitchens are not all about operational excellence but also a commitment to environmental stewardship



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Sreekumar Prabhakar
Regional Director (Middle East & SAARC), Fagor Professional

a fine balance of smart technology, sustainable practices, and ergonomic design to adapt to today's fast-paced culinary environment. "Hotels look for compact, manoeuvrable, and practical products, which is the speciality of our brand. Usually, hotels prefer products that are disturbance-free that also add to the upscale ambiance of the hotel. The Floating breakfast trays and tables in desired shapes and sizes have been the premium luxury amenities by our brand," said **YK Mehta**, Founder, Mehta Furnishers. He further added that with edge protectors, durable finishes, and materials such as wood, cane, wicker, and metal, every piece

adds an air of sophistication to any hotel's operations."

Compact kitchen will become a priority in the hospitality industry, emphasising eco-friendly designs coupled with energy-efficient appliances, water-saving devices, and recyclable materials. **Vicky Khurana**, Director, Venus Industries, said, "Hotel kitchens will increasingly adopt IoT-enabled devices such as smart ovens, dishwashers, and refrigerators. Real-time data analysis will allow chefs to track inventory, streamline kitchen operations, and reduce waste. The post-pandemic focus on cleanliness will also lead to the widespread

use of touchless technology and antimicrobial surfaces."

The future of hotel kitchens lies in smart, space-conscious solutions that enhance efficiency without compromising quality. "With modular solutions and energy-saving dishwashing systems, kitchens can optimise their layout while maintaining peak performance. Automation and user-friendly designs will simplify daily tasks and improve workflows, which will help hotels adapt to evolving demands with greater ease and efficiency," opined **Sreekumar Prabhakar**, Regional Director (Middle East & SAARC), Fagor Professional. HT

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Where leisure meets luxury

With world-class amenities, Sarovar Hotels's Cloud9 & Sea Breeze are taking luxury notch higher promising unforgettable stays.

WORDS BY **SURBHI SHARMA**

Goa is not only a top destination for leisure, but it also emerged as a popular choice for weddings and corporate events as well. Sarovar Hotels, with their five-star and four-star properties Cloud9 Sarovar Premiere in Palolem and Sea Breeze Sarovar Portico in Varcá, are redefining the luxury, destination weddings, and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) experiences. Both properties offer various personalised services and modern amenities, making them the ideal venues for experiential stays.

High-end amenities

Located in the heart of Palolem, South Goa, where the Talpone River meets the Arabian Sea and is set



Sonuraj KR

General Manager, Cloud9 Sarovar Premiere, Palolem, Goa

against the Shyadri Mountain range, Cloud 9 Sarovar Premiere is only 62 km from Dabolim International Airport, 35 km from Margao Railway Station, and 38 km from KTC Bus Stand Margao.

Based on a coastal theme, the property features 160 elegantly designed rooms and suites with all modern amenities. It also comprises Trophe, a multi-cuisine contemporary all-day dining that can accommodate upto 110 guests. **Sonuraj KR**, General Manager, Cloud9 Sarovar Premiere, Palolem, Goa, said, "From weddings to corporate gatherings, the hotel's tailored services such as themed lunches, wellness tea breaks, and private chef services—enhance the overall experience."

Additionally, Cloud 9 features a swimming pool, fitness centre, spa, and a kids' play area, catering to every age group.

Key features

Sea Breeze Sarovar Portico is located



Allan Pachaco

General Manager, Sea Breeze Sarovar Portico, Varca, Goa

in Varca, South Goa, 31 km from Dabolim International Airport, 8.6 km from Margao Railway Station and 10 km from KTC Bus Stand Margao. The hotel features 116 spacious rooms across four categories, including standard, superior, deluxe, and premium. It offers a multi-cuisine all-day dining and bar, along with state-of-the-art banquets, and conferencing facilities. Leisure amenities include a swimming pool and a holistic spa, promising rejuvenating stays.

Besides, the hotel is a popular venue for wedding and MICE events. **Allan Pachaco**, General Manager, Sea Breeze Sarovar Portico, Varca, Goa, said, “Our hotel boasts an impressive 116-room inventory, making it ideal for large wedding parties. Our banquet halls can accommodate up to 350 guests for grand celebrations.”

Finding a balance

With commitment to balancing luxury with sustainability, Sea Breeze uses recycled and renewable materials for wedding decorations. Pachaco emphasised, “The hotel



The hotel sources a variety of locally produced flowers and goods while strictly avoids single-use plastics

sources locally produced flowers and goods and avoids single-use plastics. Energy-efficient LED lighting, solar heaters, and high-efficiency HVAC systems are employed to minimise the environmental impact of events.”

Growth strategy

To boost their business, both properties actively engage with the travel and trade industry. Sarovar Hotels participates in key travel trade shows, highlighting their properties as dream wedding and corporate event destinations.





Infrastructure development key for tourism growth

To realise US\$30 trillion economy by 2047, govt must ramp up its efforts on skill development and state-specific experiences.

WORDS BY **SURBHI SHARMA**

India's tourism sector is well-positioned for remarkable growth, bolstered by various government initiatives, infrastructure development, and global branding efforts. The government has launched various schemes such as Swadesh Darshan 2.0, Vibrant Village Programme, PRASHAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive), and Paryatan Mitra, which have contributed to boosting tourism in India..

To propel the growth of India's tourism, **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, said, "The government is taking decisive steps to decongest bottlenecks and facilitate budget travellers. Our focus on integrating state tourism policies ensures a robust and unified approach to infrastructure development across India." He added, "In the past six months, we have witnessed tremendous efforts across states to harness tourism potential. Together,

we must work collectively to elevate India's tourism to new heights." "Tourism holds a unique place in India's economy, creating 11 indirect jobs for every direct job. For inclusive growth, no sector matches the potential of tourism. To build a

“*We must work collectively to unlock tourism potential and take it to new heights*”

US\$30 trillion economy by 2047, India's tourism must grow 22 times, and that requires skill development and creating unique, state-specific experiences," said **Amitabh Kant**, G20 Sherpa, India, adding that tourism should be treated as an industry, creating a conducive environment for hotels to flourish. **HT**

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HRAWI celebrates its 75-year anniversary

HRAWI marks its 75th anniversary with renewed vigour to create inclusive hospitality ecosystem.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU



Jimmy Shaw
President, HRAWI



Celebrating a rich legacy of leadership and industry excellence, the Hotel and Restaurant Association Western India (HRAWI) commemorated its 75 years of anniversary on 3 February 2025. Representing over 1,500 hotels and restaurants across Western India, HRAWI has been instrumental in driving policy reforms and sustainable hospitality practices.

Expressing the significance of its 75th year celebrations, **Jimmy Shaw**, President, HRAWI, said, “Our 75th year is a testament to the resilience, innovation and commitment of our members. HRAWI has been at the forefront of industry transformation, ensuring that the hospitality sector thrives amid evolving challenges.” He further added, “As we celebrate this

“*Our 75th year is a testament to the resilience, innovation and commitment of our members.*”

milestone, we reaffirm our dedication to advocating for progressive policies and strengthening India’s position as a global tourism hub.”

Over the decades, HRAWI has actively collaborated with the government and industry stakeholders, facilitating initiatives such as skill development programmes, regulatory advocacy, and sustainability efforts.

“The hospitality industry is a key driver of India’s economy, and as we move forward, our focus remains on enhancing Ease of Doing Business, advocating tax rationalisation, and promoting an inclusive and sustainable hospitality ecosystem,” said **Pradeep Shetty**, Spokesperson, HRAWI.

As HRAWI steps into its 75th year, the association expressed its commitment to promoting industry growth, advocating for policy reforms, and driving sustainability. **HT**

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RINGING

profitability bells

Amitabh Sanduja emphasises InnBell enables seamless connection between businesses and suppliers, which boosts procurement efficiency and profitability.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

It is often said that ideas are only as good as their execution. For **Amitabh Sanduja**, Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer, InnBell, passion and consistency define both the idea and its execution. A seasoned hotelier himself, Sanduja saw a unique opportunity in 'InnBell,' a B2B platform designed to simplify procurement, enhance hotel operations, and optimise profitability by ensuring the right price, right product, and timely delivery.



Amitabh Sanduja
Co-Founder & COO, InnBell



Pawan Gupta
Co-Founder & CEO, InnBell

There are many high-quality products being fabricated in India, but the vendors often lack reach

Narrowing the gaps

Discussing his brainchild, Sanduja explained, "The idea behind creating India's first B2B marketplace for the hospitality industry is to bridge the gap between businesses and the right suppliers for goods and services. The hotel industry, especially the non-star category segment, faces significant procurement challenges, particularly as these hotels often lack professionally run material management departments."

Calling it a game-changer, **Pawan Gupta**, Co-Founder and CEO, InnBell, elaborated on how the platform addresses key industry challenges such as inconsistent quality of local products, poor supply

chain management, fragmented and costly logistics, as well as cost efficiency and quality assurance.

Gupta added, "It is like an encyclopedia of trusted hotel vendors and consultants, featuring professionals with proven credentials across a wide range of specialties, from architects and interior designers to mechanical, electrical, and plumbing (MEP), back of house (BOH), kitchen, lighting, sound, and landscape consultants."

Primary objectives

One of the platform's key goals is to nurture local vendors and offer them a chance to showcase their products to a wider hospitality audience. "There

are many high-quality products being fabricated in India, but the vendors often lack reach. We recognise this emerging group of innovative vendors and help them showcase their products on our platform," Sanduja highlighted.

The platform provides hotels with a comprehensive database of vendors from where hotels can effectively select the most suitable vendors that meet their quality and cost requirements. Additionally, hotels will benefit from connecting with SME and MSME manufacturers, gaining cost advantages that positively impact their profitability margins and bottom lines.

Besides, hotels can achieve operational excellence by leveraging the platform ensuring a streamlined and efficient procurement process, coupled with continuous quality assurance.

Expanding footprint

Innbell is set to revolutionise hotel operations in tier II and tier III cities, remote pilgrimage destinations, and secluded hill station locations. The platform will boost the unorganised sector of the hotel industry, especially for hotels that lack a proper purchasing system.

Sanduja's vision extends beyond India; he plans to expand the platform globally by introducing vendors and project consultants across South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) nations in the near future. This will not only help hotels and restaurants but also give immense opportunities to vendors and project consultants operating in the SAARC nations. HT

Timeless artistry

From intricate wooden carvings to festive trinkets, Traditional Handicrafts Centre's collection reflects India's rich cultural heritage. It is made of wood from different trees, including teak, pine, and deodar, making a meaningful choice for the conscious consumers. Blending traditional and contemporary styles seamlessly, their designs are versatile and can be used for various purposes.



French Connection

The French Empire Candle Holder from Sage Living is intricately made with a brass finish. With a tribute to freedom and grandeur, it makes a quintessential holiday centrepiece. It can be paired with the ethereal Garden of the East side table for a harmonious blend of elegance and nature-inspired artistry.



Symphony of art & design

Exquisite designs

The Season of Splendour wallpaper collection by UDC Homes' is ideal to deck the walls for the festive season. From serene winter forests to whimsical festive motifs, these wallpapers are perfect for creating a cosy, festive mood in any room. They are easy to install and remove, and can transform your home into a holiday haven.





Elegance personified

RIMS is a collection of crystal barware by Lucaris. It offers four distinct categories. The Pillars provide a versatile foundation for mixology. The Proud boasts saucer and tulip glasses perfect for shaken cocktails. The Classic offers vintage-inspired shapes, and RIMS Orient captures Southeast Asia's essence with intricate detailing.

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Oasis of peace and comfort

Elegantly designed Nivriti Summit View is ideal for guests looking to be away from city's hustle-bustle and immerse in serenity.

WORDS BY **INDER RAJ AHLUWALIA**

Seated on the balcony deck, with fir trees literally caressing my face, I did one of the hardest things in the world. Sat back and listened to the wind.

Tucked away in the heart of Uttarakhand, located midway between Corbett National Park and Ranikhet, cradled by green mountains that look down at expansive, river-fed valleys, Nivriti Summit View, is anything but your normal homestay establishment.

Split into two units—the villa and the cottage, each with its own lawn and garden area, the establishment has an understudied look but offers all manner of comforts. The villa comprises a tastefully furnished

“

The combined views of the villa's balcony deck and the cottage's terrace, offer a staggering panorama.”

lounge cum dining room, three bedrooms with baths, a kitchen pantry, and a wind-swept balcony deck with pristine mountain and valley view. The cottage is a compact affair with three rooms and a terrace with views to fight for. The combined views of the villa's balcony

deck and the cottage's terrace, offer a staggering panorama.

The food choice is fairly substantial, offering a choice of Indian (including local Kumaoni), Continental, and Chinese cuisine

A green belt hems the establishment, watching over is a cluster of dozen-odd, pruned pines that seem to sway in a rhythm with the breeze, which I have dubbed as 'signature pines' of the establishment. According to the owner, **Randhir Brar**, the establishment, immersed

in nature, is easily accessible, providing guests with a relaxed experience that helps them unwind.

A 7-hour drive from Delhi, Nivriti is an ideal jump-off point for day-long excursions to nearby sites that include the ever-popular Corbett National Park and Ranikhet. **HT**

A journey is just the beginning

Passionate about experiential travel, **Manuj Ralhan** is always striving to make each holiday better than the last one.

WORDS BY **LIPLA NEGI**

Q: Your favourite holiday destination...

A: While the best holiday is yet to come, Europe is at the top of my list.

Q: Your last holiday was...

A: Yas Island, Abu Dhabi.

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

A: Once we begin to enjoy the journey, it naturally becomes fulfilling and rewarding. Recently, I enjoyed my family holiday in Kashmir.

Q: How do you maintain your energy & fitness levels...

A: Daily discipline, consistency, and effort. It is all about practice and repeat mode.

Q: Describe yourself as a traveller...

A: I have a great sense of urgency with my time during the first half of my day to accomplish my goals, so that the rest of the day can be more fulfilling wherever I go.

Q: Your travel essentials...

A: Grooming kit, gym wear, swimming trunks, and two suits.

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

A: It should be remuneration-based talent, skill, exposure, and results rather than designation and time in position.

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

A: An evening for guests and select team members with the General Manager once a week to unwind and not talk shop.

Q: Your biggest leadership lesson...

A: Hire for attitude and train for skills.

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

A: This is the most rewarding industry if you love the grind and want to make a heck of a professional out of you. **HT**

Manuj Ralhan
GM, Navotel Jaipur Convention Centre

Movements



Ashutosh Chhibba
Chief Executive Officer
WelcomHeritage

Ashutosh Chhibba has been appointed as the Chief Executive Officer of WelcomHeritage. Chhibba is set to lead WelcomHeritage into a new era of innovation and operational excellence. “I am honoured to lead WelcomHeritage, a brand synonymous with India’s cultural richness and heritage,” said Chhibba.



Utsa Majumder
General Manager
Westin Sohna Resort
and Spa

The Westin Sohna Resort and Spa has appointed Utsa Majumder as its new General Manager. She is set to position the resort as one of India’s distinguished luxury wellness brands. Majumder aims to elevate the resort into a sanctuary of well-being, focusing on immersive guest experiences, and sustainability initiatives.



Nivedan Kukreti
General Manager
Taj Corbett Resort & Spa

Taj Corbett Resort & Spa has appointed Nivedan Kukreti as its new General Manager. He aims to establish the resort as a premier destination for luxury, nature, and wellness tourism. Kukreti plans to create offerings that focus on the region’s biodiversity, cultural heritage, and adventurous offerings.



Jyotsna Kanwar
Director of Sales and
Marketing, The Ritz-
Carlton, Bangalore

The Ritz-Carlton, Bangalore has appointed Jyotsna Kanwar as the Director of Sales and Marketing. With over 18 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Kanwar will focus on formulating and executing sales strategies, building lasting partnerships, and optimising resources for maximising revenue.



Shrutika Puri
Director of HR,
Hilton Gurugram
Bani City Centre

Shrutika Puri has been appointed as the new Director of Human Resources at the Hilton Gurugram Bani City Centre. In her new role, she will lead all HR initiatives at the property, focusing on improving team member satisfaction and aligning HR strategies with business objectives of the company.



Gaurav Bansal
Head Chef
ibis Styles Mysuru

Gaurav Bansal has joined the ibis Styles Mysuru as the Head Chef. Bansal will oversee the hotel’s culinary operations, from curating innovative menus to managing staff training. He will be responsible for ensuring excellence in food preparation at The Verandah, the hotel’s all-day dining restaurant.



Prem Singh
Corporate Chef
Monday Hotels Group

Monday Hotels Group has appointed Prem Singh as its Corporate Chef. He will oversee menu planning, recipe formulation, cost management, and enforcement of safety standards. He possesses two decades of experience in managing renowned hotels and restaurants both in India and abroad.

Form - IV

Statement about ownership and other particulars about newspaper Hotel Talk to be published in the first issue after the last day of February

1. Place of publication	: 72 Todarmal Road, New Delhi - 110001	4. Publisher's Name	: Devika Jeet
2. Periodicity of its publication	: Monthly	Nationality	: Indian
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6. Name and address of individuals who own the newspaper and partners or shareholders holding more than one percent of the total capital: DDP Publications Pvt. Ltd. Shareholders: 1. Sanjeet, 72, Todarmal Road, New Delhi-1. 2. Sumati Jeet, 72, Todarmal Road, ND-1. 3. Devika Jeet, 72, Todarmal Road, ND-1. 4. Nikhil Jeet, 72, Todarmal Road, ND-1.

I, Devika Jeet, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Date: 01/03/2025

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