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Defying global headwinds with robust growth





he second quarter of 2025 shows that the global economy continues to face a complex landscape with slightly sluggish growth and stiff challenges. Geopolitical tensions and conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine and the Middle East and now the fierce standoff between India and Pakistan, are serious barriers and certainly not in the best interest of the economy and tourism.

The resilient Indian hospitality industry, however, continues to experience robust growth. On the development front, very aggressive numbers are being bandied about, lending little credence to reality. I would, however, confidently state that the sub-continent is seeing significant traction and brands continue to increase their portfolios at an aggressive pace. I am

The sub-continent is seeing significant traction and brands continue to increase their portfolios at an aggressive pace."

> quite sure achieving 10,000 branded rooms every year would be possible for the next five years. To support this growth, brands must adopt DEI initiatives in hiring, training and marketing. This will have a positive impact in respect of overall perception and brand equity and also improve employee engagement and retention.

Dear Readers, before I conclude my note, I would like to extend my heartfelt condolences to the families of the innocent tourists who lost their lives in Pahalgam.

We do look forward to your continued readership and support and welcome your valuable feedback to help us improve.

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Eyeing strategic partnerships with independent hotels

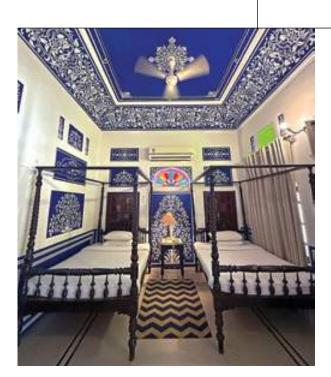
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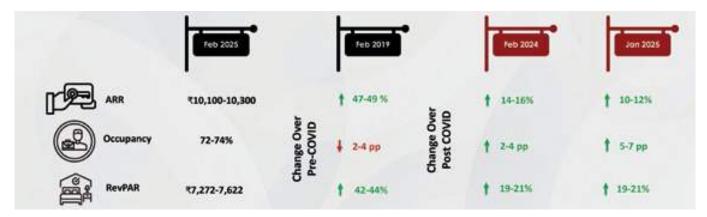
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India hotel sector performance (February 2025)



Hotel occupancy surges by 2-4% in Feb'25

Hospitality industry experiences occupancy growth across key markets, with Mumbai recording highest occupancy at over 85%.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

ccording to the monthly industry update by HVS Anarock for February 2025, the Indian hotel sector continued its strong momentum, with occupancy rising by 2-4 percentage points (pp) compared to the corresponding month last year.

ARR trends across key Indian markets (Y-o-Y growth: February 2025)





New Delhi and Mumbai lead average room rate in India, driven by the strong demand of corporate, MICE and live events

It witnessed continued occupancy growth across most major Indian hotel markets, with Chandigarh, Jaipur, Bengaluru and Chennai leading the year-on-year (y-o-y) gains. In metro markets like Mumbai, the occupancy rate continued to cross over 85 per cent, registering the highest occupancy in the country, closely followed by New Delhi with

Occupancy trends across key Indian markets (Y-o-Y growth: February 2025)



83-85 per cent. Jaipur recorded the highest annual growth of over 5 pp, followed by Bengaluru and Chandigarh. Ahmedabad was the only market to experience a marginal decline in occupancy.

The nationwide average room rates (ARR) of hotels surged by 14-16 per cent y-o-y, crossing the ₹10,000 mark, highlighting the sector's strong pricing power.

As a result, RevPAR saw a notable 19-21 per cent y-o-y increase. New Delhi and Mumbai commanded the highest average rate in the country, exceeding ₹15,000, supported by the strong corporate, MICE and live events demand. Bengaluru recorded the highest ARR Growth (37-39 per cent), followed by New Delhi (25-27 per cent) and Gurugram (22-24 per cent). In contrast, Goa was the only market to witness a 5-7 per cent decline in ARR.

AAHAR 2025 records 77%

increase in overseas exhibitors

AAHAR 2025 continues to serve as premier platform pioneering innovation and excellence, attracting over 1562 exhibitors and 68,000 visitors from across globe.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

o say AAHAR 2025 was a centre of attraction for all hospitality businesses would be an understatement. The 39th edition of the international food and hospitality fair, organised by the India Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO) alongside the Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI), held from 4 to 8 March 2025 at the iconic Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, was a grand success with fruitful business prospects and opportunities for exhibitors and visitors.

ITPO once again raised the bar this year, housing over



1562 exhibitors. The number of participants from overseas has seen a 77.5 per cent increase over the years -80 in 2024 and 142 in 2025. The event witnessed participation of 23 countries, including the UK, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Spain and Thailand.



142 exhibitors from 23 countries participated the international food and hospitality fair, showcasing latest innovations



The gross exhibition area was 112000 sqm in 2025 compared to 110000 sqm in 2024. Various trade seminars were conducted during the expo by the Society of Indian bakers, All India Food Processors Association (AIFPA) and All India Bread **Manufacturers Association**

New developments

A wine pavilion, Madhu Mandapam, in collaboration with the Forum of Indian Food Importers (FIFI), was rolled out for the first time this year. Additionally, the Council of Indian Food Trade (CIFT) also made its debut participation, representing more than 20 exhibitors as a new industry association.

Approximately 68,000 business visitors attended the fair from all corners of the globe, highlighting the event's wide-reaching appeal and opportunities for businesses.

Careers with purpose in demand

Emphasising academic reform, experts at PATA urge to do away with outdated practices to steer industry evolving needs.

WORDS BY **DEVIKA JEET**

he hospitality industry in India is standing at the threshold of a major transformation. As new technologies reshape operations and post-pandemic values redefine employee expectations, the traditional playbook for talent development is no longer sufficient.

A recent high-level panel discussion at the PATA Annual programmes across the world are witnessing a sharp drop in admissions because we have failed to evolve." Graduates today seek careers with purpose, growth and stability. Besides, factors such as poor worklife balance, seasonal employment and stagnant salaries discourage students from pursuing careers in hospitality. It becomes clear why many are opting out.





The global hospitality industry is experiencing a talent crisis, not due to a shortage of job but because of a lack of interest

Summit 2025, held in İstanbul, Türkiye, brought together leading educators, hotel executives and policy experts to explore a vital question, 'What will it take to build a hospitality workforce that thrives in the face of disruption?' The answers were not just critique but a blueprint for change.

Cracks in the current system

The global hospitality industry is experiencing a talent crisis, not due to a shortage of job but because of a lack of interest. As Chris Bottrill, Associate VP, Capilano University, pointed out, "Hospitality

Reform traditional practices

Simon Llovd, Dean, Hospitality Management and Business Administration, Dusit Thani College, challenged the outdated notion of hospitality as merely a service-oriented sector. "We are not building an army of workers; we are developing a new generation of thinkers, creators and leaders," he said. Entry-level hotel jobs still follow rigid hierarchies, such as front desk, housekeeping, F&B roles, while overlooking broader career pathways in guest experience design, brand storytelling, sustainability operations or digital concierge systems.

Redesign education system

One of the strongest themes that emerged during the discussion was the need for academic reform. Hospitality education often remains static with an overly focused on SOPs and legacy practices while global expectations shift rapidly. Bottrill emphasised the need for interdisciplinary learning. "Our students must understand climate risk, artificial intelligence, UX design and behavioural psychology and not just how to fold napkins or pour wine," he said. This will create an opportunity for schools to build partnerships with the industry.





Retention over recruitment

As Olivier Berrivin, VP-APAC, BWH Hotels, put it, "We cannot afford to keep losing good people to burnout or boredom. Retention is more strategic than recruitment today." The hotel sector, known for its massive workforce and high attrition rates, must start investing in culture, mentorship, wellness and internal mobility. BWH is already experimenting with short-term certifications, internal gig economy models and recogbition-driven pregression to keep employees engaged. "It is not about climbing the ladder anymore. It is about designing meaningful journeys," said Berrivin.

Rebranding hospitality

The most pressing concern raised during the discussion was how hospitality is perceived particularly among Gen Z. Once considered aspirational, hotel jobs today often rank low on preference lists. That perception won't shift unless the industry tells better stories-from telling stories of bellboys who became GMs, chefs who launched their own food ventures or front desk agents who now lead guest experience design at luxury chains.

Call to action

If the Indian hospitality industry is to meet the new needs and expectations of a rapidly changing world, it must start with its people. The workforce is not a cost centre, it is a value driver. And building the future workforce of the hospitality industry means focusing not just on skills but on aspirations, identity and purpose of the people.

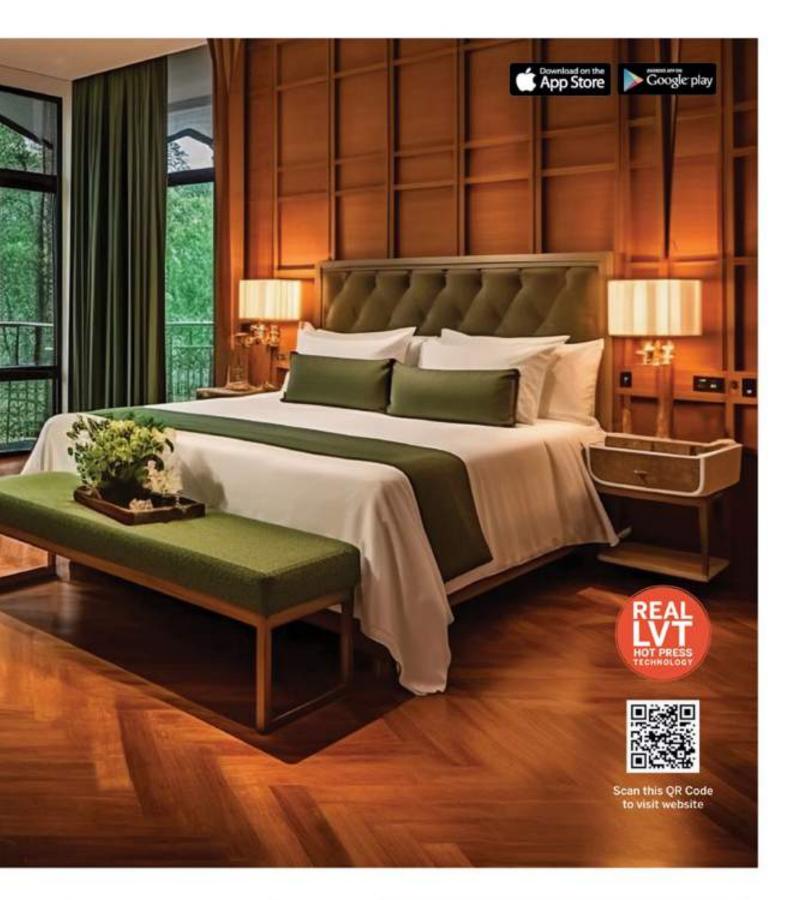


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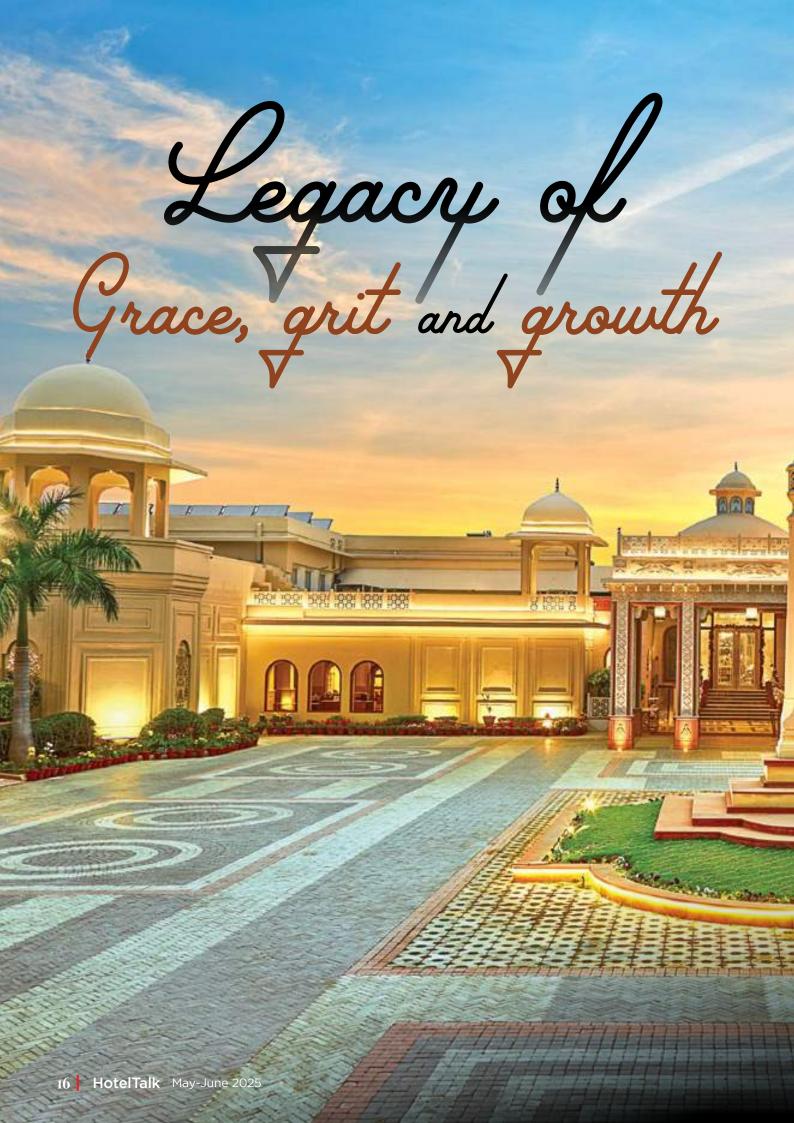
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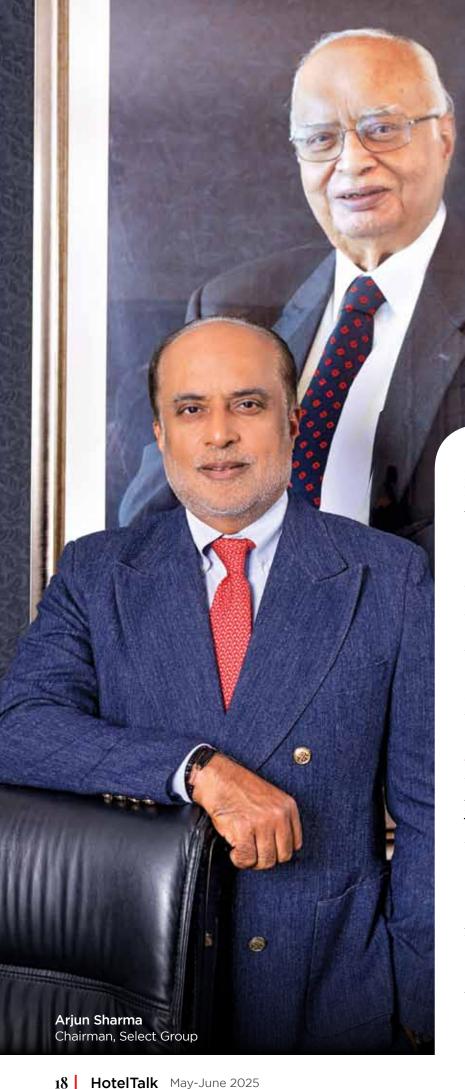


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Q: As Heritage Village Resorts & Spa, Manesar celebrates its 30th anniversary, how would you describe this moment?

A: It is truly emotional moment for the brand and all of us. This is not just the anniversary of a resort—it is the celebration of a vision, a dream and an unwavering commitment. The journey of Heritage Village Resort, Manesar, began with the passion of my father, Late Inder Sharma, a man whose life was defined by travel and hospitality and never-ending grace. His dedication and belief in his son, built the soul of this property.

A 25-year-old went to his father with this dream and vision. The father trusted the instinct and the father and son worked hard in tandem to build it—a perfect story!

Q: Every legacy has its share of trials. What were some early challenges you faced during this journey?

A: Oh, there have been a plenty. To begin with, just after opening in March, we faced a harsh monsoon and discovered that the contractor's waterproofing was not up to the mark. As a result, we had to temporarily shut down the entire resort completely just four months after opening. It remained closed for nearly six months. That was a major blow to the business. Another hurdle we faced was the extremely high interest rates from the Tourism Finance Corporation of India—around 21-22 per cent in those days. We worked only for them. And let's not forget the challenge of retaining manpower-back then, Manesar felt like in the middle of nowhere. But we never gave up on our dream and nurtured with passion. Perseverance and a deep belief in the purpose kept us going.



"We have proudly built our journey as an independent brand, giving us the freedom to craft unique, meaningful experiences."





Q: What was your original market positioning and how has it evolved over the years?

A: We initially focused on inbound travellers, positioning the resort as a relaxing stop on the Golden Triangle circuit. Over time, we pivoted to transform that triangle into a "Golden Square," creating an immersive experience that went beyond tourism into leisure, weddings and corporate stays.

We expanded in 2008, adding 63 rooms, eight suites and even a honeymoon suite with a private pool. Our conference facilities were upgraded to host over 200 delegates, along with breakout rooms, lush lawns and multiple gardens capable of hosting up to 1,000 guests.

The result? A resort that now thrives as a destination for MICE, weddings, wellness retreats, weekend getaways and a destination still for the inbound travellers on their return from Jaipur.

Q: Sustainability seems deeply rooted in your journey. Can you elaborate?

A: Sustainability has never been an afterthought-it's been part of our DNA since day one. We used the rat-trap bond wall system, reducing brick consumption by onethird and improving insulation. Much of our original woodwork was crafted from reclaimed wood, saving around 200 trees. We adopted rainwater harvesting, recycled discharged water for irrigation and embraced CFL lighting and recycled paper early on.

This ethos has been supported passionately by our team, who translates sustainability from a concept into daily practice.

O: Let's talk about the Heritage Village Resort & Spa Goa-it was ahead of its time, was it not?

A: Very much so. On August 14, 1997, we launched India's first all-inclusive resort in Goa and still only a model designed specifically for charter tourism. Guests could pay once and enjoy everything—accommodation, meals, drinks and entertainment.

It was a bold concept back then, but it worked brilliantly. We still offer that as an option to all our guests, 25 years down the line.

Q: How did Heritage weather the storm of COVID-19?

A: The pandemic was our industry's greatest test. No revenue. No movement. But we held on to our values. Not a single job was lost. Not one salary was cut. It was hard but the right thing to do. We quietly marked our 25th anniversary with a Satsang for Guruji, which reminded us of our resilience and faith during trying times.



We are working on a new hotel in Goa and Jaipur as part of Select Hotels."



Q: How did the post-COVID-19 revival take shape?

A: The revival marked a turning point—a wave of transformation that redefined the property for a new era. Fresh vision, strong leadership led by Shekhar Sawant, and a collaborative spirit helped us rethink our spaces, refine our offerings and embrace a more wellnessoriented, experience-driven approach. From aesthetic transformation to personalised guest journeys, we emerged stronger, more relevant and deeply aligned with what today's traveller truly values.

Q: The Select Group has expanded its footprint well beyond resorts. What is the larger vision?

A: Absolutely, while hospitality remains a core part of our DNA, the larger vision has always been about building exceptional lifestyle experiences-whether through travel, retail or real estate. A recent key milestone in that journey has been the creation of Nexus Select Trust, India's first publicly listed shopping centre Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT), developed in partnership with Blackstone. This REIT comprises 18 world-class malls across 14





cities, totalling over 10.04 million square feet of retail space. It also includes commercial office assets and two premium hotels-Hyatt Regency Chandigarh and Oakwood Residence Whitefield Bangalore. Of course, the iconic Select Citywalk, which we built as a family and a partnership, is part of the REIT-this portfolio is expanding as we speak. Apart from that, we are also working on a new hotel in Goa and Jaipur as part of Select Hotels.

Q: Would you ever consider entering into a partnership venture with an international brand?

A: We have proudly and resolutely built our journey as an independent brand, and that independence has given us the freedom and flexibility to craft unique, exquisite, meaningful experiences for our guests. It's a space that we value deeply. That said, we are not averse to the idea of exploring a soft franchise model, provided it aligns with our ethos.

If a partnership adds genuine value, helps us expand our capabilities, and enhances the guest experience without diluting our core identity, we are open to it. It's about synergy—not scale for the sake of scale, but thoughtful growth that resonates with who we are and what we stand for.

Q: A personal moment that stands out across this 30-year journey.

A: Without a doubt, the most cherished moment was having Guruii visit the resort and quietly sharing a cup of coffee with him. It was a moment of stillness, grace and profound blessing for us.

In a journey filled with a series of milestones that experience remains the most personal one. My roots are well grounded in travel and tourism-having started my professional journey with my father's company, SITA World Travel, and later bringing TUI into a joint venture through Le Passage to India, a business I proudly and passionately built.

From there, the journey evolved—leading to the creation of one of India's most iconic shopping destinations, Select Citywalk, along with my sister Neeraj Ghei and partner **Yograj Arora**, and eventually as said before, merging it into India's first shopping centre REIT in partnership with Blackstone. All of this has truly been by his grace.

O: Finally, how would you describe Heritage Village Resorts in one line?

A: A celebration of Indian warmth, legacy and innovation—crafted with profound love and sustained by purpose.



Suman Billa, Director General, Ministry of Tourism; Dr. Jyotsna Suri, Chairperson & Managing Director, The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group; Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Minister of Tourism, Government of India; K B Kachru, Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group; and Deep Kalra, Founder & Chairman, MakeMyTrip, at the inauguration of Tourism Sustainability Conclave 2025 by MakeMyTrip Foundation.

Sustainability

Powering economy

From grassroots to global economy, **Deep Kalra** outlines holistic vision to position India as world leader in sustainable tourism.

WORDS BY JANICE ALYOSIUS

ommeding the tourism and hospitality sector for its remarkable resilience and immense potential, **Deep Kalra**, Founder and Chairman, MakeMyTrip and Chairman, World Travel & Tourism Council, India Initiative (WTTCII), has laid out a visionary roadmap for India to lead sustainable tourism globally. Speaking at India Travel

& Tourism Sustainability Conclave 2025, hosted by MakeMyTrip Foundation and WTTCII, Kalra emphasised that sustainable tourism lies at the intersection of environment, culture and economy.

Call to action

Kalra underscored a powerful shift to sustainable travel, where it is no longer a niche but a major economic force. He shared that globally, the sustainable tourism market has surged from US\$2.73 trillion in 2022 to US\$3.12 trillion in 2023, and it is expected to reach US\$11.39 trillion in the next decade (2034). While these numbers are impressive globally, he cautioned that India still has a long way to go.

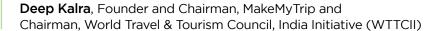
For India, this global trend holds significant potential. Kalra said that India's diverse cultural, natural and spiritual heritage makes it a prime candidate to lead the charge in sustainable tourism. "The key is localised sustainability, an approach that incorporates local communities, conservation efforts and travellers' needs," he noted.

Market trends and statistics

As per MakeMyTrip's new research, 87 per cent of Indian travellers are willing to adopt eco-conscious habits and 69 per cent of Indian travellers are ready to choose destinations that actively promote responsible travel. Kalra pointed out that these statistics



Sustainable tourism lies at the intersection of environment, culture and economy."





are a powerful signal that consumers are ready for change, noting, "The market is ready, and travellers are increasingly aligning their travel decisions with their values." However, the challenge now is for industry to provide the products and services that meet this demand.

City-led sustainable practices

A significant part of Kalra's message was focused on city-led initiatives. He stressed that urban centres need to play a crucial role in promoting

sustainability. According to Kalra, cities are at the crossroads of tourism and sustainability, serving as the primary entry points for most travellers. He further adds that these cities house a vast number of local businesses and communities, which need to go sustainable in every way.

"Sustainability must begin at the grassroots level. It is about getting local communities involved, driving eco-conscious initiatives and creating awareness about the importance of sustainable tourism," Kalra said.

Push for responsible travel

India's tourism industry is embracing sustainability—at both the policy and grassroots levels. Initiatives such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and eco-certifications for hotels and transport services are gaining traction. Kalra stated, "It is not about waiting for the perfect moment. The time to act is now. We need to create a movement for responsible travel that incorporates local participation, policy support and global partnerships." HT





GSTC Criteria offers comprehensive framework that aligns seamlessly with the United Nations Sustainable **Development Goals.**

WORDS BY JANICE ALYOSIUS

ndia may have a sustainable tourism framework in place, but it no longer aligns with today's global standards. "Since tourism is a state subject, states are expected to adopt and implement sustainability guidelines. But they often seek guidance from the Union Ministry of Tourism for direction," said CB Ramkumar, Vice Chair, Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC).

Talking about the relevance of Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India (STCI) in current changing times, he said, "The STCI document still exists, but it is outdated. The GSTC criteria have undergone revisions since their launch, but India's framework has not kept pace. Though we are in 2025, we still do not have a proper framework."

Subha Bhaskar, COO, QualStar, underscored the pivotal role of the GSTC criteria in promoting hotel sustainability. As India's first certification body focused on hotel-specific sustainability standards, QualStar partners with UCSL, an internationally accredited GSTC organisation, to offer globally recognised sustainability certifications to hotels across India and South Asia.

The GSTC criteria is comprehensive, aligning closely with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). "What makes the criteria unique is their holistic approach; they span the full scope of the SDGs, ensuring every aspect of sustainability is addressed," she said.



Gujarat & Uttar Pradesh's tourism policies offer 50 per cent subsidies on GSTC certification fees for hotels





CB Ramkumar Vice Chair, Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)

GSTC functions as the accreditation body for sustainability certifications, having authorised 10 certification bodies worldwide, including UCSL. "This accreditation process eliminates conflict of interest, meaning the hotels earning GSTC certifications are committed to meeting stringent sustainability standards," she explained.

Sustainability roadmap

Indian states are ready to act on sustainable tourism, but they need a clear strategic roadmap. "States



Subha Bhaskar COO QualStar

are smart enough to implement the tourism policy, but they need proper guidelines and direction from the Centre," he said, noting, "Kerala has crafted its own sustainable path. Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh have included provisions in their tourism policies offering 50 per cent subsidies on GSTC certification fees for tour operators and hotels."

"State-level incentives play a crucial role in promoting sustainability. Maharashtra offers perks for any globally recognised certification, thereby broadening the scope for adoption. These incentives make certification process financially viable for hotels," Bhaskar said.

Global actions

Ramkumar pointed that Singapore has set a target for 60 per cent of its hotel room stock to achieve hotel sustainability certification under GSTC standards. He also added, "The EU is targeting Scope III emissions, urging tour operators, including TUI, Booking.com, Agoda and American Express Global Travel, to ensure the hotels they contract are third-party certified for sustainability."

Empowering hotels

GSTC certification helps hotels improve their environmental practices and comply with governmental sustainability reporting requirements, Bhaskar said. In India, Qualstar's partnership with UCSL allows local auditors to perform the certifications, thereby making the process affordable for hotels. "This local approach reduces the cost for hotels, and with the GSTC certification, they are also eligible for state government incentives," she said.

Double delight

Eyeing growing demand for luxury experiences, IHCL adds Claridges Collection to its brand portfolio and expands its premium offerings.

WORDS BY LIPLA NEGI

he more the merrier, said **Puneet Chhatwal**, Managing Director and CEO, IHCL, while announcing a strategic partnership with The Claridges brand. With the company's portfolio now swelling to 380 properties, the adage is not just proving true—it is defining IHCL's growth story and expansion plans.

In a strategic move, IHCL brought the Claridges Collection under its fold, preserving the brand's original identity and retaining its iconic logo. Citing the legacy of the brand, Chhatwal said, "Some brands are not built overnight. The vision behind the Claridges Collection is to benefit from the legacy of a property, which has existed since 1955."

For the Claridges brand, the partnership reinforced the support and expansive reach of a larger brand. **Suresh Nanda**, Promoter, Claridges Hotels, said, "This collaboration unites IHCL's renowned expertise as a global leader in world-class hospitality with Claridges' rich heritage and award-winning culinary offerings, ensuring guests enjoy an unparalleled experience." He added that this alliance will redefine industry benchmarks, showcasing the best of both partners.

The hotel has established a strong foothold in the capital's F&B space, recently winning five awards for its outstanding culinary offerings. "Being





Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director and CEO, IHCL and Suresh Nanda, Promoter, Claridges Hotels, at the press meet,



Construction of railways, airports and new destination developments have fuelled significant growth in hospitality sector in recent years



a smaller hotel allows us to offer a highly personalised experience. Guests leave saying, 'What a wonderful experience,' and they look forward to returning. That is our true positioning today in Delhi-a boutique, high-quality hospitality experience that stands out. We have already made significant investments over the past two years. If you walk through our rooms and restaurants today, you will see that we are offering something better than anything else in the city," Nanda further stated.

According to Chhatwal, several phenomenal initiatives, such as the construction of highways and railway stations, the expansion and doubling of airports, and the

development of new destinations, undertaken by the government in recent years have driven significant growth in the hospitality sector. In addition, the rising spending power of the growing middle class, coupled with an increasing desire to explore, has given the industry a much-needed shot in the arm. He said, "With India's growing economic prominence, the income pyramid is witnessing a structural shift and the demand for luxury products and services is at an all-time high, led by significant expansion of households in the high-net worth bracket. This presents a market opportunity to extend hospitality offerings in the luxury segment as consumers are seeking differentiated experiences."

However, Chhatwal also added that international marketing is equally crucial along with strengthening domestic market. "People abroad cannot simply imagine the scale of transformation happening in India; we need to showcase it. There is a strong need to promote India more aggressively through tourism trade shows and marketing efforts outside the country," he said. He firmly believes that global travellers will resonate with the bespoke and evolved experiences offered by the Claridges Collection. The portfolio will commence with The Claridges, New Delhi and will include the historic Connemera, Chennai and post a comprehensive renovation, Blue Diamond, Pune.



In exclusive conversation with HotelTALK, Saurabh Rai discusses how India's surging luxury market is driving Preferred Hotels & Resorts to expand its presence in the region.

WORDS BY LIPLA NEGI





A: The pace of pandemic recovery was such that India emerged as a standout performer in 2023 and beyond, and we are thrilled to have globally finished one of our best years yet. Our portfolio currently stands at about 600 hotels across 80 countries—with 80 hotels signed in 2024 alone. That means over 15 per cent of our portfolio was



Saurabh Rai **Executive Vice President** Preferred Hotels & Resorts South Asia, Middle East and Africa

added just last year, underscoring the strong momentum we are riding. Looking ahead, in 2025 our expectations are even more bolstered.

India has been a key market for us since 2002, and over the past 23 years, we have built a robust presence here, with 27 exceptional properties in our portfolio. A major highlight of 2024 was the initiation of strategic partnerships with prominent publicly listed independent hotel companies, including Aurika Hotels & Resorts (from the Lemon Tree Hotels group), Chalet Hotels and The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, which is in the process of going public. When companies with such rigorous financial standards and governance frameworks choose to align with Preferred Hotels & Resorts as their global infrastructure partner, it is a strong vote of confidence in our model. Our 2025 growth strategy will build on this foundation with a mix of organic expansion through our existing partners, Aurika, Chalet and Leela, and new collaborations with independent brands. We are very confident that we will end up retaining the growth momentum of 2024 into 2025.

Q: We are seeing marquee hotels shift from hard brands to independent hotels. What does this trend say about the future of luxury hospitality, especially in India?

A: There is an ongoing industry conversation around the fluid movement between hard brands and independent hotel models. Globally,





We are confident that we will end up retaining the growth momentum of 2024 into 2025."

we have seen owners of marquee properties shift away from traditional big-brand affiliations to go independent, partnering with global infrastructure platforms like Preferred Hotels & Resorts and sometimes, the reverse also happens. There is no one-size-fits-all approach.

A compelling validation of the independent hotel model is the case of the Al Habtoor Group in Dubai. They de-flagged their property originally launched as the St. Regis Dubai, later aligned it with Hilton's LXR Collection, and ultimately joined our Legend Collection in October last year. Most recently, their second property—previously the Ritz-Carlton Budapest—transitioned to become the Al Habtoor Palace Budapest, reinforcing their commitment to the independent luxury space. Closer home, India's luxury market is on a highgrowth trajectory, evidenced by the rapid rise of brands like The Leela Hotels and Resorts, our esteemed partner. And it is not just us, many international luxury brands are now lining up to enter this dynamic market. With strong headroom for expansion over the next decade, India is clearly emerging as a key destination for luxury hospitality—with both domestic strength and global validation behind it.



A: At Preferred Hotels & Resorts, we have four distinct collections—Legend, LVX, Lifestyle and Preferred Residences, each with clearly defined and objective criteria. When we engage with a prospective hotel, whether the approach comes from them or us, we begin with aligning them to the right collection. From there, we look at service quality and guest experience, not dictating design or operations, but evaluating how the property delivers best-in-class service in its category.



For example, Legend, our ultra-luxury tier, competes with the world's top luxury brands, so the benchmarks are exceptionally high. We use a detailed framework of around 1,500 quality checkpoints covering service standards and guest programming. The essence is to ensure authentic alignment—we celebrate the individuality of each hotel while upholding the excellence our brand stands for.

Do you think making sustainability certifications mandatory can drive real, on-ground impact?

A: When it comes to sustainability certifications and government-backed programmes, we fully acknowledge that sustainability is a constantly evolving space—a growing sphere that truly takes a village to move forward. Across our brands, be it Beyond Green, Preferred Hotels & Resorts or under the larger umbrella of Preferred Travel Group, our Climate Action Plan reflects our role as an enabler, moderator and anchor of this conversation. We are deeply committed to keeping sustainability central to every stakeholder dialogue—with our partner hotels, customers, B2B collaborators, corporate bookers and travel management companies.

Our goal is to actively contribute and continue evolving our impact. As governments and economies introduce their own certifications and frameworks, we view it as a "blue ocean'—there is room for everyone.



What are some of the standout sustainability initiatives you are driving across your brands and hotel partners?

A: We have long believed in sustainability as a core value and have seen travel as a force for good before it became a mainstream conversation. I have been with the company for 18 years, and I clearly recall discussions as early as 2011–2013 about how we could spotlight sustainability more meaningfully within the travel and hospitality ecosystem. HT



Dusit's second coming

to India

In its second innings,
Dusit International places
its stakes on global brand
reputation to re-establish its
presence in Indian market.

WORDS BY LIPLA NEGI

omebacks are not mere chances or coincidences—they are strategic! For Bangkok-headquartered Dusit International, this return to the Indian market could not be more timely. "India is one of our most crucial markets in the Asian region. The demand for premium hospitality has grown exponentially in recent years, extending even to tier II and III cities. This growth is driven by a large, young population

that is aspirational, experimental, experience-focused and increasingly luxury-conscious. Additionally, India is one of the strongest wedding markets in Asia," said **Siradej Donavanik**, Vice President, Global Development, Dusit International while speaking to HotelTALK.

For the third-generation hotelier and an ardent traveller himself Donavanik, fondly known as 'Champ,' the return holds both professional and personal significance. He said, "While it is true we have been absent from the Indian market for some time, our journey globally has been anything but quiet. I still vividly remember my first visit to India 16 years ago—it was also my first trip after joining the company. At that time, we had just 21 hotels. Today, we have grown to 60 hotels, and our footprint continues to expand. Beyond hospitality, our luxury real estate and villa offerings have also seen significant growth, now



stepped away from India for a while, but our brand's presence has only strengthened worldwide. And now, we see this moment as an incredible launchpad to re-enter the vibrant Indian market with renewed energy and ambition."

Setting new standards of luxury in untapped regions across the country sits at the heart of Dusit's expansion strategy in India. In the post-COVID landscape, the hospitality

resurgence, with both homegrown or global brands announcing new hotel openings in rapid succession. In such a scenario, cutting through the competition could be quite an uphill task. But Deepika Arora, Head, India, Dusit International, sees it differently. At the helm of Dusit's India expansion, she brings a clear and confident vision to the table—one that blends the brand's global appeal with India's evolving

compete. We are here to stand out," she declared.

Penetrating emerging markets

The brand has touched the 800key mark across multiple strategic locations in India, aiming for 3000 rooms in the next three years. "The new signings include key business hubs such as Raipur, Bhiwadi and Kolkata, along with prominent leisure destination like Lonavala.

Outreach







Siradej Donavanik
Vice President, Global Development, Dusit International

We have also signed a new project in Sakleshpur, near Bengaluru," Arora shared. Additionally, the brand is venturing into scenic boutique markets with two properties signed in Kasol and Manali under the Dusit Collection brand. "We have already launched our first dusitD2 in Fagu, near Shimla. It was chosen carefully for its potential in the destination wedding segment. The property can host weddings of up to 400-500 guests and addresses a gap in the banquet space in that region," she further explained.

Moving forward, the hotel chain wants to strongly establish Dusit Princess in India's tier II and III cities. "Founded by my grandmother, Dusit Princess is midscale brand that brings affordable luxury to emerging cities. We have signed a mixed-use development near Hyderabad, in Bagepalli, which includes a hotel and villas under the Dusit Princess brand.



To excel in the market, Dusit will blend its global appeal with the evolving dynamics of the Indian market

Another upcoming location includes Coorg," Donavanik informed.

As an observant traveller, Donavanik believes that luxury experiences are undergoing a profound redefinition and reimagination. Today, the most sought-after destinations are often the untapped, unexplored gems. For him, India is home to an abundance of such distinctive, hidden locations. The realisation has become the driving force behind the brand's second-run, anchored by a thoughtfully recalibrated approach. He explained, "Even in our home market of Thailand, some of the properties commanding the highest room rates are located in remote, offbeat destinations—deep in the jungle or nestled in the northern mountains. These are luxury experiences that travellers are seeking today. Similarly, India has immense untapped potential in this segment, with many such unique destinations still waiting to be discovered. We have restructured our



brand architecture to offer tailored experiences in distinctive locations across the country."

Embracing local approach

According to Donavanik, India has its own uniqueness and ways of operating, therefore, a localised approach would be more suited. The first phase of this re-entry will be a litmus test for more investment in future. "Just because something has worked well for us in Southeast Asia does not mean it can be replicated here. As we build stronger networks, we are committed to investing more resources into the country," he said. Drawing similarity between the guest-centric cultures of India and Thailand, Donavanik is confident that Dusit has an edge in understanding client needs and expectations. "Indian weddings, especially in resort destinations, are a big part of what we do. We have a dedicated wedding sales specialist based at our headquarters whose sole focus is coordinating wedding-related requirements across different markets," he stated.

Agreeing with the sentiment, Arora asserted, "We seamlessly integrate wellness, hospitality and culinary experiences to create a complete and unforgettable wedding journey."

He expressed hope for their newest brand ASAI hotels in India. Launched in 2020, right in the middle of the pandemic, the brand

has been a lesson about resilience. "Many iterations later, here we are with three properties-two in Bangkok and one in Kyoto, Japanand six more in the pipeline across Southeast Asia," he shared. Built on the 'Live local' philosophy, ASAI has been able to strike a chord with the younger generation of travellers.





To maximise conversion rates. **Parvinder Dhillon** says connected tech is crucial to build unified data source and deliver personalised experiences.

he hospitality industry has embraced digital transformation-yet hotel websites often remain stuck in the past. For many hotels, a website is still treated like a glossy digital brochure. It looks great, loads quickly and maybe even ranks well on the Google rating index.

But does it convert? Does it understand your guest's intent? Does it help you build lasting relationships with your audience? The honest answer, in most cases, is no.

Disconnect: Booking struggle

With increasing dependence on online travel agencies (OTAs) and the looming sunset of third-party cookies, hotels are at a critical juncture, where they can either take control of their digital ecosystems or fall further behind.

What typically happens is—a potential guest lands on your website and explores room options, maybe even checks out your dining page. Then, they click 'Book Now'-and suddenly, they are redirected to a third-party booking engine.

At that moment, the hotel loses visibility. The hotel is not able to keep track of customer engagement and get insights into which room category caught their eye, whether they were comparing rate plans and if they almost booked but dropped off at the last second.

This broken journey leads to many setbacks, such as missed conversions, poor data and zero personalisation, which eventually obstructs a seamless guest experience. Further on, without a unified data trail, remarketing becomes a big guesswork.

New-age hotel website

Modern hotel websites need to go beyond design. They must focus on the following aspects:

- Capture user behaviour patterns in real-time
- Personalise the experience based on user journey
- Integrate booking flows directly, without redirects
- Offer loyalty-based dynamic pricing or member-only perks
- Alert internal teams when highintent users are browsing Think of it as turning your

website into a digital concierge—one that anticipates, understands and responds to user needs.



With third-party cookies being phased out, first-party data is the new gold in the hotel business. Across the globe, hotels that build systems to capture, analyse and act on their own guest data will lead the next wave of digital excellence in



Parvinder Dhillon Founder, CIN Universe



When websites, booking engines, loyalty systems and analytics work in harmony, hotels gain a 360° view of their guests."

the world. When websites, booking engines, loyalty systems and analytics work in harmony, hotels gain a 360° view of their guests—from discovery to booking and even post-stay engagement and get a real time data.

Fire up revenue engine

This, however, is not just about having more tech. It is about having smarter, more connected tech

that is purpose-built. It is about tech that makes every click count, every visit valuable and every guest remembered. In today's landscape, a hotel's website should not just be a digital presence. It should be its most powerful revenue engine.

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







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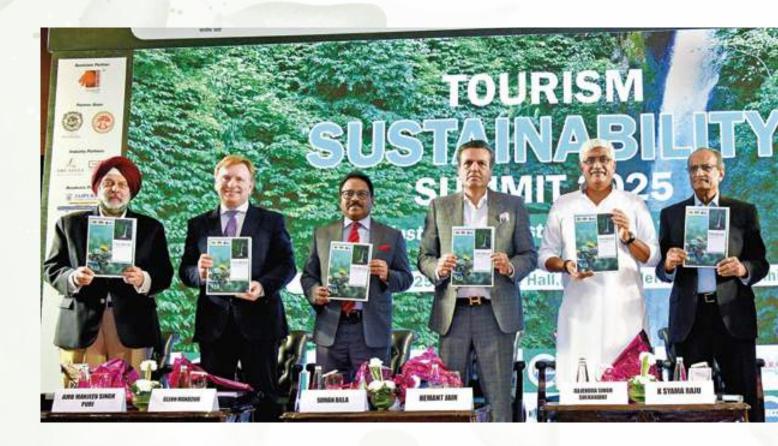
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Act now: Green transition

Beyond economic activity, 2nd Tourism Sustainability Summit called for concerted action towards building more inclusive future.

WORDS BY LIPLA NEGI



he second edition of 'Tourism Sustainability Summit 2025' brought together global hospitality leaders, policymakers and key stakeholders in New Delhi, reinforcing sustainability in tourism as a key driver of long-term economic growth. A collaborative effort by FHRAI, PHDCCI and HRANI, the summit was supported by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, with Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat joining as partner states.

The event featured four insightful panel discussions-Reimagining Sustainability, Leveraging Technology for Greener Travel and Sustainable Tourism as a Policy Imperative. The summit also marked the inauguration of a knowledge

report by PHDCCI and FHRAI, further strengthening the discourse on responsible and resilient tourism.

Collective responsibility

Urging the industry to act now, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Minister of Tourism, Government of India, said, "The challenge of climate change is now knocking on our doors as rainfall patterns are changing, glaciers are shrinking and glacier lakes are increasing. Sustainability is everybody's business. It is now or never kind of situation for all of us." Suman Billa (IAS), Additional



Climate change and sustainability are everybody's business."



Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Minister of Tourism, Government of India







emphasised, "Tourism is not just an economic driver but also a catalyst for social change."

Hemant Jain, President, PHDCCI, said, "Sustainability is no longer a choice or an option. Initiatives like this towards sustainability will further strengthen India's position in this sector."

To achieve India's path to net zero by 2070, Amb Mr Manjeev Singh

498 state protected monuments, 290 ASI protected monuments and 14 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, establishing it as a significant historical and cultural destination."

Glenn Mandziuk, CEO, World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance (UK), a special guest and speaker, spoke on the lines of sustainable tourism as a policy imperative. He said, "There must be legislative



Legislative changes, community interest, and employee welfare go hand-in-hand."



Glenn Mandziuk, CEO, World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance (UK)

Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, emphasised the need to design tourism growth in a mindful manner. He said, "Tourism should not be viewed merely as an economic activity but as a shared responsibility. There is a need to rethink the approach by building resilient, inclusive and future-ready infrastructure." He further shared that the Ministry of Tourism has launched sustainability criteria under "Travel for LiFE," which promotes a community of green travellers.

Building resilient businesses

In his opening speech, K Svama Raju, President, FHRAI, underlined the importance of sustainability in tourism and the contributions made by the industry alliance. He

Puri, Chair, India-Nepal Centre, PHDCCI & Distinguished Fellow, TERI, urged everyone to internalise sustainability in their organisations. "Our lifestyle in India has always been aligned with sustainability. Everyone must act and work towards climate-proofing our businesses and building resilience."

Making big strides

Mainstreaming sustainability as state's policies and roadmap for development, Sheo Shekhar Shukla (IAS), Principal Secretary (Tourism) and Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, Government of Madhya Pradesh, shared, "Madhya Pradesh has a responsible tourism vertical within its state department. It is home to

changes, community interest, consumer demand and employee welfare. Enabling every hotel to operate responsibly and grow sustainably, Sustainable Hospitality Alliance brings together engaged hospitality companies and the wider hospitality value chain, along with strategic partners, to address key challenges affecting the planet, people and places around the world."

Hospitality takes the lead

Surendra Kumar Jaiswal, President, HRANI and Uttar Pradesh's Hotel and Restaurant Association and Vice President, FHRAI, said, "We are urging the government to recognise our industry's true position as one of the most sustainable sectors."



Boosting market reach, AAHAR 2025, exclusive platform for businesses, showcases latest products catering to industry needs.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

Kamal M Shah Partner King Metal Works



Balaji Giri Manager, Food Business Unit Testo India



We are the top manufacturers of high-quality stainless steel, AAHAR exhibition has been the must-attend event on our annual calendar for the past 12 to 13 years, providing many networking opportunities. In the kitchen, chefs demand products and tools that enhance ease and comfort while working. Our non-stick pans with antislip handles are in demand. The steel finish is resistant to scratches and gives a satin finish look. In addition, our eco-friendly products are also in high demand. The product's quality and practicality come first for us as we aim to innovate products to make the kitchen space more efficient and stress-free.

Testo is a trusted name in the food industry, known for its reliability in testing and measuring instruments. We offer a wide range of solutions—from digital thermometers to cloud-based and digital food safety systems-helping restaurants and retailers maintain the highest food quality standards. One of our most popular products, the Testo-270, ensures food safety while optimising oil usage, leading to significant cost savings. AAHAR as an event provides an excellent platform for us to connect with new customers, industry colleagues and key stakeholders in the sector. So far, our experience has been highly rewarding, turning our discussions into valuable business deals.

PA Prabhu Managing Director **Revac Systems** (Chefmate)



For the past 25 years, we have been manufacturing advanced kitchen ventilation systems, pioneering innovative solutions in India. Our state-of-the-art hoods, including UV hoods, water-wash hoods and mist hoods, are non-conventional in design. These products are 100 per cent Indian-engineered, with no foreign collaboration, ensuring superior quality. Our front cooking station has received rave reviews from chefs, thanks to its four-level filtration system that effectively treats fumes, making it an ideal choice for front-of-house areas such as breakfast stations. As a consultant-driven business, AAHAR has immense significance for us, providing a valuable platform to engage with brand owners and hotel operators.

Karan Khanna Director American Bedding (Eclipse)



Eclipse is a US-based company known for maintaining high mattress standards in the US market-standards that were previously unavailable in India. We brought this quality to India and established our own manufacturing unit. Today, we have launched five new products, redefining the hospitality segment with innovative sleep solutions. Eclipse has about 19 patents and we are currently using 12 in India. AAHAR plays a vital role in networking and business expansion, particularly in penetrating tier I and tier II markets. It provides a perfect opportunity to connect with industry stakeholders, introduce our latest innovations and allow industry professionals to experience our products firsthand.

Gauray Mittal CEO and Director Antarctica Equipment



We offer a comprehensive range of gelatomaking machines, including pasteurisers, batch freezers, emulsifiers, etc. To support the gelatomaking process, we also provide blast freezers, refrigeration units and storage solutions. With a pan-India presence, our factory in IMT Manesar houses an experience centre, allowing customers to explore our innovations firsthand. We have observed a growing interest in our products from emerging markets, including Raipur, Bhubaneswar and Pondicherry. Our machines are regarded for their energy efficiency, space optimisation and versatility. Events like AAHAR help in keeping both customers and industry players informed about the latest advancements.

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



Our primary focus at the AAHAR 2025 exhibition was to showcase two of our latest innovations. The first was our compact combi oven, a one-of-a-kind 10-tray model with a built-in boiler, designed as a tabletop series. It addresses the growing need for space-efficient kitchen solutions. The second product was our smart dishwashing series, which is IoT-enabled. Its key feature is that it can be preheated online via a web-based application. Connected to the cloud, the product allows users to effectively monitor overall consumption and washing cycles in real time. AAHAR as an event has been evolving each year, providing various opportunities to showcase the latest products to a wider audience.

Vijay Pawar Director, Key Accounts Alto Shaam



We have supplied more than 3000 units of our food holding machines to Vande Bharat Express. Our food holding machines ensure to provide synchronised meal services. The highlight of our product is that the entire meal can be pre-plated and placed in a holding machine. It allows you to keep the meal fresh and ready to be served all at once. Currently, holding food at the right temperature is a major challenge in the industry. Our products provide innovative solutions that help address this issue, ensuring a seamless dining experience. Besides, our combi oven allows users to set three different temperatures and timers and cook multiple items simultaneously. Thus, it is one of the best solutions for meal management.

Rupesh Srivastava CFO Therapedic India



We introduced TheraWrap Hybrid, a premium mattress, featuring three-zone pocket layers combined with memory foam. Designed for luxury hospitality, this product is already being supplied to esteemed hotel chains such as Ananta Group and Mayfair Group. In addition to our standard offerings, we specialise in customised solutions tailored to specific needs of premium and luxury hotel brands. AAHAR has proven to be the most significant and engaging platform for companies targeting the hospitality industry in the Indian subcontinent. We have not only expanded our presence in India but also gained clients from Nepal and Bhutan. Some of our major partnerships have been established through AAHAR event.

Mohit Sharma Founder Romio Technologies



Romio Technologies has been revolutionising the industry for over 15 years by automating billing processes and providing cutting-edge digital display solutions. Our digital displays cater to both indoor and outdoor spaces. These displays are convenient for compact retail outlets like quick service restaurants or expansive resort properties. These solutions add a significant value to large properties and resorts, enhancing guest engagement. With versatile placement options, our displays have become a popular choice for banquet halls, clubs and hotels. They can be centrally managed through an integrated app for seamless content control. Like every year, AAHAR 2025 provided an engaging platform to reach our customers.

Jacob George **CEO** Washmatic India



We are a one-stop shop for all dishwashing and ware-washing solutions. All of our products are made in India. In terms of quality and efficiency, our machines are designed as per international standards. Our products are sustainability-focussed innovations, which enable to save 70 per cent of the water used in cleaning. We are registered with e-waste recycling and the chemicals used in our machine do not harm the environment. In addition, our washers save 70 to 80 per cent labour, and the cost of large machines is half the imported machines. AAHAR has always been a significant event for us in terms of growth and exposure, and also helping us in reaching the right hospitality brands.

Shrenik Gada Partner Zanuff Industries LLP



Zanuff Industries manufactures premium quality gasoline pans, chafing dishes and cooking utensils. This year we have launched a unique product in gasoline pans, which is made of pure copper keeping in mind the good old way of cooking. The premium utensil can be used in combi ovens as well. The new launch gives an extremely unique flavour profile. This year, we have also started a new range in the EN trays that are made of aluminium for baking purposes. We also have stainless steel base trays for steaming. All our products are made from stainless steel. We have new exciting products lined up. AAHAR has always been great place for us. It is a great place to meet potential and regular clients, offering us regular business.

Sohani Sachdeva Director, Marketing **HAKS**



At AAHAR 2025, we presented our live teppanyaki station. We offered a live personal dining experience where you would see no exhaust hood. The teppanyaki plate comes with a self-suction system. Within the same teppanyaki plate, you get a vegetarian and nonvegetarian station. To enhance your property, you must incorporate this new concept of live cooking. We also presented a Japanese robata grill, an Argentinian parrilla grill and a Brazilian churrasco grill, each of them having different mechanisms. Our focus on grills comes from the growing demand for quality food with enhanced textures. We received good responses to new launches. With teppanyaki tables or high-ends grills, we target luxury hotels.

Manoj Sharma Manager Sales Clay Craft India



At AAHAR 2025, our top showcase was the digital print HoReCa (hotel, restaurant and catering) crockery. Being microwave safe, it comes with a varied range of digital prints and can be customised creatively. It is a creative substitute for traditional prints. Additionally, we launched 10 to 12 new designs and four to five new shapes in our crockery range. The new digitally printed and fine porcelain crockery is ideal to use in the star category hotels and premium restaurants. We have a gold-plated crockery range made specially for premium top-end caterers and banquet halls. In efficiency parameters, we manufacture well-tested products that are the top choice of professionals in the HoReCa industry.

YK Mehta Chief Executive Mehta Furnishers



In operation since the last four decades in the industry, Mehta Furnishers manufactures and supplies wicker, cane and wooden products to hotels of all levels globally. Since our initial days, we have diversified into a wide range of housekeeping products. We have been providing world-class outdoor furniture and materials. We are coming up with more innovations as per the changing preferences of our customers in the hospitality world. Our products are highly efficient, sustainable and durable, supplying to prominent brands. In addition, we also offer refurbishing and maintenance services for our products. Interestingly, AAHAR has consistently improved, getting better every year and gaining global standards.

Sharon Mathew General Manager Cornell India



With 20 years of expertise in the industry, we craft premium front-of-house kitchen equipment. This year's showstopper was our exclusive induction, 'Invisible Induction Warmer,' which is made in India, specially crafted for the hospitality industry to improve aesthetics at serving counters. Next was the innovative Bain-Marie, offering both water and air heating solutions. Our third product was the seamless countertop, which looks like a regular table but the unique aspect of this product is when you switch it on, ice forms on the top. In case of a buffet counter, this product can serve as a serving counter. This was our third year at AAHAR, and being relatively young here, it gave us the best reach in the market.

Rohan Vasa Director Sales-South Asia Wyntronix Innovations, India



We operate across major Indian cities and have expanded globally, reaching Malaysia, Nepal, Bangladesh, the Maldives and the Middle East. This year, our focus was on providing sustainable and energy-efficient solutions for branded hotels, helping them achieve LEED certification. Our standout innovation was an eco-friendly lock that features a wooden card mode. Made from bamboo, the card is free from Poly Vinyl Chloride (PVC) or plastic and selfdissolving, blending security measures with sustainability. We are different from others offering products that are innovative in terms of finish and technology. Every other player in the market is changing their products but we are upscaling the products.

Atul Pandey Director Aerocide Herbal (Gralit India Biotech)



We stepped into the fragrance industry with a bold innovation, the Air Sanitizer, which helped us in establishing our brand identity. It was oneof-its-kind for the Indian and global markets. But we upgraded the product by adding fragrances following the clients' suggestions, neutralising its subtle medicinal smell. Today, we offer over 150 natural and cost-effective fragrances. We proudly partner with over 500 premium clients—from luxury hotels to airports, malls and hospitals. A true game-changer in our product line is automatic scenting machines, which have grabbed the market's attention. We previously imported these machines from China but now we manufacture them in-house and have 13 different machines currently.

Kuljeet Singh Director Cleancare



We are the manufacturers of laundry equipment for the hospitality sector as well as the health sector. We procure the best-suited inventory of raw materials and utilise cuttingedge manufacturing technology to develop quality products. Our core concerns are costs, performance and design. Therefore, we focus on giving the best products in an economical way. The accessibility and the quality of our products are the key attributes that have helped us earn the loyalty of our customers. A few of the major brands that we have served include Le Meridien, Radisson, Marrriott and Sarovar Hotels & Resorts. AAHAR 2025 was a great platform to showcase our products and reach a wider audience.



Robust tech infra

crucial for hotels

Highlighting tech gap in India hospitality, Marco Baurdoux and Shveta Sharma aver to empower tech ecosystem to bolster hotel revenue.

WORDS BY HAZEL JAIN

o deepen the company's foothold in India's dynamic hotel industry, Marco Baurdoux, CEO, Hotel-Spider, recently visited India to meet their partners. During his visit, he engaged in discussions covering various topics, including the future of Indian hospitality, revenue management, data analytics, automated check-ins and artificial intelligence (AI).

Speaking about the Indian market, he said, "All hotels look for reliable, functional software with top-notch customer care. The main difference I see in India is the tech disparity. There are a few hotel chains in India that are leading the game. On the other hand, there is a huge chunk of hotels that are not working with technology, preferring manpower over technology."



Marco Baurdoux **CEO** Hotel-Spider



Shveta Sharma COO, India Hotel-Spider



Baurdoux added, "AI comes with a few challenges, and data privacy is one of the main concerns. Where is all this data going, for instance? I believe there will be other touch points where AI could be effectively used, such as price automation, price suggestion, content creation and website creation."

Technology in the hospitality industry is evolving every year. Having a perfect tech ecosystem for hotels in India is becoming a necessity for every hotel category, said Shveta Sharma, COO, India, Hotel-Spider.

"We will soon launch a new payment solution for hoteliers that will help them convert their website into a commercial platform. With every hotelier today looking for direct bookings, they do not want to be dependent only on online travel agents (OTAs). To achieve this, they need the right website with the right tools from a booking engine to fintech layers," said Sharma.



very guest feedback, whether positive or negative, is a blessing in disguise. It is a treasure trove to gauge your strengths and flaws, providing hotels an opportunity to fine-tune their offerings that appeal to guests. According to a report by TripAdvisor, 2.81 per cent of people frequently or always read reviews before booking a hotel. Therefore, a positive image is crucial to win guests' trust, which is the linchpin to staying one step ahead of competitors.

The challenge is the credibility factor, where one fails to distinguish between genuine feedback and paid promotions. However, personal recommendations are not yet obsolete, even in an era of easily accessible online reviews. For example, who would you trust

more—suggestions coming from a friend or an unknown online user? Heartfelt and first-hand experiences shared by a friend will definitely have a greater impact. Therefore, prioritising both offline and online reviews can be a pragmatic approach for hotels to maximise their brand value.

Importance of guest feedback

Guest feedback plays a vital role in gathering valuable insights, refining service quality and meeting overall guest expectations. Valuing guest feedback can extensively help hotels to make a greater connection with customers. As **Mormukut Rathore**, Director, Narain Niwas Palace Hotel, Jaipur, shared, "Whether the feedback is a compliment or constructive





Mormukut Rathore Director Narain Niwas Palace Hotel, Jaipur



Dinesh Rai Crowne Plaza Kochi

criticism, it is key to take every review seriously—be it from Google, TripAdvisor, online travel agencies (OTGs), direct conversation or post-stay surveys. I advocate for carefully analysing recurring themes in feedback, from service quality and room comfort to dining and cleanliness."

Today, most hotel chains use Medallia as their feedback management system. This tool uses AI and real time analytics to collect, study and act on guest feedback, leading to better business results. Talking about the SaaS platform, Dinesh Rai, GM, Crowne Plaza Kochi, said, "The tool helps hotels understand guest demographics, identify trends and tailor services. It enables us to recognise a shift towards bleisure travel based on feedback and then adapted the facilities to cater to this niche."

Opportunity in bad reviews

Negative reviews are inevitable in any businesses. However, it also presents an opportunity to learn, rectify and improve your services, and turn your frustrated guest to a loyal supporter of your business. The best way to protect your business's reputation, Rai exhorted, "A prompt and professional response is key when dealing with a bad review. Our hotel



Negative reviews provide an opportunity to learn and rectify, turning your frustrated guest to a loyal supporter

prioritises actively listening to guest concerns and offering genuine solutions. We emphasise clear communication and follow-up to ensure guest satisfaction."

To ensure timely responses, active monitoring of reviews is crucial across platforms. Rathore said, "We analyse repeated complaints to identify patterns and implement corrective measures. By handling criticism constructively, we aim to rebuild guest trust and enhance service quality." He added that they



Hoteliers must emphasise both online reviews and word-ofmouth to understand overall guest expectations





Yogita Goval Co-founder Stotrak Hotels



Sanjay Sharma Director Organic Hideaways

acknowledge each criticism with empathy and take responsibility where it is necessary.

Crisis management strategies

Not all guest concerns become a crisis. But when an issue affects the safety of guests and staff, hotel's reputation, operations or finances, it becomes a crisis. Explaining how they deal when embroiled in a crisis, Rai said, "Hotels have a crisis management team to handle such situations that escalate beyond individual guest complaints. Hotels have protocols in place to deal with legal issues, safety concerns and online scams. In severe cases, the corporate office and legal team get involved."

The Marketing and PR team plays a key role in crisis circumstances. Rathore shared "In cases of misinformation or reputational risks, they manage the narrative through strategic messaging and media engagement."

Online vs offline: Credibility

There is a constant debate over the effectiveness of online reviews and word-of-mouth referrals. In today's digital age, online reviews have a wider reach of audience, however, credibility is questioned with no proper mechanism to detect fake reviews and manipulations. Sharing her views, Yogita Goyal, Co-founder, Stotrak Hotels, said, "For us, both online ratings and word-of-mouth play crucial roles in enhancing brand value, but the latter holds an emotional connection. While online ratings offer visibility, word-of-mouth builds trust organically, turning guests into brand ambassadors. A recommendation from a friend carries far more weight than an anonymous review."

Online reviews can be helpful but they are not always reliable as there are cases of fake reviews that can be misleading. "Wordof-mouth carries a level of credibility as these recommendations are based on real experiences. People trust firsthand experiences over unknown reviews. A combination of both can be the best strategy," said Sanjay Sharma, Director, Organic Hideaways.



Mumbai, a commemorative coffee table book celebrating over 70 alumni who have significantly shaped the hospitality industry.

Commenting on the F&B innovations in India, D'Cunha shared, "The Indian food & beverage industry is undergoing a transformative phase, driven by a blend of tradition and innovation. As global culinary trends evolve, India's F&B sector is not only adapting but also setting benchmarks in sustainability, health consciousness and technological integration."

Sidney emphasised the



Sidney D'Cunha Director, Food & Beverage and Culinary, Sofitel Mumbai BKC

Taking gastronomy to new heights

Sofitel BKC stands at forefront of culinary offerings through food festivals, global partnerships and sustainable practices, redefining innovation.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

he F&B segment is experiencing a revolution, blending heritage with innovation to set global standards in sustainability. Sofitel BKC exemplifies how creativity and responsibility can shape the future of gastronomy. Sidney D'Cunha,

Director, Food & Beverage and Culinary, Sofitel Mumbai BKC, has revitalised the culinary scene through innovative food festivals, collaborations with celebrated guest chefs and sustainable practices with AI support. He was recently honoured in The Legends of IHM

importance of blending traditional flavours with modern techniques, ensuring that while innovation drives the industry forward, the rich culinary heritage remains intact.

Hub for culinary adventure

Sofitel Mumbai BKC has established itself as a vibrant destination for international culinary exchanges, regularly hosting food pop-ups in collaboration with Sofitel properties across the world. These events bring various global flavours to Mumbai, offering guests an immersive gastronomic experience rooted in cultural celebration.

Continuing this tradition, the hotel is now preparing for a Korean Food Festival in partnership with Sofitel Seoul, bringing authentic Korean flavours and guest chefs to Mumbai. These cross-cultural culinary pop-ups reflect Sofitel's commitment to blending luxury hospitality with global gastronomy.

Firing up innovation

Energy-efficient, cost-effective and sustainability-driven, new-age tech solutions for hotel kitchens are revolutionising the F&B landscape.

WORDS BY SOMYA DEEP

mart kitchen equipment is no longer luxury addons but a necessity for the hospitality industry. Intelligent tools like artificial intelligence (AI), automation and machine learning, are proving to be a game-changing solution for hotels and restaurants. These technologies can effectively tackle operational challenges, such as resource wastage, energy loss and food storage, through predictive



analytics and real-time monitoring, thereby translating into hotel profitability.

Power savers

Innovation is paramount to enhance product quality, which can directly impact the operational efficiency of the hotel kitchens. Sharon Mathew, General Manager, Cornell India, said, "Innovation and product quality form the backbone of our commitment to the evolving hospitality industry. Every product we design is rooted in technological foresight, user-centricity and a deep understanding of the operational challenges faced by professionals on the ground." The company's manufacturing process adheres to rigorous quality checks ensuring durability and low maintenance costs.

In the same light, Gaurav Mittal, CEO & Director, Antarctica Equipment, emphasised the

Demand for energyefficient equipment is rising, driving longterm profitability





significance of product innovation and quality. Mittal also added, "We design temperaturecontrolled display systems that combine advanced refrigeration technology with ergonomic, space-optimised designs-tailored to meet modern operational challenges." Antarctica Equipment focuses on durability, energy efficiency and intuitive usability, enabling seamless day-to-day operations.

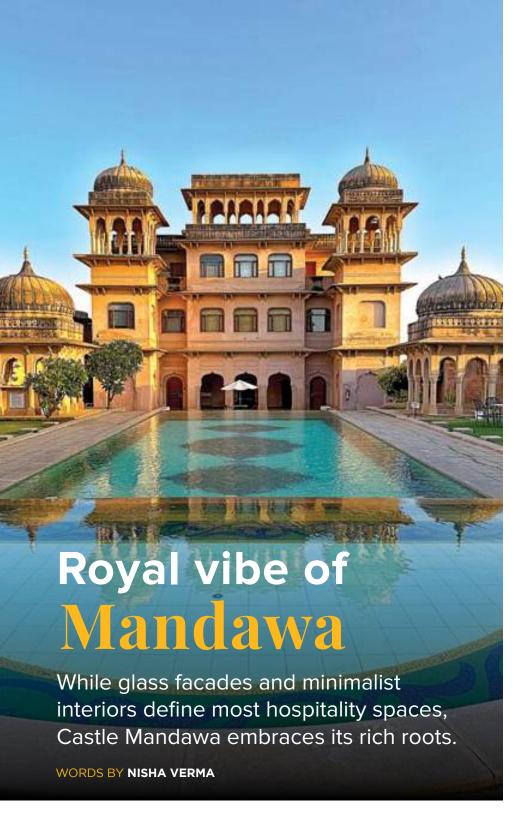
As energy costs continue to rise, implementing energy-efficient equipment in hotels has become essential to lower operational costs and drive a long-term profitability. PA Prabhu, Managing Director, Revac Systems (Chefmate), said, "All our innovations are chef-centric and are dedicated to improving the indoor air quality (IAQ) of the kitchen and focussed on energy optimisation to increase return on investment." He added, "Revac uses Varisave as a service for energy efficiency, where the demand control is managed by the sensor. This helps modulate the energy consumed by the ventilation units, thereby saving energy."

AI-driven benefits

Explaining how AI-supported products make dishwashing processes more efficient, Razi Haider, Country Manager, India, Sri Lanka and Nepal, ITW India (FEG Division), said, "The new AI-supported FLOW Line features smart vision control, which identifies every item that is loaded onto the conveyor and adjusts washing and rinsing parameters accordingly. The patent-pending AI-based feature ASR2, automatic soil removal, identifies the soil degree of the wash ware and adjusts the soil removal cycle." These features make dishwashing economical, efficient and safer.

Empowering consistent service, Mathew also stated how integrating AI and machine learning tools into their systems has revolutionised the space. "These tools help monitor performance in real time," he shared.





house tell tales of the family's lineage, blending authenticity with comfort. Every corner here tells the story of a well-preserved secret waiting to be discovered and experienced.

Royal chambers

Each of the 80 unique rooms at the property tells its own story. From the striking peacock suite decked out in vibrant blue to the royal and deluxe suites with carved pillars, jharokha windows and detailed wall paintings, every room transports guests straight into the era of maharajas. The fourposter beds and marble staircases complete the regal feel, without compromising on modern amenities.

On warm days, the large pool at the castle offers a welcome escape, while evenings on the terrace—with the cool desert breeze and sprawling lawns—are pure bliss.



Castle Mandawa
stands tall—a
majestic fortress
that commands
attention with its
turrets, painted
courtyards and
sprawling gardens

ocated in the heart of the Shekhawati region, Castle Mandawa does not just house guests—it hosts them in history and allows them to soak in art and timeless Rajputana grandeur. Whether you are a leisure traveller, a wedding party or a MICE group, Castle Mandawa promises a journey back in time.

Living canvas

Often referred to as India's largest

open-air art gallery, Mandawa is a town dotted with ancient havelis adorned with intricate frescoes and murals, built by merchants who once traded along the erstwhile Silk Route. Amidst this artistic abundance, Castle Mandawa stands tall—a majestic fortress that commands attention with its turrets, painted courtyards and sprawling gardens.

The castle's sandy courtyard, its wide verandahs, the stunningly painted Baithak and charming coffee

Regal celebrations

Castle Mandawa also enjoys great popularity among weddings and MICE agents. The 5000 sq. mt. ballroom can comfortably host up to 600 guests, while the lush garden spaces, poolside lawns and a charming baradari-styled courtyard, provide versatile options for smaller social and intimate gatherings. The timeless heritage backdrop makes all these royal venues straight out of a grand fairytale.

Savour local experiences

For those who want to venture beyond the castle walls, there is plenty to explore. Wander through the colourful local markets, visit the family's horse stables or enjoy a sunset horse ride with prior arrangements. The hotel also curates

First-hand experience



Represented by Numen Hospitality, Castle Mandawa, in association with KK Holidays N Vaccations, organised a fam trip for wedding planners and travel trade professionals from Delhi-NCR, offering them to experience the hospitality and charm of the property.



lively in-house experiences like puppet shows, pottery sessions and bangle-making workshops. The pièce de résistance? A magical cocktail evening and dinner on the dunes, offering an unforgettable slice of desert life, which is perfect

for groups or private celebrations. A night under the stars feels breathtakingly beautiful. In essence, Castle Mandawa is not just any ordinary stay-it is an experience of Rajasthan's rich culture, art and royal hospitality at its best.





Aesthetics meets functionality

Parny—Centre Table by Anupriya Sahu, Cofounder & Design Head, Alankaram, reflects her deep design sensibility. It blends the warmth of teakwood with the richness of brass in a contemporary round silhouette. It features a discreet drawer offering ample storage. The product is perfect for modern living spaces that appreciate craft, character and detail.

Artistic expression of nature

Chitrakaari's latest collection of wallpapers, Petals, Palms and Pixels, exudes the charm of the natural world. Featuring 13 designs, each with its own distinct mystical quality, the series offers an immersive escape into nature's tranquility. Every inch of the canvases is laden with visual detail, making them an interactive piece of art.



Artisanal heritage

Neel Collection by Gaurang Home comprises bedspreads, table linens, hand-painted crockery, carpets and furniture pieces. The collection celebrates craftsmanship, reinterpreting nature and preserving India's rich cultural heritage. Anchored on Jamdani weaves from Andhra Pradesh's Srikakulam and Venkatagiri villages, the collection reflects generations of mastery in intricate weaving and storytelling through it.

HotelTalk March-April 2025

Low-calorie natural sweetener

Herboveda's Monk Fruit Sweetener is a new-age zerocalorie sweetener, which is 100 per cent natural. It is suitable for cooking, boiling, and baking and it tastes exactly like sugar. Made of a sweet found in China. It is a high-intensity sweetener and contains zero calories. So Sweet offers Monk Fruit Sweetener packaged in jars. The sweetener is available for purchase on platforms such as Amazon, Flipkart, 1mg, etc.







Raising bar for kitchen versatility

Razi Haider shares how space-saving combi oven can efficiently streamline kitchen operations to meet diverse cooking needs.

WORDS BY HAZEL JAIN

Q: Tell us about your recently launched 'Justa Core Combi' oven in India.

A: The Justa Core Combi is a high-end combi oven from our factory in China, making its debut in India after successful launches in other countries. It is designed to handle multiple tasks —all-in-one compact unit. What is unique is its integrated boiler system, delivering premium performance at an economical price point.

Q: What gap does this product address in **India's hospitality sector?**

A: The industry is booming, but kitchens today face two critical challenges-space constraints and labour shortages. The product eliminates the need for multiple appliances—it is a single solution for diverse needs. This bridges the gap between high performance and operational cost-effectiveness.

Q: How are you ensuring users adapt to this high-tech?

A: Training is key. We have onboarded a corporate chef who will conduct hands-on sessions. The focus is on maximising the oven's capabilitiesteaching them not just how to use it but how to innovate with it.

Q: Beyond metros, which markets are you prioritising?

A: Although metros continue to play a vital role, tier I and tier II cities are





Razi Haider Country Manager (India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal), ITW India (Food **Equipment Group Division**)

leading the growth. In the last three years, mid-tier cities, particularly in South India, have gained remarkable traction. Our current focus is on South India. We are now expanding into markets like Kerala and Coimbatore.

Q: What is next for ITW India in this segment?

A: We have more launches in the pipeline and India is no longer a peripheral market. With F&B sector expanding rapidly, we are committed to introducing solutions that align with local needs.

Every journey Shapes you

For **Preeti Makhija**, travel promises discovering something new, unseen and exciting aspects of both culture and cuisine.

WORDS BY LIPLA NEGI

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

A: 'Philosophies of the Geeta' has shaped my outlook, both personally and professionally. It continues to offer timeless lessons in leadership, resilience and purpose.

Q: Your favourite holiday destination...

A: Paris and Goa captivate me with their vibrant culinary cultures. Paris for its elegance and refinement and Goa for its relaxed charm and creativity.

Q: Your last holiday destination was...

A: Bali—a perfect blend of nature, culture and calm.

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

A: Milan during fashion week was an experience in itself. The energy, creativity and chaos made it unforgettable.

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

A: I would love to see a stronger global push in positioning India as a

world-class destination we have so much to offer.

Q: A hospitality trend you'd like to bring back...

A: The charm of personalised service and the grace of classic, elite fine dining—there is something magical in the old-school approach.

Q: Your travel essentials...

A: Rose mist, AirPods and my mother's homemade energy bars.

Q: Describe yourself as a traveller...

A: I am a food enthusiast, easy-going and always curious to explore something new.

Q: Your biggest leadership lesson...

A: You are only as strong as your team. Walk alongside them, not ahead.

Q: One piece of advice for young professionals...

A: Be patient and stay committed. Great things do take time—so stick around and let the journey shape you.



Movements



Vineet Mishra VP, Operations, India and South Asia, Accor

Accor has appointed Vineet Mishra as Vice President of Operations, India and South Asia. Mishra will oversee operational strategies across its diverse portfolio, reinforcing the brand's presence in the region. He said, "I look forward to working with our talented teams to strengthen Accor's position as a leading brand."



Saniiv Hulugalle CEO and GM Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams Sri Lanka

Cinnamon Life has appointed Sanjiv Hulugalle as the CEO and General Manager of Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams Sri Lanka. With a career that spans over three decades, Hulugalle brings to Cinnamon Life an unparalleled legacy in luxury hospitality, real estate development and transformative leadership.



Sanjeev Kapoor General Manager Jaisalmer Marriott Resort & Spa

Sanjeev Kapoor has been appointed as the new General Manager of Jaisalmer Marriott Resort & Spa. In his new role, Kapoor will oversee the resort's operations, bringing fresh energy and strategic direction to enhance guest satisfaction and operational performance in the heart of Rajasthan's golden city.



Vaibhav Sagar General Manager Udaipur Marriott Hotel

Udaipur Marriott Hotel, the first hotel set to open in Udaipur under the flagship Marriott Hotels brand, has appointed Vaibhav Sagar as its General Manager. With Sagar's proven leadership, cross-industry expertise and commitment to service excellence position him as a valuable asset to the Udaipur Marriott Hotel team.



Shailendra Gairola GM, Rajawat The Fern-An Ecotel Hotel

Shailendra Gairola has been appointed as General Manager at Rajawat The Fern-An Ecotel Hotel, Kanpur. With over two decades of extensive experience in the industry, he will lead hotel operations, drive guest satisfaction and guide his team towards delivering excellence in service and performance.



Mohit Khanna Director, Finance, Pullman and Novotel New Delhi Aerocity

Pullman and Novotel New Delhi Aerocity appointed Mohit Khanna as Director of Finance. With over 15 years of experience spanning hospitality, retail and oil sectors, he will oversee financial planning and analysis, statutory compliance, budgeting and supporting broader strategic goals of hotels.



Noel Mendes Director, Food and Beverage, Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai

Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai has appointed Noel Mendes as the Director of Food and Beverage. With over a decade of experience in luxury hospitality, Mendes brings deep expertise, creative vision and a passion for delivering exceptional guest experiences. He will also curate innovative menus and elevate service standards.



Vipul Karkara Director, Conference and Events Eros Hotel

Eros Hotel has appointed Vipul Karkara as the new Director of Conference and Events. He will oversee and manage all aspects of hosting conferences, meetings, banquets and other events. Karkara's primary responsibility will be the planning, coordination and execution of all events held at Eros Hotel New Delhi.



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