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Tourism a tool for global soft power



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Hotels must act on minimising food wastage and make this initiative a reflection of their core philosophy.”

Indian tourism is at a pivotal crossroads. COVID-led disruptions are way behind us, and Indian tourism must begin to register a meaningful recovery. A slow increase in international tourist arrivals does not augur well for this sector. Tourism is not merely an economic driver; it is also a soft power tool. A well-marketed tourism strategy driven and supported by the Centre can reshape perceptions and highlight India's blend of tradition and modernity. Private enterprise, I am sure, would play a crucial role to support such an initiative.

While hotel brands are increasing their footprint at an unabated rapid pace, we need to reflect on the paucity of trained people, one of the biggest challenges faced by the industry. This makes skill development and talent retention not just an HR priority but a business imperative. India has no shortage of young talent eager to join hospitality, but the challenge lies in equipping them with the right skills and ensuring they stay motivated to grow within the industry. The solution lies in organisations fostering a culture of continuous learning, recognising achievement and creating career paths. Leaders must also drive mentorship programmes to significantly benefit their organisations by boosting retention and productivity and also stimulating a positive culture.

It is the time of the year when we are about to enter the season of weddings and festive dining. We do recognise that food is at the heart of hospitality, yet it is also where wastage occurs on a very large scale. In a world where millions go hungry every day, the sight of wasted food is deeply unsettling and definitely poses an ethical challenge. We must appreciate that guests today are more receptive than ever before to conscious dining practices and would, by and large, be happy to support zero wastage and other sustainability efforts. I would like to appeal to hotels to take it upon themselves to minimise food wastage and make this initiative a reflection of their core philosophy.

I would once again like to thank you for your readership and look forward to your comments.

Cheers,
Sunil Ghadiok



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Jade, The Claridges,
New Delhi

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Amalgamating global practices with deep local insights, UCSL and QualStar aim to make sustainability certification more reliable and accessible to Indian hospitality.

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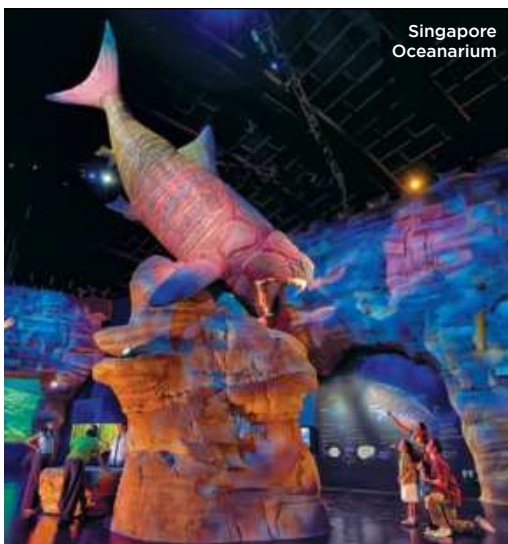
Discarding a formulaic approach to hotel design, Bobby Mukherji highlights a well-designed hotel can drive higher room rates and improve overall profitability.



The Chambers, Taj Bengal, Kolkata

42 Strategic partnerships: Rapid expansion, minimum capital risks

As global and domestic players join forces, Nikhil Shah exhorts collaboration is more beneficial than outright acquisitions, fostering rapid growth.



Singapore
Oceanarium

54 A perfect blend of entertainment and adventure

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

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India hotel sector performance (June 2025), according to HVS Anarock's monthly update



Chennai leads in hotel occupancy, followed by Mumbai

Mumbai & New Delhi top ARR growth exceeding ₹10,000 and ₹8,500 while occupancy trends display mixed performance across Indian markets.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

According to HVS Anarock's monthly update, June 2025 witnessed a stable performance for the Indian hotel sector, as early monsoon getaways and travel along new infrastructure corridors helped offset the impact of external disruptions, including the Air India Flight AI171 crash, the Bengaluru crowd tragedy, and ongoing geopolitical tensions.

ARR trends

The report indicated the average rates in saw robust year-on-year growth for the hospitality sector, with double-digit gains in several cities. Mumbai and New Delhi maintained their premium positioning, with average rates exceeding ₹10,000 and ₹8,500, respectively. Meanwhile, Hyderabad saw the highest year-on-year growth.

Goa was the only market to experience a year-on-year dip in average rates, likely due to the post-summer travel slowdown, early monsoon onset, and subdued leisure demand.

Occupancy trends

On the occupancy front, hotels displayed mixed performance across Indian markets, with overall marginal year-on-year improvement at the national level. However, regional disparities remained evident, driven by geopolitical uncertainty,

ARR trends across key Indian markets (YoY growth: June 2025)



Occupancy trends across key Indian markets (YoY growth: June 2025)



early monsoon impact, and shifting travel patterns.

Chennai led the country in occupancy, which was closely followed by Mumbai, with both cities clocking rates in the 73–76 per cent range. Jaipur and Ahmedabad, meanwhile, posted the strongest year-on-year gains.

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New GST rates to power hospitality growth

The government approves the next-gen GST reforms during its 56th GST Council meeting, which will foster India's hospitality industry.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

The consistent efforts of FHRAI have finally borne fruit. In the 56th meeting of the GST Council, chaired by the Union Finance Minister **Nirmala Sitharaman**, the next-gen GST framework was approved to accelerate India's economic growth. Just weeks ahead of the council meeting, FHRAI had made a strong representation to the Union Finance Minister and Chairperson, GST Council, urging the rationalisation of GST in the tourism and hospitality sector to boost competitiveness and align with India's Vision 2047. The association highlighted that it would act as a catalyst for the sector's growth, aligning with the Government's Vision 2047 and positioning India as a global tourism powerhouse.

Earlier, FHRAI lauded the landmark GST reforms announced

“

It would act as a catalyst for the sector's growth, aligning with the Government's Vision 2047

by the Prime Minister on 15 August 2025, reflecting the Government's continued commitment to strengthening India's tax regime

VAT rates in Asian countries
Tourism is a significant source of

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

Tourism's role for Viksit Bharat 2047

As India prepares to emerge as a developed economy by 2047, tourism certainly needs to play a critical role in shaping our global standing. It contributes not only to the socio-economic growth but also to cultural and heritage preservation, soft power diplomacy, and inclusive development.

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Heal in India

Creating global appeal

Equipped with modern medicine & ancient wisdom, India is well-positioned to become a global medical & wellness tourism hub.

WORDS BY **SURBHI SHARMA**

In a world increasingly seeking holistic healing, India stands at a transformative crossroads, where wellness meets economic ambition. At the 'Heal in India 2025 Medical & Wellness Tourism Summit,' **Suman Billa**, Additional Secretary and Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, delved into a powerful vision of India's tourism economy reaching US \$3 trillion by 2047. He highlighted that at the heart of this goal lies a clear strategy, making medical and wellness tourism strategic pillars of India's global positioning.

Modern & ancient practices

India is uniquely positioned at the intersection of clinical excellence

“

Transform the 'Heal in India' campaign into a global movement, to position India as a healing soft power

and cultural wisdom. “Our USP is not just great doctors and hospitals, but our ancient systems of healing — Ayurveda, Yoga, and Siddha that treat the body, mind, and spirit,” he said, noting that the key message is India must evolve from being a place ‘where you are treated’ to ‘where you come to heal.’

Action roadmap

Billa stressed the need to create a unified digital platform and integrate hospitals, tour operators, hotels and wellness centres. He suggested the development of 10 medical-wellness tourism clusters by 2027 to act as focused growth zones and also focus on incentivising states and service providers for quality outcomes. He further proposed for running global campaigns targeting GCC, Africa and SAARC for medical tourism and the West for wellness tourism.

Soft power in the making

To project India as a healing soft power, Billa advocated that the 'Heal in India' campaign be transformed into a global movement, empowering India's tourism potential. “India must heal the world not just with its science but also with its soul,” he added.

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Renew India's outreach

Prioritising immersive experiences, **Dilip Puri** says India needs to re-market 'Incredible India 2.0' with firm government support.

WORDS BY **SURBHI SHARMA**

As India's hospitality market evolves, the definition of luxury has also changed. It is much more than grand rooms, it's about creating meaningful, story-worthy experiences. "Whether young or seasoned, luxury travellers seek experiences that stay with them," said **Dilip Puri**, Founder & CEO, Indian School of Hospitality.

Luxury is now about emotional recall, unique storytelling, and personal connection, not just service or opulence. "This shift requires hospitality brands to

focus on immersive offerings, local narratives, and authentic cultural engagements," he added.

Green innovation

Sustainability, Puri emphasised, is no longer an optional add-on for hotels. "Even travellers paying US\$ 1,000 per night now ask about the hotel's sustainability initiatives."

He believes sustainability and technology must be integrated into a luxury hotel's core operations. From implementing energy-saving smart sensors in rooms to waste reduction



Dilip Puri

Founder & CEO
Indian School of Hospitality

systems and sustainable sourcing, these practices drive the green agenda. Not only do these reduce environmental impact, but they also result in cost savings for operators and a better guest experience.

Marketing strategy

He further stressed that India must re-market itself internationally, supported by improved connectivity, infrastructure, and guest experiences. To achieve this, he underscored the need for increased tourism budgets. "It is time to repush 'Incredible India 2.0' campaign with strong support from the government," he asserted. **HT**

“

Sustainability must be integrated into a luxury hotel's core operations.”

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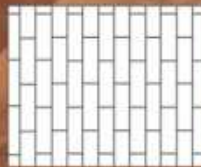
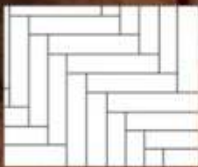
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IHCL turns the midscale tide

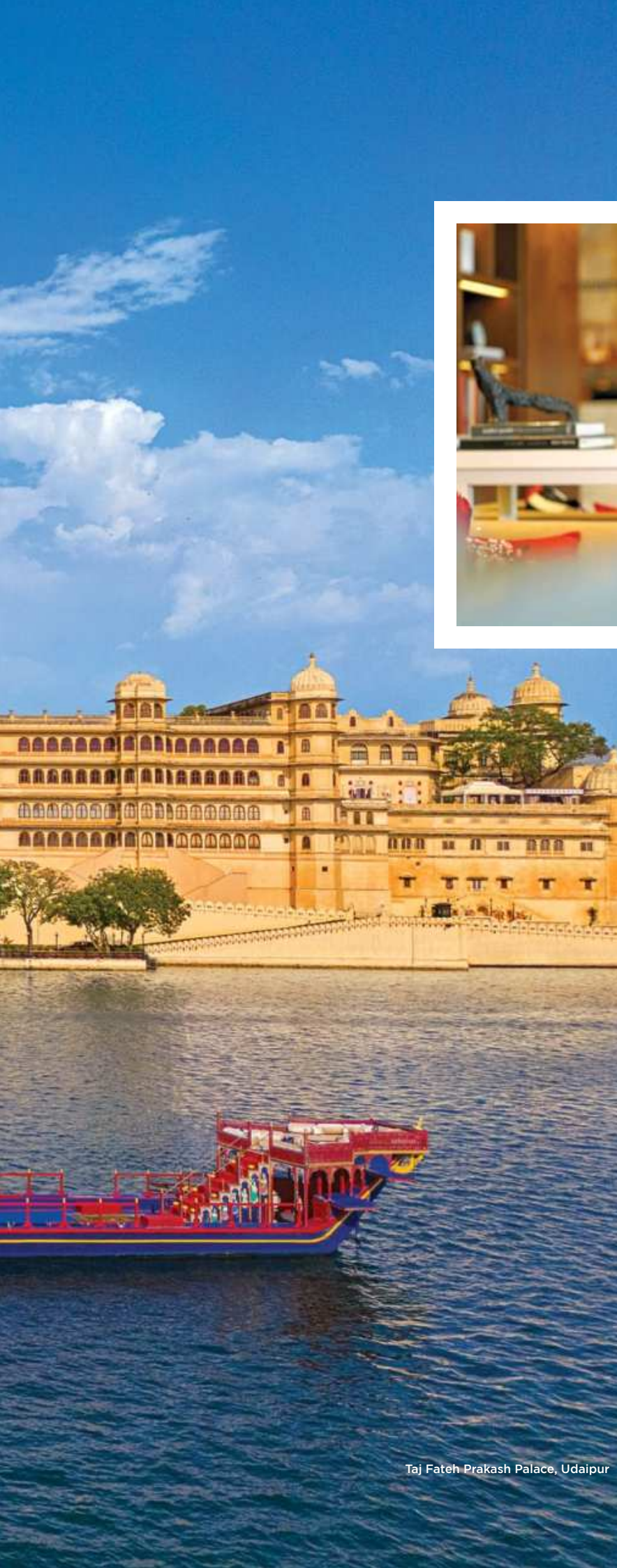
With an ambitious goal of 700 hotels by 2030, IHCL is not just expanding, it is redefining the future of Indian hospitality.

WORDS BY **LIPLA NEGI**



Puneet Chhatwal

Managing Director & CEO
Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL)



Taj Fateh Prakash Palace, Udaipur

N

Nothing is 'too ambitious' in the professional playbook of **Puneet Chhatwal**, Managing Director and CEO, Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL). A leader who believes in action over rhetoric, Chhatwal lives by a simple mantra, "We promise, we deliver." With 2030 in sight, the Indian hospitality giant has set an audacious yet calculated goal — to upscale to 700 hotels, a milestone that not only reflects the company's growth trajectory but also resonates with India's booming tourism potential. Drawing parallels between India's economy — poised to become the third largest in the world by 2030 — and IHCL's ambitious 'Accelerate 2030' strategy, Chhatwal sees a shared destination with India poised to clock a projected 6.5 per cent GDP growth, both IHCL and India are racing towards the same finish line — defining a new era of global hospitality leadership.

“

This partnership doubles the Ginger portfolio with 240+ hotels, addressing the growing needs of aspirational travellers



Ginger Udaipur, Shastri Circle

On the brink of tourism boom

Calling tourism one of India's biggest 'soft powers', Chhatwal explained, "For a long time, tourism has been a key growth catalyst, but we have not yet unlocked its full potential. It is not just about GDP contribution or job creation, tourism carries an influence, a soft power for the country that we believe can be utilised far more effectively in the coming years."

Combine this with India's rapid infrastructure growth — from highways and trains to airports — and the future of the sector looks brighter than ever. According to Chhatwal, this is a big boost for both domestic and inbound travel. "The investment the government has made over the last seven years has been phenomenal," he said. Adding to that is a new wave of discretionary consumption, especially among younger Indians who are

now at the helm of travel decisions. "The doubling of highways, trains, and airports strongly supports the demand," he noted.

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

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

Ginger: A transformative force

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

From being India's largest hospitality company to emerging as one of its strongest, IHCL is charting an ambitious path of scale,



IHCL enters into strategic partnerships with ANK Hotels, Pride Hospitality, and Brij Hospitality

size, and synergies. In line with its five-year road map 'Accelerate 2030', IHCL recently entered into a strategic partnership to acquire a controlling stake in ANK Hotels and Pride Hospitality, while also signing a distribution agreement with Brij Hospitality. By bringing the decades-old hospitality expertise

of these companies into its fold — whose promoters belong to the Clarks Hotels family — IHCL gains a definitive competitive edge in the increasingly competitive midscale segment. With this decisive move, IHCL has catapulted its portfolio to over 550 hotels. Over the next few months, these hotels will

be integrated operationally and migrated to IHCL's brandscape, predominantly under the Ginger brand, among others.

"Furthering IHCL's leading presence in the midscale segment with the successful transformation of Ginger, this partnership doubles our portfolio with 240+ hotels addressing the growing needs of aspirational travellers," explained Chhatwal. He further noted that these hotels are on a capital light arrangement of management contracts and select operating leases. ANK Hotels and Pride Hospitality have a portfolio of 135 hotels in the midscale segment spread across 110 locations.

Ginger has not only been an experiment in resilience but also

Annexure – Portfolio as on date

Total portfolio	Hotels			Rooms		
	Operating	Pipeline	Total	Operating	Pipeline	Total
Taj	87	48	135	13,001	8,154	21,155
Claridges Collection	3		3	379		379
SeleQtions	28	18	46	2,091	1,611	3,702
Gateway	10	26	36	748	3,643	4,391
Vivanta	29	23	52	3,780	3,418	7,198
Tree of Life	18	4	22	251	84	335
Brij	10	9	19	130	230	360
Midscale (Ginger + ANK & Pride)	154	87	241	9,756	7,805	17,561
Grand Total	339	215	554	30,136	24,945	55,081

Domestic portfolio	Hotels			Rooms		
	Operating	Pipeline	Total	Operating	Pipeline	Total
Taj	74	36	110	10,692	6,327	17,019
Claridges Collection	3		3	379		379
SeleQtions	27	18	45	2,008	1,611	3,619
Gateway	10	26	36	748	3,643	4,391
Vivanta	26	22	48	3,416	3,288	6,704
Tree of Life	18	4	22	251	84	335
Brij	10	8	18	130	208	338
Midscale (Ginger + ANK & Pride)	151	87	238	9,732	7,805	17,537
Grand Total	319	201	520	27,356	22,966	50,322

a reflection of the sector's growing appetite for big-box hotels that deliver well-designed rooms, strong F&B offerings, and personalised guest experiences in equal measure. "We will soon open a property at Bengaluru Airport, with another under construction in Goa. Most recently, we signed a deal for a hotel at Kolkata Airport, slated to open in the next 12–14 months. This will give Ginger a significant footprint across five airports," he added.

Ginger's steadily rising margins within IHCL's overall revenue mix fuel this optimism, he asserted, "The margins from these newly reimagined, rebuilt, and repositioned Ginger hotels stand at over 50 percent, with the sweet spot around 55 percent — and some properties even crossing 60 percent. As I always say, when you think of something and execute relentlessly, it gets done." HT



Varq, Taj Mahal, New Delhi

“

The margins from these newly reimagined, rebuilt, and repositioned Ginger hotels stand at over 50%



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Hotel Association of India introduces an Industry Mentoring Programme designed for the hotel sector.

Shaping tomorrow's leaders

To tackle the talent shortage in hospitality, HAI has introduced a well-defined mentorship platform to nurture future leaders.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

The Hotel Association of India (HAI) has unveiled a landmark initiative — an industry-first, structured mentorship platform designed exclusively for the hotel sector. This programme comes at a time when the industry is witnessing significant growth, especially in the tier II and III cities, covering about 50 locations.

Bridging the gap

This initiative aims to address the widening talent gap in the Indian hotel sector and support its sustainable growth. The focus is on leadership development, career progression, organisational culture, and improving

employee attraction towards the sector and their retention and engagement. A team of domain experts from HAI member hotels has designed the operational framework.

Hailing the initiative as a gamechanger for the Indian tourism landscape while launching the programme, **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, Minister of Tourism, GoI, said, “The Hotel Association of India’s innovative programme marks a significant step towards establishing India as a global tourism powerhouse, with an ambitious goal of creating a US\$ 3 trillion tourism economy by 2047.” He added that as the demand for tourism continues to surge, the need for talented and visionary leaders

“

The programme reflects a shared commitment to cultivate the next generation of hospitality leaders.”



Priya Paul
Chairperson, Apeejay
Surrendra Park Hotels



“

This is a one-of-its-kind initiative by industry experts, rooted in guru-shishya parampara.”

KB Kachru, President, Hotel Association of India and Chairman, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group

in hospitality has never been greater. This programme will develop professionals prepared to lead the future of tourism and hospitality, setting a high standard that inspires excellence beyond our borders.

KB Kachru, President, Hotel Association of India and Chairman, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, added, “This is a one-of-its-kind initiative by industry experts – rooted in the guru-shishya parampara, to provide expert mentorship and inspire a lasting commitment to the future of hospitality leadership in India. The government and industry have set a target of creating around million branded hotel rooms to achieve the India Tourism vision 2047. This will require an addition of around 100,000 middle to senior management hotel managers to the existing pool.”

Terming mentoring as more than a guiding talent exercise, **Rohit Khosla**, Vice President, Hotel Association of India, opined, “It is about maximising potential, nurturing future leadership, and building a resilient

tomorrow for our industry. Through this structured mentorship programme, we will empower individuals to grow, innovate, and carry ahead the legacy of Indian hospitality that is synonymous with excellence.”

For **Priya Paul**, Chairperson, Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels, HAI’s industry mentorship programme is a significant step to empower and inspire hospitality professionals across organisations. “The programme reflects a shared commitment to cultivate the next generation of hospitality leaders and experts and is a much-needed investment in people,” she added.

HAI will work with its member hotels to adopt this programme and embed it into their brand culture, empowering future leaders and strengthening India’s position as a world-class hospitality destination. “At its heart, hospitality is about people – and this programme recognises the power of investing in talent,” concluded **Vikram Oberoi**, Managing Director & CEO, EIH Limited.

HT



India welcomes UN-backed GSTC certification

The globally recognised hotel sustainability standard is now available locally via QualStar, helping Indian hotels cut costs, aligning them with the world's trusted benchmark.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), the world's most trusted benchmark for sustainable tourism, has finally arrived in India, offering hotels a locally accessible and cost-effective path to global recognition. This landmark move, enabled by a strategic partnership between United Certification Systems Limited (UCSL), a pioneering GSTC-accredited body, and QualStar, India's leading hotel certification expert, eliminates the need for expensive international audits, making it easier for Indian hotels to align with global sustainability standards.

A new era for Indian hospitality

The Indian hospitality industry is experiencing unprecedented growth, but with this expansion comes increased scrutiny from global travellers, corporations, and governments who are demanding verifiable sustainability. Until now, obtaining GSTC certification required inviting auditors from overseas, a process fraught with high costs and logistical challenges. This made certification an expensive proposition, limiting adoption to just a handful of properties.

The new UCSL-QualStar partnership addresses this critical

barrier. By combining UCSL's international accreditation with QualStar's deep local expertise and established network of trained auditors, hotels can now achieve the same rigorous, globally recognised certification at a fraction of the cost.

Besides, the local accessibility of the certification is crucial for an industry facing a shortage of over 300,000 hotel rooms and rapidly expanding its footprint.

The gold standard of sustainable tourism

Established through a UN-led initiative, GSTC creates unified, global standards for sustainable tourism. This means a hotel certified in India meets the same rigorous parameters as in Singapore, Türkiye, or the US. It ensures consistency and

credibility among global travellers, tour operators, and corporate clients who are increasingly prioritising ethical and sustainable choices.

The certification covers four key pillars of sustainable tourism:

- **Sustainable management:** Ensuring a hotel's operations are transparent and committed to sustainability goals.
- **Socio-economic impacts:**



Olga Shuvalova
CEO, United Certification
Systems Limited



Subha Bhaskar
COO
QualStar



“

This pivotal step will empower Indian hotels towards becoming global leaders in sustainable tourism

Focusing on fair labour practices, community engagement, and supporting local economies.

- **Cultural impacts:** Promoting and protecting cultural heritage.
- **Environmental impacts:** Effectively managing energy, water, waste, and biodiversity.

By meeting these criteria, certified hotels not only reduce their environmental footprint but also enhance their brand reputation and marketability on a global scale. This is especially relevant in a world where countries like Singapore and Türkiye

have already made GSTC certification mandatory for their hotel sectors.

Voices from the partnership

Emphasising the importance of local expertise in maintaining global standards, **Olga Shuvalova**, CEO, UCSL, said, “Our partnership with QualStar ensures that GSTC certification remains rigorous, impartial, and internationally credible while also becoming more accessible and relevant to the Indian market. We are confident that this collaboration will accelerate India’s

journey towards becoming a global leader in sustainable tourism.”

Subha Bhaskar, COO, QualStar, highlighted the synergy between the two organisations. “We are proud to collaborate with UCSL as their authorised partner. This allows us to combine UCSL’s global credibility with our decades of local expertise in hotel classification and audits.” She further highlighted that by providing internationally recognised and deeply relevant sustainability audits, “we are empowering Indian hotels to meet and exceed global expectations.”

Key benefits for Indian hotels

The availability of local GSTC certification is a game changer for the Indian hospitality industry, positioning it for long-term growth and global leadership. Additionally, the certification can help hotels achieve cost-efficiency, enhanced market access, and brand credibility and competitiveness.

HT



GreaT trails Kodaikanal By GRT Hotels

From plastic-free to profit-positive

A switch from plastic bottles to in-house alkaline water results in savings of ₹1.2 crore in just a year, says **Vikram Cotah**.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

When **Vikram Cotah** decided to eliminate plastic bottles across all 22 GRT Hotels properties, it was not about PR. It was about principle and profitability. “The board was happiest,” he said, referring to the ₹1.2 crore saved in just 12 months after switching to in-house alkaline water. The initiative created an immediate ripple effect on many fronts — reduced landfill waste,

enhanced guest experience, and measurable cost savings.

Going the extra mile

But that was just the start. Cotah led a set of initiatives anchored in the World Travel and Tourism Council’s Hotel Sustainability Basics. From recycling water and cutting power use to replacing mini toiletries with refillable, paraben-free alternatives, the group has gone above and

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

The company has also invested in regenerative practices. In Kodaikanal, where forest land was cleared for a new resort, the timber was reused to



“

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

Vikram Cotah, CEO, GRT Hotels & Resorts

build rooms. Today, 23 bird species have returned to the area. He said that this circular thinking pays off.

Nurturing hyper-local sourcing

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

GRT's push into sustainability is not limited to internal operations, it extends to guest-facing innovations too. Each property now offers 'Great Meetings' — a carbon-neutral MICE initiative that offsets emissions through afforestation.

“We calculate the carbon footprint of your event and plant trees accordingly,” Cotah explained. “You walk in for a meeting and walk out knowing that you have contributed to the planet.”

Even their breakfast offering termed the 'Great Sunshine Breakfast' is part of the offset model. “We serve global recipes using local produce,” he quipped.

What stands out for GRT is the emotional connection formed with guests. Cotah recalled a guest who teared up after being gifted fresh vegetables grown onsite in Thanjavur. “She said it reminded her of going back to her mother's home,” he said.



“That is the kind of hospitality we believe in — one rooted in memory, not marketing.”

Leading change

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

He also urged the industry to stop waiting for regulation and instead lead the transformation.

“Sustainability is not a cost; it is an investment,” he emphasised, pointing to higher guest satisfaction, stronger brand loyalty, and growing interest from ESG-focused investors.

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

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

HT



The Capital's Culinary Icons

Transcending their role as mere dining venues, these iconic restaurants have become enduring landmarks, deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of the city.

WORDS BY LIPLA NEGI



House of Ming

Experience precedes metrics

Taj Mahal, New Delhi

What makes a restaurant iconic? Is it its food, design, or number of years? According to **Dr Anmol Ahluwalia**, Area Director, Operations & General Manager, Taj Mahal, New Delhi, an iconic restaurant thrives on consistency, a strong culinary identity, and deep resonance with its cultural and social context. His answer perfectly captures the legacy the hotel has built over the decades with its F&B offerings. Each of the hotel's restaurants carries its own distinctive flavour and character.

At Varq, time-honoured Indian recipes are preserved through authentic methods but elevated with premium ingredients and contemporary artistry. Machan stays true to its legacy of international favourites while incorporating responsibly sourced produce, and design that reflects both nostalgia and eco-consciousness. At House of Ming, traditional recipes from Hunan, Sichuan, and Canton are honoured, while new interpretations of dim sums and Chinese teas reflect evolving preferences.

The menus are designed around balance. Describing this fine balance, Ahluwalia said, "Signature dishes remain constant and are the icons that guests return to repeatedly, while chefs introduce innovative creations around them. Guest chef collaborations, Michelin restaurant pop-up experiences, and seasonal showcases bring additional dynamism. Every special menu is crafted as a sensorial journey — one that combines tradition, innovation, and symbolism to create an immersive cultural experience."

The guiding philosophy is rooted in heritage yet continuously revitalised with innovation. Besides flavours, enomatic wine dispensers offer effortless tasting journeys, while



Anmol Ahluwalia
Area Director - Operations
& General Manager
Taj Mahal, New Delhi

live kitchens, chef's tables, QR-code menus, WhatsApp ordering, and Braille menus champion inclusivity and tech adaptation. The authenticity is valued by younger clients too.

Signature dishes remain constant while chefs introduce innovative creations around them

Strategic brand pillars

The Claridges, New Delhi

If there were a masterclass on how to turn every inch of space in the F&B category into a driver of both revenue and reputation, The Claridges, New Delhi would be the one to deliver it. The hotel's dining experiences are as diverse and eclectic as the capital city itself. From Dhaba and Jade to Lutyens Deli, Pickwick and Aura, each restaurant has carved a niche for itself.

Calling these 'strategic brand pillars', **Hemendra Singh Kushalgarh**, General Manager, The Claridges, explained, "While revenue optimisation remains important, we view our restaurants as long-term investments in brand equity — destinations in their own right that reinforce The Claridges' reputation as a hallmark of hospitality."

So, what is the secret sauce behind their award-winning

restaurants? Kushalgarh outlined four pillars, "First, unwavering attention to detail — because the smallest touches often leave the deepest impressions. Second, genuine warmth and attentiveness towards guests, ensuring each person feels personally cared for. Third, staying true to our ethos rather than chasing every passing trend, which preserves authenticity. And finally, a stringent focus on quality and hygiene — from



Hemendra Singh Kushalgarh
General Manager
The Claridges, New Delhi

"Our signature dishes are part of our heritage and continue to bring comfort to long-time patrons."



sourcing the finest ingredients to maintaining impeccable standards in the kitchen and beyond."

In the spirit of innovation without compromising legacy, the team continues to refine its offerings. "Our signature dishes remain untouched — they are part of our heritage and continue to bring comfort to long-time patrons. Alongside these, we have introduced contemporary interpretations and global inspirations," added Kushalgarh.

An epicurean landmark

ITC Maurya, New Delhi



There are restaurants known for their food, and then there are those that put cities on the global culinary map. ITC Maurya, New Delhi, is one such landmark that has become synonymous with the Capital's identity. Home to the legendary Bukhara, Dum Pukht, and Avartana, it continues to set milestones while delighting diners from around the world.

A highlight on the itinerary of almost every visitor to Delhi, Bukhara — celebrating its 45th anniversary — recreates the rustic charm of the clay oven with its iconic menu of succulent kebabs, smoky vegetables, and freshly baked breads. Its unchanged menu, a rare phenomenon in today's ever-evolving dining world, has stood as a timeless favourite of celebrities and heads of State alike.

The unchanged menu of Bukhara is a rare phenomenon in today's ever-evolving dining world

Marking 35 glorious years, Dum Pukht reflects a journey steeped in refinement and consistency. Inspired by a 200-year-old culinary legacy from the royal kitchens of the Nawabs, Dum Pukht's signature slow-cooking process allows ingredients to mature in their own juices, yielding nuanced flavours. With its sapphire-and-silver interiors that echo the grandeur of a bygone era, the restaurant elevates dining into

an experience of regal indulgence. For an Italian escape, Ottimo at West View offers a colonial-style dining room with stone walls, wrought iron chandeliers, and decorative accents that set the stage for soulful antipasti, wood-fired pizzas, live grills, and artisanal pastas.

Guests savour these authentic creations while enjoying panoramic views of Delhi's green belt from the comfort of ITC Maurya.

Essence of Asia's culinary soul

The Imperial, New Delhi

Since ancient times, the fabled Spice Route has captured the imagination of travellers. Its intoxicating aromas launched countless ships in search of treasures once valued more than gold. Evoking that timeless journey of spice boxes crossing seven seas and winning every corner of the world with aroma and flavours then unknown, The Spice Route at The Imperial, New Delhi blends history with innovation. Here, each dish marries time-honoured recipes with modern artistry, making it the perfect backdrop for refined business gatherings or memorable evenings with friends.

Designed across nine meticulously curated sections, the journey culminates in an enchanting open courtyard that shimmers under the moonlight. Within this setting, ethnic Asian cuisine comes alive — tracing a culinary path from the mystique of East Asia and the vibrant flavours of Java to the soulful traditions of Southern India.

Perfect for business lunches, leisurely afternoons, or a well-deserved break, the Luxe Lunch promises an unforgettable dining experience. It unfolds against a captivating tapestry of gastronomy and culture, where ancient temple



More than a restaurant, it is a voyage through history, artistry, and the enduring spirit of Asian kitchens

pillars and evocative murals whisper timeless tales. More than a restaurant, it is a voyage through history, artistry, and the enduring spirit of Asian kitchens.

By popular demand, The Spice Route recently reintroduced its Luxe Lunch. Originally a seasonal indulgence, it quickly became a cherished ritual for those seeking a refined mid-day escape. Guests can now savour a thoughtfully crafted three-course journey — from vibrant appetisers to soul-satisfying mains and indulgent desserts.

To keep the dining experience ever-evolving, unique, and exotic, new dishes and flavours will be introduced each week, making every visit a discovery in itself.

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India's global ascent in hotel design

Merging global outlook with regional nuances, **Bobby Mukherji** underlines how India's hospitality design is at its peak, influencing the global design landscape.



Hilton Gurugram Baani City Centre



In recent years, the hotel design has undergone a remarkable transformation globally. The hospitality sector, once dominated by formulaic blueprints and copy-paste aesthetics, is now embracing new paradigms of wellness, sustainability, personalisation, and high design. At the heart of this change is not just a shift in global thinking but a quiet revolution being led by Indian designers and hoteliers.

Top global trends

Let's begin with the emerging trends shaping hotel design across the globe. Several powerful movements are happening simultaneously, each influencing how the modern traveller experiences hospitality.

Wellness and biophilic design: Across the globe, even business hotels are being reimagined with a deep focus on wellness and nature. From air purification systems to organic materials, herbal amenities to soundproofing for restful sleep — hotels are no longer just a place to stay but a space to heal, recharge, and



Intercontinental Resort,
Mahe, Seychelles (WIP)

connect with oneself. Central to this is biophilia — the design philosophy of integrating nature indoors. From lush green walls to internal courtyards and indoor gardens, biophilic elements are fast becoming a non-negotiable. Travellers today actively seek hotels that embrace sustainability, reduce synthetic use, and showcase a natural ethos. Most importantly, they are willing to pay a premium for it.

Rise of boutique luxury:

Another significant trend is the rise of boutique experiences, especially in the upper-upscale and luxury segments. High net worth individuals today want privacy, calm, and exclusivity. Mega hotels with hundreds of rooms are slowly giving way to niche properties with fewer than 50 keys, offering elevated services, customised experiences, and peace away from the crowd. This small-scale luxury is not only intimate but often more immersive and design-driven, which leads us to the next trend.

Remote, experiential locations: While prime tourist spots



Bobby Mukherji
Founder & Design Principal
Bobby Mukherji Architects

will always have their charm, the real innovation lies in luxury resorts in offbeat, remote, and exotic locations. These resorts are purposefully designed in lesser-known, secluded landscapes, providing travellers with both isolation and immersive nature.

Design individualism: The era of templated hotels is finally on its way out. Global travellers are increasingly seeking authentic, locally inspired design. This has led to a resurgence of high-concept design, cultural storytelling, and curated atmospheres that reflect the essence of the place. Hotel brands now want each property to stand on its own as a design statement — unique, immersive, and memorable.



Global brands hesitated to assign large-scale projects to Indian designers, but today they are leading big projects



The Chambers, Taj Bengal, Calcutta

Stealing the global limelight

For decades, global hotel brands hesitated to entrust large-scale projects to Indian designers, often defaulting to foreign names. There was, at one time, a genuine concern — a generational gap had left India with too few globally competitive hospitality architects. However, the last 8 to 10 years have changed the design landscape.

A new breed of Indian designers and design firms has emerged, bringing with it a fresh global sensibility rooted in regional nuance and expertise. These firms are no longer limited to the Indian subcontinent. Today, Indian architects are leading prestigious projects across the USA, Caribbean Islands, UAE, China, Indonesia, Italy, the UK, Bhutan and more.

This evolution is more than anecdotal. Recently, Indian-designed projects competed for international hotel design awards and outshone local American entries, particularly outside the few design hubs like New York. With detailing, atmosphere, and luxury embedded into the DNA of their work, Indian design firms are now setting global benchmarks.

Much of this success can be attributed to two factors — the precision and affordability of Asian design ecosystems and the immense support of the Indian diaspora. In the US alone, nearly 50 per cent of all hotels are owned by Indian-origin entrepreneurs. This powerful

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This role reversal marks a historic shift that speaks volumes about the exceptional growth of Indian design talent

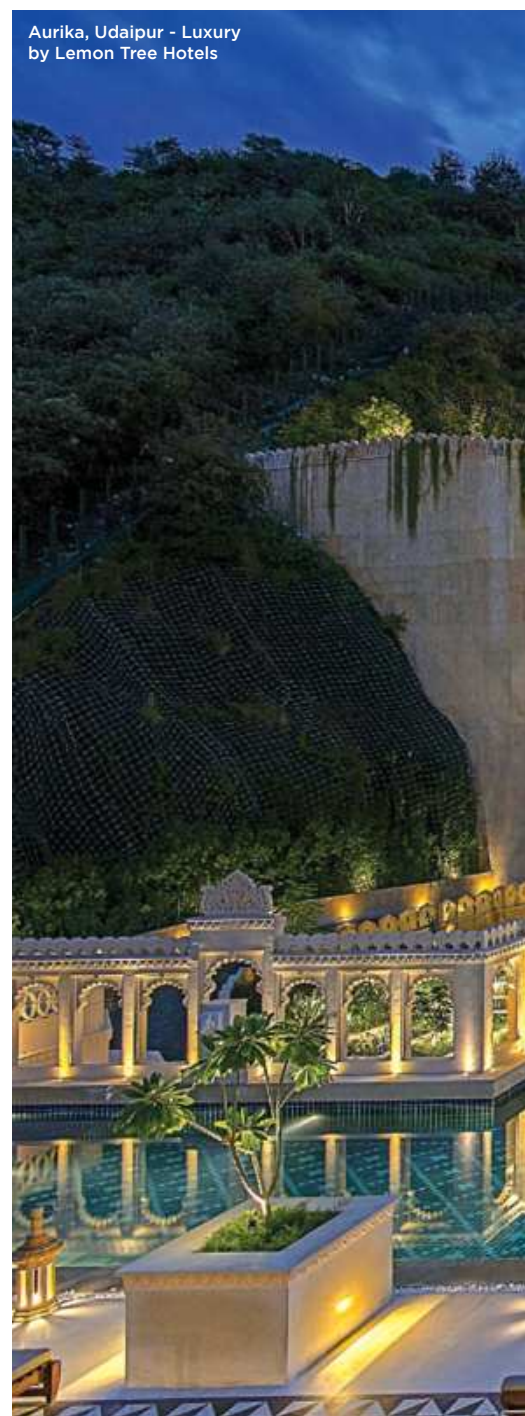
community, rooted in hospitality, has championed Indian designers — not out of sentimentality, but because of quality, delivery, and vision.

The result? For the first time in history, Indian firms are leading the concept design globally, with American architecture firms now working as local consultants under their direction. This role reversal marks a historic shift and is a testament to the exceptional growth of Indian design talent.

Investing in design

Simultaneously, within India, a powerful realisation is underway — design is not a cost, it is an investment. Traditionally, many hotel developers in India hesitated to pay premium fees to designers, seeing

Aurika, Udaipur - Luxury by Lemon Tree Hotels



it as an avoidable overhead. But as the market matures and competition intensifies, developers are seeing clear evidence that a well-designed hotel drives higher room rates, better brand partnerships, and ROI.

Seasoned hoteliers who have operated successful properties now prioritise working with specialist hospitality designers. They understand that great design takes time, money, and talent. From conceptualisation to detailed documentation, it involves thousands of man-hours, prototyping, and constant refinement. When executed correctly, the results speak for themselves — visually stunning

properties, seamless operations, and customer experiences that create long-term brand loyalty.

Even new entrants are following suit, learning from industry veterans and opting to engage reputed Indian firms that have proved their mettle through globally successful projects. Importantly, they are also willing to pay fair fees — knowing that excellence cannot be achieved on a shoestring budget.

As one leading architect aptly put it, “You cannot expect a BMW 7 Series at the price of a budget car. Both will take you from point A to B, but the quality of the journey is what makes the difference.”

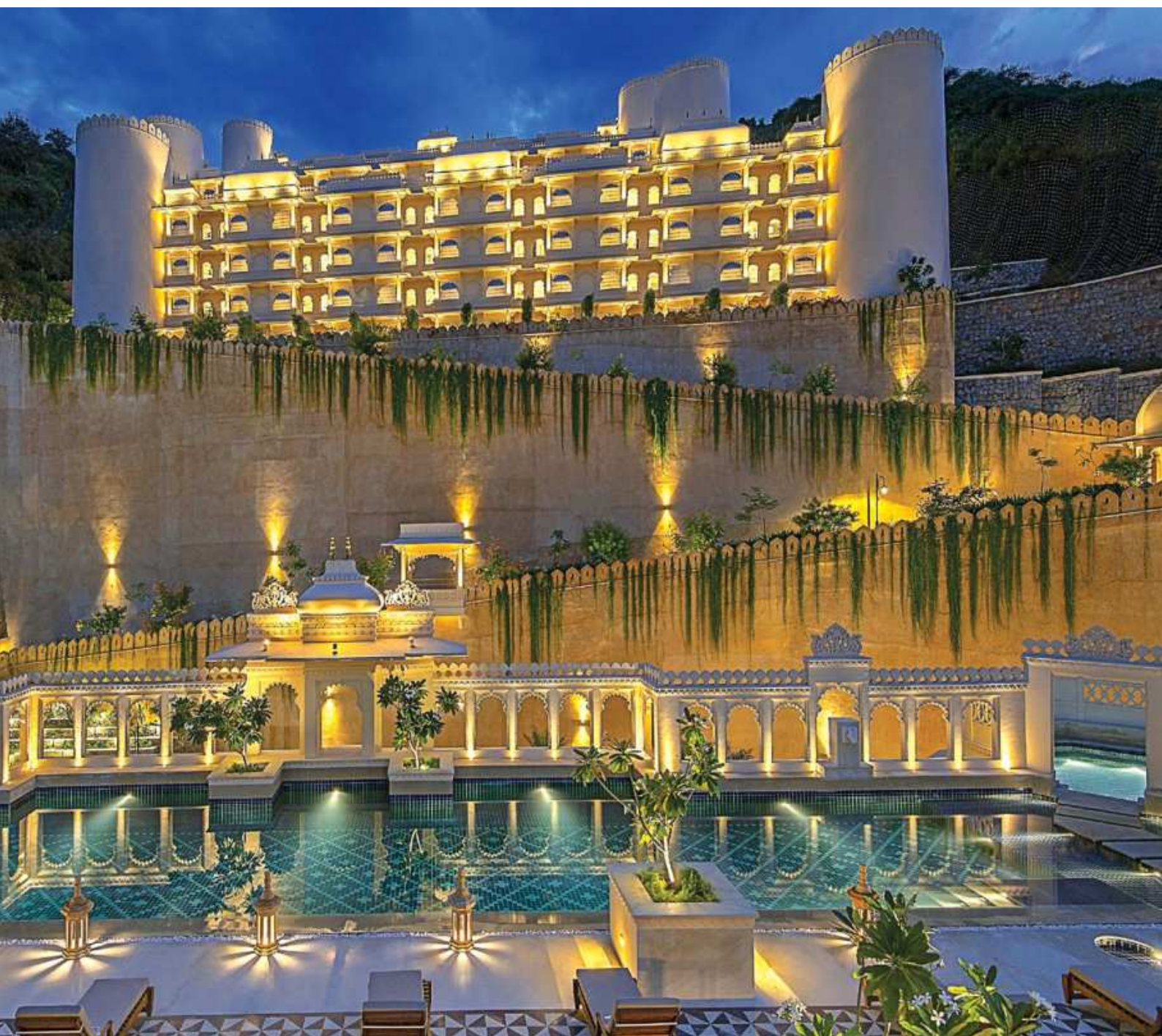
Golden era

As global trends tilt toward wellness, uniqueness, and sustainability, India is not just following — it is leading. Indian designers are no longer looking West for inspiration or validation; they are commanding global respect on their own terms.

With homegrown hotel developers embracing the power of design and global players recognising Indian creativity and capability, the future of hospitality design is not just bright — it's proudly ‘Made in India’.

HT

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



Rewriting India's growth story

Nikhil Shah explains why India's hospitality prioritises strategic partnerships to unlock growth potential and mitigate capital risks.



The Fern Vishranta Resort, Kamrej, Surat

By 2030, India's hospitality market is projected to reach significant heights, with various estimates ranging from US\$ 30–50 billion for the hotel market specifically, to over US\$ 500 billion for the broader hospitality industry. Unlike anywhere else in the world, it won't be dominated by a handful of mega-corporations. Instead, a wave of strategic partnerships is creating India's unique growth story.

In most mature markets, the hospitality industry follows a predictable path, beginning with consolidation through mergers and acquisitions, and leading to a few dominant players controlling the landscape. However, India's hospitality sector is charting a radically different course. Instead of consolidation, the market is witnessing an unprecedented trend of partnerships, where global brands collaborate with domestic players to unlock new growth avenues.



Nikhil Shah
Managing Director,
Hospitality & Alternatives,
Colliers India



Strategic stakes trump full buyouts

Rather than outright acquisitions, major hospitality players are opting for strategic stake purchases and franchise agreements, allowing them to expand rapidly while minimising capital risk. This approach has accelerated significantly since 2020, with numerous partnership agreements transforming the landscape.

Numbers behind the deals

IHCL acquired 51 per cent equity stake in two companies that operate 135 hotels under the Clarks Hotels and Resorts brand for ₹204 crore. The two companies include ANK Hotels, which has a portfolio of 111 midscale hotels and Pride Hospitality, which operates 24 hotels across India. ANK Hotels operates and manages hotels under the umbrella of The Clarks Hotels &

Resorts which include brands of Clarks Inn, Clarks Inn Suites, and Clarks Inn Premier.

IHCL acquires 55 per cent stake in Tree of Life (₹18 crore). This move helps IHCL strengthen its presence in the boutique and resorts segment.

Marriott invests in Fern Hotels (₹131 crore): The partnership introduces “Series by Marriott”, a new brand operated by Fern. This marks Marriott’s first direct equity investment in the Indian hotel sector, leveraging Marriott’s Bonvoy loyalty programme.

Suba Hotels secures master franchise for Choice Hotels: This allowed Suba to expand Quality Inn, Comfort, and Clarion brands across India, targeting 50 properties by 2026, tapping into Choice Hotels’ global loyalty network.



Clarion Hotel Khayal Kochi



Hilton (NYSE: HLT) announced the signing of a strategic licensing agreement (SLA) with Olive by Embassy to open 150 Spark by Hilton hotels across India, marking the brand's debut in Asia Pacific.

Franchise-led expansions

Wyndham’s multi-brand strategy: La Quinta and Registry Collection operated by Cygnett — targeting 25 hotels by 2025.

Signum trademark collection: It allows 30+ independent hotels to join Wyndham’s global system while maintaining local character.

Hilton’s Spark by Hilton with Olive by Embassy: Embassy Group’s hospitality arm will develop 150 Spark hotels across India, focusing initially on Southern states, marking Hilton’s fastest brand rollout in Asia.

Accor’s tier II/III City Play via Treebo Hospitality Ventures: Treebo transitions from aggregator to operator, managing Ibis and Mercure brands in India with ambitious targets for smaller cities.

Thriving on collaboration

Fragmented ownership: Unlike China, where large conglomerates dominate, India's hotel real estate is highly decentralised. Independent hotels command approximately more than 70 per cent of the hotel market size in 2024, making full-scale acquisitions difficult.

Asset-light preference: Global brands (Marriott, Hilton, and Accor) prefer management contracts over ownership, while Indian operators (Fern, Cygnett, and Treebo) benefit from global branding without heavy capital investment.

Diverse demand: India recorded 2.51 billion domestic travellers in 2023, requiring options across all price points, from budget to luxury, making partnerships more viable than standalone expansions.

Capital efficiency: Collaborations allow brands to scale faster with partnerships requiring significantly lower capital per key compared to owned properties.

Regulatory environment: India's 100 per cent FDI allowance in hotels through the automatic route encourages international partnerships as well as investment in the hospitality sector.

Hybrid models & niche branding

Expect more innovative alliances by 2025-2026:

- Luxury brands partnering with budget operators for new market segments. For example, premium brands exploring hostel formats
- Competing global chains collaborating with Indian partners for different property types
- Co-branded hotels where a single property operates multiple flags for different floors or wings
- Wellness-integrated partnerships combining traditional hospitality with Ayurveda and wellness brands

Next frontier: Asian expansion

Having honed their distinctive partnership approach at home, Indian hotel chains are now poised to expand across Asia, where their deep understanding of Indian travellers' preferences creates a natural advantage. This cultural alignment makes Indian hospitality brands ideally positioned to serve the growing outbound Indian tourist market and regional travellers. HT

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

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Raising the bar for HoReCa innovation



From strategic partnership opportunities to innovative solutions
IHE 2025 has proven to be a powerhouse of hospitality.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

The 8th edition of the India International Hospitality Expo (IHE 2025), held from 3–6 August at the India Expo Centre & Mart, Greater Noida, witnessed a stellar gathering of industry leaders, policymakers, exhibitors, and hospitality professionals from across India

and around the world. With the participation of over 1,000 leading brands and a vast array of product categories, IHE 2025 has firmly positioned itself as the single largest hospitality sourcing platform in India.

Sharing his conviction in the transformative role of IHE 2025, **Dr Rakesh Kumar**,



“

A notable increase in international participation facilitated greater B2B exchange & collaborations

Chairman, India Exposition Mart, noted the event as a vibrant confluence where India's hospitality potential takes centre stage on the global map. He emphasised that IHE is a movement that celebrates innovation, fosters international collaborations, and reimagines growth for every business across the HoReCa and hospitality sectors.

Over a span of four days, the event showcased latest innovations across various categories, including food and beverage, hospitality technology, cleaning and hygiene, kitchen equipment, furnishings, textiles, operating supplies, and wellness products.

Notable highlights of the event included the Master Bakers Challenge India 2025, Junior Pastry Indian Cup 2025, Agropure Culinary League, Zero Proof Cocktail Challenge, Housekeepers Conclave 3.0, and Campus2Startup 1.0. This edition has been a success, recording a notable increase in international participation from various countries, facilitating greater B2B exchange, knowledge sharing, and partnership opportunities. Exhibitors utilise the platform to strengthen their business connections. Here are key conversations with leading industry players on the evolving hospitality businesses.

Karan Khanna

Director
Eclipse Mattress India
(American Bedding
Company)



We focus on introducing cutting-edge technologies that appeal to hotels seeking innovation and freshness. Our latest product, the Royal Grand, features titanium-based pocket springs with a plush pillow top — an industry-first in India and among the newest global technologies, launched in the US just last year. It offers an unprecedented spring count of 3,500 compared to the usual 900, delivering exceptional comfort. The design also ensures unmatched edge support capable of withstanding 200–300 kg on the corners without bulging or sliding — solving a common challenge with thicker mattresses. We have brought this breakthrough to India to set new benchmarks in hotel comfort.

Vinod Khatri

National Manager
Contract Sales
Sealy India



Last year, we set up a factory in Hyderabad, allowing us to produce everything in-house, including our proprietary technology. We design and fine-tune the specifications after fully understanding the requirements of every hotel. One of our standout innovations is the Posturetech Coil, which senses weight and responds accordingly. This coil, combined with our unique edge support system, ensures proper spinal alignment and skeletal support. As a result, your muscles relax and you wake up refreshed, knowing you have had a truly restorative night's sleep. That is what Sealy Posturepedic stands for — a perfect blend of comfort architecture and patented spring technology, backed by 140 years of expertise.

Mayank Sharma
Business Head
Hospitality
(Premium Segment)
King Koil



Great hospitality is remembered not only for service but for the quality of rest it provides. In the premium segment, the promise remains uncompromising luxury. In the budget segment, the future lies in smart, space-optimised solutions for evolving guest needs. Business travellers demand restorative sleep, making innovation in mattress design a business imperative. At King Koil, we craft customised mattresses for every category — budget, business, premium, resort, boutique, and suite rooms — aligning with brand vision and guest expectations. From advanced sleep-grade foam and body sink foam to memory foam and organic latex, every material is chosen for comfort, durability, and performance.

Seema Khurana
Owner
Venus Industries



Demand always depends on the client's specific requirements — hotel needs differ from restaurants, cafeterias, or banquets. We serve all these sectors, including catering. In catering, gold and rose gold finishes are in high demand, while luxury hotels prefer more subtle, wood-based designs. Government clients, on the other hand, often choose silver and we have worked on projects for the new Parliament, the Indian Navy, and the Indian Air Force. The hospitality industry in India is expanding rapidly, with more hotels, restaurants, and cafeterias opening every year. Earlier, we did not work in furniture, but now we supply banquetting furniture, hotel furniture, and customised counters for bar areas.

Rupesh Srivastava
CEO
Therapedic USA



We work directly under the guidance of our US-based principal company, Therapeutic International. All research and development is carried out in the US, and we replicate that technology and expertise in India. Most raw materials are sourced as per their specifications, and we use the same technology that they use in the US. We also develop India-centric products to cater to local preferences, much like adapting a global menu item for regional tastes. Indian customers often look for price-sensitive options, but even in this segment, we never compromise on quality. In our basic hospitality range, we produce foam-encased mattresses that meet international standards in both design and technology.

YK Mehta
Founder
Mehta Furnishers



Modern travellers expect convenient, contactless, and personalised options for check-in, check-out, and service requests. They seek a more effortless and seamless guest experience. Therefore, hotels are compelled to evolve and tailor various aspects for a guest's comfortable stay, from welcome amenities to eco-friendly, stylish service equipment at fitness centres, spa services, and culinary experiences. Breakfasts have moved from restaurant tables to leisure meals in floating trays in the swimming pools for modern, experience seeking travellers. We have reinvented handcrafted service equipment, compact HK-caddies, safari bags, and Victorian furniture, keeping both utility and aesthetics in mind.

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Marriott's dual deal in Thailand woos Indian weddings

Marriott's Phuket and Khao Lak resorts lure Indians with seamless multi-day celebrations, from bachelorette parties to grand weddings.

WORDS BY **AMITA PANDEY**

As destination bachelorette celebrations gain traction among Indian travellers, Marriott International is strategically positioning its properties in Thailand to meet this rising demand. The Courtyard by Marriott Phuket, Patong Beach Resort has emerged as a preferred venue for pre-wedding festivities, offering a perfect blend of large-scale event infrastructure and beachside leisure.

This 445-key resort, complete with its own beach club, has seen a notable increase in enquiries,

particularly from Indian groups. "The property is witnessing a rise in bachelorette enquiries," said



Shannon Creado

Market Director, Sales & Distribution South Thailand and Cluster Director, Sales & Marketing Marriott International

Shannon Creado, Market Director, Sales & Distribution, South Thailand and Cluster Director, Sales & Marketing, Marriott International, underscoring its popularity for MICE events and celebrations.

To address the surging demand, Marriott offers an extended, hassle-free experience by pairing The Courtyard Phuket with its sister property, Le Méridien Khao Lak, for wedding ceremonies. This dual-



The Courtyard by Marriott
Phuket, Patong Beach Resort



Smokestack BBQ & Grill at The Courtyard by
Marriott Phuket, Patong Beach Resort

where guests arrive for bachelorettes in Patong and move on to Khao Lak for the wedding, making it a five-day celebration instead of the usual three,” Creado emphasised.

He further noted that the Courtyard’s central location, which is close to local markets, Indian restaurants, and Phuket’s nightlife hub Soi Bangla, makes it an obvious choice for events.

Strong connection

With rising demand from India, Le Méridien Khao Lak has become synonymous with Indian weddings.

With a total capacity of 269 rooms, the hotel can offer up to 150 rooms, which makes it suitable for the ‘Big Fat Indian wedding’.

What sets the hotel apart is its close connection with Indians. “Half of our executive committee is Indian, including the General Manager, Executive Chef, F&B Director, and Event Manager,” said Creado. “It gives Indian families a sense of comfort as the hotel staff is well-equipped to understand Indian cultural and culinary sensibilities, especially for luxury weddings.”

Inclusive approach

Mindful of price sensitivity, Marriott offers flexible packages across its diverse properties while maintaining its brand standards. “We offer multiple options of properties in this region based on client requirements to ensure value for money,” Creado said. Marriott, as a brand, ensures to be in sync with the evolving trends of MICE and wedding celebrations.

With concerted efforts towards building an inclusive society, the brand will soon host an LGBTQ+ wedding at Le Méridien Khao Lak. “This reflects our commitment to diversity and social responsibility,” Creado added.

HT

destination strategy allows guests to enjoy a multi-day celebration without the inconvenience of navigating multiple airports or shifting logistics.

“We already host many weddings at Le Méridien Khao Lak, with around 70 per cent of the clientele being NRIs from countries like the US, the UK, Canada, and Africa,” stated Creado, adding, “They prefer to attend all events in a single trip, considering the fact that they are already travelling such a long distance to attend the wedding. They would not want to make the trip twice to the same destination.”

Seamless connectivity

Phuket International Airport serves as a common gateway to both properties, enabling a smooth transition between pre-wedding and wedding events. “We have successfully executed multiple events,



Le Meridien Khao Lak Resort & Spa

Hotels emerging as new boardrooms

Driven by the rising demand for flexible, tech-smart spaces, hotels are emerging as the go-to destination for residential meetings.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU

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

Traditionally, many companies maintained in-house facilities



Akshay Gupta
Executive Director
Tivoli Hospitality Group

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





“

For meetings of every size, companies now prefer to collaborate with hotels offering end-to-end solutions for a seamless experience

Small is the new big

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

The Tivoli, New Delhi, has concentrated on building a conferencing ecosystem to tap into the growing need for more efficient yet static boardroom spaces. Its dedicated meeting infrastructure has a boardroom for all sizes, whether it is a meeting for four, 50, or more. For international conferences, this five-star property offers high-speed internet access and secretarial support. They also offer smaller cubicles for interviews and one-on-one discussions along with multiple boardroom seating for 8 to 20 people. “From boardrooms for focused deliberations to ballrooms for larger conferences, complemented by a diverse F&B spread — from poolside cafes and bars to all-day dining — the integrated spaces make team building and networking seamless for companies,” said Gupta.

Personalised solutions

Like every great transformation, The Tivoli now speaks the language of



luxury and experiential hospitality. It elevates its legacy of delivering impeccable celebrations to an entirely new level. Responding to the rising demand for larger-than-life decor, a global culinary palette, and celebrations designed to feel like the event of the century, the property has reimaged itself into an all-equipped resort-style destination. Sitting elegantly at its heart, are five state-of-the-art banquet halls, each crafted to deliver unforgettable experiences.

Among its signature venues are Oakwood, Oyster Greens,

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

Luxury's own playground

At RWS, the lines between reality and reverie blur. This isn't just a destination, it's a curated universe of indulgence.

WORDS BY LIPLA NEGI

Luxury today is no longer about size; it is about stories. Stories that are gilded, layered, and deeply personal. Few destinations script them better than Resorts World Sentosa (RWS). Tucked away on Singapore's vibrant Sentosa Island, RWS refuses to be defined by a single experience. Instead, it offers a galaxy of experiences that play out like an Instagram feed brought to life — only more indulgent and real.

In an age where luxury often risks being defined by predictable sameness, RWS sets itself apart — crafting experiences that connect generations. More than anything, the brand represents a shift in modern travel — a move away from simply asking 'where to go' to 'how it makes you feel.' Whether you are waking up to rainforest-draped vistas, dining on plates that double as art, or stepping into immersive entertainment that blurs the line between reality and spectacle — every detail here is designed to make your stay a story worth telling.





Spin it like minions

With the launch of Illumination's Minion Land — the latest star attraction at Universal Studios Singapore, officially opened this year — the resort's fun quotient has gone up several notches. Minion Land features three immersive zones — Minion Marketplace, Gru's Neighbourhood, and Super Silly Fun Land.

Bringing the blockbuster movie 'Despicable Me' to life, the park offers thrilling rides, exclusive merchandise, and an interactive movie-inspired experience. Among the highlights are Buggie Boogie, the first-ever Minion dance-party-themed carousel and the Super Hungry Food Stand, an oversized, larger-than-life recreation of the iconic snack stall from the movie.

Beneath the blue

The much-anticipated Singapore Oceanarium, formally known as S.E.A. Aquarium, opened doors to the public in July this year. And it is

“

An all-year, all-age, all-itinerary wonder, it is that rare destination where every moment feels tailored to you





Singapore Oceanarium



not just about the size, it is about the deep, exciting, and invigorating experience that comes with it. The bold transformation brings marine life up close and personal for guests. The 22 purposefully designed zones exhibit the journey of marine life from the beginning of time. You will traverse rich thematic environments including Ocean Wonders — home to one of the world's largest kreisel habitats, housing thousands of mesmerising moon jellies, and Singapore's Coast — where mangrove-inspired landscapes and interactive habitats spotlight native biodiversity.

Step into an awe-inspiring, life-sized recreation of a whale fall ecosystem at Whale Fall and Sea Mount — a breathtaking glimpse into the wonders of the ocean. At the Hallway of Hope, conservation-driven stories come alive through dynamic screens, intricate 3D models, and interactive displays, inspiring visitors of

all ages to cherish and protect the ocean. Right next door, the Research and Learning Centre at the Singapore Oceanarium goes beyond being just a hub of marine education — it is a movement to safeguard our oceans. The centre features state-of-the-art learning labs, seminar rooms, collaborative workspaces, and even a rooftop event venue. Here, scientists, researchers, and curious minds come together to advance marine research, foster innovation, and drive impactful conservation efforts — making visitors a part of this incredible journey.

Splash of excitement

Adventure Cove Waterpark, one of the most thrilling highlights of RWS, is a water wonderland. More than just an escape from the tropical heat, it is a playground of slides, swirls, and splashes that promise adrenaline on overdrive. There is no one too old, no one too

Adrenaline amplified: The rides you can't miss



Revenge of the Mummy

Treasure Hunters

Battlestar Galactica: Human vs. Cylon

Jurassic Park Rapids Adventure

Canopy Flyer

Puss in Boots' Giant Journey

Enchanted Airways

At the edge of hyper reality

Shrek 4D Adventure

Through the miracle of Ogre Vision, you will see, hear, and even feel the action right from your seats — hold on tight!

TRANSFORMERS The Ride

Fasten your seatbelts to get transported into the incredible world of transformers on this hyper-realistic 3D thrill ride.

Lights, Camera, Action!

Hosted by Steven Spielberg, witness how a calm day turns stormy when a Category 5 hurricane warns to destroy.



young and no holding back — every splash is a jolt of joy.

Groove to the beats of ‘Baby Shark doo doo’ and other DJ hits as you chill with friends at the Bluwater Bay wave pool or grab a tube and float along the Adventure River, drifting through 14 stunning scenes — from lush tropical gardens to mysterious grottos inhabited by fantasy-like marine creatures. Snorkel with thousands of vibrant fish at the Rainbow Reef or sign up for an up-close encounter with graceful rays, feeding them with your own hands.

Wizarding wonders

Whether or not you are a Potterhead, Harry Potter: Vision of Magic is an unmissable stop — the kind that completes the entire RWS experience. Think interactive screens, secret

doors, hidden chambers, and dazzling sound-and-light spectacles — its 10 spellbinding, immersive zones come alive as you take hold of your very own Elder Wand.

Spanning over 40,000 sq ft, it recreates iconic series with enchanted zones like The Chamber of Secrets, The Trap Door, Room of Requirement, Hall of Prophecy and more. One flick and the magic begins — spells swirl, doors creak open, and you find yourself inside the very heart of JK Rowling’s universe. It is often said that there is no such thing as a ‘one-size-fits-all’ escape, but RWS rewrites that rule. An all-year, all-age and all-itinerary wonder, it is a rare destination where contrasts coexist beautifully — global yet unmistakably Singaporean. Here, every moment feels tailored to you, no matter who you are or what you seek.

HT



Adventure Cove Waterpark



Timeless charm

Heritage Armchair by Prerna Mohan Design Studio is a statement piece that blends classic design with whimsical charm. It comes with safari-print upholstery, hand-turned wooden legs, and plush cushioning, making it ideal for any space. The dimensions of the armchair are 665 mm x 750 mm x 750 mm (W x D x H).

Artistic touch

The Great Eastern Home's latest collection of ceramic artefacts is a celebration of form, texture, and craftsmanship. The collection includes a horse head, cactus-like tree, and cat sculptures. This hand-sculpted collection offers a blend of bold designs and subtle details, making it versatile for both classic and modern décor settings.



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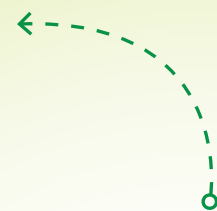
Angle Adjustable

Free rotation support
Left/right +90° screen rotation
30° tilt adjustment



Interactive displays

The Interactive Digital Signage by Romio Technologies is the perfect blend of style and smart technology. It features 180° rotation with support for both vertical and horizontal orientations, powered by an inbuilt 15000mAh battery. It runs on Android 12.8, making it suitable for videos, images, Google Meet, OTT apps, and digital menus. Additionally, the device is lightweight and movable, equipped with an HD display, camera, speaker, 4GB RAM, and 64GB memory.



Play of glass & light

Sans Souci has launched the Brush Collection, a series inspired by the fluid motion of an artist's brushstroke. Designed by Radek Brezar, it captures the essence of creativity in glass and light, transforming a simple gesture of art into refined artistry. It brings a unique character to interiors offering illumination, with a statement of creativity and craft.



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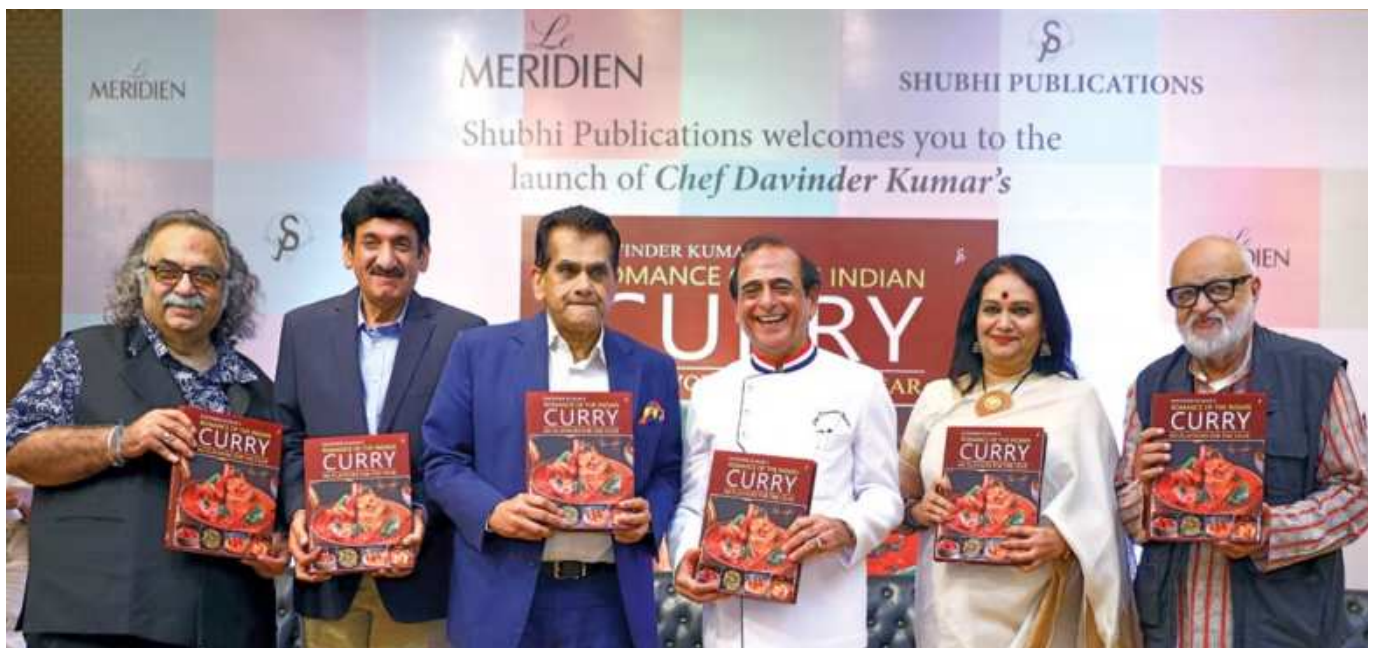
A saga of India's culinary diversity

Chef **Davinder Kumar**'s book, *Romance of the Indian Curry*, reflects his reverence for India's diverse flavours and culinary heritage.

WORDS BY HT BUREAU



Chef Davinder Kumar
National Tourism Award winner &
VP, F&B, Le Méridien New Delhi



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

Culinary treasures

The highlight of the evening was the presence of **Amitabh Kant**, former CEO, NITI Aayog and India's G20 Sherpa, who unveiled the book alongside Chef Kumar. Praising the author and his work, Kant said, "Chef Davinder Kumar's genius

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

lies in creating a book that lets you experience the joy of Indian cuisine every single day of the year."

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

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

The launch was graced by an esteemed gathering of industry stalwarts and cultural icons, including **Pratibha Prahlad**, celebrated Bharatanatyam exponent, **Tarun Thakral**, Executive Director, Le Méridien New Delhi, and several distinguished guests.

Diverse perspectives

A special panel discussion was also held at the event, featuring culinary experts **Dr Pushpesh Pant**, **Rocky Mohan**, **Gautam Anand**, **Kamal Kant Pant**, and **Chef Vinit Manocha**, who shared in-depth insights into India's food heritage and contemporary dining. **HT**

The maximalist traveller

Khushnooma Kapadia packs one rule for travel — to squeeze every drop of joy from each journey she embarks on.

WORDS BY LIPLA NEGI



Khushnooma Kapadia
Vice President, Marketing, South Asia
Marriott International

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

A: Hospitality is more about service and less about numbers.

Q: Describe yourself as a traveller...

A: Adventurous, experimentative, and absolutely touristy.

Q: Your favourite holiday destinations...

A: New York for its energy and diversity and Italy for the sensory overload it offers. While Italy nourishes my soul, walking through New York is absolutely energising.

Q: Your last holiday was...

A: Belgium, which I visited during Christmas. Experiencing Europe during Christmas is completely magical.

Q: Advice that you would like to give young professionals...

A: Learning, assimilating, and managing setbacks are critical in your upward climb.

HT

Movements



Kiran Andicot
Senior Vice President,
Marriott International

Marriott International has appointed Kiran Andicot as Senior Vice President to lead its South Asia region. He will now oversee both operations and development across Marriott International's South Asia portfolio. In this expanded role, Andicot will align growth with operating performance, accelerating conversions and openings.



Kumar Saurabh
General Manager
Fortune Landmark

Kumar Saurabh has been appointed as the General Manager of Fortune Landmark, Ahmedabad. With 18 years of experience, he brings a strong blend of operational expertise, strategic vision, and leadership acumen to his new role. He will oversee the property's overall performance and growth.



Sharath Rajan
General Manager
Fortune Airport Road

Fortune Hotels has appointed Sharath Rajan as the General Manager of Fortune Airport Road, Kochi. Rajan brings a strong track record of driving operational excellence and delivering exceptional guest experiences. In his new role, he will oversee the hotel's operations and overall property performance.



Saurabh Mishra
DOSM, Sheraton Grand
Pune Bund Garden Hotel

Sheraton Grand Pune Bund Garden Hotel has appointed Saurabh Mishra as Director of Sales and Marketing. With over 15 years of experience, Mishra brings deep expertise in sales, marketing, and event management. He will drive revenue growth, expand market reach by leading corporate, MICE, and partnership initiatives.



Deepali Mathur
Director of Rooms
Hyatt Regency Dehradun
Resort & Spa

Hyatt Regency Dehradun Resort & Spa has appointed Deepali Mathur as new Director of Rooms. Mathur's appointment comes at an opportune time as the resort positions itself as the ideal destination for all travel purposes. In her new role, she will focus on amplifying guest value and driving sustainable innovations.



Anuradha Konar
Assistant Manager,
MarCom, Grand Mercure
Bengaluru-Gopalan Mall

Grand Mercure Bengaluru at Gopalan Mall has appointed Anuradha Konar as the Assistant Manager of Marketing & Communications. Konar will spearhead marketing campaigns, manage media relations, and drive brand communication initiatives on digital platforms, enhancing visibility and awareness.



Vandana Joshi
Rooms Division Manager
Fairfield by Marriott Goa
Benaulim

Fairfield by Marriott Goa Benaulim has appointed Vandana Joshi as the new Rooms Division Manager. Joshi has built an impressive career in 17 years across some of India's most prestigious hotel brands. She will leverage her knowledge of rooms to elevate the hotel service quality and streamline processes.



Anindita Tah
Executive Housekeeper
The Den Bengaluru

The Den Bengaluru has appointed Anindita Tah as the new Executive Housekeeper. With over 15 years of experience, she will focus on enhancing guest experience. Tah is adept at implementing high housekeeping efficiency, and optimising service performance aligning with guest expectations.

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