

HOTELS & RESTAURANTS INDIA fhrai magazine

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A MONTHLY ON HOSPITALITY TRADE
By DDP Publications

Hotels count on 'sold out'
WEDDING SEASON

FHRAI wins, CCI imposes
fine on MMT-Go, OYO

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WEDDING





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Dear FHRAI Members,

The month of October has brought some special news for FHRAI and the hospitality sector as our long battle against the malpractices of online travel agencies (OTAs) has produced fruitful result in the form of the Competition Commission of India (CCI) order dated 19th October 2022. It is highly gratifying to state that, based on the complaint filed by FHRAI, the CCI has slapped a total fine of ₹392 crores on MMT-Go and OYO for their alleged anti-competitive and unfair business practices, that has been adversely affecting the hospitality industry for a long time.

The actions of Go-MMT and OYO have caused immense damage to hotels across all segments. While MMT-Go had indulged in deep discounting, unfair business practices, dominant positioning, and unilateral agreements, among other unethical business practices, OYO has been responsible for the systemic depredation of the budget segment hotels, causing serious concern to the hospitality ecosystem of our country.

As a result of FHRAI's relentless efforts, CCI has issued this landmark order, directing MMT-Go to suitably modify its agreements with hotels to remove the price and room availability parity obligations and the exclusivity conditions imposed by it on its hotel partners. The entity has also been asked to provide access to its platform on a fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory basis to the hotels. The FHRAI members showed tremendous solidarity in this battle against the OTAs, something which motivated FHRAI to pursue the matter in the right earnest.

The 2nd National Conference of Chief Secretaries is planned in January 2023 by the Government of India. One of the themes of the Conference is 'Reducing Compliance Burden and

Cost of Regulations' and hospitality sector is one of the focus sectors under this. Recognizing the fact that the hospitality sector is overburdened with obtaining a scores of licenses, approvals, and clearances from multiple authorities, the Government of India through the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has highlighted that there is a need to reduce compliances for the sector for providing a conducive business environment with an aim to facilitate Ease of Doing Business. DPIIT has sought FHRAI's inputs and suggestions to reduce the burden of compliances for the hospitality sector in the country. FHRAI is actively engaged with DPIIT on this very pertinent subject which can bring sustainable changes for the hospitality business of the country.

In furtherance to its services to the members, FHRAI, in association with Quality Council of India (QCI), organized a webinar for members, giving detailed demonstration of NIDHI+ portal along with explaining all its features. The experts from QCI also resolved queries from members while also welcoming suggestions made by the participants.

In the rapidly evolving world, it is important that we remain abreast with the changes that are making revolutionary value-adds to our lives. The coming few months are going to be important for the hospitality sector and we all shall put our best efforts to reap the maximum benefits in this dynamic environment.

With best regards,
Jaison Chacko
Secretary General, FHRAI



Jaison Chacko
Secretary General
FHRAI

“ IT IS HIGHLY GRATIFYING TO STATE THAT, BASED ON THE COMPLAINT FILED BY FHRAI, THE CCI HAS SLAPPED A TOTAL FINE OF ₹392 CRORES ON MMT-GO AND OYO FOR THEIR ALLEGED ANTI-COMPETITIVE PRACTICES ”

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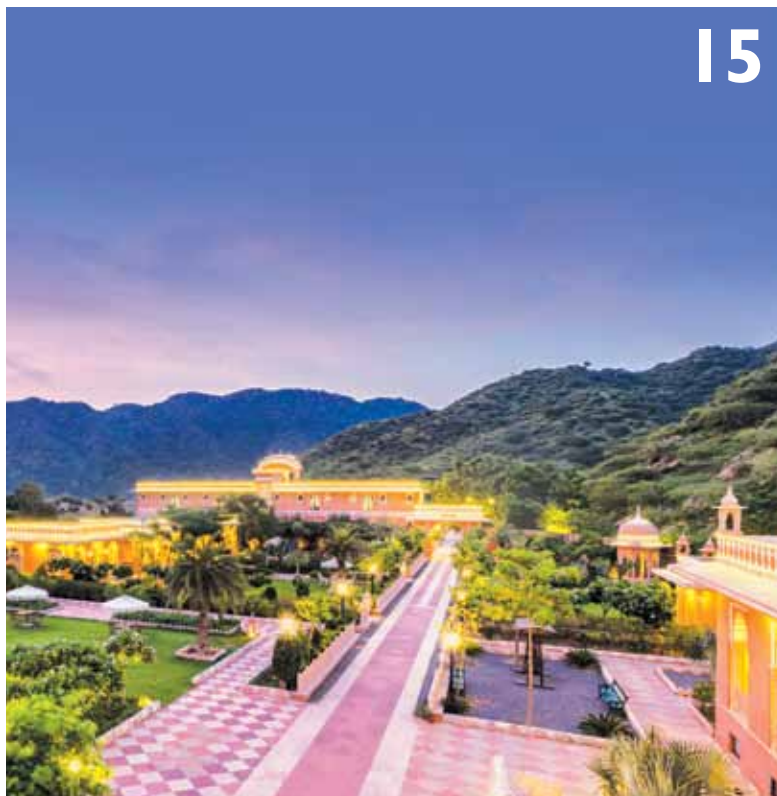
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Cover Photo: Unsplash



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THE FEDERATION OF HOTEL & RESTAURANT ASSOCIATIONS OF INDIA

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CCI slaps penalty of ₹392 crore on MMT-Go, OYO

In landmark victory for FHRAI, CCI finds MMT-Go, OYO guilty of indulging in anti-competitive and unfair business practices.



The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has imposed a penalty of ₹223.48 crores on MMT-Go and ₹168.88 crores on Oyo. Acting upon the complaints filed by India's apex hospitality Association, Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) in 2019, the competition watchdog found the aggregators guilty of indulging in predatory pricing, exorbitant and unfair commissions, misrepresentation of information and arbitrarily levied service fees.

FHRAI has termed the order as one of the biggest wins for the hospitality industry against the dominance of the aggregators. The Association further stated that this will also serve as an eyeopener for investors and the regulatory bodies regarding Oyo's unethical conduct which is proposed to go public. In its response to the verdict, the Association stated, "The actions of MMT-Go and Oyo have individually as well as collectively caused immense damage to hotels across all segments. These entities indulge in deep discounting, unfair business practices,

dominant positioning and unilateral agreements, among other unethical business practices. Oyo is responsible for the systemic depredation of the budget segment hotel business and its market as a means to achieve a notional billion-dollar valuation. This has been a serious cause of concern for the hospitality ecosystem of our country."

The Commission has directed MMT-Go to weed out anti-competitive practices and to implement the directions of the CCI in its true import and spirit. MMT-Go is further directed to submit a

compliance report, on an affidavit, with regard to the aforesaid directions within 60 days of the receipt of the order. In order to encourage a level playing field for both online travel agencies (OTAs) and franchisee service providers, the CCI has issued the following directions to MMT-Go:

- To suitably modify its agreements with hotels/chain hotels, to remove/abandon the price and room availability parity obligations imposed by it on its hotel/chain hotel partners with respect to other OTAs.
- To modify its agreement with hotels/chain hotels, to remove/abandon the exclusivity conditions that exist inter-alia in the form of D minus clause.
- To provide access to its platform on a fair, transparent and non-discriminatory basis to the hotels/chain hotels, by formulating the platforms' listing terms and conditions in an objective manner.
- To notify all its hotel/chain hotel partners, about the aforesaid modifications.

FHRAI HAS TERMED THE ORDER AS ONE OF THE BIGGEST WINS FOR THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY AGAINST THE DOMINANCE OF THE AGGREGATORS

■ To provide transparent disclosures on its platform as regards the properties not available on its platform, either on account of termination of the contractual arrangement with any hotel/chain hotel or by virtue of exhaustion of quota allocated to MMT-Go by such hotel/chain hotel. Illustratively, for properties listed on MMT-Go but sold out on the said portal

by virtue of exhaustion of quota allocated to MMT-Go, may specify 'sold out on MMT-Go portal'; similarly, properties continuing to be appearing on MMT-Go portal, despite termination/expiry of listing arrangement should be removed from the portals and in the interregnum with a 'not available on MMT-Go portal' specification.

■ MMT-Go to submit a compliance

report, on an affidavit, with regard to the aforesaid directions, within 60 days of the order

The FHRAI members showed tremendous solidarity in the battle against the OTAs, which in turn motivated the Association to pursue the matter with the government on all possible platforms. While it is a collective win, here is the core team that led the legal battle from the front:

COMPETITION CANNOT BE ERASED BY THE VIRTUE OF DOMINANT POSITION

We see this as a major verdict that will go a long way in disciplining the OTAs and saving the Industry. The actions of MMT-Go and Oyo have individually as well as collectively caused immense damage to hotels across all segments. These entities indulged in deep discounting, unfair business practices, dominant positioning and unilateral agreements, among other unethical business practices. Oyo is responsible for the systemic depredation of the budget segment hotel business and its market as a means to achieve a notional billion-dollar valuation which is a serious cause of concern for the hospitality ecosystem of the country. We need to create a level playing field for the sustenance and growth of the industry which in the recent past witnessed the dilution of fundamental business ethics.



Pradeep Shetty
Executive Committee Member,
FHRAI and President - HRAWI

“IT HAS TO BE A FAIR MARKET WHERE THERE SHOULD BE SUFFICIENT COMPETITION”



It has to be a fair market where there should be sufficient competition. They were giving freebies to consumers directly. The biggest problem was the deep discounting. The loyal customers were taken away for the hotels. Competition cannot be erased by the virtue of the dominant position.

COLLECTING AND COLLATING THE DATA FOR A STRONG CASE WAS CHALLENGING

While pursuing justice in this case there were no roadblocks in literal sense. However, we had our own set of challenges which had to be overcome so that we present a solid case with evidence to CCI. The biggest challenge is usually data and from where to get the same and thereafter collating everything that is received. Another challenge that is normally faced in such cases is how to present the data that is collected and collated to the authorities so that it becomes easy for them to understand. We had multiple meetings to understand the data collected amongst us and with our legal team to discuss what is needed by



Chetan Mehta
Vice President, HRAWI

CCI authorities and how to present our case in a manner that all facts and information are taken on record.



“WE HAD OUR OWN SET OF CHALLENGES WHICH HAD TO BE OVERCOME SO THAT WE PRESENT A SOLID CASE WITH EVIDENCE”



COMMISSION CHARGED BY MMT-GO RANGED FROM 28–42 PER CENT

Over the years, FHRAI has received a string of complaints mostly from small, individual hoteliers about the discriminating behaviour and unfair business practices of the OTAs. It was alarming to see that the Commission charged by MMT-Go was ranging from 28 per cent to 42 per cent. FHRAI and its regional Associations reached out to MMT-Go for a meeting to resolve the issues, the small independent hotels were facing. But they rejected and refused to meet in totality.

FHRAI was left with no choice but to take this matter up with the authorities. These OTAs consider hotels as partners but in reality, they dictate their terms to the hotels,



Nirav Gandhi
EC Member, FHRAI &
Sr Vice President, HRAWI

especially in the case of small and independent hotels. Roughly, 80 per cent of MMT-Go accommodation

“IT WAS ALARMING TO SEE THAT THE COMMISSION CHARGED BY MMT-GO WAS RANGING FROM 28 PER CENT TO 42 PER CENT.”

listings are independent hotels. After the verdict, FHRAI will ensure that OTAs adhere to the CCI order and maintain a level playing field in the Indian hospitality market. FHRAI will also encourage the OTAs to treat and practice true partnerships with hotels for them to survive.”

INDIVIDUAL HOTELIERS SHOULD BE PROTECTED FROM MONOPOLY

When MMT-Go or OYO offers discounts, then obviously it benefits the customers. One may also argue about how this could be bad or restricted practice as per law. Certainly, in the short run it is an advantage to the customer, but in the long run once the competition is eliminated or when there won't be any alternate options available to the customer other than OYO or MMT-Go, then these companies will increase their rates. There will be no market forces to control the rates and the customer will be forced to pay because there will be no alternative.

“ALL THESE ISSUES WILL LEAD TO THE DECLINE OF THE OVERALL SIZE OF INDUSTRY AND ECONOMY”

Vikramraj Shetty
Executive Committee Member,
HRAWI

When all the major sales channels will be acquired and controlled by few then the small individual hoteliers

will have to surrender before these monopolies. These monopolies will always take the lion's share of profit and all the remaining stakeholders will be at mercy of these entities. Traditionally, the budget segment of the hospitality industry was driven by the interpersonal bond with guests and the hotelier who were passionate about hospitality. So, when these monopolies take control, passionate hoteliers will automatically succumb and eventually the middle-class travellers or guests who cannot afford star hotels will suffer. All these issues will lead to the decline of the overall size of industry and economy.



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e-Visa facility sought

FHRAI submits representation to external affairs and tourism ministries for the restoration of e-Visa facility for the UK, Canada, and other countries.

Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) has submitted a representation to Dr. S Jaishankar, Union Minister of External Affairs and G Kishan Reddy, Union Minister of Tourism requesting the restoration of e-Visa facility for the UK, Canada, and other source markets. Unavailability of the facility is critically impacting the survival efforts of the tourism sector in the post-pandemic period. FHRAI has highlighted that non-restoration of e-Visa facility has been found to be a major reason behind the low traffic of tourists to India from these countries in the recent months.

FHRAI has stated that prior to the suspension of e-Visas in March 2020 due to the pandemic, the facility was available to the nationals of 171 countries, who immensely benefitted from the facility. While the e-Visa facility has now been restored for nationals of 156 countries, the UK and Canada, among a few others



FHRAI HAS STATED THAT PRIOR TO THE SUSPENSION OF E-VISAS, THE FACILITY WAS AVAILABLE TO THE NATIONALS OF 171 COUNTRIES

continue to be left out whose nationals contribute to the maximum foreign tourist arrivals. International tourists make advance flight and hotel booking for a hassle-free experience but the unavailability of e-Visa creates hurdles in travel planning. The Association also elaborated that the delay and difficulty in procuring Indian visas is a big deterrent for tourists while considering their tour to India. It has been widely reported that the travelers are cancelling their bookings in large numbers, especially in the UK, which in turn is affecting the Indian tourism sector adversely. If the current situation persists, it will be a big loss for inbound tourism business and will cause further devastation to the already battered sector. With the travel and tourism sector opening up, it is imperative that India too adopts tourism-friendly policies and practices to accelerate the growth and revival of the sector in the country.

Simplifying food prep

Patented plumbing innovation from T&S Brass and Bronze Works, UltraRinse is a perfect tool for washing produce or thawing frozen foods.

The key provider of commercial foodservice plumbing fixtures, T&S Brass and Bronze Works has released yet another innovative product—UltraRinse that ensures easier, safer, and more efficient food prep.

“UltraRinse has already paved its way to accolades and recognitions internationally. It was recently announced winner under the category, Most Water Conserving Equipment by HOSPISOURCE during the Innovation Awards 2022 and I am sure it is just the beginning. T&S Brass has been dedicated to building innovative products that go beyond business and help the planet itself in sustaining health and will keep this flawless endeavour going,” said Shawn Kuhlman, Director, International Sales, T&S Brass and Bronze Works.



Kitted with unique fan spray tips to create a broad, soft water spray, UltraRinse is a patented swing nozzle attachment. Angled tips maximize surface area contact, making the UltraRinse a perfect tool for washing produce or thawing frozen foods.

David Scelsi, Product Marketing Manager, T&S Brass and Bronze Works said that the Ultra Rinse Unit is a deceptively simple tool to help restaurants and other food service operators make a real difference in their food prep process as the specially designed spray is highly effective at cleaning, helping to boost food safety. It also offers a gentle clean to reduce food damage and waste.

It is equipped with a spray pattern which is faster and easier in cleaning produce and uses less water than traditional rinsing or thawing methods and it washes away particulates and bacteria that many faucet spray patterns can leave behind, hence, boosting food safety and operational efficiency.

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Eliminate Air Suvidha Form

Mandatory filling of Air Suvidha Form should be removed, says FHRAI in the letter submitted to aviation and tourism ministries.

The Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) has requested to the aviation and tourism ministries to remove mandatory filling of Air Suvidha Form for the inbound travelers.

“Presently across the globe, COVID infections are under control and COVID-related restrictions have been relaxed my most of the countries. It is also pertinent to note that the COVID vaccination drive has yielded fruitful results and the number of cases being reported these days aren't that alarming. With the travel and tourism sector slowly opening up throughout the world, it is imperative that India also make necessary relaxations in this regard and remove the Air Suvidha Form which is posing a hindrance in the growth of Indian tourism, post-pandemic,” FHRAI said in the letter submitted to Jyotiraditya

IN THE LETTER, FHRAI CITED FOUR CHALLENGES BEING FACED BY THE PASSENGERS



Scindia, Minister of Civil Aviation and G Kishan Reddy, Minister of Tourism.

In the letter, the Association cited four challenges being faced by the passengers. These are as follows:

- Lack of sensitization and awareness about such a mandatory requirement: it has been found in numerous occasions that travellers are not aware of this mandatory requirement.
- Issues in filling the form through mobile

phones: Travelers face great difficulties in filling the Air Suvidha Form through their mobile phones, which is a cumbersome exercise, requiring high-speed internet connectivity.

- Difficulties in uploading passport and vaccination certificates: One of the most common issues being faced by the travelers is the difficulty in uploading the low-resolution images of their passports and vaccination certificate / negative RT PCR reports as the system doesn't allow normal / basic resolution images to be uploaded.
- No facility to fill physical copies: In the eventuality of customers not able to fill the online form, there is NO alternative available to fill a physical copy of the Air Suvidha Form at the airports, that has led chaotic situations, and, on many occasions, the travelers had to miss their flights as they failed to complete this formality.





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HRAEI seeks policy changes

HRAEI met with newly sworn West Bengal Tourism Minister Babul Supriyo and advocated policy changes to promote tourism in the state.

Hotels and Restaurant Association of Eastern India (HRAEI) held an interactive session with West Bengal Tourism Minister Babul Supriyo and state Tourism Secretary Saumitra Mohan on August 30 at Taj Bengal Hotel. The meeting was organised to welcome the newly sworn minister who had been a central minister for two terms.

In the meeting, the hospitality industry—represented by HRAEI—in West Bengal urged the state government to consider policy changes to promote tourism such as granting industry status

to hotels, introducing single window clearances, and preparing separate rules for private jetties.

The association also pointed at the skewed distribution of star category hotels in biggest cities of the state,

HRAEI POINTED AT THE SKEWED DISTRIBUTION OF STAR CATEGORY HOTELS IN BIGGEST CITIES OF THE WEST BENGAL

Kolkata, Durgapur, Asansol, and Siliguri. Sudesh Poddar, President, HRAEI, said, “We have about 10,948 hotels in West Bengal. This does not include the homestays and small guest houses. I am talking about the hotels which have over 10 rooms. Of this, 60–70 are hotels in two-star to five-star category.” He stressed the fact that “most of these hotels are Kolkata-centric. Somewhere, we need to improve the investment pattern so that hotels and restaurants grow in the rest of Bengal.”

The minister said the state government was holding talks with various industries to boost tourism in the state, particularly during the Durga Puja celebrations. He said, “Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister, West Bengal is serious about the tourism sector. She has formed seven sub-groups. We have categorised the sub-groups to improve each sector. We are also focusing on religious, cultural, and heritage tourism. We are holding brainstorming sessions to come up with innovative ideas.” He said that West Bengal was the fifth most visited state in the country by domestic tourists and ranked seventh when it comes to international visitors.



Annual convention announced

SIHRA's upcoming annual convention will focus on current challenges and create opportunities to find solutions.

The city of gardens, Bengaluru is all set to welcome members and delegates to the annual convention of the South India Hotels and Restaurants Association (SIHRA) from 18–20 November 2022.

K Syama Raju, President, SIHRA outlined, “The chosen theme, “Together Towards The Future,” rightly amplifies the need of the hour to meet the challenges head-on and create opportunities to find solutions for various issues the hospitality industry faces. Under the leadership of B D Prabhu Shankar, Chairman, Organising Committee has laid out an exciting



K Syama Raju
President, SIHRA

programme for you to be enriched by the content, the fellowship, and the networking opportunities the convention brings in.” Basavaraj Bommai, Chief Minister, Karnataka is the Chief Guest and will address the participants at the inaugural ceremony. G Kishan Reddy, Minister of Culture, Tourism and Development of North Eastern India, will be the Guest of Honour. Anand Singh, MoT, Ecology and Environment, Karnataka and Ministers of Tourism of all the other Southern states, senior government officials and other dignitaries are expected to participate in the Convention.



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National Tourism Board of India **GAINING GROUND**

Rakesh Verma, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, shares details of the recently announced National Tourism Board.



Nisha Verma

Claiming that in the time of current challenges, there is a need to refresh our current brand positioning and overall strategic plan, **Rakesh Verma**, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, said, “We have been constrained by two factors—one was about our overseas offices where there was a change in the policy and thinking, which needed to be crystallized. Second was our scheme for overseas promotion, which was held up because of certain procedural issues. Now we have cleared these two issues, we have clarity, and it is coming in the shape of National Tourism Board of India (NTBI).”

CURRENT SCENARIO

Sharing statistics, Verma said, “In 2019, our Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) were

10.93 million, and the remaining were NRIs. Within that, US and UK made up for about 34 per cent of FTAs. Thus, there are many things to be targeted and done to improve our position and reach. As part of our new policy, we are targeting two percent of global travelers.”

NEED FOR NTBI

Saying that the country’s brand must be established by the government, he added, “The ministerial formations are

good for policy making, strategy and oversight, but for operational reasons, dedicated organisation is needed. That’s where this demand to set up NTBI was there for a long time. Now we seem to be reaching there,” Verma said.

Adding further, he shared, “This dedicated organisation will have a very dynamic and professional workforce. It will have operational autonomy to further the overseas marketing in the true spirit. The board will have flexibility to work with the industry more closely than what the Ministry of Tourism (MOT) can directly do. Most of the countries already have such boards and we are joining this club much later. We looked at national tourism boards of some important destinations to see their structure, divisions, manpower and funding. Based on that, we picked up best practices for NTBI.”

**NTBI WILL HAVE
FLEXIBILITY TO WORK
WITH THE INDUSTRY
MORE CLOSELY THAN
WHAT THE MOT CAN
DIRECTLY DO**

SALIENT FEATURES

Verma explained that for practical reasons they incorporated the board as a not-for-profit company under the Companies Act. "It will be treated as a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), unlike a commercial PSU, for overseas promotion. The SPV under the company format gives the advantage of having basic compliances in place. This makes sure that the functioning remains centred around professional requirements," he said.

"The overarching mandate is that NTBI will be the nodal agency of Government of India for promotion and development of tourism sector under the aegis of MOT and we are starting with core mandate of marketing and promotion. In due course, other subjects can also be given to the board," he highlighted.

OBJECTIVES

The very reason and essence of setting up this board is to enhance the contribution of tourism, enhance market share, both in terms of usual tourism but also MICE and position our destinations in overseas markets, he claimed. "Thus, complete management of Incredible India brand will be with the board. Apart from the formation of the board, we have suggested an



Rakesh Verma

Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism

“NTBI WILL BE TREATED AS A SPV, UNLIKE A COMMERCIAL PSU, FOR OVERSEAS PROMOTION”

integrated marketing strategy, which will be implemented through this board, focusing on India as a year-round world class tourist destination. This board will be engaging with Indian missions abroad, Indian diaspora and with market representation agencies," he said.

"Within the country, they will work with the state tourism boards and the private sector to jointly plan for

marketing and promotion activities. The board will represent India in most events, including travel trade shows, roadshows, or anything that we organise. They will also be building research and strategy wing, so that we are informed of proper data evidence for developing our policies. The board will also help in digitalisation," he added.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

He shared that at the organisational level, they will have board of directors, where four ministries and four industry professionals will be represented. "Four representatives from key ministries of— Culture, Civil Aviation, External Affairs and Commerce will be there on the board. Similarly, from the industry, four professionals from different verticals will be nominated. For the transition period, the Director General, MOT, will be the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, but within three years, we will get a private sector professional to help the board in due course," he shared. In his presentation, he shared that Secretary, Tourism will be the Chairman of this board. Also, MOT's Financial Advisor will also be one of the directors of the board. There will also be a full time COO from the private sector, to assist the MD."

ANNUAL ISSUE

December 2022

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HOSPITALITY will retain its old GLORY IN 2023

Newly regional heads of FHRAI opine that hospitality sector will make a strong comeback in 2023 and India will emerge as top tourist destination.



Fhrai Bureau

POLICY CHANGES NEEDED TO REVAMP HOSPITALITY SECTOR

The hospitality industry has gone through one of its most challenging phases over the last couple of years. There are quite a few challenges that the industry continues to face and have been the industry's concerns for quite some time. So, when we zoom out and look at the more crucial solutions to address the long-term opportunities for the industry, we arrive at a few much-needed reforms.

On the top of the list is the need for granting infrastructure status for the hospitality industry. The infrastructure status allows hotels to avail term loans with longer repayment schedule of 15 or even 25 years like road, railways, and ports, among others. However mid-market and budget hotel projects that are



Pradeep Shetty
President, HRAWI

**“THE HOSPITALITY
INDUSTRY SHOULD
BE ACCORDED
INFRASTRUCTURE STATUS”**

below ₹200 crores are not entitled to this facility. As a result, they need to repay their debt in a relatively short period of seven to eight years. The threshold of ₹200 crores needs to be brought down to ₹10 crores per hotel to give fillip to the budget segment in the hotel industry. Granting of infrastructure status shall bring catalytic effect to this endeavour. We have been advocating this for the longest time now however, this has become an immediate requirement for the industry especially, in the aftermath of the pandemic.

While the short-term schemes such as ECLGS are welcome but what the industry truly needs are schemes that benefit it in the long term. At present, loans borrowed must be repaid in seven to eight years. But, for a capital-intensive

industry with long gestation periods and wafer-thin margins like in hospitality, the loan term should be longer. The industry requires tax incentives or tax holidays for developers setting up tourism projects in tier II and III cities and remote locations and, subsidies given to other sectors should be extended to the hospitality sector as well. The schemes should be able to take into account the nature of this business which is vastly different from other industries.

Although industry status has been granted to hotels by many state governments, the incentives and privileges associated with an industry are not conferred to the industry properly.

Efforts should be made in this direction to bring the cost of operations down and the benefits accruing out if this should help with lower power tariffs, availability of easy, and quick funding and certain other statutory benefits.

Another extremely critical factor impacting the industry is absence of a uniform system for approvals and compliances. The industry needs a unified system of compliances by incorporating and codifying the innumerable rules prevailing in various states to bring ease of doing business for the sector across the country.

The GST rates for the hospitality industry too need to be revisited and

rationalized. The GST rate applicable for hotel room tariffs of ₹7500 and above at 18 per cent is just not viable and needs to be brought down to 12 per cent. India has one of the highest rates for its hospitality sector in the world and this is a big impediment to its growth.

Among other concerns, HRAWI is continuing its efforts towards raising awareness on the copyright issues faced by hospitality firms over playing recorded music.

We will also be keeping an eye on the online travel agencies (OTAs) and food service aggregators (FSAs) that have been exploiting vulnerable, small independent hotels, and restaurants.

NORTH EAST WILL SEE MAJOR BOOST IN TOURISM

I envision the hospitality industry to be back to its old glory in 2023 since the onset of the pandemic. The demand is going to be fuelled by segments across the spectrum be it leisure, wedding, corporate or MICE.

Until COVID hit hard, the wedding market had been a key segment of the industry. The pandemic had severely blown the demand from this segment considering small wedding groups were only allowed as per the government ruling. However, now with the pandemic situation under control, no such restrictions for wedding groups, the demand is definitely now back on track. The current wedding season is likely to record about 40–50 per cent growth over the last year's wedding season. Corporate events and conferences are also back on track. We expect a similar windfall in the entire MICE sector also.

The pandemic also has opened up a new avenue for boutique resort experiences in the budget-friendly category. These resorts with an inventory of 40 or fewer rooms in remote areas across the eastern India, especially the untapped horizon of North East, are expected to garner a robust business. Even though tourism in the region has improved over the years, this part of the country is still largely unexplored by tourists. However, it is heartening to see the Government of India is focussing on infrastructure development in the region which has opened new doors for the hospitality sector.

As part of its Act East policy, the Indian government has been investing



Sudesh Poddar
President, HRAEI

“THE IMPORTANCE OF WELLNESS HAS GAINED SIGNIFICANT IMPORTANCE IN THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD”

heavily in infrastructure projects like national highways, railway networks, and telecommunication in the North East. By 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi headed Indian government aims to connect the capitals of all eight states by air. So, the future belongs to the North East. Our vision is to continue growing aggressively. Apart from Tier I cities, our focus is on smaller cities that are missing the presence of a branded hotel chain. We have a target of adding more than several thousand keys in the North East, and also encourage building of new properties in markets such as West Bengal, Odisha, Sikkim, Assam, and Jharkhand.

The importance of wellness has gained significant importance in the post-pandemic world. .





2023 BODES WELL FOR INDIAN HOSPITALITY SECTOR

With India celebrating the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' in its 75th year of independence, it gives industry and especially our youth a headway to contribute to India's development journey towards becoming one of the leading nations globally on the strength of our economic performance and vibrant democracy. As the second fastest digitizing nation in the world, India is on the path to becoming a US \$1trillion digital economy by 2025.

The last eight months of the year have been truly encouraging for the hospitality sector with positive trends such as surge in domestic traveling, improvement in hotel occupancies, higher average room rates. It is safe to say that there are strong signs of recovery in the sector driven by robust domestic demand which is ably supported by facilitative measures of lifting of restrictions by all the states and unparalleled success achieved by our country in COVID vaccination.

The return of corporate and foreign travel would also catalyse an increase in the overall performance of both leisure and business. India's 2023 presidency of the G-20 will provide a huge opportunity to the industry to showcase India and Indian hospitality while providing a boost to occupancies and revenues.

Although the hospitality sector is firmly on a path of recovery in terms of revenues and occupancies, the shortage



Garish Oberoi
President, HRANI

“The last eight months of the year have been truly encouraging for the hospitality sector with positive trends such as surge in domestic traveling, improvement in hotel occupancies, higher average room rates.”

of human resources is a major challenge at present. Equipping the workforce with the skills required for the jobs of today and those of tomorrow is a strategic concern.

The need of the hour is to align with the changing needs of the industry. We

need to enhance the responsiveness of education and training systems to these changes in skill requirements and to improve access to training and skills development.

All the industries are becoming increasingly complex, driven by the rise of data and advanced technologies, changing demographics, and customer preferences and demands. Factors that are generating increased volatility are inflation, energy price rises, high taxation, and supply chain gridlock.

Industry status, ease of doing business, single window clearance, rationalisation of GST in two slabs 5 per cent and 12 per cent and be linked with input tax credit instead of room rate, reduction in licenses and levies are some of the concerns to be addressed by the government as this would create demand, abate inflationary pressures, enhance hoteliers' sentiments, and create job opportunities.

The government too has announced a series of investments in infrastructure, to improve road and rail networks, along with plans to privatise airports in Tier II & III cities, which will help in improving connectivity to several new and emerging tourist hotspots. All that will encourage hoteliers to tap further into the new segments. But let us be prepared for this new and exciting journey.



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Great prospects from UNION BUDGET

Hospitality sector is hopeful that the Union Budget will fulfil long-pending demands of it and lead it to the recovery path post-pandemic.



HIGH HOPES FOR RECOVERY

The hospitality industry has always contributed to the growth of the economy by adding to the GDP, employing more than 4.5 crore people and giving livelihood to more than 16 crore people directly or indirectly, but on the other hand, it has also been the worst hit due to the pandemic and has been bleeding ever since. The industry had expectations from the Union Budget last year too, to give a helping hand and show a path of recovery. This year again the industry has high expectations from the government to help it recover from the acute slowdown seen during the height of the pandemic and post-pandemic. The Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) has been time and again sharing recommendations and requesting the finance ministry to lay emphasis on a few things:

1. The industry should be allowed to carry forward business losses up from the current eight years to 12 years and avail of the SEIS/EPCG (Service Exports from India Scheme/ Export Promotion Capital Goods) benefits without any capping and rate reductions.
2. The expectations from the Budget are to provide an extension on the timeline for export obligation under the EPCG scheme.



Vineet Taing
President, Vatika Hotels Pvt. Ltd.

“GRANT INFRASTRUCTURE STATUS TO THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY AND FOLLOW THE FOOTSTEPS OF MAHARASHTRA AND GUJARAT”

3. Grant infrastructure status to the hospitality industry and follow the footsteps of Maharashtra and Gujarat. Also, provide the provision of special tax incentives for domestic travel.
4. Hotels and tourism-related sectors should be included in infrastructure projects listed in the National

Infrastructure Pipeline set up under the Development Financial Institution by the Ministry of Finance for promoting infrastructure funding.

5. Incentives should be offered to corporates for organizing meetings and conferences at hotels in India. This may include giving partial or full tax exemptions to the corporates on the expenses incurred.
6. Property tax should be waived for the first five years.
7. We would request the ministry to include hotel bills in LTA offerings once a year for tax rebates.
8. To open and promote new five-star hotels and offer them tax waivers for the initial five years which are critical for any business to stabilise. This would in return encourage tourism, have more safe tourist accommodations, and also ensure more job offerings.

Our humble request from the government is to approve our requests which would help the entire Industry walk the path of revival and in return, the industry would play a vital part in nation-building through investments, more employment, better livelihood for many households, forex improvement, and thus leading to GDP growth.

NEEDED SIMPLER GST RATES

The industry always looks forward optimistically from the coming union budget. The Hospitality sector contributes almost 9 per cent of India's GDP and employs more than 4.5 crore people both in organized



Param Kannampilly
Chairman & Managing Director
Concept Hospitality Pvt. Ltd.
The Fern Hotels & Resorts

“THE GOVERNMENT CAN ALSO DO A LOT IN TERMS OF INFRASTRUCTURE BUILDING TO DEVELOP TOURISM”

and unorganized sectors. On one hand the government talks about creating employment and on the other hand it completely ignores the demands of the industry. Another issue which I think is very important to the industry is the simplification of GST. The industry has several GST slabs which make it difficult. If there can be more uniformity in the tax structure, it will provide relief to the industry.

Last year the government introduced the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS). The scheme is ending on 31 March 2023. If this budget can extend it by one year it will help the hoteliers. Besides, a favourable interest rate can go a long way in improving the health of the industry. The government can also do a lot in terms of infrastructure building to develop tourism. A lot has been done to improve it. However, there is still a long way to go.

RAJASTHAN NEEDS BIG BOOST IN TOURISM

After the two years of the pandemic, expectations of the travel and hospitality industry have also come to life. We have gone through tough times. The Ukraine war, volatility in oil and commodities prices, fluctuations in global currencies (including the Indian Rupee) are adding immensely to the challenges of governance. Needless to say, these challenges will continue through the coming years. Now governments and policymakers have to show their compassion, acumen, and expertise to help the travel and tourism industry rise once again, in a holistic and comprehensive manner. Rise and shine! Looking at new geographies, new markets and audiences and providing the best-in-class products, services throughout the year.

Be it at the macro-economic level, or the micro-levels with the state and city governments, travel and tourism will have to be a priority. A top priority if I may say so. The travel and tourism need 360-degree economic and financial packages for the short, medium, and long-term. I sincerely look forward to the Union Budget 2023 to be the gamechanger for the travel, tourism, and hospitality industries.



Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar
Executive Director, HRH Group of
Hotels, Udaipur

In Rajasthan, our state, where both the foreign and domestic visitors throng, there are many gaps in the infrastructure, fiscal policies, and comprehensive marketing of the tourism products. Let us fill in those gaps and give Rajasthan the due importance it deserves. I may add that macro policies, which are well thought-out, need to favourably impact the economic life of ordinary people in our vast land. If the smallest hotel in Kumbhalgarh district is not the beneficiary of the government policies, then the policies need to be relooked and revised.



Hotels count on “SOLD OUT” WEDDING SEASON

After a crackling festive season, hotels are rolling out the red carpet for the much-anticipated comeback of big fat Indian weddings minus the COVID restrictions.



Lipla Negi



A mix of zero COVID restrictions, pent up demand and fear of pandemic waning out is raising the hopes and possibilities of a fabulous wedding season this year. The market continues to look buoyant with big fat Indian weddings making a strong comeback. “COVID has taught people one thing—it is one life and they must enjoy it to the fullest. During the pandemic, people did not have the opportunity to host grand weddings. However, today the High Networth Individuals (HNIs) clientele that is coming to us, is back to 400–500 guest count,” reveals **Rajeev Kapoor**, General Manager, Fairmont Jaipur. From people travelling more



Rahul Joshi

GM, Taj Hotel & Convention Centre, Agra

“BIG FAT INDIAN WEDDINGS ARE NOT GOING ANYWHERE—THIS IS WHO WE ARE”

uninhibitedly to no capping on guest list for weddings, all the omens are pointing towards a wedding boom this year. “Physical travel is back and I see people traveling for both business and leisure. November onwards, the MICE business will majorly be driven by weddings and I definitely see RevPAR surpassing the pre-COVID levels,” asserts **Ajay Bakaya**, Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels. November and December are packed with ‘saaya dates’ and most of the hotels are already booked for the most auspicious wedding dates of this year. “Q4 will surely see a massive revenue jump for our wedding-positioned hotels, ideally over 25 per cent,” confirms **Rajan Kalra**, Director Sales (India), Suba Group of Hotels.



Ajay Bakaya
MD, Sarovar Hotels

“NOVEMBER ONWARDS, THE MICE BUSINESS WILL MAJORLY BE DRIVEN BY WEDDINGS”

BIG FAT IS BACK

Two years back, the pandemic had shrunk the size and scale of Indian weddings, but fortunately, it failed to diminish people's appetite for larger-than-life wedding celebrations. “People were forced to compromise on their nuptial celebrations due to COVID outbreak. They always wanted to do large weddings. Big fat Indian weddings are not going anywhere—this is who we are,” believes **Rahul Joshi**, General Manager, Taj Hotel & Convention Center, Agra.

COVID nudged people to think intimate, and eventually started the trend of smaller weddings. But not all were satisfied with an intimate affair, and thankfully such clients are gravitating back to the grand celebrations. Agrees **Ameet Raj Kundu**, Cluster Commercial Head of JRT, “We are still having boutique weddings with 100 guests. But people are also looking at bigger weddings where 2,000 people are attending the wedding. So, the ‘small and intimate’ trend was limited post-pandemic. Right now, the clients can go as big as they want, and this trend will continue for the next two years.”

BUY-OUT TREND CONTINUES

The hotels are witnessing an escalation in demand for wedding venues across locations with a significant increase in the number of room bookings and banquet sales. “Since the period from November to February is the peak season, we have already sold out 90 per cent of these months. Only 10 per cent is left, that too for the ‘non-saaya’ or non-

auspicious dates. Especially in the case of Jaipur, where an outdoor setup comes with lovely weather, most hotels are sold out to capacity, says Kapoor.

Echoing similar optimism, **Atul Upadhyay**, Senior Vice President, Pride Hotels Ltd., says, “We have done about 142 weddings in 2019-20. Currently, we have about 257 bookings for November to March 2022-23. Most of our banquets are all booked.” The buy-out trend, fuelled by the pandemic, continues to gain ground and attract both big and small wedding parties. “The buyout trend currently is more specific to offbeat locations and properties with limited inventory, as ‘intimate weddings’ have been a norm and trend,” says **Abinash Manghani**, CEO, WelcomHeritage Hotels.



Puneet Dhawan
SVP Operations, Accor

“DEMAND FOR BESPOKE EXPERIENCES, A HEARTFELT AMBIENCE AND VARIOUS CUISINES TO CHOOSE FROM IS ON THE RISE”



Rajeev Kapoor
GM, Fairmont Jaipur

“THE KIND OF GUEST SERVICE & HOSPITALITY INDIA OFFERS CANNOT BE REPLICATED ELSEWHERE”

Meanwhile, a section of industry professionals believes that while there are relatively fewer guests at ‘small and intimate’ weddings, the events come at a big-ticket price with focus on small details, storytelling through food, rewriting the rule book on wedding entertainment and more spends on additional bespoke experiences for the couple as well as the guests. “This creates opportunities for smaller inventory hotels to be a part of the bandwagon,” says Manghani.

DOMESTIC DESTINATIONS IN DEMAND

The rising fuel prices and higher air ticket fares are turning people towards domestic wedding destinations. “With some of the usual overseas wedding



Mehul Sharma
Founder & CEO, Signum Hotels

“**DESTINATION WEDDING MARKET IS EXPECTED TO WITNESS A GROWTH RATE OF 30% IN 2022-23**”

is also one of the prime reasons people are deciding to tie the knot within the country, giving a boost to the domestic destination wedding business. “The destination wedding market is expected to witness a year-on-year growth rate of 30 per cent (approx.) in 2022-23,” reveals **Mehul Sharma**, Founder and CEO, Signum Hotels & Resorts. Some of the top wedding destinations include Rajasthan, Goa, Srinagar, Kerala, Shimla, Uttarakhand, and Andamans.

BIG BUDGETS, MORE EXPERIENCE-CENTRIC

While the wedding budgets have expanded, the hoteliers unanimously agree that the wedding expenditure has also gone up due to multiple reasons such as rise in prices of fuel, rooms, and



Rajan Kalra
Director - Sales, Suba Group of Hotels

“**Q4 WILL SURELY SEE A MASSIVE REVENUE JUMP FOR OUR WEDDING-POSITIONED HOTELS, IDEALLY 25%++**”



destinations still struggling with post pandemic protocols, the wedding buyout momentum continues in India. We are witnessing a continuity of business queries that started after the pandemic for this season,” informs Manghani.

However, Kapoor feels that it is the tradition of “atithi devo bhava” that strengthens India’s position in the global wedding market. “From NRIs to HNIs, our cultural diversity and rich heritage blends effortlessly with the wedding sentiments of various communities across the world. Adding on to this, the kind of guest service and hospitality that we provide cannot be replicated at an international destination. We are blessed with incredible manpower as well as passion for hospitality,” he further explains. The scenic beauty and easy accessibility of domestic locations



Ameet Raj Kundu
Cluster Commercial Head,
Radisson Hotels of GRT

“**PEOPLE ARE ALSO LOOKING AT BIGGER WEDDINGS WHERE 2000 PEOPLE ARE ATTENDING THE WEDDING**”

perishable items. “Today, we see 45–50 per cent more expensive weddings,” states Kapoor, while pointing towards the demand-supply imbalance for the rising wedding cost. “There is a huge demand for big weddings, and there are very limited premium destination wedding options. For the last two years, the rates were low, and hotels also compromised on the salaries. So, now the price correctness has happened. These prices will continue and not come down,” he declares.

However, Kapoor is quick to point out, “People are not buying prices anymore. Rather, they are buying rich, unique, and invigorating experiences.” It has been observed that today, people are preferring premium brands for weddings. “Safety and hygiene are key factors for picking premium hotels as wedding venues,” adds Joshi. As a result, the demand for good branded hotels outruns the supply.

When it comes to wedding trends, guests are looking for more personalised experiences—be it destination or city weddings. “We have curated new innovative and creative packages for our guests, which can be altered and customized according to their needs, bringing it all together under one roof, leaving them hassle-free. The demand for bespoke experiences, a heartfelt ambience and various cuisines to choose from is on the rise. Our mid-scale economy brands, Novotel and ibis are sought-after venues for city events, while Fairmont Jaipur and Raffles Udaipur are among top favoured wedding destinations in India,” says **Puneet Dhawan**, SVP Operations, Accor.

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Lights... sound... WEDDINGS

Immersive panel discussion at the Wedding Travel Show' 22 brought to the fore key objectives and obstacles that matter the most in the wedding biz.



Lipla Negi

Matchmaking in a wedding is not just restricted to pairing the bride and groom. For a successful wedding or to say, a 'larger-than-life' wedding celebration, matchmaking of a wedding planner and a hotel (venue) is also equally important. Coupling the two driving forces of the industry at the Wedding Travel Show 2022, the panel on 'Confluence of Wedding & Hotel industries' saw a lively discussion with panelists Arif Patel, CCO, ITC Hotels and Chetan Vohra, MD, Weddingline, craftily moderated by Rajeev Jain, Founder & MD, Rashi Entertainment. Hosted at Hyatt Regency Dehradun, the show witnessed the country's top wedding planners, hotels, airlines and tourism boards in attendance.

Describing the relationship between wedding service agencies and hotels. Jain quipped, "It is like—we cannot live with or without each other—a typical husband and wife relationship." He began the session by laying out the key matters that act as 'bone of contention' between wedding agencies and hotels. "The hotels complain about wedding agencies taking rates from 20 different hotels and then finally giving the business to none or one. On the other hand, agencies complain that hotels do not treat them as equal partners and make them pay for even the smallest things like tea and coffee for their staff," he revealed.

PRICE PARITY TOP PRIORITY

On being asked about transparency in prices and commission to the agencies,

Patel said, "In the organized sectors, everybody understands 'pricing parity'. We also understand that commission is the cost of doing the business. While airlines and many other sectors have stopped paying commissions, we (hotels) are still paying standard commission, considering it as your (wedding agencies) birthright." He further explained that larger hotel chains with proper revenue management streams and culture of collaboration form 65–75 per cent rooms in the country. However, there are still 35–40 per cent unstructured, fragmented hotels in India, driven by individuals and not by professionals. But in due course of time, these hotels will also learn how to run the business. "It is a process that will take some time to become a standard practice. Today, you will rarely find that a lead has come from





a wedding partner, and then end-user at the hotel, and a discount is happening,” he shared.

Highlighting some of the common practices followed by hotels to ensure transparency and pricing parity, he informed that hotels nowadays ask for the names of bride and groom and wedding dates. On the question of hotels leaking the client leads that wedding planners share, Patel responded, “Once we get the names and dates, we maintain a complete price parity. For example, last week, a groom approached us via five different wedding planners. So, we decided to leave it on the groom to choose his wedding agency. But we will maintain a price parity with all five planners. Commission, if there is any, is strictly a hotel and planner’s business and the client has nothing to do with it,” he revealed. Advising wedding planners

to share details of wedding dates, he stated that “we never try to undercut our partners. We never want to create enemies by giving different rates to five different planners.”

Sharing his standpoint about price parity, Vohra said, “This is something we have personally experienced in the past. We shared a query with a hotel and a few hours later got to know that another wedding agency, which was never in the picture, got in touch with the client

COMMISSION, IF THERE IS ANY, IS STRICTLY A HOTEL AND PLANNER’S BUSINESS AND THE CLIENT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH IT

directly, and negotiated the wedding planning offering them competitive prices. So, it is not just about price parity. Hotels should work towards protecting the details of the client.”

POWER OF COLLABORATION

Roping in Harkaran Singh, GM, Hyatt Regency Dehradun, the panelists collectively emphasized the power of collaboration. Adding on, Singh said, “Sometimes the agencies also do ‘rate shopping’ by giving fake names of bride and groom, which confuses us too.” Agreeing to what Singh pointed out, Jain advised the wedding planners in the audience to always give the right names of bride and groom to the hotel “and make them ‘partners’ and not competitors,” he underlined the takeaway lesson from the invigorating session. Crediting ‘creativity’ of the wedding planner as the

top strategy as well as skill, Patel stated that planners who are at the top of their game never lose business due to rates. "The rates do not matter when your work is phenomenal. Delivering unique experiences is the most important thing for families. I don't think families mind the 5 or 10 per cent rate difference." The panel unanimously agreed on the fact that if both parties approach this from a partnership perspective, it creates a win-win situation for all.

"I have been doing weddings with ITC for 20 years and the relationship has given us the confidence to be flexible where we could and put our foot down in front of the client where we could not. So, it is crucial to build an understanding," opined Vohra. While revisiting the run-up days to famous Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas nuptials, he added that "doing a 7-tier wedding cake as high as the central dome of Umaid Bhawan Palace would not have been possible without the team of the Taj Hotels".

COMPLIANCE CHALLENGES

Under section 52 Z(a) of the Copyright Act, any religious ceremony including a marriage ceremony doesn't require to take PPL (Public Performance License), IPRS (Indian Performing Right Society Limited) or any other such copyright license. However, as Jain pointed out "many times the banquet managers of hotels inform the PPL and IPRS officials about the wedding ceremony taking place. Now the officials arrive at the very moment when we are about to play the

HOTELIERS AND PLANNERS UNANIMOUSLY AGREED UPON MAKING HAR DIN SHUBH HAI (EVERY DAY IS AUSPICIOUS) A COMMON PRACTICE IN THE WEDDING INDUSTRY

sound. Can hotels help us with this?" he asked hoteliers present in the room.

In response to his question, Singh said, "If there are any state or central-level compliances that must be followed then the hotel cannot do anything about it because hoteliers also have to run the hotel, and nobody wants to get into any non-compliance trouble and put the entire hotel at stake. The state mandates have to be followed." Speaking on the matter, Patel suggested that the matter of compliance and licenses should be properly taken up with the concerned ministries in order to change the situation on ground. "No hotelier wants to take a risk when it comes to compliances," he appealed.

IT IS ONE TEAM

The hoteliers and planners unanimously agreed upon making 'Har Din Shubh Hai' (every day is auspicious) a common practice in the wedding industry. "Over 5 crore weddings in just 40 days create demand-supply imbalance, resulting in skyrocketing costs. It happens in

commodities and perishables," said Patel, while advising planners to convince their clients to look beyond the 40-days bracket if they want good prices, "I always say 'Your date, My rate. My date, your rate'. It makes logical sense." Referring to 'peaks and valleys' business theory, Patel further made his offer straight and clear, "if a wedding agency gives us business that helps us cover our 'valley' days, we will give you a superb rate. In case you cannot do that, do not complain about rates." In addition, he advised the agencies "to buy brands and not rates. Buy experiences and not rates. We are all together in this."

Reminiscing the time when agencies used to command the pricing, Vohra highlighted that the pandemic has changed the business. For a better understanding of the audience, he further listed out the shortcomings of wedding agencies, while advising his fraternity, "not to lose sight of who they are and what is their primary role in a wedding". In a frank response to the issue of taking 'rates' from multiple hotels, he explained, "We all are in this business to make money. Yes, we take rates from four different hotels and sometimes, it is the fifth that is hungrier for our business, and more flexible in accommodating our clients' demands."

Along with an 'industry' status for the sector, Vohra also expressed his desire for a global recognition for the indigenous wedding agencies, which are now doing grand weddings in most international destinations.





REVENGE BUYING propels Wedding biz

After two disruptive years of COVID restrictions and subside celebrations, the wedding business is poised to make a better comeback, says **Rajeev Jain**.



FHRAI Bureau

Propelled by the ‘revenge buying’ trend, the wedding business is expected to set new benchmarks of growth and revenue generation this year, believes Rajeev Jain, Founder & MD, Rashi Entertainment. The deep desire for bigger and grander wedding celebrations has only been pronounced by the pandemic. “Post-pandemic, the pent-up demand for wedding celebrations has pushed the ‘revenge buying’ trend. People are eager to celebrate their weddings like they used to but, with bigger budgets and stronger fervour,” said Jain.

A RISING AND SHINING INDUSTRY

Speaking on the sidelines of the Wedding Travel Show 2022 in Dehradun, Jain stressed upon the need to make ‘Wedding Tourism’—the way forward for the industry. While delivering a presentation on top wedding trends, he observed, “The global wedding market size was valued at US \$160.5 billion in 2020, and is projected to reach US \$414.2 billion by 2030.” The Indian Wedding Industry



Rajeev Jain

Founder & MD, Rashi Entertainment

“DRIVEN BY THE PENT-UP DEMAND, THE WEDDING COST IS ALSO RISING”

is pegged at US \$50 billion (approx. ₹5 Lac crores), which is the second best in the United States. “We will soon take the Number 1 spot,” he declared, as people are determined to make up for the lost time during the pandemic. “Even in 2021, only 4 per cent of people chose

small functions over large wedding celebrations. Furthermore, 42 per cent people preferred to go with 200 plus guests for their wedding functions while 32 per cent picked intimate weddings with a 100 plus guest list,” he added. As weddings are ingrained in Indian tradition and culture, the pandemic failed to shrink people’s enthusiasm for wedding celebration, which now returns with a vengeance translating into big budgets.

WEDDING COST GOES UP

Driven by the pent-up demand, the wedding cost is also rising. Jain shared, “In 2021, more than 50 per cent vendors charged higher for wedding services such as venues, photography, decoration, makeup, etc.”

Even hotels have increased their prices by 30-40 per cent in 2022. “Buy-outs are not happening at anything below 75 lakhs or so. Having said this, the hotels also need to be more flexible with the wedding planners and treat wedding business as an equal partnership,” he emphasized.

Destination **WEDDINGS** **HIGH ON DEMAND**



Picturesque, value-for-money, and sprinkled with luxe experiences, domestic destinations continue to be favorite among wedding revelers

WEDDING BUSINESS TO GROW MASSIVELY

The Indian wedding industry is the second largest in the world to America, with over 10 million weddings a year (source: New York Times). This suggests that the Indian wedding industry is resilient and recession proof. The industry is increasingly moving toward destination weddings. Wedding tourism and destination weddings can significantly shift the game in the burgeoning Indian hospitality business. Exotic destination weddings have revolutionized the way Indians view marriage.



Harkaran Singh
GM, Hyatt Regency Dehradun

“RISE IN THE DESTINATION WEDDING INDUSTRY IS FUELED BY THE NATION’S RISING MIDDLE-CLASS POPULATION”

Rise in the destination wedding industry is fueled by the nation’s rising middle-class population, a flourishing economy, and celebrity endorsements, which have been greatly stoked by

aspirational social media. The Indian hospitality sector benefits the most from this shift and Indian millennials are the key target population.

THEME-BASED DESTINATION WEDDINGS ADVANCING

Rajasthan, Goa, Kerala, and Uttarakhand are some of the preferred locations for distinctive, theme-based destination weddings in India. Hyatt Regency Dehradun is the newest entrant in hotels for weddings, MICE, and leisure. It is also the largest hotel in the state of Uttarakhand in respect of room inventory and event spaces.

The concept of destination weddings is not particularly Indian, but it was inevitable for the Indian millennial community to be influenced by the Western trend. Beautiful, fairytale picturesque surroundings for life's most important occasion is getting increasingly popular.

Couples from all over the world, not only India, are selecting destinations in India for its beautiful settings and reasonably priced lodging and travel.

Future economic transformation of host states would be significantly influenced by rising demand for destination weddings, enhancing new growth opportunities for the Indian hospitality and wedding industries.

REVENGE BUYING FUELLING DESTINATION WEDDINGS

So, to put things in perspective, the global size of the wedding industry is valued at US \$160 billion in 2020 and expected to reach US \$414 billion by 2030 which is practically a jump of around 150 per cent by year 2030. As per reliable sources, in 2021 intimate weddings with 100 plus guests was 32 per cent less than 100 guests was around 22 per cent, 200 plus guests reached around 42 per cent. So, practically approximately only 4 per cent clients reduced the size of their weddings post pandemic.

In the current year 2022, we can see a trend of revenge buying in the wedding market.

For hotels wedding business is a big segment and for destinations like the Hyatt Regency Dehradun, which is a wedding and MICE friendly hotel, it becomes even bigger as the hotel location, the way the property is built and the expertise the hotel has to offer is a tick mark in all the checklists while planning a destination wedding.

INDIAN MILLENNIALS PREFERRING CURATED WEDDINGS

Weddings in India are a traditional affair, spread over a week with multiple events and celebrations. Our society being culturally inclined and family-oriented, weddings are a celebration of a lifetime with our loved ones.

Karma Lakelands is set in a picturesque exuberance of radiance and tranquillity. Spread across 235-acres, in Gurgaon, it becomes a great wedding destination—with an easy accessibility. With multiple venues—lawns, banquets, villas, a talented team of chefs and service staff, we ensure every detail is executed flawlessly, and are known to create magic for couples and their families who are ready to walk down the aisle.

WEDDINGS GOING INTIMATE

Post pandemic, the demand for destination weddings has seen a phenomenal spike and guests are no longer keen in hosting their event within a banquet hall. This trend is here to stay, and it is a great opportunity for us. The destination wedding business in India is expected to reach a market size of ₹45,000 crores by 2024 with annual projected growth of 20–25 per cent. Indian millennials are more eager to spend on curated weddings and will choose the most exclusive location then can afford to celebrate their special day. They also prefer intimate celebrations with premium offering in decor and food. With our villa set up, we offer luxury and intimacy for small events and for the grand reception there are lawns, banquets, and other beautiful venues.



Damandeep Singh
GM, Karma Lakelands Gurgaon

“**DESTINATION WEDDING BUSINESS IN INDIA IS EXPECTED TO REACH A MARKET SIZE OF ₹45,000 CR BY 2024**”

PRICING: A CRITICAL FACTOR

A large chunk of our client base is from Delhi NCR region, seeking a destination within city limits. With the rise in Indian middle class and steady economy post COVID, the increase in number of people looking for an exclusive wedding destination has increased considerably.

Our pricing plays a critical role as a deciding factor, as we offer competitive packages for locations such as Jaipur and Udaipur yet offering the USP of a destination.

The millennials are at the forefront of driving change towards sustainability. They have become more conscious of their lifestyle choices and avoid relentless wastage of plastic and paper.



DEMAND FOR PAN-INDIAN DESTINATIONS GROWING

Destination marriages have grown in popularity as more affordable travel options and picturesque places have become available. Destination weddings are important for travel and tourism businesses. The increased number of hotels, resorts, cruise line stop-offs, and flight connectivity has made it easier for couples to marry at their desired location. While couples are looking for a unique and personalized experience abroad, marriages abroad play a significant role in the overall growth of the global hotel industry. These weddings have a positive impact on local economies, which is good for the market.

EXOTIC DESTINATION WEDDINGS MAKING HEADWAY

Exotic destination weddings have revolutionized the way. The rise has been fueled by the rise of the country's middle class, a booming economy and celebrities, which were strongly boosted by aspirations fueled by social media. In addition, restrictions and fear with respect to international travel, which has led to increasing demand for pan-Indian destinations.

PRICING: A DECIDING FACTOR

People do look for an experience during a wedding but the price does still remain a major factor. Post-COVID, we are seeing a lot of queries coming through wedding planners/events companies and looks like this trend will continue for the



Gaurav Apte
GM, Goa Marriott Resort and Spa

“**PEOPLE DO LOOK FOR AN EXPERIENCE DURING A WEDDING BUT THE PRICE DOES STILL REMAIN A MAJOR FACTOR**”

next two years. Clients do look in for value for money and the experience does drive decisions as well, especially in the peak season from November to February.

The big fat Indian wedding is back with its grand events, bold colours, and dazzling décor. The past two years had put a question mark on the scale, tenor, and complexion of marriage functions. There were restrictions on the number of attendees and many guests chose to give the event a miss if they had comorbidities or were not vaccinated. Others did not turn up as they lived far away and were reluctant to travel. But now that India is faring much better on the COVID front with an almost fully-vaccinated population, and with travel opening up the world over, people are planning their nuptials at overseas and domestic destinations.

COUPLES OPTING FOR CUSTOMIZATION

Couples are inclined towards destination weddings owing to the availability of multiple options for personalization. For instance, some couples may prefer smaller, more intimate ceremonies and celebrations at ballrooms, mansions, gazebos, cenotes, or private offsite locations. This trend encourages players to provide customized packages. Couples can also customize aspects like cuisine, ambience, and themes. Variety provided by destination wedding market players is seen to be far better than local marriages which is expected to boost market growth.

INDIAN DESTINATIONS STRIKING A CHORD

Until recently, the generic idea of destination weddings always revolved around international locations, that is, until destination weddings in India became popular. The rich cultural heritage of India makes every wedding celebration feel at home in every part of the country. Whether you are hosting a Bengali wedding ceremony in Coorg, or you are planning a Northeastern destination wedding in Jaipur or a beach wedding destination in Goa—you get to enjoy an experience of a lifetime without having to travel abroad. A destination wedding in India would be an ideal experience that combines culture, traditions, and vibrancy, with breathtaking locations and stunning architectural beauties to choose from.



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UNIQUE WEDDING DESTINATIONS IN DEMAND

Indian weddings are experiencing a boom again post pandemic. The markets are growing with bookings for the upcoming wedding season inching closer to the 2019 figures. Typically, the size of the destination weddings in India roughly accounts for 40 per cent of the catering revenue with a constant increase in demand prices. The industry is also seeing a boom of almost 25–30 per cent annually with the peak wedding season being in January, February, April, July, November, and December.

PERSONALISED WEDDINGS GAINING GROUND

Guests are prioritising the need to do personalised weddings and hotels offer the perfect melange of curated services and experiences to its clientele. Today, almost all hotels cater to the wedding segment since we cater to clients from different strata of society as well as there is a surge in



Siddharth Sathe

HM, Courtyard by Marriott Mahabaleshwar

“GUESTS ARE PRIORITISING THE NEED TO DO PERSONALISED WEDDINGS AND HOTELS OFFER THE PERFECT MELANGE OF CURATED SERVICES AND EXPERIENCES”

aspirational weddings that include rising demand for destination weddings or weddings at a star-rated property. For us, the growing local markets, especially around the ‘Satara-belt’ in Maharashtra is a big wedding and leisure market segment waiting to be explored.

BUDGETS SEEING A STEADY INCREASE

The budgets for Indian destination weddings are witnessing a steady increase though we see a trend of it growing not just vertically but also laterally. We see a spike in guests desiring a destination wedding wherein they can reach a buyout scenario and have the entire property cater to their needs. Price is not the sole deciding factor anymore with people looking at exploring newer destinations for an experience driven wedding. Today, every wedding aims to stand out on the experience quotient. In this case, hotels offering unique propositions get an edge over other regular wedding venues. With destination weddings, people are also looking to explore unheard places which leave their guests awestruck and pleasantly inspired. It is thus that places like Mahabaleshwar, Karjat, and Nashik are becoming very popular alongside Udaipur, Jaipur, and Goa that have been favourite wedding destinations for many years now.

Our target client segment comes from nearby feeder market cities such as Satara, Pune, Mumbai, Gujarat, and communities like Marwari, Sindhi, Jain and Maharashtrians. Marriages in India are big family affairs with elaborate preparations for week-long celebrations.





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Innovative sales strategies

WITHSTOOD POST-PANDEMIC EFFECTS

To manoeuvre the twists & turns of COVID, the sales pros at hotels leveraged innovative sales strategies like digital marketing and online channels.

 **Ananya Kukreja**

Crisis breeds ground for higher opportunities and innovation, if monetized efficiently and resourcefully. The decrease of pandemic restrictions has elevated the demand of eager customers who now wish to unapologetically spend on travel, luxury, and lifestyle. This “Revenge Buying” is shaping the recovery path for hospitality industry post-COVID. “Most brands and standalone hotels have already surpassed their 2019 levels and it is now a matter of leveraging demand and yielding rates,” says **Nupur Shukla**, General Manager Revenue at The Clarks Hotels and Resorts. Corporate travelers are more discerning now and wish to



Dheeraj Kukreja
VP- MGM Muthu Group

“THE INFLATION HAS ALSO PLAYED A ROLE”

foremost choose brands that they trust. With revised budgets set, many corporates are trying to do their groups, catering, and travel so that they can continue getting the same or higher. “The industry is witnessing a V-shape recovery which is forecasted to stable by Quarter Two of 2023,” foresees **Ayesha Bhalla**-Director of Sales and Marketing, JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar. A spontaneous or instantaneous buying behaviour is observed in corporate clients where lead time form prospect to definite business has reduced significantly.

The pent-up demand in market is allowing hotels to control higher rates than pre-COVID period. “The inflation has also played a role and it

is now easier to elucidate and persuade clients about the prerequisite for rise in ADR,” says **Dheeraj Kukreja**-Vice President, MGM Hotels and Resorts, M.G. Muthu Group. A 10 per cent raise per annum compounding since 2020 itself leads to an organic 21-22 per cent rate increase; add inflation and hotels must and are able to suggest higher CVGR. Education and awareness that individuals and companies have gained during the pandemic has allowed hotels to calculate client needs, and clients, to understand hotels.

DIGITAL DEMAND

The role of digital marketing and online channel bookings has certainly amplified with higher internet penetration, mobile connectivity, technology literacy, and dependency, and of course the rise in last minute travel plans. While all brands try to push their own brand websites, they also understand the importance of third-party bookings. “Travel agents, OTAs or digital bookings comprise about 20 to 25 per cent of our total room revenues,” says **Alpana Singh**, Cluster Director, Sales and Marketing, Uttar Pradesh and Director, Sales, Taj



Rishi Puri

Senior Vice President- Operations & Development at Lords Hotels & Resorts

“THE ‘NECESSARY EVIL’ OF DIGITAL MEDIA IS HER TO STAY”

Mahal, Lucknow. “We maintained online channel productivity up to 30% while offline travel agencies and direct channels continued to perform at 70% productivity,” says **Shahzad Aslam**, Head, Sales, Leisure Hotels Group.

“The ‘necessary evil’ of digital media is her to stay, however, the Indian culture always celebrates and depends on the ‘humane touch,’” says **Rishi Puri**,

Senior Vice President of Operations & Development, Lords Hotels & Resorts. Digital presence assists in retail bookings however a reduced dependency on third party bookings is bound to improve a hotel’s bottom line and reduce rate disparity. Given the market mix is inclined towards domestic tourists, the upsurge of bookings from OTAs and other digital platforms has amplified more than most hotel’s organic growth since COVID. The usage of technology by MGM Hotels and larger emphasis on digital marketing has likewise contributed to the growth. It is safe to say that while digital marketing is essential for lead generation, in-person meetings are vital for sales closures, affirms Kukreja.

RECOVERING REVENUE

There are clear signs that the industry is and will continue to improve in the continuing years. As per the Economic Times, the hotel industry is expected to reach a valuation of ₹1,210.87 billion by 2023 end; further the travel market is projected to reach US \$125 billion by 2027. The industry is witnessing as much rebound in leisure as corporate.




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Cloud **k**itchens: **GOING FORWARD**

Cloud kitchens are steadily rising in India as these kitchens are designed for delivery only and do not require a physical space for customers to dine-in.



Charmaine Fernz

A couple of years ago, getting food delivered to the comfort of your home was considered a luxury. Fast forward to 2022, food delivery has become a way of life. In a way, we can attribute this growth to the pandemic which had nothing but misery and pain. Nonetheless, as the adage goes, there is always a silver lining. The silver lining during the pandemic was the booming growth of the food delivery industry. Explaining the trend, Chef **Pawan Bisht**, Corporate Chef and R&D Executive, One8 by Virat Kohli says, cloud kitchens are tried and tested in India. Results have shown that this is a successful model for the Indian market and with the increase of technology in tier II and III cities, this business model will become even more successful in the coming years.

Elaborating on the technology takeover, **Raj Kamal Chopra**, Corporate Chef, Fortune Park Hotels Ltd explains that people have to accept that hospitality services are evolving into new and fresh forms with rapidly changing times. Everything has been digitised since the pandemic therefore, the transition to a delivery-only strategy has intensified. With the digital shift of all the services, people have begun to prefer online platforms and despite the pros and cons, both online and offline platforms will run simultaneously for foreseeable future at least.

Talking passionately about a concept close to his heart, **Shubham Maheshwari**, MD & CEO of Being Chef says that they ventured into the concept of cloud kitchens long before. He explains saying in 2013, we launched a concept called five-minute recipes wherein anyone can cook anything within five minutes with our DIY meal kits. Post this, we ventured into multiple models such as cloud kitchen dining, subscription-based models, and many others. However, we were way ahead of our time when there was no Zomato or Swiggy.

Citing the pandemic as one of the boosters for the growth of cloud kitchens is a common thought in the industry. Sharing similar views, **Vishaal Bharadwaj**, Head, Operations, Bird Catering & Lounges, owner and operator of Eat.Co says, over the last three years the outlook toward the restaurant business has seen a rapid shift from the perspective of customers and business owners. The home delivery



Pawan Bisht
Corporate Chef and R&D Executive, One8

“CLOUD KITCHENS ARE TRIED AND TESTED IN INDIA”



Shubham Maheshwari
MD & CEO of Being Chef

“WE WERE WAY AHEAD OF OUR TIME WHEN THERE WAS NO ZOMATO OR SWIGGY”

business which contributed a small chunk to the restaurant's revenue now holds a considerable share.

He further adds that a substantive increase in internet penetration, a rise in technology integration in the food business and the rise of app-based online food aggregators have fueled the growth of delivery and cloud kitchens.

THE BALANCING ACT

Cloud kitchens are here to stay, and this fact has been established in the last two years. However, every new trend effective will have its fair share of advantages and disadvantages. While food delivery has a bright future, are cloud kitchens a viable business model?

Chopra claims that while having a cloud kitchen can help reduce operating costs, the reporting and tracking benefit can also be beneficial in predicting higher demand and can help maintain lower selling prices due to lower overhead expenses. However, these factors do not assist in overcoming multiple other scaling-up problems, which could potentially dilute consistent customer experience. He further adds that a top-of-mind recall occurs only when you encounter the brand repeatedly. This is not possible with cloud kitchens. Furthermore, as there is no dine-in, there is a lack of experience that can be shared, drastically limiting the most reliable marketing route for local businesses—word of mouth. Maheshwari believes that it is a two-pronged approach for both consumers and business owners.

He says from a consumer perspective there are much more options, lower costs in ordering food and convenience of one's home. While the cons are a lack of brand connectivity and physical presence. You just have a presence of a food delivery app with no strong brand connection. However, for business owners, the advantages are lower overheads and operations from a single kitchen serving multiple brands resulting in a larger market share without added logistics support and supplier support. However, anyone looking to create a brand legacy cannot rely on cloud kitchens.

Sharing a clear view, Bisht explains the advantages of cost reduction for the business model, great expendable model, no overhead cost and gives a great opportunity to build multiple brands



Vishaal Bharadwaj
Head, Operations, Bird Catering & Lounges

“THE OUTLOOK TOWARD THE RESTAURANT BUSINESS HAS SEEN A RAPID SHIFT”



easily. However, the disadvantages are the lack of pricing power, huge competition, high dependence on food aggregators' platforms and low-profit margins because of the cut in between for all the delivery platforms.

Bharadwaj shares a similar view on cost savings in terms of the lease and setting up facilities. Buying or high rentals are a major chunk of revenue. Unlike restaurants, cloud kitchens do not need to be in high-end (rent) areas. Setting up a cloud kitchen is relatively quick since businesses do not have to build up a whole new place.

COMPARISON OF CONCEPTS

For many people, the one lingering question is the difference between a cloud kitchen and a restaurant (be it standalone or

fine dining). There is a stark difference. As Bharadwaj explains, establishment cost is a major differentiating factor between the two. Cloud kitchens today invest a lot in technology, infrastructure, manpower training, and delivery fleet among many others. Sharing a rather different view, Bisht says that there is no comparison between a restaurant and a cloud kitchen when it comes to business models and experiences. Though both are food and beverage models but function differently. A cloud kitchen can be operated from anywhere while a restaurant needs a good location and accessibility for guests and customers.

THE GROWING POTENTIAL

Cloud kitchens hold a lot of promise but provided things get streamlined. As Bisht explains, post the pandemic's drastic growth was witnessed in the cloud kitchen space across India. Today, people prefer to order food online due to safety and comfort levels.

Bharadwaj elaborates further saying people are adapting to the change quite comfortably as cloud kitchens deliver quality food at a place of consumer's choice with the click of a few buttons on an app. It saves up a lot of time and the hassle of planning an outside dinner.

Maheshwari is confident that cloud kitchens do not require huge investments. He says that one can easily open a cloud kitchen brand in less than five to ₹10 lakh. The requirements are simply a small space which can even be your basement.

THE FUTURE

Cloud kitchens have a promising future and are on the rise. Industry experts share a similar view, as Bharadwaj explains, minimum wastage of food, environment friendliness, sustainability, and healthy cooking will be the key trends defining cloud kitchens.

Technology is the next buzzword and if deployed across the right mediums will change the dynamics of cloud kitchens. As Chopra states technology serves as the foundation for restaurants that exclusively accept incoming orders through online ordering systems.

Bisht adds that the huge potential forecasted for this industry says a lot about potential. The F&B industry has seen a major shift in the past few years and food delivery is a major aspect of it. Today, people prefer the comfort of their homes, with quality restaurant food so why not serve it up to them?



Raj Kamal Chopra
Corporate Chef, Fortune Park Hotels

“TECHNOLOGY SERVES AS THE FOUNDATION FOR RESTAURANTS THAT EXCLUSIVELY ACCEPT INCOMING ORDERS”

KING KOIL delivers the best in hotel mattresses

King Koil provides hotel quality mattress solutions to boost the sleeping experience for hotel guests and that sets it apart from other competitors, outlines **Archit Gupta**, Managing Director, King Koil.

How soon hotels should change their mattresses? And post-COVID, what can be done to keep the mattresses safe and hygienic—tips for housekeeping?

Most hotels replace their mattresses every three to five years, though the exact timetable varies depending on volume, usage, and budget, as well as the type of mattress and mattress brand. Most mattresses are designed to last 7 to 10 years or more, but hotel mattresses are typically replaced more frequently because comfort and support are critical to their business and their mattresses are frequently used.

The safety and hygiene of a mattress is defined by two terms:

a) Cleaning: Cleaning is defined as the removal of dirt and impurities from surfaces, including germs. Cleaning does not kill germs, but it does reduce their number and, as a result, the risk of infection spreading.

b) Disinfecting: Disinfecting is the process of killing germs on surfaces by using chemicals. This method does not necessarily clean or disinfect dirty surfaces. However, killing germs that remain on a surface after cleaning reduces the risk of infection spreading even further.

Many hotels focus majorly on 'sleep' factor for room-selling. Please tell us how your brand addresses the expectation of 'good sleep' in hospitality business?

From a soft to an extra firmer mattress, we got it all. King Koil offers a wide range of mattresses to select from which will suit approximately every body type and lets your body recharge. Whether you need a Memory Foam Mattress or Latex Mattress or a mattress which helps you reenergize every time you wake up, we have the best mattresses to offer. Our hotel quality mattress solutions are designed to enhance



Archit Gupta
Managing Director, King Koil

the sleeping experience for hotel guests and place us above the competition. We offer feather feel mattress beds for hotels that bring a whole range of advantages for hotels including premium aesthetics, unmatched comfort, and competitive pricing. Our 20 plus product range for hotels is specifically designed keeping in hotels of all sizes, from luxury to budget. For premium and business class clientele, you can opt for the ultra-plush mattress from King Koil, the Guest Rest Eurosoft. It is equipped with body sink technology along with a combination of high-density super surfer foam and Pocket or Bonnell springs. No one makes the hotel spring mattress like we do. The King Koil Maharaja Grand is a luxury hotel mattress suitable for suites. It is one-of-a-kind Euro pillow top fusing a high-density memory foam over a bouncy HD pocketed spring for best support and comfortable sleep. King Koil's Comfort Sense is the ultimate hotel mattress type designed for guests staying at top hotel chains. Made with a combination of feather feel layer, body sink foam and HD resilience foam, it makes hotel guests feel like they are sleeping on the clouds.

How is technology bringing innovation in the way mattresses are created these days? Please tell us about the material that is

being used to ensure utmost comfort.

Finding the best mattress for your partner and yourself can be a very tough situation given the fact that there are a lot of products available in the market and claiming to be the best. Also, buying a mattress just by its firmness or softness might give your body aches and sleepless nights. Our research-based technology allows you to find the right mattresses for your body type. Our software takes various focal points into consideration before making a recommendation.

Some factors we take into consideration before populating a mattress to meet your requirements: posture analysis, sleep tracker, body composition, pressure mapping, sleep discomfort, and spinal alignment.

Other bed accessories like pillows, cushions, and bedsheets are also carrying great importance today. How is your brand working on these?

We manufacture some of the best premium pillows be it a memory foam pillow or a contour pillow to support your neck, shoulder, and head while you sleep. Our pillows are made with 100 per cent pure PU Foam, microfibre, or poly fibre. No matter for your requirement our pillows will always help you sleep better.

Please tell us about your premium products? What are you doing to target and attract more hotels?

King Koil opens up your world to a comprehensive range of premium quality mattresses that are designed to enhance the quality of your sleep and promote overall wellness. We offer some of the best mattresses in India made with top-notch materials and available at cost-effective prices.

The best handcrafted luxury hotel mattress from our King Koil hospitality team is Maharaja Grand.

Ozone's first **Experience Centre** comes up in Lucknow

Ozone Group has recently inaugurated its experience centre, The Ozone Hub, in Lucknow. The Hub comprises a live display of Architectural Glass Fittings, Shower Enclosures, Digital Locks & Safes, Hardware for wooden & glass doors, and more.

Speaking on the launch, Alok Aggarwal, Managing Director – Ozone Group, said, “We are delighted to announce the launch of our latest experience centre, The Ozone Hub in Lucknow, one of our key markets in the North region. This strategic expansion will play an integral role in increasing our footprint in the region. We are confident that this will help our audience make informed decisions while choosing from our ‘Made in India’ products portfolio and be assured of their quality.” The Hub was launched to impart technical



knowhow, functionality, and usage of the products to both B2B and B2C audiences. At this experience centre, the product displays and practical demonstrations from Ozone's experts will give a first-hand experience to the customers, offering them an end-to-end exposure to the perfect blend of modern aesthetics and innovative designs that are a vital component in Ozone offerings.

Rajiv Agarwal from Doorbhai – the local channel partner of Ozone, said, “The experience centre will enable a client to perceive how a solution will look once installed. The centre will also be used as a training centre for architects, dealers, installers, and fabricators to understand the actual installation process of the Ozone fittings & give a better finish to the final solution.”

Biodegradable gloves to ensure **green environment**

Greenware has developed biodegradable gloves that can help conserve Mother Earth as they decompose more quickly and have a smaller carbon footprint.

As rightly said, “Conservation means the wise use of the earth and its resources for the lasting good of mankind”—Gifford Pinchot emphasizes that one should not exploit the resources and privileges one has. Conservation and preservation are synonyms, yet while both aim to safeguard nature, they go about it differently.

Conservation is concerned with the sustainable use of nature by humans for activities such as hunting, logging, or mining. In contrast, preservation is concerned with protecting wildlife from human use. Similarly, Aditya



Aditya Rajesh Daga
Founder, Greenware

Rajesh Daga's Greenware has developed biodegradable greenware gloves that can help conserve Mother Earth. Greenware



India's Most ECO- Friendly Gloves

gloves decompose more quickly, have a smaller carbon footprint, and help establish a green or environmentally friendly economy.

Conservation is the practice of caring for these resources so all living things can benefit from them now and in the future.

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MOVEMENTS



SANJOY BHATTACHARYYA

**Vice President Finance
Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts**

★ Sanjoy Bhattacharyya is a certified Chartered Accountant and completed B. Com (Hons) from St. Xavier's College, Kolkata. He is a seasoned accounting and finance professional with over 25 years of experience in driving strategic financial operations, budgeting, statutory compliance, risk management, funds raising, and financial restructuring. Before joining Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts as Vice President Finance, he has held senior positions at Oberoi Hotels and Resorts, The Imperial, New Delhi, Zuri Hotels and Resorts and Bloom Hotel Group, New Delhi.



R SRIJITH

**Director of Sales and Marketing
The St. Regis Goa Resort**

★ R Srijith brings with him over a decade of experience and will be responsible for driving revenue through targeted strategies and overseeing all aspects of the sales and marketing department at The St. Regis Goa Resort. Prior to joining The St. Regis Goa Resort as the Director of Sales and Marketing, he worked with many established hotels in India including The Leela Group, IHHR Hospitality Private Ltd, and Ginger Hotels. He is a true believer and enforcer of providing wholesome experience to guests, and does so by ensuring comprehensive training for each member of his team.



SAAHIL SHEOKAND

**Director of Sales & Marketing
Radisson Gurugram Udyog Vihar**

★ SaaHil brings with him a wealth of experience in the hospitality arena. He has been associated with some properties such as Hyatt Regency Delhi, Hyatt Regency Gurgaon, Hyatt Place Gurgaon, Dusit Hotels & Resorts and Corus Hotel Hyde Park, London. Prior to joining Radisson Gurugram Udyog Vihar, he was associated with Hyatt Regency Gurgaon as Director of Sales. He will be overseeing Sales, Events, Revenue, and Marketing for Radisson Gurugram Udyog Vihar as Director of Sales & Marketing.



AMIT K SINGH

**General Manager
Hotel Golden Tulip Lucknow**

★ Amit is a seasoned hospitality professional with a strong background that boasts of an illustrious and ascending career graph with a rich experience of working with good hospitality brands. Before associating with Golden Tulip Lucknow, he was with Sarovar Hotels New Delhi as Cluster General Manager for The Muse Sarovar Portico, New Delhi- Nehru Place and Kapashera. In the past, he has worked with hospitality brands such as Sarovar Hotels & Resorts, Park Plaza & Radisson Hotels.



RASHMI SHARMA

**Cluster Marketing and
Communication Manager
Sheraton Grand Pune**

★ With over seven years of experience in public relations and marketing, Rashmi Sharma will be spearheading the marketing activities for Sheraton Grand Pune and Le Méridien Mahabaleshwar Resort & Spa. She will be creating a unique positioning for the properties through effective and innovative strategies. Prior to this, she was spearheading the PR mandate at Taj Santacruz, Mumbai for three years. During her tenure in the PR industry, she has worked with agencies such as Edelman India and Fleishman Hillard.



VIKRAM N PATIL

**Junior Sous Chef
Courtyard by Marriott Pune Chakan**

★ Vikram N Patil has an extensive experience in culinary field and has worked with various renowned brands. Chef Vikram has gained his expertise by working with phenomenal teams at Fairfield by Marriott, Oakwood Residency, Grand Mercure and others. Courtyard by Marriott Pune Chakan has appointed Vikram N. Patil as Junior Sous Chef to join their culinary team. Chef Vikram will be working closely with Executive Chef Feroz Patel and Sous Chef Pradnesh Kishore handling the culinary operations of the Hotel and the in-house MoMo café.



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