

HOTELS & RESTAURANTS INDIA

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A MONTHLY ON HOSPITALITY TRADE
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BUDGET BLUES



HOSPITALITY SECTOR FEELS LET DOWN

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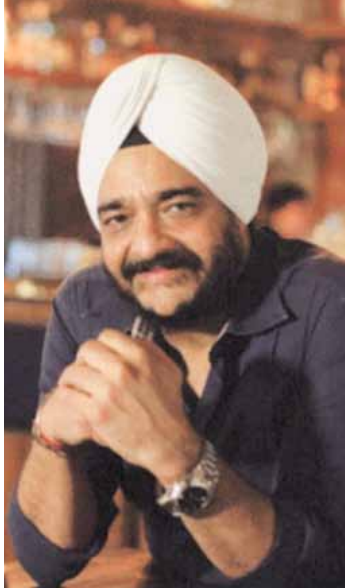
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Gurbaxish Singh Kohli
Vice President
FHRAI

The inclusion of hotels and tourism-related sectors in NIP, infrastructure and industry status for the sector, and the right to claim ITC for restaurants are equally important requirements

My Dear Members,

In one of the most awaited announcements of the year, the Union Budget 2022-23, the Hon'ble Union Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, announced a slew of measures and reforms the government aims to undertake for different industries throughout India. However, to our utter disappointment, the budget had very little to offer to the hospitality industry, which is reeling under tremendous stress due to revenue losses and disruption in business. Needless to say, we were anticipating some much-needed respite in the announcement, but it has proven to be a letdown.

FHRAI had many rounds of communication, sent many representations, and held several meetings with key government officials to apprise them about the plight of the industry and recommend appropriate measures for the budget. During a meeting with the Hon'ble FM in December 2021, I made it a point to raise all the concerns of the industry and requested her to consider the recommendations made by FHRAI in the larger interest of the industry. However, it looks like all our efforts have gone in vain as the budget remains gravely disappointing. The ECLGS extension with additional allocation to the hospitality sector and the provisioning of an outlay of ₹2 lakh crore through CGTMSE are the only relief measures provided to the industry as part of the budget. It is pertinent to mention that the special allocation through ECLGS will support the sector to mitigate some of the pandemic-induced challenges, and the CGTMSE scheme is expected to facilitate additional credit of ₹2 lakh crore for micro and small enterprises and expand employment opportunities.

However, these are just cosmetic measures for a severely devastated sector. The budget has made no mention of reviving the industry. Given the tremendous damage that has ravaged the whole sector's environment, these steps are insufficient to bridge the gap and provide impetus. The number of meetings we had with the Finance Ministry and other ministries led us

to believe that the government would definitely announce some specialised assistance, but it is a grave disappointment that this has not transpired.

We requested that the Hon'ble FM include domestic travel as a deductible expense in IT returns for individuals and corporates. Also, the inclusion of hotels and tourism-related sectors in the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP), infrastructure and industry status for the hospitality sector, and the right to claim the Input Tax Credit (ITC) for restaurants are equally important requirements. We also requested long-term credit facilities in view of the vulnerabilities and the time it would take for businesses to resume normalcy. However, the government has not paid much heed to the industry's requests made by the industry. It is critical for the hospitality sector to have a business-friendly ecosystem in order to thrive. However, repeated lockdowns and limitations, combined with travel restrictions, have caused the business to enter its worst phase. Every time the situation improves, there appears to be some hope of getting the business back on track. However, the erratic arrangement has prevented the hospitality businesses from running continuously. The current crisis is also having a tumbling effect on employment. Aside from another wave of layoffs and salary cuts, the situation will pose a severe challenge to business in the guise of a lack of trained manpower.

We are in need of an urgent catalytic stimulus, without which the pandemic will continue to exacerbate our distress. At a time when the going is getting tougher with every passing day, it is important to have strong backing from the government. We firmly believe that a little bit of hand-holding from the government will help the industry stay afloat during such troubled times.

With kind regards,

Gurbaxish Singh Kohli
Vice President, FHRAI

FEBRUARY 2022

VISION OF EXCELLENCE

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FHRAI-IHM is geared to deliver the *Hunar se Rozgar* skill development programme aimed at targeting individuals with little resources who need to gain skills conducive to employment.

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While the hospitality industry welcomed a few favourable announcements, the players are struck by the fact that the FM has drawn a blank on many of their urged relief measures.



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The hospitality business faced several obstacles in 2020 and 2021, however throughout the Omicron wave, the industry has built resilience and is optimistic for rapid recovery.

THE SELLING STRATEGY: HOTELS IN NEW NORMAL 30

The pandemic has had a massive impact on the hospitality industry. In such drastic situations, the industry has no choice but to think differently and reinvent itself.



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Budget 2022: Hopes come a cropper

The Union Budget 2022-23 has left the hospitality sector disappointed. FHRAI opines that even though ECLGS and CGTMSE moves are welcome, they appear to be a compensatory gesture.

In the Union Budget 2022-23, **Nirmala Sitharaman**, Union Minister of Finance, Government of India, recognised in her address that hospitality and allied services, particularly those provided by micro and small enterprises, are yet to achieve their pre-pandemic levels of activity. In light of these considerations, she announced extension of the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) till March 2023, and increase of its guarantee cover by ₹50,000 crore to ₹5 lakh crore, with additional amount reserved exclusively for hospitality and allied sectors.

Expressing his views on the Union Budget 2022-23, **Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**, Vice President, FHRAI, opines, "Though the budget has been gravely disappointing, the sole relief measures included in the

budget are the extension of ECLGS with additional allocation to the languishing hospitality sector and the provision of ₹2 lakh crore under CGTMSE. The ECLGS special allocation would help the ailing sector mitigate some of the pandemic-induced challenges, while the CGTMSE plan is expected to provision an outlay of ₹2 lakh crore for micro and small firms and create employment opportunities. This move is the outcome of FHRAI's many representations and extensive meetings with authorities since the pandemic began. The sector's massive losses were acknowledged by the Hon'ble FM.

However, this is a drop in the ocean for a battered sector. Given the huge damage that has ravaged the whole sector's ecosystem, these measures are insufficient to bridge the gap and provide impetus to the hotel and

FHRAI RECOMMENDATIONS

- Inclusion of hotels and tourism-related industries in the NIP
- Modifications in infrastructure funding for hotels
- Deduction U/S 35AD-proposed withdrawal of various incentives under the Income Tax Act
- Allowing business losses to be carried forward up to 12 years
- Allowing hotels to avail the SEIS/EPCG benefits without any capping and rate reductions
- Secondary condition waiver in relation to average fee under the EPCG scheme retroactively from FY 2007-08 onwards
- Extend the deadline for fulfilling export obligations under EPCGS and grant the industry export status
- Treat payments by foreigners in INR as FOREX earned for EPCGS
- Special emphasis on promoting meetings and conferences in view of COVID-19's impact on business
- Granting infrastructure and industry status to the hospitality industry
- Placing tourism and hospitality on the concurrent list of the constitution
- Special tax incentives for domestic travel

tourism industries. The number of meetings we had with the Finance Ministry and other ministries led us to believe that they would surely announce some form of specific relief for the industry, but it has been a huge disappointment that this has not transpired. We had urged the FM to include domestic travel as a deductible item in IT filings for individuals and corporations. Inclusion of hotels and tourism-related sectors into the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP), infrastructure and industry status for the hospitality sector, and availability of the Input Tax Credit (ITC) for restaurants These are equally essential needs. In light of the risks and the time it would take for businesses to restore normalcy, the industry has been requesting long-term credit facilities."

According to **Pradeep Shetty**, Joint Honorary Secretary, FHRAI, while ECLGS for the sector is a welcome move, there are no other policies in the budget that may help the ravaged industry. "We will team this budget

with the pandemic, given it is the third budget under COVID-19, and the disappointment remains. There are no takeaways other than the extension and funding of ECLGS. It was nice of the government to finally identify and recognise the three rounds of battering the industry has had to endure, and distinguish the hospitality industry from everyone else by asserting that this is the most affected sector and that is why special measures, other than ECLGS, were launched last year.

ECLGS was announced months ago, but its implementation is still lacking on the ground. Financial institutions are refusing to implement it, and we have repeatedly appealed to the government, apprising that financial institutions are making it incredibly hard to allow people to have more money for capital. Therefore, we have requested a grievance window where these concerns between industry players and financial institutions may be promptly resolved. We had sought a meeting of all bank chairmans to discuss these concerns. This sector has undeniably been placed on the negative lending list by all institutions.

All of this had a cumulative effect, and as a result, 30 to 40 per cent of the establishments were shuttered. We wanted the government to incentivise domestic tourism with more funding, especially for the hospitality sector, and to offer last-mile connectivity between tourist spots and nearby hotels. That, of course, did not occur. Soft and easy loans could have made a comeback or reopening easier for those who had closed, as well as for employee support. All of these measures would have expedited the industry's revival. But, with no real aid and only an ECLGS, this implies "I have a loan and I am going to get more and more loans." Is there a way to repay such debts because international flights continue to be unavailable? So, no one will be able to repay it all.

We were looking forward to the industry's one-time funding of ₹60, 000 crore for the hotel sector, which was announced a few months ago, but operational details have yet to be given. Loans were provided through this fund at a low interest rate. This type of fresh funding would have benefitted the industry. Most of the players are in debt or losing due to successive waves of open-shutdown scenarios, and many of them are not open. Certain tax reforms were crucial in rebuilding the sector. There was an LTC allowance to be used in hotels, would have been favourable to the hotels. Employees are now using LTCs everywhere, such as for groceries. Fresh loans and longer tenure under infrastructure status would have greatly aided recovery and growth."

The hospitality sector is undergoing an existential crisis as a result of the ongoing pandemic's lockdowns and restrictions. There is no denying that the sector's recovery is heavily reliant on the government's support and favourable policies.



Gurbaxish Singh Kohli
Vice President, FHRAI



The hospitality industry has been requesting the government for long-term credit facilities



Pradeep Shetty
Sr. VP, HRAWI



ECLGS was announced months ago, but the execution is still lacking on the ground





Ambiguities in Copyright Act

FHRAI has requested the government take necessary measures to ensure a level playing field for public and stakeholders involved in commercial use of music in India.

The Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) has addressed a letter to Piyush Goyal, Minister of Commerce & Industry (MOCI), Government of India, in relation to the ongoing challenges and harassment that the association's members face as a result of ambiguities in the Copyright Act. Because of this, an exceedingly challenging environment arose for the general public who booked private locations for weddings and related events. Hotels are thus drawn into a conflict between guests and copyright agencies as a result of the latter's unlawful acts, such as trespassing on private events, issuing threats to guests and hotel owners, sending legal notices, and videotaping of the events.

Continuous harassments of hotels in violation of the MOCI notification dated August 27, 2019: Weddings and wedding-related events are excluded under Section 52 (1) (za) of the Indian Copyright Act 1957. A notice released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on August 27, 2019 reaffirmed that all religious and marriage-related activities are free from copyright levies. On the other hand, the copyright agencies constantly harass the members by issuing letters and demanding royalties for playing music.

Unlawful and extortionary tactics adopted by the copyright agencies:

Copyright agencies/assignees, such as PPL and Novex, have been using extortionate tactics such as illegally trespassing at private events and videotaping the functions to charge hefty amounts from guests and hotels in the name of copyright licence fees, causing a schism between hotel owners and guests. A similar instance occurred recently in Pune, when quick action by informed hoteliers and guests resulted in the filing of FIRs against Novex and PPL. FHRAI further brought to attention that, in a ruling dated April 25, 2018, the Bombay High Court stated unequivocally that police officials must file an FIR for trespassing. However, the copyright agencies routinely disregard and violate this judgement ruling.

Demand for royalty/licence fees from multiple copyright agencies for the same event: Another area where the sector is constantly harassed by copyright agencies is the demand notifications/legal notices received by the different agencies requesting licencing fees and royalties for playing music in their premises for the same event. For

example, IPRS, PPL, Novex, ISRA, and RMPL all need a licencing cost to use sound recording or DJ music in any event. Similarly, IPRS, ISRA, and Novex are requesting a licencing fee for live musical performances. CINEFIL is demanding a fee for content presented on TVs in hotel rooms, which is is governed by TRAI.

Contradictory position of the copyright agencies in regard to Section 52 (1) (za) of the Copyright Act: PPL and Novex engage in illegal actions, including criminal trespass into private gatherings. However, copyright societies such as IPRS and RMPL have clarified that they would not levy a fee for marriage-related events. This conflicting assertion by the agencies speaks volumes about their unethical stance on the subject.

FHRAI has requested for corrective measures. The association has also made recommendations for the ministry's consideration: Take strong punitive action against PPL and Novex for continuing violations of government orders and regulatory provisions regarding the exemption granted under the Copyright Act for marriage-related events, causing ordeal to the general public and other stakeholders; and establish a single registered the copyright society for all rights relating to music, both live and recorded, per a single registered copyright society per a single registered copyright society.

PPL and Novex are at the forefront of defying government notices and regulatory provisions

Urge for continuing EPCG scheme

FHRAI urges the government to continue the EPCG scheme to support the most distressed tourism and hospitality sectors to overcome the impact of COVID-19.

In a representation to Piyush Goyal, Minister of Commerce & Industry, FHRAI sought immediate relief for the hospitality industry. In a virtual meeting with the minister on January 20, 2022, FHRAI was represented by Vice President Gurbaxish Singh Kohli, as well as Joint Honorary Secretaries Pradeep Shetty and SP Jain. During the meeting, FHRAI reiterated its request for a waiver of the secondary condition relating to the average foreign exchange earnings under the Export Promotion Capital Goods Scheme (EPCGS) for licences issued after 2008. Since then, FHRAI has been pleading with the government to remove the condition. The association is now urging that the EPCG scheme be extended for another 10 years. In view of the pandemic effect for licences with export obligation (EO) terms expiring before March 2020, it has sought an extension of EO periods under EPCGS from six to 14 years. The following are some of the grounds for requesting the extension:



UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGES

With another tourist season wrecked by the rise of Omicron variant, the sector now faces a bleak future with rising debt, duties, and statutory liabilities to meet but no means or avenues to do so. Under the current conditions, many more hospitality businesses would be compelled to close their doors if sufficient government support is not provided.

LACK OF TECHNOLOGY, GLOBAL STANDARDS, AND COST EFFECTIVENESS

Hotels import high-end products such as light fixtures, kitchen equipment, security equipment, and fire-fighting systems, among others, as the products are required to meet certain global standards. Other benefits of importing products include the quality, technology, and cost, as these products are not available in India within the specified parameters. Hospitality projects, particularly those with a foreign brand, must adhere to strict guidelines.

TIME AND REVENUE SAVING DUE TO IMPORT OF SPECIALISED GOODS

For hotels to provide a world-class experience in terms of both products and services, the five



The hospitality industry is committed to render high-end services

core value drivers of product availability, luxury of choice, quality, timely delivery, and price competitiveness must all function in tandem. Unfortunately, India's indigenous manufacturing and supply chain are not yet fully prepared to fulfill these value drivers.

DOMESTIC PROCUREMENT OF CAPITAL GOODS UNDER EPCGS

Domestic procurement of capital goods under the EPCGS is quite low due to a lack of technology in India and a long delivery period. It was also impacted since duty refunds to EPCG suppliers remained difficult and time-consuming. Domestic suppliers, many times, refused to deliver capital items under the EPCG due to the long process of obtaining reimbursements under the deemed export category.

"As per the scheme, establishments importing capital goods are expected to earn six times the

duty saved over the average forex earned during the first three years from the date of licence issuance for the purpose of licence redemption. Hotels, on the other hand, have seen a sharp decline in business since 2007. Occupancy plummeted from 20 to 40 per cent, and forex profits continued to fall. Given the year-on-year drop in business, we are requesting that the maintenance of exports for hotels in the services sector be exempted," says **Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**, VP, FHRAI.

"Given the volatile economic situation, the timeline for completing export obligations for all EPCG licences with EO periods beginning in February 2020 should be extended by at least eight years. The hotel industry's forex earnings have been hit by an unprecedented pandemic and travel restrictions imposed by many countries. This results in non-compliance with EO for pre-COVID capital goods imports and a penalty for the hospitality industry," says **Pradeep Shetty**, Jt. Hon. Secy, FHRAI.

In conclusion, Piyush Goyal has assured the sector that the FHRAI's requests are being considered, especially in terms of EO deadlines for hospitality units that have secured licences under the scheme.



J&K tourism: Marching ahead

In a first, the Government of Jammu and Kashmir has inked a memorandum of understanding with FHRAI to develop hotels and other hospitality-related infrastructure.

The Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Government of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) to develop hotels and other hospitality-related infrastructure. This is the first time in history that a joint MoU has been signed between a hotel and restaurant association and the government.

The memorandum was signed at the Jammu Convention Centre on December 27, 2021, at a real estate summit co-hosted by the Government of J&K, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India, and the National Real Development Council.

Hardeep Singh Puri, Union Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs, graced the occasion, which focused on giving an effective platform to present possible real estate investment prospects as well as an intensive discussion on the policy and regulatory framework.

At the summit, Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State for PMO, Manoj Sinha, Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, and Durga Shanker Mishra, Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India, among others, were present.

Gurbaxish Singh Kohli, Vice President, FHRAI, represented the industry at the summit and signed the MOU. "We thank the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India, the J&K government, and the National Real Development Council for inviting us and signing the MOU to develop hospitality infrastructure in the region. J&K is a promising venue, with wonderful people and a hospitality-friendly ecosystem. With this MoU, we look forward to further strengthening the public-private partnership in the region to leverage the enormous potential the region has to offer for hospitality and tourism."

Speaking about the opportunities the MOU will offer for the hospitality sector, Kohli adds, "We are hopeful that this will facilitate the J&K government in providing land to FHRAI members for various projects and extend incentives and other benefits as per existing policies and rules. New developments in hospitality will provide an

impetus to economic growth through increased investments and will create more employment opportunities in the region."

At the summit, the Jammu and Kashmir government signed 39 memorandums of understanding with real estate businesses, four of which are in the hotel industry. The move is anticipated to provide a significant boost to economic growth in the region through infrastructure development, greater investment, and the creation of direct and indirect jobs.

Gurbaxish Singh Kohli also took part in one of the panel discussions, titled 'Next Destination J&K: Tourism, Films & Entertainment, Logistics, Commercial, Warehousing', where he and the other panellists emphasised the importance of promoting the region as an untapped destination for growth in infrastructure, tourism, hospitality, and real estate. Rohit Kansal, Secretary-Information Department, Government of J&K; Sarmad Hafez, Secretary-Tourism Department, Government of J&K, Anoo Malhotra and Mahmood Ahmad Shah, Directors-I&C, Jammu; Sanjay Sethi, MD and CEO, Chalet Hotels Ltd.; Nitin Desai, Art Director and Producer; Rajesh Gupta, Executive Committee Member-LEAD; and Khair Ull Nissa, Executive Director-WTC, and WTCA Board Member.



This will facilitate the J&K government in providing land to FHRAI members



The case of OYO: Arguing the toss

In a civil appeal filed by FHRAI, SC serves notice to OYO. FHRAI also appeared before the NCLAT as an intervenor, representing 50 members with claims totalling around ₹100 crore.

A Supreme Court bench, led by Justices Indira Banerjee and Abhay S. Oka, has issued a notice to OYO in a recent hearing on January 25, 2022, based on the civil appeal filed by FHRAI. In August 2021, FHRAI filed an appeal in the Supreme Court under Section 62 of the IBC, contesting the final order issued by the Ld. NCLAT on July 7, 2021, along with the appeal of Mona Agrawalla of Dabriwal Enterprises in Siliguri.

"Dissatisfied with the NCLAT's impugned order, many members sought FHRAI to file an appeal and to be impleaded in Dabriwal Enterprises' appeal. The SC Bench was pleased to issue notice for a final hearing on February 10 at the most recent hearing of the appeal of FHRAI and others. The counsel for FHRAI and others argued that there were other greater legal issues at stake in these matters, and that settling with one of the creditors could not be



Withdrawal of IBC proceedings against OYO is a breach of legal procedure



used by NCLAT to withdraw IBC proceedings against OYO, especially where there were a significant number of creditors-hotels. This is a breach of the statute and the legal procedure," says **Pradeep Shetty**, Joint Honorary Secretary, FHRAI.

FHRAI filed the appeal on behalf of its hotel members who are suffering on account of OYO Hotels & Homes Pvt Ltd's failure to pay their debts. This development came after NCLAT granted the withdrawal application filed by operational creditor Rakesh Yadav, who settled with OYO, in an impugned judgement dated July 7, 2021. According to the association, the withdrawal application was accepted without taking into account the 110 other operational creditors who owed more than ₹225 crore. FHRAI was also an intervenor before the NCLAT, representing around 50 members with claims totalling approximately ₹100 crore.

Steering the course

HRAWI is making strides in effecting change through education and training.

The Hotel and Restaurant Association of Western India (HRAWI), in collaboration with the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), conducted an online Food Safety Supervisory Training in Advance Catering (FoSTaC) programme on January 18, 2022. The programme focussed on imparting standard health and food handling practices to personnel employed in hotels and restaurants. The programme also covered information on the licencing requirements of the FSSAI hospitality establishments in the country.

"With the help of FSSAI, HRAWI has made inroads in effecting change through education and training. Prioritising education in food safety and handling SOPs among hospitality professionals is the need of the hour. This will ensure that the Indian hospitality sector continues to evolve and remain competitive on the global map. The members have been proactive and participative in these training sessions," says **Sherry Bhatia**, President, HRAWI.

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Lift night curfew in Delhi, save hospitality sector: HRANI

HRANI has requested Delhi government's urgent consideration for review of the present capacity and timing restrictions on operations of hotels, restaurants, and banquets.

Given the circumstances, as well as the continuous decline in the number of Omicron cases and the improvement in the situation, the Hotel and Restaurant Association of North India (HRANI) has requested that the Delhi government review the current capacity and timing restrictions on hotel, restaurant, and banquet operations. HRANI has further requested the state government to take the following recommendations into account:

- Remove the night curfew that is currently in effect.
- For the past two years, the hospitality sector in Delhi has continued to operate at 50 per cent capacity and with time restrictions, while other sectors have been allowed to run normally. Therefore, the state government is urged to evaluate the capacity and timing limits and allow restaurant operations in accordance with licencing norms. Any more restrictions on operations will be



Surendra Kumar Jaiswal
President, HRANI

These measures will provide relief at this critical juncture

critical for the restaurant industry in Delhi at this juncture.

- Increase the limit of 200 people for social gatherings at spacious

premises. Banqueting is a key source of revenue and is also considered when determining the operational costs of hospitality units. Therefore, in line with the social distancing protocol in effect, the limit for social functions should be raised in accordance with the capacity of the hall and open space to accommodate guests.

- As long as the social distance protocol is followed, banquets and halls with more space should be able to host social functions and gatherings with a 50 per cent capacity without requiring additional local permission.
- Conferences and gatherings should also be allowed with a capacity of 50 per cent of the hall's capacity. A review of the most recent DDMA order is needed since it only allows weddings in the capital.

These measures will provide much-needed relief to the industry, preventing future closure of businesses and employment losses for millions of people.

HRANI

Drumming up support

Following the increase in the number of Omicron cases and the tightening of curbs, SIHRA ensures that hoteliers and restaurateurs maintain business as usual.

The South India Hotels and Restaurants Association (SIHRA) has issued guidelines for hoteliers and restaurateurs in the region to ensure normal operations in light of the new restriction measures enforced by state governments in the southern region.

shops, and restaurants, must remain closed. On Sundays, only essential services are authorised to operate. Sundays are prohibited for any public transportation and metro rail, while religious sites are prohibited from being open for public darshan on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.

SIHRA advises hoteliers and restaurateurs to follow their issued guidelines to maintain business as usual. Banquet functions will be permitted with a maximum of 100 guests. All functions must be announced through the corporation's website or email only. Authorities will constantly monitor hotels,



Additional containment measures have been implemented by the Karnataka government, including a night curfew from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. on all days and a weekend curfew from 10 p.m. on Fridays to 5 a.m. on Mondays. Intensive surveillance is being carried out at Kerala and Maharashtra borders. Weddings should be organised in an open space with a maximum of 200 people or in a confined location with a limit of 100 people. Religious places are authorised to be open for darshan and no sevas are permitted. The number of people permissible at any given moment will be limited to 50 who are fully vaccinated. The Tamil Nadu government has imposed a night curfew from 10 p.m. to 5 p.m. During this curfew, all commercial businesses, including malls, markets,



K. Syama Raju
President, SIHRA

**Strict implementation
of restrictions will be
followed**

and guests and hotels will be fined heavily for any violations. In case of repeated violations, the hotels will be sealed by the corporation. Dine-in facilities will run at 50 per cent capacity, and alternate chairs will be marked and blocked. Strict implementation are to be followed during January and February. A 100 per cent room occupancy is permitted, but restaurants are only allowed to operate at 50 per cent capacity. The Nilgiris District Administration had ordered the closure of all hotels since the RT-PCR test revealed only a few positive cases. Recognising the gravity of the situation, SIHRA elevated the subject to the Tamil Nadu government, and the issue was resolved. The next day, the reopening of all hotels was approved by the District Administration of Nilgiris.

Vision of excellence

FHRAI-IHM is geared to deliver the *Hunar se Rozgar* skill development programme aimed at targeting individuals with little resources who need to gain skills conducive to employment.

The hospitality sector requires several skills to cohabit under one roof in order to operate a roaring business. As a result, planned and sustainable skill development is becoming highly relevant. Academic institutions play a critical role in delivering skill development in the sector since they help transform an individual into a professional.

In line with this vision, FHRAI-IHM, Greater Noida was founded in 2005 by the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) to educate young boys and girls about the hospitality industry. This educational endeavour of FHRAI is unique as only two hospitality associations in the world have set up such training institutes, one being located in Singapore.

The FHRAI-IHM has been recognised by the National Council for Hotel Management, Noida (an organisation of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India) for the purpose of affiliating government and private IHMs offering hotel management programmes in the country. FHRAI-IHM is built upon a seven-acre plot of land with a spacious and well-equipped training facility, as well as separate hostels for boys and girls.

It is heartening to know that recently, the Ministry of Tourism (MOT) entrusted the FHRAI-IHM to facilitate a unique skill development programme. Titled *Hunar se Rozgar*, the programme aims to impart requisite skills to individuals who have completed eighth standard and above, providing them with proper training and employment in hotels, restaurants, canteens, hospital catering, industrial catering, or other eateries. Having undergone the *Hunar se Rozgar* programme, they would become eligible to even start their own business.



MOT finances the entire cost of these courses, so students are not required to pay any fees



The skill development programme includes courses such as multi-cuisine cook, F&B service staff, room boy, and front and office staff, among others. The *Hunar se Rozgar* is an initiative from MOT to impart knowledge and training with an aim to create a pool of potential workforce for the hospitality and allied services. The two-month programme is funded by the Ministry, so the students are not required to pay any fee for the same. Students would also receive a stipend upon completion of the programme.

As part of MOT's suo moto initiatives under the scheme of 'Capacity Building for Service Providers', it was decided to provide financial assistance to government-sponsored and private tourism and hospitality institutes, state tourism development corporations, and state governments to conduct skill development programmes. *Hunar se Rozgar* is designed to target those with little means and those who need to acquire skills that are conducive to employment.

Apart from *Hunar se Rozgar*, FHRAI IHM also provides regular educational courses in hospitality, such as an 18-month diploma in food production and F&B service. Interested candidates may contact the institute for JEE specifics such as test norms, course fees, age limit, employment opportunities, and admission to diploma programmes by visiting the institute between 0930 and 1630 hours on all working days (Monday-Friday).



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Occupancy rates stand in good stead

Spread of Omicron in India led to a dampened demand for leisure and business travel in January. However, HVS Anarock forecasts a strong rebound in domestic travel soon.

HOTEL SECTOR

Key Stats (India Average)

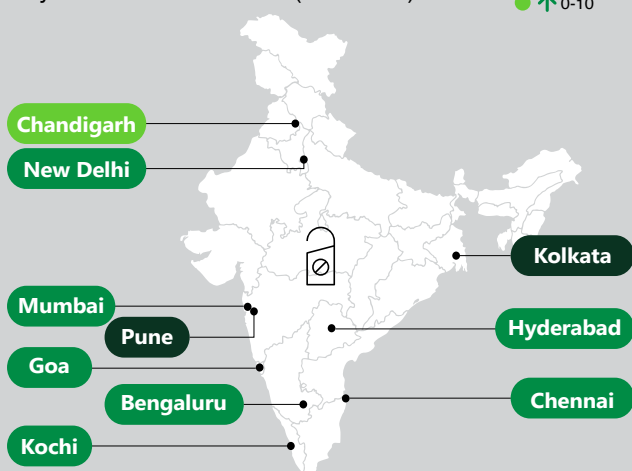


	DEC 2021	M-o-M (%)	Y-o-Y (%)	DEC 2021	NOV 2021	OCT 2021	SEP 2021
ADR	₹5,750 - ₹5,950	↑ 7-9%	ADR	↑ 33-35%	↑ 42-44%	↑ 25-27%	↑ 19-21%
Occupancy	58% - 60%	↑ 3-5pp ¹	Occupancy	↑ 15-17pp	↑ 24-26pp	↑ 25-27pp	↑ 29-31pp
RevPAR	₹3,335 - ₹3,570	↑ 15-17%	RevPAR	↑ 82-84%	↑ 156-158%	↑ 133-135%	↑ 163-165%

Source: HVS Research

OCCUPANCY CHANGE¹

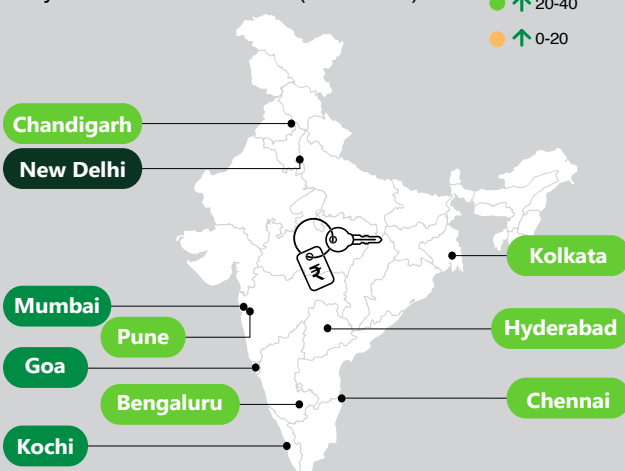
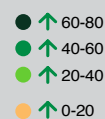
Key Indian Markets Y-o-Y (Dec 2021)



¹Occupancy change in percentage points (pp)

ADR CHANGE²

Key Indian Markets Y-o-Y (Dec 2021)

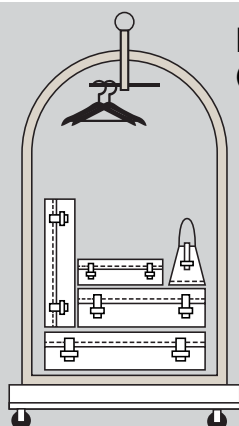


²ADR change in percentage

Source: HVS Research

BRANDED HOTELS³

(Q4 2021 vs. Q4 2020)

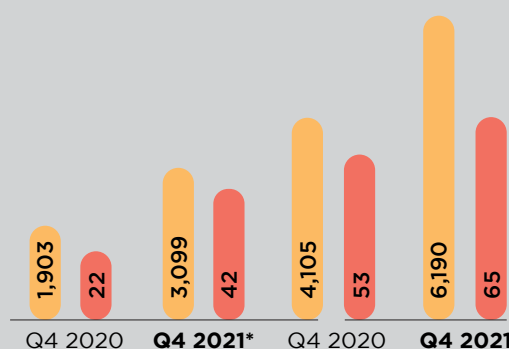


By Keys

By Properties

Openings

Signings



³Data collated by HVS from 16 hotel operators and media reports as of Jan 22, 2022

Source: HVS Research



Mr Greesh Bindra
VP Operations, The Suryaa, New Delhi

“The auditors were very professional and touched points that were very relevant, more so after we have gone through these trying times. It was delightful to see the lead auditors do a through back of the house round and give us some valid inputs.”

Mr Kush Kapoor
CEO, Roseate Hotels & Resorts

“To get certified by QualStar, an accredited body that is recognised in over 100 countries, was very reassuring, both for the hotel and the guests. It helped us examine the standard and protocols put in place for Covid and assess their efficiency from a fresh perspective.”

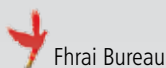


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In the doldrums

Fate of the hospitality industry depended on this year's budget presentation which was once again entirely neglected, according to the regional heads.



Sudesh Poddar
President, HRAEI

NO RELIEF FOR THE AILING SECTOR

I welcome the decision to extend the ECLG scheme up to March 2023 and the increase in guarantee cover to ₹5 lakh

crore, earmarking an additional ₹50,000 crore for hospitality and allied sectors. It was good that the Hon'ble Finance Minister mentioned the hospitality industry's distress in this context. This will bring a lot of relief and has been a key demand from us.

The proposed Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) revamp will benefit the micro sector, which was unable to access ECLGS due to a lack of existing credit outstanding, which was quite a basic requirement.

However, there is no direct intervention to support the highly stressed hospitality sector

Long-term urge to give industry status has been ignored

companies and their employees. There was no announcement of relief for higher utility bills, wage support for employees, or raw material costs.

The industry needed a tax holiday for at least a year, along with temporary relief to ease the cash flow crisis that has affected the functionality of the industry. Exemption of tax collected at

source (TCS) on outbound tours, restoration of input tax credit (ITC) on GST, reduction in indirect taxes and removal of service exports from the India scheme (SEIS) benefit capping of ₹5 crore were also expected.

Our long-term demand to give industry status to the hospitality sector has also been ignored year after year. Despite the fact that we are among the highest employment generators in the country and a valuable source of foreign exchange earnings, what we have is just a drop in the ocean of demand. In short, there is no specific relief for the ailing sector, which contributes significantly to India's GDP.



Sherry Bhatia
President, HRAWI

NEED ALL-ROUND DEVELOPMENT

For the hospitality industry, Union Budget 2022-23 has been extremely disappointing. The industry welcomes the ECLGS extension. The special allocation of ₹50,000 crore will provide some relief to the struggling businesses. However, the extension is available only to businesses that have existing credit lines or outstanding sanctioned loans. The budget

availing funds with extended repayment periods at a low rate of interest. Infrastructure status and industry status for the hospitality sector and allowing an ITC for restaurants are equally crucial for the sector. The government should have allowed business losses to be carried forward to 12 years. Because of the pandemic, hotels will not be able to set off past business losses within a period of eight years.

The hospitality sector should have been given the benefit of being able to avail of the SEIS/EPCG benefits without any capping and rate reductions. It would have helped the



Projects for boosting tourism infra should be in the NIP list



has also provisioned an outlay of ₹2 lakh crore through CGTMSE, which will benefit small and medium-sized establishments.

The hospitality and tourism-related sectors should have been included in NIP. This would have enabled the sector to continue its survival by

sector in its recovery if the SEIS entitlement had been increased to 10 per cent of the net forex earnings for the next three to five financial years. To incentivise all-round development of tourism infrastructure, fiscal incentives in the form of SEIS certificates and imports against EPCG should have been continued.



Surendra Kumar Jaiswal
President, HRANI

Many presentations and recommendations have already been submitted to the Finance Ministry by industry associations for the revival and survival of the hospitality and tourism industries. In the pre-budget recommendations to the Finance Minister, we included some priority reforms to stabilise the industry, such as infrastructure status for hotels, wages support for



LONG-PENDING REQUESTS IGNORED

The announcement of the extension of ECLGS up to March 2023 and the increase in guarantee cover from ₹50,000 crore to a total cover of ₹5 lakh crore is a positive move. The additional amount earmarked exclusively for hospitality-related sectors would help the industry, but we were looking at support for immediate and short-term measures for critical revival.

Though the decisions to give special impetus to seamless multimodal connectivity, including master plans like PM Gati Shakti-Expressway, 400 new generation Vande Bharat Trains, water transport, National Ropeways Development Programme, and e-passports, could boost the sector in the long term. However, the Union Budget 2022-23 lacks support for the tourism, travel, and hospitality industries.



Single window clearance requires immediate attention



employees of the hospitality and tourism sectors, industry status and export status for tourism export earnings, and a review of the GST structure, including the restoration of ITC. However, all of our long-pending requests have not been addressed. Single window clearance is something that also requires immediate attention, as developing hotels and operating restaurants requires multiple licences and clearances in advance, and any delay in obtaining such documents discourages entrepreneurs from entering the industry business. We are still hopeful that the government will look into our requests and provide some relief.

A silent treatment

While the hospitality industry welcomed a few favourable announcements, the players are struck by the fact that the FM has drawn a blank on many of their urged relief measures.



Arun Kumar
Director, FHRAI-Institute of Hospitality Management

“ COVID-19 has had a negative impact on education, and most schools and colleges were not prepared for online education. It is disappointing to note that budget allocation to the PN-vidya Scheme was reduced. The education budget allotment has been increased to ₹1.04 lakh. Aid for higher education, research, and innovation has grown over the previous year's allocation, but additional funding is required to meet the demand.

Kush Kapoor
CEO, Roseate Hotels and Resorts.

“ The one-year extension of the ECLGS moratorium for the hospitality sector would provide some relief to hotel players who are battling with the weight of loan repayment and uncertainty in revenue generation. The move will provide much-needed liquidity to the sector. It is appreciated that, despite the government's income limits and the impact of the growing budget deficit, the government has recognised the burden on the industry.



Zubin Saxena
MD & VP-Operations, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group

“ We welcome the Union Budget and the allocation of strategic aid that will allow the hospitality sector to bounce back. The expansion of the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) for the hotel sector with an expanded insurance cover of ₹5 lakh crore is a welcome step. With domestic travel on the rise, we believe the government's highway expansion plans will improve accessibility and strengthen demand even further.

Himmat Anand
Founder, Tree of Life

“ I am really disappointed with the government. Are the previous two decades not enough to realise that the government does not and will not consider us a priority, despite our massive GDP contribution and provision of millions of direct and indirect jobs? And these two shining examples of our contribution are starting to sound as jaded as Incredible India! Each of us must do our best in order for our industry to shine jointly.



Pankaj Gupta
General Manager, Crowne Plaza New Delhi Mayur Vihar Noida

“ While the industry welcomed the extension of ECLGS, there were hopes for far more specific measures to be announced to provide relief. The specifics must be researched in order to better comprehend the impact on certain enterprises and organisations. This will help small and mid-sized hotels in overcoming liquidity challenges and resuming expansion. Overall, the budget prioritises long-term, sustainable benefits over short-term.



Sarbendra Sarkar
Founder, Cygnett Hotels and Resorts

“ The expansion of the ECLGS to include additional funding for the hospitality sector is a positive step. This will help small and medium-sized hotels in overcoming liquidity challenges and returning to growth. The increased emphasis on infrastructure development will benefit the tourism and hospitality sectors as well. We also welcome the unveiling of the National Ropeways Development Programme.

SP Jain
Managing Director, Pride Hotels Ltd.

“ The FM considered extending ECLGS, and its guarantee cover has been increased by ₹50,000 crore, bringing the total insurance to ₹5 lakh crore. This would be a massive boost for the hotel and tourism sectors. This will offer the industry a much-needed lift by providing more liquidity and helping it regain its position. Millions of people who have lost their jobs can now find work in the sector. We welcome this announcement.



Manoj Agarwal
Head-Asset Management, InterGlobe Hotels

“ One of the industries that has yet to recover from the pandemic is hospitality. The third wave of viruses prevented people from travelling and slowed the industry's recovery in the fourth quarter of the previous year. We applaud the FM's announcement to prolong the ECLGS by ₹50,000 crore until March 2023. Hopefully, this will bring some relief by increasing liquidity and help in the sector's speedier recovery.

Sanjay Sethi
CEO & MD, Chalet Hotels Limited

“ We welcome the FM's emphasis on hospitality in ECLGS. However, we are waiting for the fine print on any relaxations in meeting debt ratio covenants from past ECLGS, as well as on whether the ₹200 crore cap under the scheme has been increased. We are encouraged by the FM's emphasis on sustainability. The current budget's focus on clean mobility and green energy is consistent with Chalet Hotels Limited's initiatives and actions.



JK Mohanty
CMD, Swosti Group

“ The move to grant an extra ₹50,000 crore as an ECLGS loan is another debt that is not relief. The one-year moratorium term is insufficient and should be prolonged until March 2025. Although the tourism ministry's budget allocation has been raised from ₹2026 crore to ₹2400 crore, this is insufficient to promote India.





Food as a sustainable story

Philip Mahoney, looking after India and nearby regions in his new role at Accor, aims to bring hyperlocal cuisine menus into the fold of an immersive dining experience.



Lipla Negi

Accor has appointed Philip Mahoney as Vice President of F&B for India, the Middle East, Africa, and Turkey. In his 30-year career, for him, this position is particularly unique as it gives him key responsibility to drive the group's strategy in the region: making food and drink the heart and soul of each of its hotels. Speaking about his new role and challenges, he says, "The size of the country and geographical nuances are challenging, obviously. It would be easy to just refer to India, but we know there are many variations in terms of style and diet. So we really have to get into the details of this amazing country. Fortunately, we have identified regional specialists in each of the countries we operate in to make sure our strategic approach is applied sensibly according to regional nuances."

AGAINST 'THROWAYISM'

Authenticity and the locale are always most important to us, and that will always remain the focus. For travellers visiting hotels, that immersion into the destination, that sense of place, is very often part of the experience people value the most, and it does not matter if you are a domestic or international visitor. Similarly, for local guests using our restaurants and bars, I think it is important that they see that international operators embrace the traditions of their environment and, more so, respect them. We will reinforce this by really pushing hyperlocality: It is one of our key messages and we are seeing some real progress with hotels setting up partnerships with local farmers for specialised and organic produce, but also establishing micro farms either through traditional methods where they have availability of land or through vertical hydroponic farming where they don't. We want to be 'against throwawayism' and this ties in nicely with our push towards more plant-based menus and, in this, of course, we can learn a great deal from the Indian culinary scene. The beauty of having hotels with multiple outlets, though, is that we can do both. So, we can implement global concepts, such as KooX Asian Grill in Chennai, using local produce to present it in a more international fashion. What we want to avoid, though, are the bland international offerings you see in so many hotel restaurants, where they do not really know what they are and have no identity at all.

CONSCIOUS CONSUMPTION

We can push 'local' and still gently suggest people in different directions to encourage them to think a little differently. Take weddings, for example: The abundance of a massive buffet is wonderful for a celebration, but how good for the planet is all the associated food waste? I think we will start to see a shift in people's attitudes in that respect, and we would like to play a small part in that trend of 'conscious consumption'.

ORDERING IN IS THE NORM

I think we have to celebrate 'ordering in'. Obviously, it has been dramatically increased by the pandemic, but

it was becoming so much the norm that it had brought untraditional players like upscale restaurants and hotels into the scene. We have already invested in a new start-up delivery service operating in GCC countries (Kitch In), partnering with our hotels, and we see no reason why that can't expand further afield. In the meantime, we will continue to foster the partnerships that have been built up by hotels before and during the pandemic.

EXPERIENCE IS THE KEYWORD

It is a key part of the dining out journey as it is not just about getting some food and drink. It is the theatre involved, the sociability, the 'us-time'; whatever is driving you, it is rarely just getting some food. This we have to reimagine constantly. How can we make it better without invading a party's privacy? How can we tell you stories without becoming a bore? And we can bring the experience home: Meal kits do just that, transforming communal cooking into a wonderful bonding experience for people at home, transforming the joy, successes, and failures of communal cooking into an almost primal thing as we chew bones around the fire.

EMBRACING DIGITAL PLATFORMS

We need to tell people about the experience they are missing in restaurants. We have seen a significant release of pent-up demand in several of the countries where we have a presence, but we can give that a nudge by embracing digital – our teams are getting very story-savvy and the need to tell these stories goes beyond restaurant walls onto digital platforms.

FLAVOUR VARIATION IN DRINKS IS FUN

We have been doing some work with tea-based cocktails and mixes and pairing them with food. The sourness and bitterness you can achieve with those and with fermented drinks will undoubtedly appeal to people who like to experience more complex flavours. So, that is a route we can explore to expose people to flavour variations. But, should we really try to do it that way? We can, of course, explore food pairing with traditional vertical drinks, and there are so many flavour combinations to discover that I think it could be fun!

SUSTAINABILITY AT THE CORE

It should be the 'chinois' through which we pass all our activities. To our hyperlocal activity, we can add a range of food waste reductions. And definitely no plastic. The challenge for us comes in construction, as we do not build or own our hotels. So, we need to work with our partners and present the case for building sustainable practices from the get-go.



Philip Mahoney



Sustainability should be the 'chinois' through which we pass all our activity



Set for a CENTURY

Ajay Bakaya, Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels, reveals the company's plans to open a number of hotels this year to breach 100-hotel mark by 2022 and lessons learnt in 2021.



Nisha Verma

While the pandemic has hit every hospitality chain hard in the beginning and many of them had to take hard decisions to sail through the sudden situation, not many have come forward to say that there were decisions that turned into learning. Ajay Bakaya claims that while they did not make any blunders in the beginning, they never waited to take decisions to handle the situation. "We were the first ones to go ahead with reducing staffing, rotating staff, and cutting costs. We started vaccinations right at the beginning. As difficult in hindsight as it is to say, perhaps we could have anticipated it more. Still, I would honestly do exactly what I did in those 12 to 18 months," he says.

But, he insists that lessons were learnt. "We were looking at cutting down costs dramatically. We compromised in some of our hotels on upkeep and maintenance of plant and machinery (P&M), which hurt us very badly when it was time to get back in action in a big way. The demand came in, and we did not know what hit us, because some of the P&M was not working. Some were not ready, and it was obvious that the upkeep had been neglected. So, the lesson was learnt and it has already been put in place. Despite a downturn, areas like gardens, horticulture, swimming pool areas, and every single bit of front-end machinery must be kept in proper working order all the time without compromise,"



he reflects. Another lesson he says one should learn is not to let their guards down. "With the second or third wave being milder, one tends to take a lot of things for granted. That is where we are going to be extra careful," he reflects.

Insisting that they take all the actions when needed, Bakaya says, "One challenge that all hotel chains are facing is that we have had to let a lot of our people go. At one stage, we had to lose almost 50 per cent of our workforce. To my mind, half of the population is unemployed. I have my business back and I am calling these people. They are either not available or not keen on returning to the hotel industry. Going forward, we may probably make sure that the GM himself sits with every single person on the team that we see leaving, on his own or otherwise, and has a long chat to figure out the reason for leaving and probably leave a window open until things get better."

STANDING UP TO THE PANDEMIC

When the second wave resulted in a dearth of beds across the capital city, one of the Sarovar properties in Gurugram was converted into a COVID-19 hospital. However, the model was not replicated in any of the other properties. Bakaya explains, "We did not do it in more properties. Firstly, it was an expensive exercise and needed corporate sponsorship since we had to pay for top doctors, nurses, and ward staff, usually around 3-5 times more than they make. Our funding came in for one hotel very nicely. We did explore our options, but by the time we thought of deciding on a second hotel, the time had passed. It went well for 45 to 60 days, after which hospitals had beds again and people had their own oxygen concentrators available. The demand has died down significantly."

REVIVAL VIA TRAINING

When it comes to revival, Bakaya believes it is vital for the workforce to be properly trained. "Our emphasis is training and getting all the frontline staff back on board, which is what we lost the most. Hence, our focus is on getting people back or getting new people. Hotels cannot engineer revival or thrive, but it is the market engine that controls it. We had a good run from July to December as well as from October to December. However, we took a big tumble in January. We lost 50 per cent of our December business in January. February would be better, but still behind our expectations. In March, we could get back on track with our budgeted numbers," he says.

NEED FOR ONLINE TRAINING

While there are online training sessions for hoteliers, including Sarovar Hotels having one of their own, Bakaya still believes in traditional training methods. "I have gone through a lot of training sessions online. However, in my mind, in our business, if there is a youngster in a hotel,

somebody actually needs to tell him what to do. Doing that on camera is not always the best solution. While we have been doing a lot of online training sessions, we will focus very strongly on conventional structure. Sarovar has had an e-learning programme for 10 years. There needs to be a blend," he shares.

LOOKING AT THE FUTURE

Sharing details about their plans, Bakaya informs, "We have 45 hotel projects running currently. We are conservatively committed to opening eight hotels in CY2022, which would allow us to comfortably pass the 100 hotel mark. We are at 96 right now. In Africa, we have lost a couple of hotels because of the pandemic. However, we have a great property currently operating in Lusaka and one opening soon in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. Also, in Uganda, we are exploring another hotel project."

INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

He believes that the hospitality industry follows the Indian economy. "I think the economy will see an upswing that we last saw from 2003 to 2007. In the next three to five years, we are going to see an upswing in hotel business and hotel rates," he shares.

GOVERNMENT'S ROLE

As far as the hotel industry is concerned, Bakaya believes that the government has been patient and a sympathetic listener. "We are pitching strongly to have the hotel industry benefit from the infrastructure status, and we have reached out to several quarters. This would mean easier access to capital for putting up new hotel projects. The entire country, including tier 2 and 3 cities, as well as smaller places, has a huge demand for accommodation like hotels, resorts, glamping, etc. If capital becomes easily available and payable for a better repayment period, we will benefit as an industry over the long term."

TECHNOLOGY AND JOBS

Sarovar Hotels have adopted technology, says Bakaya, but he does not believe it would compromise jobs. "We accept that across India and the world, the number of physical meetings will reduce and many people would prefer to manage things online. We have also gone paperless, with no brochures. We have systems in place to reduce human intervention for people checking in due to concerns over physical contact. Some of it would change in reverse because we need to interact with real human beings rather than technology, but we are accepting and adapting to technology as per the needs of the customers. Technology is not meant to reduce jobs. Technology usually means many people working on technology. The key for hotels is to make sure that there's a healthy balance for the customers between what happens on screen and physical interaction, which would remain integral to hospitality."



Ajay Bakaya

We had a good run from July to December as well as from October to December



SWEETENING the REVENUE pot

The hospitality business faced several obstacles in 2020 and 2021, however throughout the Omicron wave, the industry has built resilience and is optimistic for rapid recovery.



Kush Kapoor

Kush Kapoor
Chief Executive Officer, Roseate Hotels & Resorts

The entire world has been living in the shadow of this pandemic for nearly two years now. Contact-intensive industries, such as hospitality, airports, movie theatres, etc., were adversely affected. After the passage of the first and second waves, India initiated the largest vaccination drive in the world. The hospitality industry breathed a sigh of relief as the hotels started to witness a recovery in business from August 2021, both in terms of occupancy and room rates. Then, at the end of the year, we were hit by the third wave.

Unlike FY2020-21, the impact of the third wave has not been severe thus far. This can be attributed to various factors. By the time the third wave hit us, guests and staff had both become well-versed in the COVID-19 protocol drills. A large section of the population was shielded

from severe symptoms due to the high efficacy of the vaccine cover. Most hotels have already adapted to the new technology to make dining as well as checking in and out contactless. For luxury hotels like ours, where guests can be assured that safety and hygiene protocols are strictly followed, RevPAR has not decreased. It was only on account of government regulations on certain days that affected our business.

All in all, for the current financial year, despite the third wave of Omicron, in Q1 2022, hoteliers expect better results compared to Q2 and Q3 2021. In fact, an interesting trend has been noticed: guests are now booking rooms for longer durations. In the near future, we will see the lifting of restrictions in India, following the suit of many other countries which have decided to live with COVID-19 rather than aim for a utopian, no COVID-19 scenario. When sanctions on international travel are lifted, domestic travel will be the first to recover, and inbound tourism will follow suit. We are optimistic that better days are ahead.



When int'l travel resumes, domestic travel will be the first to recover



Neha Chhabra

General Manager, Courtyard by Marriott Bengaluru Hebbal

The hospitality industry has faced a lot of challenges in the last two years across the globe, but now has developed resilience and the ability to absorb the shocks that the new wave is causing. When the first wave hit in 2020, nobody knew what was to be done or what kind of crisis we were dealing with, but we have now gone through these scenarios and, as a result, we understand what levers to put into action and what not.

At Courtyard by Marriott, Bengaluru, while November and December 2021 looked promising and there was lots of hope for Q1 and the rest of 2022, the vicious cycle of restrictions due to COVID-19 and its subsequent impact on business has started again from the first week of January 2022 itself.

all our decisions. We are utilising this time to train our resources, give them their well-deserved leaves, and overhaul the product so that we are ready once the restrictions are eased out. With the night and weekend curfews, we have looked at all the avenues where we can control wastage, like controlling the HLP, reviewing the need and quantity of our buffets, staggered shift timings, and so on.



Neha Chhabra



We are keeping a close eye on all incoming revenue streams



Travellers have started cancelling their bookings and postponing their trips. Assuming the third wave goes away by the end of March 2022, and with the learning from the first two waves, we could expect business to return by Q2 onwards.

The demand for hotel stays in the last few months has come primarily from staycations, weddings, and special-purpose groups. But they are now cancelled due to the increased restrictions. While the panic has subsided, we hoteliers have done this twice now, and we are keeping a close eye on all incoming revenue streams, as well as controlling costs and wastage across the board.

In this uncertain scenario, taking care of our assets—be they physical assets or our teams—will be the pivot of

Talent drain is one of the biggest fears we have as an industry. With the imminent lockdowns, it is the staff who end up fearing for their future, and this time around, it is important that we reassure them and make them ready for the seasons to come.

The hotel sector has embraced technology wholeheartedly. With technology such as contactless online bookings, cloud-based property management, and smartphone apps that guests use to book services, order meals, or make payments, hotels are now well prepared to give guests a smooth, safe, and comfortable experience. To conclude, we can say that the travel and hospitality sectors are concerned with the recent developments but well prepared to handle the upcoming challenges.



Vishal Lonkar

Vishal Lonkar General Manager-Brand Development, Renest Hotels & Resorts

The mood of society can be judged by the state of its hospitality industry most of the time. If this industry is faring well, it can be safe to assume that people in general are feeling secure about their present and future. While last year, the hotel industry was battered by the first and second waves of the pandemic, this year, despite being hit by the third wave of Omicron, the industry is faring much better.

The hospitality industry has been doing quite well since August 2021 due to pent-up demand as an aftermath of the second wave and is showing a good recovery graph. The industry was bracing for a severe blow, but Omicron has been kinder, in a manner of speaking, to the hotels and restaurants. The rebound in recovery is also expected to be faster this time around, especially in leisure tourism. After the wave, hotels can expect to get back on track within 50 to 60 days. In fact, by the time this gets published, we will be back on the path of recovery, I believe. The net losses in Q1 2022 are definitely expected to be lower as compared to the losses incurred in FY2020-21.

Fewer hospitalisations during the Omicron wave is one of the main reasons why our business has not witnessed a severe blow. The high pace of vaccination and the commencement of booster shots along with shots for teenagers has infused confidence in people.

What has also worked for the hospitality industry is the fact that branded hotels, whether luxury, mid-market, or budget, follow COVID-19 protocols strictly. Domestic tourists by now know what to expect when checking into a hotel.

The hotels in tier 1 cities were more affected in this wave than in the last wave and witnessed event cancellations. Their revenue from F&B was also affected due to the night and weekend curfews. But hotels in leisure destinations have not faced the impact. In fact, leisure destinations, such as Manali and Jaipur, saw healthy occupancy rates comparable to pre-COVID-19 levels.

With working from home once again becoming the norm in cities, people are opting for longer stays at resort properties as they have the luxury of being on a workation. This trend has worked very well for hotel chains like ours, which operate experiential resorts. Due to the restrictions on flights, inbound tourism is still at a low ebb. Room rates are still lagging in hotels in most cities, but the sector will recover soon.



The biggest trend will be that guests will seek personalised experiences





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The selling strategy: Hotels in the New Normal

The pandemic has had a massive impact, particularly on the hospitality industry. In such drastic situations, the industry has no choice but to think differently and reinvent itself.



Charmaine Fernz

In a competitive world, we have always heard of the adage, 'survival of the fittest' but this is even truer in a post-pandemic world. The hospitality industry, not just in India but globally, was majorly affected by the pandemic, which also resulted in hampering the livelihoods of millions of people.

A similar sentiment is expressed by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation, wherein a release states that the pace of recovery remains slow and uneven

across world regions due to varying degrees of mobility restrictions, vaccination rates, and traveller confidence.

Tourism suffered the greatest crisis on record in 2020. International arrivals plunged by 73 per cent in 2020. This is likely to be followed by a 70 per cent and 75 per cent fall from 2019 levels in 2021.

The impact was severely felt by the Indian hospitality industry, as the HVS Anarock report states that the markets were set on a path to recover the ground lost due to the past disruptive events and supply overhang as the year 2020 started on a positive note with strong performances in the first two months.

The onset of COVID-19 and the subsequent travel restrictions and nationwide lockdown, however, has had an unprecedented impact on the sector.

However, moving on optimistically, **Kush Kapoor**, Chief Executive Officer, Roseate Hotels & Resorts, explains, "With the impact of the pandemic lessening, we have discovered new nuances in hospitality to give our guests an experience and satisfaction while keeping all hygiene and safety standards in place."

Elaborating further, **Nikhil Sharma**, Regional Director-Eurasia, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, says,







Arif Patel



Today, it is all about the right content, social media channels, and advanced technology



"A new industrial revolution is underway, having a huge impact on the hospitality industry. Technology continues to shape the hospitality industry and improve the customer experience."

Sharma expounds, "The hospitality industry has embraced technologies, such as the Internet of Things (IoT) and, over the last few years, Virtual Reality (VR) applications have also become increasingly popular in the business."

THE TECH FOCUS

With technology leading the way in the new normal, hotels are fast adopting strategies to welcome guests and build numbers.

As **Arif Patel**, Regional Vice President, Sales and Marketing, Hyatt India asserts, "In the current times, it is all about the right content, social media channels, dedicated websites, advanced technology, and online sourcing and planning tools. All of these elements integrated with the right channel mix and decision-making backed by data and analytics are anticipated to help us appeal to the guests."

For the hospitality industry, it is all about three key factors which will help build guest numbers:

- Accelerating innovation
- Increasing resiliency
- Witnessing growth

A recent Oracle report puts the spotlight on how hotels could more efficiently monetize and merchandise different aspects of the hotel experience by competing with short-term rental properties, as traveller demand for short-term rental properties increased significantly in 2020, and finally, rethinking operations as the pandemic forced many hotels to make tough decisions about their staffing, operations strategy, remote work plans, and changes to the guest experience.

Technology investments too had a focus as 2020 accelerated a variety of changes implemented by hospitality IT departments. As Kapoor explains, "Touchless hospitality is the new future, which is here to stay."

With a keen focus on health and hygiene, hospitality players are opting for a contactless approach. "For dining, guests book a table through an app while also surfing through the menu to order. Guests can also share their location with the hotel so that the kitchen staff can start preparing the meal when they are en route to the hotel restaurant," says Kapoor.

Another option is to add more items while having a meal. Finally, settling the bill through the app can be paid via several payment gateways.

Kapoor adds, "We have also associated with Bird Apps for delivery of laundry to the doorsteps of guests with the utmost safety, hygiene, and well-being through the Launderette app."

A DIFFERENT APPROACH

The business environment of 2020 has created new momentum among hotel executives to rethink their notions of profitability and revenue diversification. This was thinking beyond the ordinary. Hotel rooms had to be filled with uniqueness. This is where pricing comes into the picture.

Hotels' approaches to meeting short-term guests have changed. There was also a lot of focus on staycations. 2020 changed the world, but 2021 was all about adapting and making up for lost vacations while working remotely.

According to OYO Travelopedia 2021, nearly 48 per cent of Indians worked from home during the year, of which a whopping 85 per cent preferred workcations, or working away from home in a scenic location. And of these, 61 per cent took a workcation.

What is more interesting? Nearly 27 per cent took a month-long workcation. Hill stations ranked top on the list of spots for these Work x Travel trips, which was followed by several who visited their hometowns as well as beach destinations.

Hotels were now catering to a different and evolved traveller. Patel explains that COVID-19 has fundamentally shifted the importance of wellbeing, making it top of mind for many.

"At Hyatt, we are addressing this shift in new ways. For our MICE sector, adapting to hybrid events is an important way to make participation more inclusive and allow people who are not travelling to join the conversation," says Patel.

"Furthermore, there are hybrid packages that take the guesswork out of planning and budgeting hybrid events. We have a team to help guests navigate the technology to create a fully integrated and shared experience that makes attendees feel like they are in the same room," he adds.

THE HUMANE TOUCH

The hospitality industry, no matter what, is all about customer service. Despite the influence of technology, which has penetrated far and deep, the human touch will still exist.

As Sharma puts it, "Whilst technology continues to shape the hospitality industry and improve the customer experience, we at Wyndham believe that the personalised touch that our team members provide cannot be replaced or replicated."

He adds, "By using technology to complete mundane tasks, team members have more time to spend interacting with guests and providing excellent customer service."

"In the future, technology will increasingly interlace with traditional hotel operations in order to simplify and enhance the customer journey, but it will not replace the human touch that hospitality offers," concludes Sharma.

Going forward, travellers will be more cautious and aware about health, safety and sanitisation, but life goes on. As they say, the travel and hospitality industries are very resilient.

Undoubtedly, there is no looking back for technology proliferation, but the time is now for a more strategic line of thought and a backup plan. As we conclude, if there is one key lesson the pandemic has taught each one of us, it is to plan and prepare for the unforeseeable future.



Nikhil Sharma



A new industrial revolution is underway, having a huge impact on the industry





Bullish on expansion in 2022

Unveiling a new logo and identity, **Akhil Arora**, Chief Operating Officer, Espire Hospitality, talks about tweaking the brand's business strategy for an asset-light model and expansion.



Lipla Negi



Akhil Arora

With a refreshed brand identity, Country Inn Hotels & Resorts aims to add 20 resorts to its portfolio by the end of 2023. Rooting for serene and safe resort stays, the brand considers its refreshed visual identity, especially the new logo representation with a lotus, symbolic of a new journey towards growth, exceptional guest experience, and, of course, mesmerising destinations within the country. Betting big on the growth of domestic tourism, its business strategy now adapts to an asset-light model, considering expansion via hotel management contracts. Emphasising the need to stay prepared for COVID-19-induced disruptions, Arora says, "2021 was a good year for the months when the business was permissible. In the six months from July to December 2021, we recorded a growth of 22 per cent in occupancy and a 32 per cent average rate compared to the same period in 2019. No doubt, Omicron has impacted the January-March

quarter, but these disruptions are something we all have to plan for and overcome. We are confident that for the remaining year, domestic travel will bounce back, which is why our growth plans remain unchanged."

BE READY TO TACKLE DISRUPTIONS

This pandemic has created social and economic disruptions that have certainly led to the most challenging times for the hospitality industry, but we have all shown resilience and learnt from the previous two waves. We also have to accept the fact that disruptions like these may continue in the future, but we must be ready to handle such difficult times while keeping the physical and emotional wellbeing of our colleagues and guests as our top priority. In terms of the survival strategy, amongst the other measures, we adapted an operations model where 78 per cent of the expenses at our resorts are variable in nature, as against 55 per cent before the

pandemic. Over a period of time, we have been able to convert our fixed expenses into variable ones, and this process is ever evolving.

PANDEMIC: A PAUSE TO RETHINK

The last two years have given us an opportunity to pause, rethink, and plan. To take Espire Hospitality to the next level, we see a great opportunity ahead for our mid-segment brand, Country Inn Hotels & Resorts, irrespective of the temporary disruption caused by the pandemic, and therefore, we have planned to grow it further. Our refreshed visual identity is indicative of our new journey with big expansion plans, revamping of existing resorts and a slightly different business strategy of having an asset-light model, considering expansion via hotel management contracts. India is a diverse market with a lot of spectacular destinations where we would like to be present, as our Country Inn Hotels & Resorts brand has a lot to offer to the domestic market. Our brand promise of exceptional guest service and memorable experiences is what will allow us to increase our patronage and keep on expanding further.

EXPANSION PLANS IN 2022

Domestic tourism has been gaining strength from strength, not only in the last few months but over the last decade. It is just that the topic has gained a lot of limelight now, with restrictions on international travel and increased dependency on domestic tourism. According to statistics, the difference between winter and summer occupancy has narrowed significantly over the last 8 to 10 years. This is only due to the year-on-year growth of domestic tourism. We firmly believe that domestic tourism is only set to get stronger, and therefore, we have announced our expansion strategy in the Indian market. We are all set to expand our footprint in more than 12 other locations in 2022, including Goa, Dehradun, Mussoorie, Varanasi, and Vrindavan, and plan to have 20 hotels in the portfolio by the end of 2023.

MORE THAN JUST A STAY

Our resorts themselves are beautiful destinations and have a lot to offer for all kinds of travellers, including families, couples, social groups, and inspired business travellers. Each Country Inn hotel displays lush green nature in its unique backdrop and is set in a natural junction flanked by great Himalayan Mountains, alongside tranquil lakes, in the midst of virgin forests or bordering wildlife sanctuaries to offer friendly experiences. To overcome the stress that people have gone through in the last two years, they are looking for serene destinations, slow travel and places where they can revive and restart, and our resorts fit into this criteria really well, and that is what will continue to attract our domestic tourists.

At the same time, our brand promise of offering high-quality guest service and a safe, hygienic stay is the key.

Due to our consistent service levels, we are delighted that the response in the second half of last year has been phenomenal. We constantly launch special experiences in these exclusive locations, so we always have something more to offer to our guests than just a stay.

TAPPING LEISURE TRANSIENT BUSINESS

The destinations where we are planning our hotels are already very well established and witness a great number of leisure and business travellers. We will have a good channel mix to promote our hotels in these destinations. This will include our sales team's efforts to tap travel agents and corporates, as well as print and digital advertising, media familiarisation trips, and influencer marketing, among others, to tap the leisure transient business.

LEISURE TRAVEL WILL GROW

Guests are showing preference towards resorts over city hotels as they feel safer and more secure in the open



In H2 2021, we recorded a growth of 22 per cent in occupancy



areas that resorts offer. Also, to make up for the missed travel in the last few months, people want to consider longer stays in resort locations. Leisure travel will grow this year even further as international outbound will continue to be very limited. Moreover, we have witnessed the emergence of so many new and smaller destinations across the country for experiential travel. This will propel the demand over and above what the established destinations already create.

MILLENNIALS to dominate the INDUSTRY

Nandivardhan Jain, Founder & CEO, NOESIS, opines that the hospitality industry is undergoing a shift in market demands, spearheaded by millennials.



The hospitality industry has entered a new age, and we have witnessed a significant shift in market demands and trends which hotels must adapt to in order to continue surviving and growing. This seismic shift is being spearheaded by millennials, who are different from the earlier generations. From location to food menu, they have a distinct set of tastes that many hotels and companies have already begun to accommodate. The widespread use of technology is one of the major changes. Millennials are a digital generation, and keeping in touch with the world through networking and social platforms is crucial to them. Smart, functional devices play a vital role in their daily lives, where technology is employed everywhere, from entering your accommodation with a smartphone app to ordering meals and paying for them with the scan of a QR code. Consider Wi-Fi. A decade ago, a hotel that provided free Wi-Fi was considered a luxury; now it is a standard amenity. For example, when one thinks of the brand Yotel, one of the first things that comes to mind is their robot-controlled baggage management system and automated check-in systems.

Yotel is well-known not just for its advanced technological features, but also for its vibrant and efficient design. There are two aspects of hotel design that must be considered: aesthetic appeal and utility. It is no secret that the designs and interiors of any hotel must be visually pleasing to leave an impression on the visitors' minds. This is also the centre of the Indigo by IHG hotel. Therefore, no two Hotel Indigo properties are alike among the 79 worldwide. They provide locally-inspired designs in their interiors as well as in all aspects of the hotels, such as cuisine, scents, and uniforms.

The design does not necessarily have to be loud and vivid; it should be practical and, more importantly, fit the experience that visitors are looking for at that specific hotel. So, if a guest has travelled to a remote part of the country to a village to experience the local culture, the hotel's design should reflect that; but, if it is a business hotel, the design should be basic and minimalistic while being technologically modern for optimum ease. Furthermore, it is critical to understand that the lifestyles of this generation are becoming increasingly fast-paced, so it is essential to create a design that is functional and complements the multipurpose needs of the guests.

The millennial generation is one that has already begun to dominate the industry. They take 3.5 vacations each year on average and account for 70 per cent of the lodging industry's market. Having said that, they are still in the early phases of their careers, so they are quite price-sensitive. This implies that people want to get the most bang for their buck with every penny spent. Maximum utility may be reached by charging fair prices and providing services that meet their most basic needs. Most millennial-favoured hotel brands, such as UK

Village Hotel, JO & Joe, Moxy by Marriott, and others, have one thing in common: they provide a wide choice of amenities at reasonable pricing.

When attracting millennials, we must appeal to all five of their senses and provide them with a satisfying experience. Even minor details may make or break an experience. Having said that, this is a highly dynamic generation that is just searching for as many diverse and exceptional experiences as possible. One of the major aspects of a hotel's experience is its location. Since this generation is moving away from the city's chaos, crowds, and usual tourist destinations and into quirky destinations offering unique experiences, they may play a key role in helping rural economies. Thanks to the power of social media, millennials will turn many previously unknown areas into popular tourist destinations within the next decade. This is when the term "instagrammable" enters the picture. As long as you provide an attractive offering, you can leave it to the millennials to use social media to make the other generations fall in love with it because it is a large part of their lives as well, making them fairly fluent with the online world. Therefore, brand marketing on social media should be tactical. The uploaded content should not be used to sell anything; rather, it should be used to promote what the brand has to offer its visitors.

Millennials want to spend less time in their hotel rooms and more time in the common hotel areas and nearby neighbourhoods, where they can engage with other travellers and have a genuine and real experience. These consumer trends have a number of ramifications for the travel and accommodation business. Millennials are the driving force behind the emergence of sharing economy firms such as Airbnb, Saffron Stay, Vista Rooms, and Ama, which feature villas, residences, and homestays. Several international and national hotel companies are actively monitoring this market. Over the next several years, we will see a number of organised hotel chains launch their own sub-brand aimed at millennials.

Food is still something they genuinely enjoy and will always be the most effective way to attract them. It is not unique to the millennial generation, but everyone places a high value on every element of their food. So, with the growing popularity of organic food, vegan meals, and locally produced superfoods, it is essential for hotels to modify their menus accordingly. Moreover, hotels are diversifying their F&B offers, not just in terms of cuisines but also in terms of the eating experience, the visual appeal of the food, and the modes of offering. Many hotels, for example, are seeking to implement the grab-and-go idea as well as food delivery to their visitors wherever they are in the hotel. Another emerging trend is the visual mapping technology, which is heavily used in the 'le petit chef' idea, in which projectors are used to give guests the impression that mini creatures are cooking their food as they wait.



Nandivardhan Jain

Millennials take 3.5 vacations each year on average and account for 70 per cent of the market



Obeetee's Gypsy Oasis collection

◆ OBEETEE's Gypsy Oasis Collection is inspired by the decorative traditions of the old Ottoman Empire, as well as the free spirit of the gypsy soul. Rugs in the collection exemplify the traditional legacy of the Khotan and Oushal designs while incorporating a modern twist. This collection's colour palette is vibrant in its genuine form. They have a typical bohemian charm and are crafted with meticulous precision and artisanship on silk and wool canvases. With over 25,000 artisans dedicated to the creation of remarkable carpets, OBEETEE boasts a community that supports its existence and excellence, and the Gypsy Oasis Collection is an incredible extension of that.



Logam redefines multi-functionality

◆ Understanding the role multi-functionality plays in product design, homegrown brand Logam has launched an eclectic collection of everyday items that gravitate towards immaculate minimalistic designs while redefining multi-functionality and resonating with traditional artistry. The collection features the finest selection of wooden coffee tables, side tables, tableware, and planters. The assortment of strikingly handcrafted design vocabulary on textured wood and gleaming metal is a glorious example of everlasting and classic workmanship.

Handcrafted Sabai baskets

◆ The House of Ekam's vibrant handcrafted Sabai baskets offer multi-utility features. Woven in bold colours, abstract prints, and unique patterns, each piece carries the love and labour of women artisans from Odisha. Inspired by the vibrant African Sabai baskets, the House of Ekam has worked closely with a cluster of over 200 women in the state of Odisha to recreate these beautiful home décor collectables.





Nostalgic comfort with Fleck

◆ Fleck's latest brassware line is a stunning blend of Scandinavian design aesthetics and traditional Indian craftsmanship. The brand's cutlery and heirloom bowls add an innate elegance to your table without overwhelming your senses, with some of the most beautiful designs in brass tableware. The brand's vision is anchored in the three pillars of minimalism, sustainability, and artistry, as envisioned and fabricated by husband-wife duo Shruti Gupta and Nishant Chauhan. Each piece is made in-house, blending traditional techniques with modern sensibilities and utilitarian designs, celebrating their deep love for the gold material. These brass products are precision rolled into sheets, hand-shaped by artisans or moulded, sheared and polished, and then lacquered for water stain resistance and smooth finishes.

Utilitarian value at the fore

Zubin Mehta's designer label, "Dezenzia," provides a one-of-a-kind fusion of chef wear that is both trendy and functional for use in even the most demanding industrial kitchens.

Today, Today, all chefs desire to flaunt stylish uniforms. Designer chef wear is the latest trend. One such trend-setter is our very own **Zubin Mehta**, Managing Director, Uniforms Unlimited and creator of the brand Chefs Unlimited.

His designer brand, "Dezenzia," creates a unique blend of chef wear that is uber stylish yet

practical for use even in the most challenging industrial kitchens. Zubin believes in bringing in inspirational chef wear that enhances the pride of a chef exponentially. He emphasised that the designs created by him are unique and charming and play an important role in perfectly complementing the chef's personality. Zubin creates functional everyday chef's wear as well as statement jackets for celebrity chefs with equal élan.

Chef's wear needs to strike a balance between practicality and sensibility. The chef's uniforms are created in such a way that they are durable with an assurance of quality and will stand the test of time.

The brand Chefs Unlimited comes with decades of manufacturing experience and a state-of-the-art facility to back up the production. The brand has a reputation for keeping up with trendy designs in chef wear.

They are forever experimenting with bright coloured coats, denims, dry fits, digital prints, fancy trims, etc., while maintaining the utilitarian value of the garment as well as maintaining the utmost comfort of the end user.



Zubin Mehta

“**Dezenzia offers stylish yet practical chef wear**”



In midst of forests

As a result of revenge tourism, **Manoj Kumar**, MD, Jungle Lodges & Resorts, Government of Karnataka, says that people are falling in love with nature more than ever.



Nisha Verma



Manoj Kumar

Manoj Kumar explains that Jungle Lodges & Resorts, having over 26 hotels across Karnataka, is a joint venture between the forest department and the tourism department. "We have properties throughout Karnataka and specialise in eco-tourism and adventure tourism. Most of the properties are located within or near sanctuaries, national parks, and tiger reserves. Earlier, the department was unable to manage these nature camps and other activities professionally due to its own responsibilities. Hence, we felt Jungle Lodges & Resorts could take over all of these properties with an MoU." He reveals that they are divided into three sections. "One is high-end, akin to any seven-star hotel. We also provide nature camps for the upper and lower middle segments. Every camp is linked with an activity. Butterfly Camp, Mystery Trails, and Timber Trails are all options that are themed trails. The high-end camp is usually linked with tiger-based tourism as well as wildlife. We are quite close to tiger reserves, such as Kabini, our star property. We also have a property in the Bandipur Tiger Reserve. Then there are properties in Bhadra Tiger Reserve, Dandeli Tiger Reserve, and Kali Tiger Reserve. All of these tiger reserves provide safaris. We also offer beach tourism," he explains.

PROMOTION STRATEGY

"We engage with people regularly and participate in roadshows across the world. We have promotional and theme-based videos that are distributed over the internet and digital media. We are now focussing on digital marketing, and we are present on Twitter, Instagram, and other platforms," he shares.

PANDEMIC SCENARIO

"Unfortunately, we were in a bad position when COVID-19 struck," Kumar explains. However, as a result of revenge tourism, people have grown to appreciate nature more than ever. "Hence, fortunately, Jungle Lodges & Resorts are fully booked," he adds. While they are largely centred in certain areas, such as the Mysore belt, they also have properties in other areas that they aim to promote. "We also have sites in north Karnataka that are less well-known. Next year, our strategy will be to guarantee that visitors who are unable to book properties in prime locations can visit alternative properties. Hence, we are designing a package in which if you spend one day at one property, you get two days at the other in order for the other properties to have an equal share."

STATE INITIATIVES

Kumar reveals that Karnataka is a progressive state. The state has developed its own tourism policy for 2020–2026. "We recognised tour guides and operators as frontline workers. Four-to five-star hotels were granted industry status by the state. Taxi and car drivers were provided with financial assistance. Relief measures include a 50 per cent decrease in property tax, the waiver of fixed charges on power bills from April to June, and a 50 per cent reduction in the excise licence fee. We also have a one-time ₹5,000 grant to help tourist guides recuperate. In November, we attended WTM London and had in-person roadshows in Birmingham and Manchester. We will participate in future events in Dubai and Madrid. We have a Marketing Development Assistance scheme for tour operators, and the KITE Second Edition will be released in June 2022. We are working with the Karnataka Tourism Society to instill trust in the industry. They have begun heli-tourism and are working on coastal tourism as a new location."



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Appointments



ANUJ SOIN

Director of Operations
Radisson Hotel Group

★ Reporting to the General Manager, Soin will be responsible for overseeing the performance and strategic direction of operational departments. A proven industry leader in hotel food and beverage (F&B) operations for more than 15 years, Soin joined the Radisson Hotel Group family as the Director of food and beverage in 2018. He has created memorable dining experiences for travellers and locals while boosting the operating efficiencies of its food and beverage options in Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport.



ROHAN SAMARTH

Director of Sales & Marketing
Novotel Hotels & Resorts, Goa

★ Samarth will supervise the full administration of the two five-star properties in Goa's sales and marketing programmes, as well as the implementation of plans and budgets. He offers 10 years of revenue management expertise and is acquainted with the Goa market from his previous position as Director of Revenue at Novotel Hotels and Resorts Goa in 2016. He was named Accor's 'RM person of the year'. His most recent position was as Director of Revenue and Distribution for Ibis and Ibis Styles India.



SOORAJ NAIR

Multi Property Director of Sales and Marketing, Marriott International

★ Nair has been named the new Multi Property Director of Sales and Marketing for the Kochi Marriott Hotel, Courtyard by Marriott Kochi Airport Hotel, and Port Muziris, A Tribute Portfolio Hotel. His new responsibilities include devising and implementing sales and marketing strategies for the three Marriott-managed hotels in Kochi. He has a track record of providing profits to stakeholders, as well as creating and implementing successful business growth plans and revenue increase approaches.



RAVIKANT TIBREWAL

Director of Finance, Novotel
Hyderabad Convention Centre

★ Tibrewal will spearhead the day-to-day financial operations. He brings over 17 years of domain experience in financial planning and analysis, accounting control, budgeting, taxation, and statutory audit. Prior to joining Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre, Ravikant had led finance operations for hospitality brands such as Taj Exotica Resorts & Spa Goa, Taj Ambassador New Delhi, Usha Kiran Palace, Gwalior, primarily working in accounts, taxation, finance policies, audit, and finance operations.



ABHIJEET BAGWE

Executive Chef
W Goa

★ With over 14 years of culinary expertise in a number of luxury hotel brands in India and abroad, including Ritz Carlton, Park Hyatt, Protea By Marriott, Renaissance Mumbai, and Viking Cruises, Bagwe is poised to accelerate W Goa's aim of igniting a global W F&B revolution. He likes experimenting with common ingredients to create new and fascinating flavour profiles that surprise diners with each bite. His love of painting has enabled him to create aesthetically pleasing dishes with the perfect flavour combination.



MALLIKARJUN REDDY

Executive Housekeeper
DoubleTree Suites by Hilton Bangalore

★ Reddy will manage all housekeeping operations while supporting the hotel's aim of providing exceptional service to guests. His passion for the DoubleTree by Hilton brand and deep understanding of housekeeping operations make him the ideal candidate to head the Housekeeping Department at DoubleTree Suites by Hilton Bangalore in accomplishing its business goals. He formerly worked as the Director of Housekeeping at the Radisson Blu in Bangalore. He began his career as a housekeeping assistant at The Oberoi.



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