

MARCH 2024 SPECIAL EDITION

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**DESTINATION INDIA**

# HOTELSCAPES

PROMOTING HOSPITALITY & TOURISM



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# CONTENTS

## TRENDING

Time To Reconstruct! It is Happy Days for Indian Hospitality! Time to Position Afresh, in Keeping with its True Relevance and Outreach!..... 4

## HICSA 2024

The Success Story of HICSA. From a Modest Beginning to Becoming the Flagship Hospitality Event..... 8

## TOURISM & HOSPITALITY

Tourism can be the Key Driver for Indian Economy. Our current Infrastructure is Ready to Host MICE and global airport hubs, driving a new economy.....14

## TOURISM TODAY

Understanding 10 years of PM Modi and India's Tryst with Tourism .....18

Indian Tourism's Brand Ambassador-in-Chief: Narendra Modi.....20

## IDEAS EXCHANGE AT HICSA 2024

Senior Leadership Spells Confidence  
It's a Serious Business Vertical of the Growing Indian Economy .....28

## ARCHITECTURE & MASTER PLANNING

Shaping Tomorrow. Archetype India's Pioneering Role in Transforming India's Hospitality Landscape .....36

## GUEST COLUMN

What Makes a Hotel Iconic? Defining Moments and Unique Renderings! ..... 44

## CUISINE

Going High-end Vegetarian with Vir Sanghvi ..... 46

## SKILLING

In a People's Industry, the Biggest Challenge is Finding the People.....50

## INVESTMENTS

Institutional Investors Bet on an Optimistic Future for Indian Hospitality.....52

## SUSTAINABILITY

"Check-Out Time: Why Sustainability in Hospitality Spells an Existential Crisis? .....54

## BEST PRACTICES

Marriott Bonvoy. A Successful Industry Case Study : Unlocking a Loyalty Programme like Marriott Bonvoy.....58

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## FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the 19th edition of HICSA, gathering fresh momentum both in numbers and depth, year on year. As an annual coming together of global and Indian professionals engage on trends in this space, an emerging powerhouse of hospitality, in the emerging Indian economy and global prominence. There is much to suggest that there is maturity, confidence and certainty in direction.

The one big take away of our times is the recognition and strengthening of the mid-market. This is virtually the backbone of the industry; with a clear distinction between budget on one hand, and up-scale and luxury on the other. The mid-market needs little central classification as brands define themselves. With finer tuning happening, between classic and lifestyle, there are more brands to emerge. Witness the re-emergence of a modern, lifestyle Ginger from the IHCL portfolio. Look at the Radisson Individuals as a brand, allowing a free flow of design.

The Future is Here! And it looks like it is here to stay! Amidst all this euphoria of growth, what can one hope for, at best! A big need of this hour is Humility. That is one element that can define our services industry differently, as it is 'service' with humility that should become the motto of the composite industry. Service with passion and warmth, that come best with a sense of honest and sincerely felt humility. It is also best imbibed from up down, as every person in the hierarchy is watching his seniors, looking up to them as role models. It is the senior leadership that may consider driving this credo, for others to follow.

The opposite of Humility, for abundant clarity, is Arrogance, Conceit, Infallibility. It is important for the industry as a whole to steer clear of these pitfalls. These alone can spell disaster for our growth. Today, on the horizon, one sees numerous individuals invested in hospitality, with a passion to grow, succeed, acclaim new heights. These are not just for lucre, or monetary profits, but more importantly, a manifestation of desire to achieve goals, achieve perfection, for just sheer process of 'karma'.

On this annual homecoming at HICSA 2024, let us pledge as an industry, to grow with reason, with profound responsibility, in togetherness and harmony towards a better realisation of Indian hospitality.

**Navin Berry**  
Editor

# Time To Reconstruct!

**It is Happy Days for Indian Hospitality!  
Time to Position Afresh, in Keeping with its  
True Relevance and Outreach!**



by NAVIN BERRY

**T**hese are excellent times for the hospitality industry. On a personal note, I can share modestly that I have witnessed the hospitality industry from up close from the mid-seventies to now, which is a good span of 50 years, right from the top, meaning even then and now. I have been an editor of a hotel magazine and I've had the privilege of knowing and interacting and engaging with the hospitality czars of that time, as even now. So, with that vantage point, I can share or say that hospitality has seldom seen such a good environment to grow. There is no looking behind. I see only an upside, no downside unless we plan our own demise. The market has boomed beyond recognition, the number of hospitality majors then were a handful, now almost a hundred of them. Brands

were unknown except just a few, today each brand has its own 20 and more! Hotels are no more 'oases' in a land of poverty; today, they are mainstream as part of the social and economic fabric of the economy.

The pipeline, howsoever robust that all the chains share, and indeed it is robust, is not going to match or is not likely to match the kind of demand that we will witness in the immediate years to come, in the next three to five years. Full credit to our growing economy, growing relevance in a multi-polar global environment, an aspirational middle class that wants to experience every luxury, available at its own price points. **So, one can expect high occupancies, very good returns on**

**India is also going to engage more with the world at large. You will have more hospitality conferences more, more international diplomacy meetings. As a strong emerging economy, with government capex in infrastructure, on a previously unimagined scale, will witness ease in travel, giving rise to demand on hotels across all price points.**

investments, very good ballooning of allied verticals like weddings and sports and more, way above what we had seen from inbound tourism groups, on which our traditional business has rested.

India is also going to engage more with the world at large. You will have more hospitality conferences more, more international diplomacy meetings. As a strong emerging economy, with government capex in infrastructure, on a previously unimagined scale, will witness ease in travel, giving rise to demand on hotels across all price points. So, if hotel business has always been a matter of demand and supply, and it was



meant to be cyclical, for the next five to seven years, we will see only a steady growth in demand. The cycle, if any, acquires a larger diameter!

A growth in supply, but not likely to meet up with the demand. That's the current scenario. And this is not at the five-star in the premium. It will also be at the mid-market. It will also be at the lower end. And I see more and more ballooning or emergence of star categories among branded hotels. Some more branded categories are going to come up for sure. Likely, in the months ahead, professionals will leave their jobs, set up their own brands, grow in size. This was earlier a practice seen more among Indian tour operators, less among hotels.

Now, I think a lot of this above, all of you know, probably better than I do. So, what is this story about that I am going to share?

**Good times are good times to enjoy, but they are also the most favourable time to look inwards and see where your growth is going to be, and how you can become responsible citizens, a responsible industry, a responsible part of the growing economy of the country.** And that requires a lot of serious introspection. That introspection is more convenient and possible only because you are in good times. You are not actually having to bother about meeting your targets, repaying your loans. I mean, bottom lines are only getting healthier. So, this is a good time to introspect. And like I said, **how do we project hospitality, hotel industry as a responsible engine, responsible growth engine of a growing economy, which is going to witness upwards of 8% growth over the next eight to 10 years.** And it's time to become realistic and not just pat ourselves on the back. Not just that where we may, or may not, have gone wrong in the past, but to more effectively, more importantly, where we must go as an industry, where we wish to position it in India's future roadmap.

**The big challenge is how and where we can actually join hands and make things different, make things better for hospitality in the country as a whole. How can hospitality become an important engine, a true and important engine of India's growing economy?**

In a moment of honest introspection, I think the time is ripe to go beyond 'tokenism'. I personally feel that a lot more can be achieved, given the wisdom and the insights and the knowledge that the hospitality industry enjoys today across the spectrum; the leadership is more empowered than has ever been before in the last 50 years that I have seen. These are not just passionate people who have believed in hotels. These are people with insight, fully aware of the technology advancements, fully aware of new age developments like power of digital, the outreach that the world of web can provide. So, the leadership is savvy and they are most suited to making the big change. And there, **I feel it is time to go beyond tokenism.** Some of it is going to cost small bits of money, small bits of time, small bits of attention. And I think the leadership must look

**A chain may be and is responsible, but is the entire hospitality industry responsible? And the answer could be a decisive no! There are issues and concerns, but there is fortunately also a new awakening! A more concerted and sustained effort is required of industry bodies, old and new, to forge alliances that break new ground.**

into the larger hospitality canvas. The minds are there, the passion is there, the willingness is also there. What we need are more avenues, new initiatives for the composite industry to come together and signal the big change.

It is not just about me and how well I have provided for my company; it is also for your industry, because the name 'hotel', the name 'hospitality', is not just ascribed to A or B or C company, but to the totality of the hospitality experience. And I dare say in recent times, there have been many instances when hospitality has come for a fairly negative connotation in terms of responsibility. What I am emphasising, again, is responsible hospitality. A chain may be and is responsible, but is the entire hospitality industry responsible? And the answer could be a decisive no! There are issues and concerns, but there is fortunately also a new awakening! A more concerted and sustained effort is required of industry bodies, old and new, to forge alliances that break new ground.

**1 There is the most critical concern about skilled manpower. There is the big announcement of IHCL that they will open 50 skilling centres around the country, to train a lakh of young men and women, that will include some 30% women, over the next five years. We need such commitments from across the leading players, and also from stand-alone hotels. Who will**



The Leela Palace  
New Delhi



Wayanad Wild by CGH Earth - Nature Interpretation Center

**Rates are an issue. A tricky one, but allow me to say that there can be a ceiling! Let us not say that the sky is the limit. Is there a tendency to short changing in the industry? Consumers have often complained about the difference between the 'asking' rate and the final 'negotiated' rate.**

help them go about it, assuming the spirit is willing? That is the crunch, going forward? One suggestion is how an association such as HAI can look around the country, scout for retired professionals, they are eminently knowledgeable and between themselves represent a very rich body of knowhow, get them on board to create a national pool, a consortium, if you like, that can be assessed by anyone who is looking for ways to skill. **Presently, we are managing to do more and more with less and less qualified people.** You need to be a customer yourself to go, and experience how the delivery falters. Let us not look at those ten-twenty top five-star hotels in Delhi or Mumbai. Let us go to the smaller cities. Everybody is talking about the big growth in tier two and three, but let us go to these cities, witness the growth, and also the yawning gap between expectation and delivery.

**2 Rates are an issue.** A tricky one, but allow me to say that there can be a ceiling! Let us not say that the sky is the limit. **Is there a tendency to short changing in the industry? Consumers have often complained about the difference between the 'asking' rate and the final 'negotiated' rate.**

**3 Inclusivity is a big word.** Today, it is a great jargon word being used left and right indiscriminately, assuming if we have all understood it. I'm still trying to

understand how and where it can fit our industry. Indeed, small steps have been taken by quite a few hotel companies as a policy to say that we are going to employ differently abled people. There is also a policy to employ women more and ensure gender parity. But is the gender parity also showing parity in pay scale? Like in men's and women's tennis, it shows there is a long way yet to go! That's a big question. Is the gender parity narrowing or equalising over a period of time? Do not forget that in the fifties and sixties, hotels had women housekeepers, even then. So, it's not as if we have introduced some new, new novelties today; women chefs were a common practice. Today we have also male chefs. So, the question of gender parity, inclusivity how we can also employ less privileged people into our industry.

**4** How we can be inclusive in terms of the local environment in which we are situated, our local community. Are we employing enough people from our own immediate community as in the village or city that you are in? Or, are you importing staff all the time? Is the local guy also becoming a manager?

**5 Education and knowledge sharing** is another need of our times. All these are critical issues for inclusivity and I think as an industry, we need to create a charter. For now, I keep thinking that perhaps the big chains know it all, but is that knowledge being disseminated adequately down the industry at large? Is that happening? There are many entrepreneurs who are making it big in the same tier two and three cities of business interest or tourist interest. I don't think they know **where to go for gathering best practices. There is no single source in the open domain, as far as I can tell. That too, at a price that is affordable. They are actually on the loose end aspiring to do well and they don't know where to go.** Is there any possibility that our industry associations open the doors to saying, we will provide education, such knowledge. These can be in the form of workshops, learning courses, in cities around India, and possibly in close connect with state governments, who ought to be willing to help, and also fund, and why not? To just say "we will provide technical expertise for a song - just come and grow the industry".

**6 There is the other buzzword of our times – Experiential!** Now that too sounds like it has just been discovered. Heritage hotels have all along been just this. So, has a group like CGH Earth, earlier known as Casino Hotels; or, InDeco Hotels floated by Steve Borgia. It has gained prominence in recent times, post the covid recovery as more and more domestic tourists wanted to get away from the big cities, for fear of contracting the deadly virus. Many of the well-heeled booked villas for months, some of them even the smaller boutique

resorts, and worked out of these confined spaces.

**Heritage hotels have always been a product of their own local ethos, immersed in their history and traditions. Employed local staff, local produce, have been lords and masters to the entire local community. Everything about them has been born out of local.**

Perhaps what is dawning anew is that this earlier experiential is merging into inclusivity for the industry as a whole. And most of the produce, at least the vegetables and the eggs and the poultry, all of it is also coming from neighbouring clusters of villages. It's fresh, it's guaranteed, and above all, it's cheaper as you buy direct from the grower. There is no freight involved, there's no logistics involved, there's no uncertainty whatsoever. So, I think it is all coming in for the good. And I think a lot of these experiential properties are also bringing in a training manager, and they are at every property. They are training the local people to becoming waiters, chefs what have you. Among them are players like StayVista, Saffron Homes, Isprava and numerous others, building vacation homes for the family.

What is now growing is beyond heritage properties, even new ones are being made. Local people are eagerly introducing their local cuisines, their local crafts into the experiences. And the entrepreneurs or the hospitality managers are gladly encouraging them to "show-off", how they are rooted in the local soil or how successfully they are 'inclusive'.

Some bit has been encouraged by recent government initiatives like going strong on millets. So, the story of the bajra and the ragi, and all the rest were already being consumed in the villages, as common place. So was jaggery. But it had lost currency in the cities, and the industry is now nursing its grand revival. So, the wheel has turned full circle. Many of the traditions which had survived in the rural are now coming back to the urban. This reverse swing will also help in the integration of India with Bharat.

**7 My other issue is tourism per se. Today we are still promoting only individual hotels and not cities. And destination marketing, to my mind internationally, has moved to cities away from states. It is no longer like selling Gujarat. Or, sell Andhra. It is destinations such as Hyderabad, Vijaywada, Vishakhapatnam, Tirupati, Ahmedabad, Gir Forest. So, all these are destinations in themselves. It's not Uttar Pradesh as much as Varanasi or Agra. Even in smaller countries around Europe, the focus has moved to cities, and there are organizations that are funded by EU bodies, only to learn best practices among cities, as destinations in themselves. So, I think this perspective needs to come around in India as well. And, in fact, such teaming can also be extended within South Asia. City based evolution, grouping and marketing!**

**8 In the absence of any tangible tourism lobbies in the country, it is the hotels that can provide leadership in channelizing, coming together with the larger tourism product of individual cities and bringing them around and saying, we will provide the core. City based clubs, promoted by hotels, bringing together the tourism interests of the city. We will provide the time and opportunity, but you as tourism people, give us leadership in promoting the destination and we will back you up. So that could be a quantum leap for tourism as a whole, whether for domestic tourism or for inbound, or verticals like weddings. Why not say weddings in Agra? It is the city that immortalises love. Why not say weddings in Tirupati, what better a location for solemnity and piety and getting blessings? Not just individual hotels for themselves but collectively as a city/destination!**

**The essence is collaboration, not through tokenism, but collaboration in the real sense where you are not collaborating simply to make a presentation to the government, but you are collaborating to educate the industry at large and providing the customer experience, which is warranted at the price points that are being charged at various levels across the system.**



**The essence is collaboration, not through tokenism, but collaboration in the real sense where you are not collaborating simply to make a presentation to the government, but you are collaborating to educate the industry at large and giving hotels and hospitality a good name and providing the customer experience, which is warranted at the price points that are being charged at various levels across the system. The whole ecosystem must change, evolve, and I think it's the big calling right now only because the times are good. We are in an upbeat mood, it is the right time to consolidate upon the gains, the opportunity to get our act together is now and here! 📺**



#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Navin Berry, Editor, Destination India, over five decades has edited publications like CityScan, India

Debates and Travel Trends Today. He is the founder of SATTE, India's first inbound tourism mart, biggest in Asia.

# The Success Story of HICSA From a Modest Beginning to Becoming the Flagship Hospitality Event



*In conversation with* **MANAV THADANI,**  
*Founder and CEO, Hotelivate*

## Beginnings

**H**ICSA was a byproduct of our competition comments back in the early part of the century when we had just set up the consulting company. We unfortunately lost two senior executives to two different companies, and the competition back then suggested to the market that HVS my then company, was a one man show. Therefore, to counter that argument I decided to start a conference

which would give confidence to the hotel owner community that we were a bigger firm and use it to market our services and it worked. Another factor that pushed me towards hosting my own event was that the only prominent conference back then was the FHRAI annual event, and I would never be given a speaking slot as I was considered too young to be a speaker. The first time I got the opportunity was in 2004 thanks to Vivek Nair's leadership and I pulled off a good session on stage. Post that even a few people present said why don't you do this more often and have your own event and thus six months later, HICSA was born.

The first event in April 2005 was on the back of the global WTTC Summit in India as we decided to attract some of the global speakers attending the event. Our first big catch as a speaker that year was Marilyn Carlson Nelson of the Carlson family that owned the Radisson group at the time.

## The Grand Hyatt, Mumbai Decade

The first event happened at the Hilton Trident at Nariman point. However, we quickly outgrew the space and moved to the Taj Lands End. With our continued success of growth, we were forced to find yet another bigger venue and we landed up at Grand Hyatt, Mumbai. The next 9 years were at the Grand Hyatt at a stretch and HICSA became synonymous with this hotel. We had great growth, some very memorable speakers from around the globe. We initiated some lifetime achievement awards with PRS Oberoi and Capt. Nair to be amongst the first two recipients. My favorite however remains that we were able to present the same to Dr AB Kerkar – the man who laid the foundations of the Taj or today's IHCL. He was a forgotten hero and I felt proud that we were able to recognize him.

In 2009 we introduced the deal of the year award and also the Hotel of the Year awards which have become very popular and in fact were the first time such awards were ever done. The main evening dinner at the Grand Hyatt usually followed and was always the showstopper event and we organized many an entertainment evening around this dinner at the outside courtyard. The second day of the events always ended with a dinner across many of the city's other hotels. A few lucky folks made it back to the post HICSA parties which went on till dawn at China Kitchen which converted itself into a night lounge.

## The New Delhi Experiment

After 9 years we felt there was fatigue setting into our conferences and we needed to do something different and therefore decided to try another hotel, another city and we chose to bring the event to JW Marriott, Aerocity. This was also the first year we chose to try and com-





bine our operations event HOSI with HICSA. Unfortunately for us, both experiments did not achieve the success we had hoped for and after two years we decided to go back home to the Grand Hyatt. The Delhi experiment was a mystery to us as to why it failed to meet our expectations. One consistent message we got was from most of the development teams that were based in Delhi was that they wanted the conference to be outside their hometown. True or not, we perhaps just chose to accept that discontent.

Our return to Mumbai in 2018 also coincided with us becoming Hotelivate and us continuing to have the trademark to all the conferences not just in India but around the globe with the THINC series in Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Africa.

### Covid Set Back

March 9th, 2020 – approximately 24 days before the conference we took a decision to cancel HICSA. It allowed for delegates time before all their flights were booked. With the globe shutting down 10-12 days later, in hindsight it turned out to be the right call. This however created a huge pressure on finances of the company. We had already spent money on the event, paid advances and had no revenues to back these expenses. Plus, many of our delegates and some sponsors asked us for refunds which we chose to honour despite our own precarious financial situation. We had salaries to pay now for two year or more before we had any conference. We also knew that whenever we did do the next event, we will not make any revenue as the new sponsorships would be limited but the expenses will remain there.

We innovated and offered some of the existing delegates a one plus one deal so that they did not ask for refund and made the ticket valid for 3 years. Those sponsors that chose to stay back and not ask for refund were given



discounts in the next two years etc etc. This was all good and the right thing to do but it added up as a burden on us for 2-3 years.

Finally in 2021 when we did indeed re-start HICSA (in September) it was in Delhi at the Taj Palace as it was less expensive for us to travel as organizers to Mumbai and it was only possible on the generosity of IHCL and Puneet Chhatwal who hosted the event for us. We shall forever remain indebted to him and Nayan Seth, the GM at Taj Palace and his team, for the same. In 2022 we chose to go back to Grand Hyatt, Mumbai for our 17th event.

### Creating a Theme

Our return to the Grand Hyatt was unfortunately not that great. The hotel team during Covid had changed and somehow the HICSA mojo was missing and therefore we took an audience poll and were encouraged to



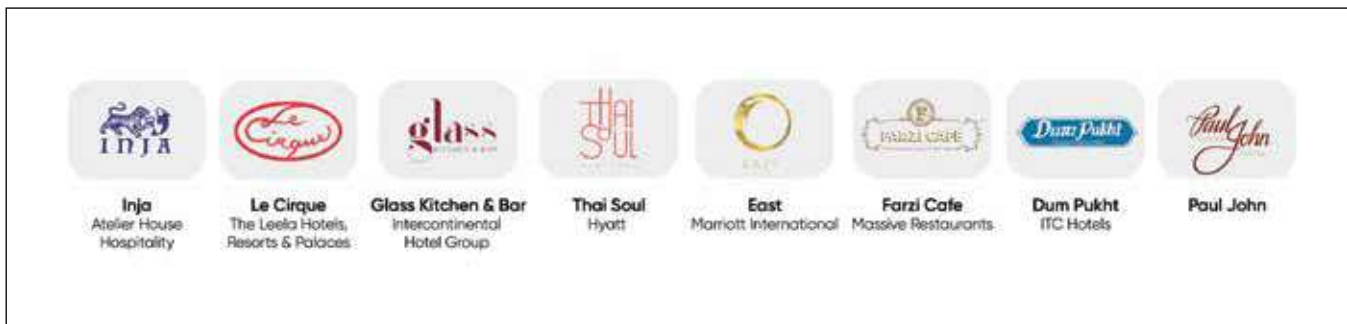
choose a new destination, hotel and therefore we moved to Bengaluru at the Hilton Hotel & Convention Center at Manyata Park. Keeping in mind that we had a slightly disappointing HICSA when we had moved out of Mumbai, therefore we decided to embrace Bengaluru and created a theme for the first time around AI – Artificial Intelligence, Astute Investments, and Architecture & Interiors. We also chose to focus on a lot of the smaller hotel companies and owners from the south. The icing on the cake was our ability to organize a round of golf for some of the golfing enthusiasts. Bengaluru was a success as we managed to get our numbers back to 600 delegates, but the most heartwarming part was the number of owners that attended was 147 or nearly 1/4th.

This year we have continued in Bengaluru and have continued with a theme and shifted focus on food and beverage. Our theme for 2024 is Savoring South Asia: Innovations in Food Tech and Design. As an industry for many hotels food and beverage constitutes 30-50% of their revenues. Yet how many times do we really talk of the subject at hotel conferences. We talk about rooms revenue, segmentations, and optimization of revenue. Yet we don't use or have similar tools to apply for the food and beverage business. This year we hope to change some of that through the discourse that is being planned; at the JW Marriott Golfshire which allows us to create a big culinary food carnival at the end of day 1. We have 7 restaurants from across India putting up food pop ups. The convention center next door is our largest venue till date and we expect 650 – 700 people to participate.

To take reference to Golf – while I have personally never hit a hole in one in the game – HICSA certainly has been an ace hole in one for Hotelivate over the years and we feel blessed.

# GLOBAL REACH

<p><b>Anthony Capuano,</b> President &amp; CEO, Marriott International</p>	<p><b>Arne Sorenson,</b> President &amp; COO - Marriott International</p> <p><b>Christopher J Nassetta,</b> President &amp; CEO, Hilton Worldwide</p> <p><b>David P Berg,</b> CEO Carlson Hospitality Group</p>	<p><b>Frits Van Paasschen,</b> President &amp; CEO, Fourwood Hotels and Resorts</p>	<p><b>Gerald Lawless,</b> Executive Chairman, Jumeirah Group</p> <p><b>Giles Pelisson,</b> Group CEO - Accor Hotels</p> <p><b>Ho Kwon Ping,</b> Executive Chairman, Banyan Tree Holdings</p>	<p><b>Mark S Hoplamazian,</b> President &amp; CEO, Hyatt Hotels Corporation</p>	<p><b>Raymon Bickson,</b> Principal &amp; CEO, Bickson Hospitality</p> <p><b>Richard Solomons,</b> CEO, InterContinental Hotels Group</p> <p><b>Sébastien Bazin,</b> Chairman &amp; CEO - Accor</p>
<p><b>Denis Hennequin,</b> Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Accor</p>	<p><b>Diana L Nelson,</b> Chairman, Carlson</p> <p><b>Donald Trump Junior,</b> EVP The Trump Organisation</p> <p><b>Ed Fuller,</b> President &amp; MD, Marriott International</p>	<p><b>Hubert Joly,</b> Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Carlson Companies, Inc.</p>	<p><b>Jean Gabriel Pérès,</b> President and CEO, Mövenpick Hotels &amp; Resorts</p> <p><b>Michael Issenberg,</b> President, Accor Asia Pacific</p>	<p><b>Trudy Rouito,</b> President &amp; CEO, Carlson</p>	<p><b>Stelios Haji</b> Chairman, EasyGroup</p> <p><b>Raymond Bickson,</b> MD Indian Hotels Company Ltd</p>
	<p><b>Eric Danziger,</b> President &amp; CEO, Wyndham Hotel Group</p> <p><b>Federico J. González,</b> President and CEO, Radisson Hotel Group</p>	<p><b>Marilyn Carlson Nelson,</b> Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Carlson Companies, Inc.</p>			



## Global Reach

HICSA today is on the rolodex of many of the global CEO's. This year we are blessed to have three CEOs from Accor, Hyatt and Radisson. Each of them has previously attended the event 3 to 4 times. Last year, we had the CEOs of Marriott and Hilton. The presence of global CEOs at HICSA sends a strong signal to the international community about India's growing importance in the global hospitality landscape. It showcases India as a lucrative destination for investment and highlights the potential for growth and development in the country's hospitality sector. Additionally, HICSA's impressive line-up of speakers, including global CEOs and hotel investors, attracts institutional investors looking to explore opportunities in India.

This not only brings in investment but also brings valuable expertise and best practices from around the world, contributing to the overall growth and development of India's hospitality industry.

The event has a history of being the stage for major announcements and partnerships, making it a crucial event for anyone looking to make a mark in the hospitality industry. This is one event

which is known for its networking, deal announcements by the development teams and simply owners who come to learn, educate and re-charge themselves. Over the years, our lineup of speakers has always been very impressive of not just global CEO's but hotel investors and particularly the institutional investors.

As of today, HICSA has evolved into much more than just a conference; it has become a cornerstone event for the hospitality industry, serving as a nexus for industry professionals to come together, network, and collaborate. HICSA's reputation as a must-attend event has solidified its position as the go-to platform for anyone looking to stay abreast of the latest trends, developments, and opportunities in the hospitality sector.

# Kudos to HICSA

## Looking Back at Select Milestone Events

### *A Flashback in Pictures on Yesteryears*

**19**<sup>th</sup> edition of HICSA is a job well done, extremely well. Initially it had the support, a good base to work upon, which was HVS, for which Manav was the Indian anchor, but subsequently, as the years have rolled on, the event has gathered steam, catapulting it into India's foremost hospitality industry gathering. So, when Manav launched his own Hotelivate, it brought a new spark to the event, an even more pronounced enthusiasm to do better each year. Indeed, it has, except for that brief covid period when all was forgotten, not just events but the industry in itself, all of travel, tourism and hospitality, looked set to doom. Happily, it has since then bloomed, and so has HICSA.

An extraordinary achievement when national industry associations, such as FAITH, FHRAI and HAI, have either not ventured into conducting hospitality or tourism events, or their efforts have dwindled into insignificance. Manav deserves full credit for his perseverance, in his focus, ability to bring the best in global and national hotel industry to come around and share their ideas. It has become the big market for not only ideas, but also discussing investments and collaborations.

Each year, there are two sets of people attending HICSA. First, there are the faithful, who have jotted down the dates and will swear that they must attend. There are others, who are venturing into the industry, have heard they must attend, as this is the meeting place to be. So, if you see the template of partners, supporting this year, their list continues to grow. More strength to HICSA, and more strength to Manav and his team, for a great show ahead this year, and for years to come!

We bring on these pages some images from yester years. Vignettes include Lifetime Achievement Awards to illustrious names like PRS Oberoi and AB Kerkar. Other images catch business sessions, fireside chats, lively debates on issues concerning hospitality, trends in the marketplace and Indian tourism. **DI**





# TOURISM CAN BE THE KEY DRIVER FOR INDIAN ECONOMY

*Our current Infrastructure is Ready to Host MICE and global airport hubs, driving a new economy*



hoteliers'2024  
conclave

by **AMITABH KANT**

*(This presentation was a keynote address at the recently held annual convention of Hotels Association of India in New Delhi)*

One thing that really comes across is that in every speech of the Prime Minister, he emphasizes the importance and the significant of tourism and how tourism can be the biggest driver of growth.

Even this budget spoke about tourism, because I think everybody in the government really believes that tourism can be a big driver of growth. And globally, if you look at tourism, it is actually a \$5 trillion economy. A \$5

trillion economy with India's share at about less than 2%. So less than 2% share to my mind is very dismal, and it's needs to be very substantially increased. And if you look at the pre-pandemic level, the total arrival in Thailand was 40 million, in Malaysia was close to 28 million. India now 10, 10.8 or 10.9 million tourists.

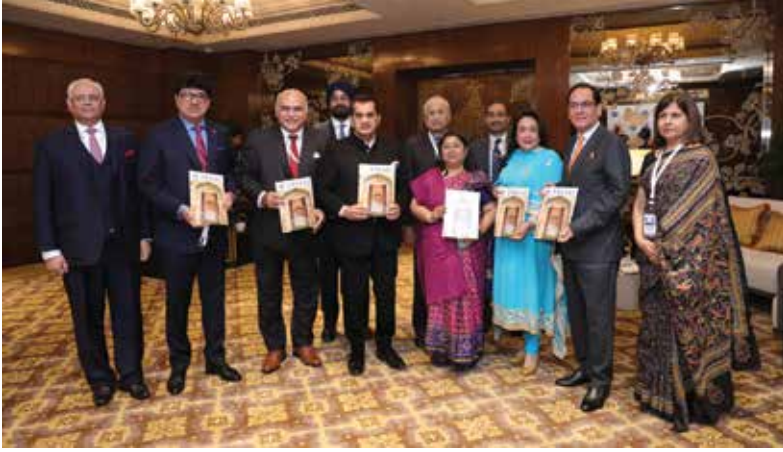
I am not a great believer in just the volume. I am a great believer in per capita earnings. And I don't believe in the numbers game, actually. But if you look at tourism, I think from a perspective of a political lens, the politician only understands one thing. And that is how many jobs has the tourism sector created? And I and you know, tourism has a huge multiplier impact for every direct job that you create, you create seven indirect jobs. But I think somehow the tourism industry has failed to tell the politician that we are a big creator of jobs.

If you look at employment, Thailand creates close to about 20 million jobs. Malaysia creates close to about 15 million jobs from tourism sector. We create about 7.3 million jobs. But I think it'll be worthwhile for the tourism industry to have a target of creating, of telling the political system across the centre and the states that if you give attention to tourism, we will create 25 million jobs by 2030. And it is a do-able target. If you put this target before the political system, that 25 million jobs will be created by the tourism sector, that it will have a huge impact on the minds of the political system, and they will do everything possible for tourism. And to my mind, that's the only language which would be understood and that I think you should push at the state level.

Second, is that you know, when I was in the tourism sector, we had a huge challenge of not having clean sheets, clean bathrooms in tier 2 and tier 3 cities, et cetera. But I think India has been through a huge radical transformation in the last eight to nine years. We are now the fifth largest economy in the world. By 2027 end, will be the third largest economy in the world. We are heading to be a \$10 trillion economy by 2030, and by 2047, by the time we become a hundred years old as an independent country, maybe a \$35 trillion economy.

And if you look at the last eight to ten years, there's some remarkable things that have happened in this country. We made close to about 40 million houses in India. It is like making a house for every single person living in Australia.

We provided 110 million toilets and that's like providing a toilet with everyone living in Germany. That's the size of the population of Germany. And we provided 253 million piped water connections, which is like providing a pipe water connection to everybody, every single citizen of Brazil. That's the size, the scale of India, what India has done. But India has also, in the last 10 years, actually built about close to 77 to 78,000 kilometres of road. So, it's provided accessibility to everyone. And it's built close to about a close to about 70 to 75 airports in India.



“If you look at tourism, I think from a perspective of a political lens, the politician only understands one thing. And that is how many jobs has the tourism sector created? And I and you know, tourism has a huge multiplier impact for every direct job that you create, you create seven indirect jobs. But I think somehow the tourism industry has failed to tell the politician that we are a big creator of jobs.”

associations, all of them should get together and challenge all the states and union territories of India and say that these are five states of union territories, where we are going to work for the next two, three years and really work in good private public partnership and transform them. And we will really make them world class destination in terms of their circuits, in terms of their destination. Because I believe that tourism is essentially a private sector activity, from the point of arrival to the point of departure.

If you are able to select five states and make them top class and challenge these states, really throw a challenge to these states that we are going to work to create world class museums. The states should do their bit, you do your bit and really make them really top class that might be so really if you are able to create a huge spinoff. If you can make states compete with each other for tourism, then you'll see a huge spinoff in subsequent years.

Second is my belief that actually one area where India has really lagged behind is the meetings, incentives, convention and exhibitions market; it's a 500 billion market. Now, when I was in the tourism sector, one of the challenges was that there was no world class facility. There was no world class infrastructure.

Look at both Yashobhoomi and the Bharat Mandapam. And I have seen all the top convention centres around the world, because I've got it designed and I've got it executed, this one at Dwarka. India never had these kinds of infrastructure facilities. Now you are dealing with a 500 billion market. India share is less than 1%. And in my mind for an industry which claims itself to be really dynamic, really vibrant, really energetic. If you're not able to capture a major chunk of that market, it is a shame. And what we should really challenge the world is that not a single exhibition or convention will be held anywhere else in the world other than India because we have the best in the world now.

So, it is provided tier two and tier three cities with accessibility, with airports which never existed. Now you'll have clean bathrooms, you'll have a huge focus on Swatchh Bharat, you'll have road connectivity, airport connectivity to all these areas which never existed in India.

And actually, we should not worry too much about the outlay, which has been provided to the ministry of tourism, because tourism is a multi-dimensional sector. If roads come up, if you know, you have airports coming up, tourism will automatically grow. And that's why if India grows, tourism will grow. And to my mind, the multiplier impact of what has been done in India in terms of infrastructure creation will be enormous in the years to come. But one of the key things that's happened is that the impact of G20 has been enormous. If you've had about 120,000 people coming in as the participants with G20, they've all gone back as brand ambassadors of India. We did not do the G20 in one city or two cities, but we spread it out over close 220 odd meetings in over 60 cities of India.

So in all these cities, we improved the drainage, the sewage, the solid waste, the roads, the lakes, all of them were cleaned up. So, the infrastructure redoing, redesigning redevelopment has been enormous of this impact of this G20. And I think that will have a long-term spinoff in, in terms of tourism.

But my view is that there are four or five key areas which are important. And I think first and foremost, I really think that enhancing the quality of tourism infrastructure and creating experiences in states is very important. And it's very significant. And to my mind, rather than looking at the whole country, because India is a very large country, it's bigger than 24 countries of Europe plus another 30,000 kilometres.

So, if you look at India as a whole, you'll never be able to make an impact. But my view is that the hospitality industry should really challenge all the states and union territories over here and really pick up five key states where there's huge tourism potential. You you have many, many



The third big ticket thing to my mind is being that at a point of time when Indian civil aviation sector was weak, we gave away a lot of our bilateral rights to international carriers. And in the process since we gave away a lot of bilateral rights, we allowed many other airports to become hubs. And they became global hubs.

They are very big opportunities for the hospitality sector, for retail sector. They become very big drivers of those destinations. And that's how Dubai grew, that's how Qatar is growing. It's now time for us because India's never had great airports. Now with Mumbai, with Bangalore and Hyderabad it is important that we review these bilateral rights and really make our airports, the global hubs for direct operation from here to the rest of the world. We should really reposition India as global hub airports, which will ensure a huge amount of tourist inflow.

And therefore, there is a need for all of you to lobby and position for Indian airports to become global hubs.

And my belief is that there is, there is a very clear need. While the domestic market has been revived, it's been lively and vibrant. The foreign tourists need to grow in large numbers because they bring in value. And there is a need for a very lively, very vibrant, very dynamic and a highly digital version of the Incredible India campaign and that should penetrate every single market. And this is critical because foreign tourists are critical for India, and we need to do that. Leisure tourism is important because they bring in high value and there is a need for this market to grow.

The last point, why is it necessary to make tourism an industry? It is needed because when you treat a sector as a commercial sector, the power tariffs are much higher than the industry tariffs, much higher. The interest rates are higher, and it is necessary that tourism is treated as an industry. And your day-to-day operations then tend to get impacted. And my view on that is very clear that all states must treat every activity, every sector of the tourism industry, as an industry. I think 11 states

have done it, but they have not extended, many of them have not extended the benefits. They treated us as industry, but have not extended the benefits of what they give to the industry, to the tourism sector.

And I think we need to really work hard and really push the governments at the state level, centre also needs to put it as an industry because that will help.

So, my belief is very strongly that it is an important industry because it's a very major job creator. And pushing it as an industry will really help both at the state and central level. And to my mind you should work with states, you should work very closely with states which declare as an industry and provide all the benefits.

So, I am a very clear believer in tourism. I'm a very clear believer that the multi-dimensional impact of tourism is like no other. The Prime Minister is a great believer in tourism. He believes that this is a sector which has a huge impact on jobs. He believes that it can give you a huge amount of growth, and he believes that it can have a huge amount of equitable spread across many sectors. Because when you impact tourism, you are having an impact on livelihoods. You are having an impact on craftsmen. You are having an impact on the cuisine sector of India, many, many other sectors of India.

And therefore, I really think that we together with the government, we all need to work together to make tourism grow and expand and become the key sector. And I'm a believer that for India to grow, it needs to fire on manufacturing. It needs to fire on services, it needs to fire on agriculture, productivity. But more than anything else, it needs to grow and expand at rates of about 25% plus year after year, year after year for the next decade or so in the tourism sector. And this, to my mind, is very, very doable considering the very small share that we have in the global tourism market. And if we do this for the next decade or so, we truly transform the lives of many citizens of India, provide vast segments of jobs in India. **DI**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amitabh Kant is presently India's Sherpa to G20 group, during a year when India holds its presidency. Kant is formerly a secretary in the Government of India, former CEO of Niti Ayog, and creator of globally acclaimed campaigns like 'Incredible India' for the Ministry of Tourism.





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# Understanding 10 years of PM Modi and India's Tryst with Tourism

**Infrastructure First. Ensure ease in Travel. Tourism will Follow! A Holistic Approach and Understanding have Brought New Growth Opportunities for Indian Tourism, opening new destinations with new found access.**



by NAVIN BERRY

**A**s this government ends its second five-year stint in power, much can be said of its push for tourism. Not perhaps as how the industry would like to see it; it embraces the larger picture of which the contours are beginning to emerge. From the very start, PM Modi identified tourism as one of the 5-Ts of his government, well before 2014. Indeed, whether one agrees or not, to each his own. **Modi has been consistent with his belief that infrastructure first, ensure ease in travel, and tourism will follow.**

So, this story is now unfolding. **In the last several years, the push has been towards creating infrastructure that provides comfort and speed, both, with safety and surety in travel.** There is some that people may not agree with. Like the Bullet Train project, for instance. However, commuters will be able to make day trips between two big commercial capitals, Ahmedabad and Mumbai. The Statue of Unity is another; apart from its political messaging on the status of Sardar Patel, the fact is that we have a new tourism product, around which the state government has nurtured another five to six tourist attractions, making it a new tourist hub. A big statement in more recent times, is lifting of prohibition in Gift City, an unprecedented step for a state like Gujarat, where liquor bans have been a constant source of irritation and political discourse.

**It is a truism that there can be no tourism without travel infrastructure.** Apart from a few international airports like at Delhi and Mumbai, there was little to commend incoming visitors with global

**From the very start, PM Modi identified tourism as one of the 5-Ts of his government, well before 2014. Indeed, whether one agrees or not, to each his own. Modi has been consistent with his belief that infrastructure first, ensure ease in travel, and tourism will follow.**

standard facilities. But this has changed dramatically. Lucknow has a new terminal. Ayodhya has an airport, and some dozen new terminals have changed the course of Indian aviation. More airports have been opened across the hinterland; **witness the growth of airlines like Indigo, connecting cities like indeed it was essential air transport that it is, and not some fancy civil aviation in the clouds!**

His other **big concern was Swachh Bharat.** It is equally true that only clean and healthy environments can attract footfalls. That our track record in this endeavour has been far from impressive. Usable and clean toilets have always been a huge issue at our monuments. Has the Swachh Bharat campaign succeeded? It did, it is still around. It should have achieved more success; what it did not, must remain dependent upon local administrations and the people at large; can a small contribution from our industry help bridge the last mile? The industry, too matched the enthusiasm in the first push, and then it seems to have petered off. Can hospitality become a prime mover, within our immediate neighbourhood, give a fresh impetus, and put local bodies on alert in a positive and helpful way. **Going Swachh is the most important surety that our tourism stays!**

Strengthening India's culture and history, traditions and unique offerings to the world, has been his big contribution to our tourism, in-



ded to the tourism product that had for long been left to fend for itself. It was almost in decay. If we are to grow our appeal as an inbound destination, it is most important to identify and develop the Brand India. He has given a pronounced direction to growing the Indian legacy, our heritage and tradition – remember Tradition was one of the original 5Ts when they were announced, in 2014.

The story took a negative connotation when during covid lockdown there was no relief for the tourism sector. Especially when some news channels kept repeatedly saying that we should expect some breakthrough announcements, for which the industry kept waiting with bated breath. Who was briefing whom, I cannot say, but the fact is there was never any move for extending relief towards specific sectors but to the entire industry, as a whole. Fortunately, for the industry that time has gone by, for all its misery, moving on to an era of unheard prosperity. It is our own domestic that has come to help, that same domestic who was not counted among its primary market, till a little while back.

Is there a sense that only relief and incentives amount to seriousness on the part of the government? That asking for 'more' and getting it, meant a well-intentioned government towards tourism? That we need to be recognized as serious economic activity, our other concern, and rightly so, also depends upon how seriously we position ourselves? That, as far as I can tell, is yet to happen. My personal understanding is that industry needs a totally refreshed statement on its impact on economy, jobs and inclusive outreach, to break new ground.

Politics apart, and that is not the concern of this publication, this government has an impressive score card on all things travel and tourism. In providing a strong edifice upon which we build our tourism, both domestic and inbound.

You might ask, what about inbound? What about promotions overseas? What about the replacements for all the international tourist offices that were closed down more than a year ago, without an alternative mechanism in place? Was that the right thing or not? On the one hand, we need not have closed the offices without an alternative in place. The other fact is also true: that our offices had become almost redundant, we did not have the requisite expertise to manage them, that they had become a waste of resource. Will PR agencies be an effective alternate? Going by our past record, I doubt it; we do not have the understanding/maturity to get effective and professional guidance without making uncalled for interventions.

A possible answer lies in creating a national level marketing

**His other big concern was Swachh Bharat. Can hospitality become a prime mover? Going Swachh is the most important surety that our tourism stays!**

organization, headed by a renowned and proven advertising professional. I will throw up a name like Piyush Pandey, for example. Or, Prasoon Joshi, as another.

Meanwhile, some effort needs to be put into place to assist specific inbound promotions, best being through IATO, the national body for inbound tour operators, which can assist their members with organizing promotions and road shows, with direct government interventions, in fact as an agency appointed by the government. We should not lose the season of 24/25; in fact, the summer of 2024 was ideal to start such activity, but then with elections on hand, with a model code of conduct in place, this may not be possible.

A major bane of Indian tourism has been the stagnation in Indian tourism products. These were either not being added, or refreshed, we had achieved a position of zero movement. All had come to a standstill. Modi has brought rejuvenation to our products across the country. His latest pronouncement of some 1500 crores, to provide last mile connectivity or ease in travel will go a long way in ensuring a better experience for tourists. Varanasi and Statue of Unity are two sterling examples. In fact, the re-birth of Ayodhya will create a new centre of tourism attraction; it has brought focus on religious tourism which had gone ignored or overlooked by the industry for decades, as not to their 'taste'; it spells a new awakening for us to look at.

But back to Modi's ten years in government and its trysts with tourism? Many definite pluses, without any specific minuses, as far as I can tell. There does not appear to be any going back on this impetus. It is only going forward in one way: up North, upwards, with a promising future. □

*(These above remarks are without any political bias, as facts that we can all understand and see. Modi's politics and the national discourse on elections is not within the purview of this magazine).*

From mentioning tourism as one of the five 'T's' in his vision for Brand 'Bharat,' to championing domestic tourism with government schemes like 'Dekho Apna Desh,' PM Narendra Modi has been India's undisputed tourism brand ambassador. His role as the most vocal votary for tourism in India was visible yet again as he broke the internet with his viral pictures and videos in Lakshadweep. Wearing a scuba diving suit, he was seen strolling on the languid and untapped beaches of the Indian islands in the Arabian sea. Many considered it a big photo-op but as the weeks rolled by, his intention to focus upon these precious islands unfolded both for tourism as well as strategic national interests.

by SHASHANK SHEKHAR

Tourism has been close to his heart and features solidly in his vision for a Viksit Bharat. In fact, those following his rousing speeches abroad to packed halls of expat Indians in Australia, USA, or UK, would remember that his engagement with the Indian diaspora has been instrumental in driving outbound tourism from their adopted countries into India. During his foreign trips, Modi has actively engaged with Indian expatriates, exhorting them to become ambassadors for Indian tourism in their respective nations.

Here's how PM Modi has been championing tourism in India.

## Positioning India as a holistic Tourism Destination through G20

India's historic hosting of the G20 as the rotational president was far from a routine affair. India hosted over 200 meetings of more than 1.50 lakh foreign delegates across 60 destinations across the country, from Jammu and Kashmir to Arunachal Pradesh.

# Indian Tourism's Brand Ambassador-in-Chief: Narendra Modi

“From the high Himalayas to dense forests, dry deserts to beautiful beaches, adventure sports to meditation retreats, India has something for everyone. If you ask your friends who have already visited India for these meetings, I am sure that no two experiences will be alike. From transport infrastructure to the hospitality sector to skill development, and even in our visa systems, we have kept the tourism sector as a focal point of our reforms. The motto of India's G20 Presidency, 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' - 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' can itself be a motto for global tourism. With more than a million voting booths, there will be no shortage of places for you to witness this festival in all its diversity.”

**PM Modi**, while addressing the G20 Tourism Ministers' Meet held in Goa via teleconferencing





## India Showcased Its Diverse Culture, Heritage, Art, and History

- **Cultural Performances:** From classical Bharatanatyam and Kathak to folk dances like Bhangra and Garba, the cultural extravaganza offered delegates and attendees a sneak peek into India's rich artistic heritage. The viral images of the IMF chief dancing to the beats at the airport underline India's success in showcasing its soft power to the world at large.
- **Heritage Sites:** The government organized special tours and visits to India's iconic heritage sites for G20 delegates, allowing them to experience the grandeur of historical monuments such as the Taj Mahal, Qutub Minar, and Red Fort.
- **Art Exhibitions:** Renowned Indian artists were given a platform to showcase their masterpieces at art exhibitions organized as part of the G20 event. The artworks, ranging from traditional paintings and sculptures to contemporary installations, provided a glimpse into India's thriving art scene and its contribution to the global art community.
- **Culinary Escapades:** Delegates were treated to a culinary journey through India's diverse cuisines, featuring an array of regional delicacies and flavours. From spicy street food to royal Mughlai feasts, the gastronomic experience highlighted India's culinary diversity and gastronomic heritage, tantalizing taste buds and igniting a newfound appreciation for Indian cuisine.

The G20 was a perfect stage to position India as a leading tourism destination, and India did a commendable task of presenting its unique identity and allure to the world.

## Rebooting Jammu and Kashmir

Jammu and Kashmir has always been a tourism destination of high repute, capturing the imagination of travellers globally. However, political turmoil, following the dreadful exodus of Kashmiri Hindus in the late 1980s, and terrorism impacted the state from realizing its tourism potential. Post Article 370, the Union of Jammu and Kashmir witnessed several historical projects.

The ambitious Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Railway Link, or the Kashmir Railway Project, has been a cornerstone of the region's infrastructure development. Despite facing formidable challenges such as rugged terrain and security concerns, significant progress has been made on this project. The Indian Railways has already commenced train services on the 48.1-kilometre-long Banihal-Khari-Sumber-Sangaldan section. Once fully completed and operationalized, the rail network will provide a key link, connecting the Kashmir Valley with the rest of India.

All-weather road tunnels have emerged as game-changers in improving connectivity within Jammu and Kashmir. Projects like the

"Various heritage monuments in and around the host cities were also spruced up for excursion by G20 delegates and provided them with an opportunity to witness India's rich natural and cultural heritage. Apart from the excursions and immersive experiences, G20 Meetings have been a great platform to showcase the art, culture and traditions of the region. Art and Craft Bazaars were set up by the State Governments during the Tourism Working Group Meetings showcasing local handicrafts and artisans and facilitating community participation. The delegates showed enthusiastic participation in 'Do It Yourself' activities organized at the Craft Bazaar offering hands-on experience of local arts and handicrafts. Furthermore, the souvenir gifts presented to the delegates showcased regional craftsmanship.

The Ministry of Tourism also inked several significant Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) during the Tourism Working Group Meetings, paving way for development and promotion of the tourism sector in the country. Recognizing the immense potential of Film Tourism, an MoU was signed with Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) for its promotion and development. Another MoU was signed with Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) underscoring the importance of promotion and development of Ecotourism in India. An MoU was also signed between United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and the Ministry of Tourism to enhance cooperation and collaboration on key programmatic areas related to tourism promotion and development."

**Minister of Tourism  
Shri G. Kishan Reddy's written  
reply on the impact of G20 on  
tourism in Rajya Sabha in a  
written reply.**

Chenani-Nashri Tunnel and the Atal Tunnel have drastically reduced travel time between various regions. Many more such key connectivity projects like the under-construction Zoji La Tunnel, slated to be completed by 2026, which passes under the Zoji La Pass in the Himalayas between Ganderbal of Kashmir



“Foreign tourist arrivals saw 350 per cent surge post successful G-20 summit that was held in May 2023 in Srinagar. We have made the common man a stakeholder in policy-making and development works are being taken up as per their needs. J&K is making impressive strides in the country in digital connectivity and physical connectivity. Smart City projects have realized the dream of urban transformation and the aspirations and dreams of the youth are blossoming.”

**Manoj Sinha**, *Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir*, was quoted in a leading daily

and Drass town in Kargil district of Ladakh, will completely transform connectivity.

The expansion of the Srinagar International Airport and the construction of new airports in regions like Kishtwar and Rajouri aim to improve air connectivity.

In 2019 alone, Jammu and Kashmir recorded over 4.6 million domestic tourist visits, marking a substantial rise from previous years. Similarly, there has been a noticeable uptick in the number of foreign tourists exploring the Union Territory, indicating growing confidence in the region as a safe and attractive destination.

Local communities are actively involved in tourism-related activities, offering authentic experiences and cultural insights to visitors. Moreover, initiatives like homestays and community-based tourism projects empower locals to directly participate in and benefit from the tourism industry, thereby fostering sustainable development and inclusive growth.

Dubai’s Emaar Group’s recent pledge to build a US\$60 million shopping and office complex is expected to generate windfall gains for the locals. “This is the start, we should



inspire people, people should aspire to follow us. This is a one million square feet mall with 500 shops and will generate around 7,000 to 8,000 jobs,” Emaar CEO Amit Jain was quoted saying to Reuters after the ground-breaking ceremony for the Mall of Srinagar.

## Propelling the Archipelago into Tourism Prominence: Lakshadweep

**For those who wish to embrace the adventurer in them, Lakshadweep has to be on your list. During my stay, I also tried snorkelling - what an exhilarating experience it was! – PM Modi tweeted during his viral visit to the Lakshadweep**

Proactive measures and strategic initiatives aim to position Lakshadweep as a premier beach and holiday destination for Indian travellers, offering alternatives to destinations like the Maldives, Thailand, and Malaysia. Several key initiatives have been identified to bolster tourism in Lakshadweep:

- **Promotional Campaigns:** These campaigns will target Indian travelers seeking beach holidays, positioning Lakshadweep as a preferred alternative to popular destinations like the Maldives, Thailand, and Malaysia.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Upcoming projects include the construction of new hotels and resorts, expansion of airport facilities, and enhancement of transportation networks within the archipelago. The Taj Group was the first to sign for hotels to build under its different brands.

## Wed in India: Tapping the Big Fat Indian Weddings Segment

The recent pre-wedding bash of the Ambani’s has re-written the definition of the big fat Indian weddings, with the world’s who’s who in attendance. Other than a display of India’s corporate might and wealth, it was an evident endorsement of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision of wed in India. He has particularly focused on the lucrative segment of domestic weddings, consistently emphasizing the significance of domestic weddings as a catalyst for economic development and cultural preservation. He has spoken at length about India as not only a destination for international tourists but also as a preferred choice for couples seeking memorable wedding experiences. By promoting weddings within India, PM Modi aims to showcase the country’s rich heritage, diverse traditions, and world-class hospitality to a global audience.



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Weddings are lavish affairs in India, often spanning multiple days and involving elaborate ceremonies and celebrations. According to industry estimates, the Indian wedding market is valued at over \$50 billion annually and is projected to grow steadily in the coming years. According to a report by KPMG, the Indian wedding industry is estimated to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 25-30%. And the wedding tourism market in India is expected to reach \$9 billion by 2025, driven by a growing demand for destination weddings and luxury experiences.

## Transforming Gujarat into a Tourism Powerhouse

### *How The Statue of Unity Became an Integrated Tourism Destination*

Those keenly following the meteoric rise of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, from Gandhinagar to Lutyens' Delhi would know that his tryst with tourism began during his tenure as Chief Minister of Gujarat, where he laid the foundation for transformative tourism initiatives.

Remember those captivating Gujarat Tourism advertisements featuring Amitabh Bachchan – where he was seen walking on the pristine sands of the Rann of Kutch and praying at India's first and perhaps most revered Jyotirlinga, Somnath Temple?

The Statue of Unity, a lasting tribute to India's Iron Man who unified India's 570-odd princely states into a Union, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, stands tall as the world's tallest statue, towering over the picturesque Narmada Valley. Beyond its symbolic significance, the Statue of Unity has evolved into a holistic

tourism destination, offering visitors an immersive experience through museums, exhibitions, and panoramic views. New attractions have been introduced to develop Ektanagar and there has been an improvement in the major allurements. To promote adventure tourism, attractions like Jharwani-Khalwani eco-tourism, and like cycling and river rafting have been introduced.

## Varanasi Makeover: Reclaiming Lost Glory

Varanasi, one of the oldest cities in the world and the de-facto spiritual capital of India, has undergone a profound metamorphosis since PM Narendra Modi took charge as both the MP from Varanasi and the Prime Minister of the country. At the forefront of this change is the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, a project that symbolizes the city's rebirth and revitalization.

The corridor connects the Kashi Vishwanath Temple with the Ganga riverfront, facilitating seamless access. This ambitious undertaking involves demolishing numerous buildings and structures to clear the pathway for the corridor, stretching over 50,000 square meters. The corridor incorporates intricate stone carvings, ornamental motifs, and traditional architectural styles, showcasing Varanasi's rich cultural heritage.

The project includes the reconstruction of several ancient temples and ghats, aside from enhancing infrastructure facilities, such as widened roads, improved lighting and sanitation, landscaping, and better amenities for visitors, to accommodate the growing influx of pilgrims.

Significant investments have been made in infrastructure development, including the expansion of transportation networks, the modernization of railway stations, and the improvement of civic amenities.

## The Homecoming of Lord Ram Has a Massive Economic Impact

The inauguration of the Ayodhya Ram Mandir marked a historic milestone in India's cultural and religious landscape, fulfilling a long-standing religious sentiment and catalyzing Ayodhya's emergence as a significant tourism, spiritual, and religious destination. With the construction of the Ram Mandir, Ayodhya is witnessing a surge in pilgrimage tourism, attracting devotees from across India and around the globe, and catapulting it into a comprehensive tourism destination.







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The city's ancient heritage sites, including temples, ghats, and historical landmarks, are being revitalized, setting the stage for an unprecedented tourism infrastructure development. Several upcoming projects in rail, road, and airports are underway to enhance connectivity and accessibility to the city. The central government has allocated funds for the expansion and modernization of Ayodhya's railway station under the Amrit Bharat scheme. New Vande Bharat trains are being operationalized from different parts of the country.

Additionally, road infrastructure projects are being implemented to upgrade highways and expressways connecting Ayodhya. The recently inaugurated airport is facilitating seamless air transport access to the city.

Several leading hotel chains and hospitality companies, including IHCL and Lemon Tree Hotels, have announced plans to establish luxury hotels, resorts, and guesthouses in Ayodhya to cater to the growing influx of tourists and pilgrims. A Park Inn has opened its doors, so has a Sarovar hotel.

"Given the completion of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya this year and a melange of initiatives taken by the UP government to promote tourism, we believe that the total expenditure by tourists (domestic + foreign) in UP may cross ₹4 lakh crore mark by the end of this year helping the state government earn an additional tax revenue of ₹20,000-25,000 crore due to huge spurt in number of tourists during FY25."

## Paving an Expressway to Prosperity Uttar Pradesh

Uttar Pradesh is undergoing a massive overhaul of its road network, with a slew of completed and upcoming projects aimed at enhancing connectivity, reducing travel time, and stimulating growth across the state.

### Key Completed Road and Expressway Projects:

- **Agra-Lucknow Expressway:** Spanning over 302 kilometers, the Agra-Lucknow Expressway, a flagship infrastructure project, is a six-lane expressway connecting the historical city of Agra with the state capital, Lucknow.

- **Purvanchal Expressway:** Stretching over 340 kilometers, the Purvanchal Expressway is a key project in the eastern region of Uttar Pradesh. It connects Lucknow with cities like Azamgarh, Mau, and Ghazipur.

- **Yamuna Expressway:** The Yamuna Expressway connects Greater Noida with Agra, thereby emerging as a corridor for trade, tourism, and commerce. It has become a preferred route for travelers and freight transport between Delhi-NCR and Agra.

### Key Upcoming Road and Expressway Projects:

- **Bundelkhand Expressway:** The under-construction Bundelkhand Expressway will connect the Bundelkhand region's districts of Chitrakoot, Banda, Hamirpur, and Jalaun. Once operational, it is expected to boost connectivity and spur economic development in the drought-prone region.

- **Ganga Expressway:** The under-construction Ganga Expressway will connect Meerut in western UP with Prayagraj in the eastern part of the state.

### New and Upcoming Airports:

Uttar Pradesh, the once infrastructure-starved state, is slated to become the first state in the country with 13 airports – with new airports being planned in Azamgarh, Aligarh, Moradabad, Shravasti, and Chitrakoot. Some of the key airports include:

- **Jewar International Airport:** Jewar International Airport, located in Gautam Buddha Nagar district near Greater Noida. Once operational, it will serve as a second international airport for the National Capital Region (NCR), easing congestion at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi.

- **Ayodhya Airport:** The newly launched Ayodhya Airport is enhancing connectivity to the sacred city of Ayodhya, catering to the growing number of tourists and pilgrims visiting the region.

## Char Dham Project: A Long-Awaited Infrastructure Undertaking

The Char Dham Project, also known as the Char Dham All-Weather Road Project, is a massive infrastructure initiative undertaken by the government of India to improve connectivity to the holiest of pilgrimage sites of Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath, and Badrinath in Uttarakhand. These four pilgrimage sites, collectively known as the Char Dham, hold immense spiritual significance for Hindu devotees. Key features of the Char Dham Project include road widening and improvement, construction of tunnels and bridges, land acquisition and rehabilitation, disaster resilience, and tourism promotion. **DI**

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shashank Shekhar is a freelance journalist, keeps track of political and social issues.



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# SENIOR LEADERSHIP SPELLS CONFIDENCE

## It's a Serious Business Vertical of the Growing Indian Economy



KB Kachru

**Prioritize on Assets, Focus on Delivery to Ensure Hospitality Industry Continues to Thrive**  
**This is how we can contribute significantly to economic growth while spotlighting the country's rich cultural heritage and diverse tourism offerings on the global stage.**

by **KB KACHRU**, *Chairman, Radisson Hotel, Group South Asia*

The significance of the Indian hospitality industry goes beyond offering accommodations; it serves as a gateway to showcasing India's rich cultural diversity and tourism potential to the global audience. As we delve into the intricacies of this ecosystem, it's crucial to understand the pivotal role of government initiatives, market trends, and industry players in driving this forward.

The travel and hospitality industry in India is a multi-billion diverse sector driven by factors like disposable income and has attracted the attention of global investors. Recently domestic tourism has been extremely buoyant. Indians are traveling across the length and breadth of their vast country for leisure tourism, for events and weddings

Besides infrastructure development, regulatory ease, simplification of the visa process, and a focus on sustainability are key to attracting inbound tourists.

and to experience spirituality. Radisson Hotel Group, with over 165 hotels in operation and development, has been a stalwart in the Indian hospitality landscape for the past 25 years. Our strategic

presence across tier-2 and tier-3 markets underscores a commitment to inclusive growth and accessibility beyond major urban centers. The group's diverse portfolio of brands, ranging from upper upscale to midscale segments, ensures a wide range of options for guests across different travel preferences and budgets.

While domestic tourism continues to flourish with Indians exploring their own country's diverse offerings, the spotlight now turns towards attracting global travelers to India. The potential of Inbound international travel is huge. It is heavily dependent however on the attractiveness of a destination and how it is perceived by the discerning traveler. This requires a well-curated marketing and promotion plan in target source markets. International travel is becoming more regional and fewer people are going in for long-haul travel. India would therefore do well to promote itself more aggressively in the Asia Pacific region. Incentivizing travel could be one way. Several countries are wooing Indian



Guest Experience at Radisson Hotel

traveler through hassle-free and complimentary visas and similar incentives. To receive its fair share of travelers, India should follow suit and position itself as an attractive destination with better value for money, in comparison to the competing destinations in the eyes of the regional traveler.

Besides infrastructure development, regulatory ease, simplification of the visa process, and a focus on sustainability are key to attracting inbound tourists. Embracing sustainable practices not only minimizes environmental impact but also aligns with the growing preference for eco-conscious tourism preferred by travelers these days. By prioritizing these aspects, the Indian hospitality industry can continue to thrive, contributing significantly to economic growth while spotlighting the country's rich cultural heritage and diverse tourism offerings on the global stage.



Puneet Chhatwal

## Indian Hospitality Industry on Thrival Mode

by **PUNEET CHHATWAL**, MD & CEO, IHCL;  
Chairman – CII Tourism Committee; and Chairman - FAITH

As India strides confidently to be among the top three economies of the world, its hospitality industry finds itself at the cusp of transformation led by the Indian consumption story. The country's rising affluence and higher disposable income is reflected in growing travel spends among other such socio-economic development indicators. This coupled with strong and favourable macro-economic factors and infrastructure led growth has set the stage for the travel sector to witness a sustained upcycle.

### India Advantage

India has exceeded expectation at 7.2% GDP growth in FY2023 on the back of strong domestic demand. This was broad based across sectors with the service sector being one of its highest contributors at 9.5%. Within the service sector hotel and transportation clocked a second consecutive year of 14% growth. Indian economy continues to be on a strong track with an estimated GDP growth of 7%+ in FY2024.

Government's tourism focussed schemes like UDAN and Dekho Apna Desh, and the emergence of brand "India" has led to a surge in travel demand. In addition, the complete overhaul of the transport network is changing the country's internal connectivity and accessibility, un-



Vivanta Tawang

locking India's tourism potential with its unique geographical diversity and rich cultural heritage.

The value of the travel and tourism sector's contribution to the Indian economy in 2023 was US\$ 209.7BN and is expected to reach USD 468.6 BN by 2033, a CAGR of 8.4% far exceeding overall economy CAGR of 6.5% in the same period, according to figures from the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC).

### Fast Evolving Industry

The India opportunity is large and diverse with a heterogeneous market landscape presenting a ripe field for developing multiple brands and offerings. Recognising the developmental push of the government, along with the consumer appetite for travel, our industry has forayed into new markets and new formats.

Presence of organised hotel supply in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities has doubled in the last decade with more than 70% of the industry's pipeline coming from these cities. We are also witnessing the diversification of hospitality formats. Within in the leisure space itself there are now multiple offerings, be it heritage tourism, wellness resorts, wildlife parks and more recently homestays.

However, India continues to be an underserved hotel market with only 1,73,000 chain affiliated rooms trailing the combined supply of Singapore and Dubai which exceeds 1,95,000 rooms. Development activity has picked up pace in the recent years with formalization of the un-branded hotels, addition of new supply, consolidation in chain affiliated hotels and brand conversions is reflective of a fast-evolving hotel market.

### Fostering Inclusive Growth

India's travel and tourism sector the key axis of development in the coming years. The sector is a force multiplier enabling employment generation, infrastructure development, social inclusion and building reputation

**Government's tourism focussed schemes like UDAN and Dekho Apna Desh, and the emergence of brand "India" has led to a surge in travel demand. The complete overhaul of the transport network is changing the country's internal connectivity and accessibility**



Anil Chadha

capital globally. It employs a large number of low skilled workers, giving boost to local economies. As a pillar of development, the sector accounts for 8% of the total employment directly contributing 6% of the overall GDP, as per a WTTC report.

The increasing room supply in the sector is generating requirement for skilled workforce. Recognizing this urgent need, the government and private players have set in motion skilling initiatives to bridge the employability gap. India's largest hospitality company, IHCL partners with state governments, institutions and private players to operate 32 skill centers across 15 states and 25 cities in India, committed to train 1,00,000 youth by 2030.

Indian hospitality sector is at the crosscurrents of economic growth, domestic demand, and evolving consumer dynamics and is charting a course towards unprecedented heights in thrival mode.

## Tourism has taken a 'Transformative Turn' in the past few years

by ANIL CHADHA, Divisional Chief Executive, ITC Hotels

Tourism has taken a 'Transformative Turn' in the past few years. Past predictions have been rewritten. "Local" has witnessed a sharp increase across various spaces -be it travel, taste or talent. We see this trend continuing for a longer time. Domestic travel will see sustained growth with travellers opting for local and hyperlocal destinations. Immersive travel will be on the

**At ITC Hotels, we initiated Responsible Luxury in 2009, from a point where many questioned our reason to take the road less travelled, to 2024 - we have seen many others join in on the same road to Sustainability.**

rise, hence, hospitality experiences dipped in regional flavour will become significant. Having consolidated our position in the luxury market, we at ITC Hotels are already exploring tier 2 and tier 3 destinations that offer experiential leisure travel. There is defi-



Storii Shanti Morada, Saligao, Goa

nately a skew towards boutique stays and our premium Storii Brand caters to this segment. Storii Dharamshala, Storii Moira (Goa), and Storii Shanti Morada (Goa) are popular with guests for these experiences. Simultaneously, destination weddings are on the rise. Our luxury Brand Mementos is uniquely poised to offer memorable celebration/ weddings. Mementos Udaipur has witnessed many such beautiful moments and the soon to open Mementos Jaipur is already drawing a lot of interest. Planet consciousness is gaining more ground and guests now are greatly impacted by the sustainability ethos that hotel chains follow. At ITC Hotels, we initiated Responsible Luxury in 2009, from a point where many questioned our reason to take the road less travelled, to 2024 - we have seen many others join in on the same road to Sustainability. We believe that we cannot be individually well in a world that is unwell. It is important that we realise the importance D&I plays in enriching the organisational Culture. Diverse groups of people have diverse thoughts and ideas that creates fertile ground for innovation. This directly influences Culture which is at the heart of every company.

## The opportunity for investment in South Asia's hospitality sector is immense

by BINOD CHOUDHARY, Chairman, CG Hospitality

CG Corp Global's journey, encompassing 200 companies, and 261 brands, spanning over 15,000 employees across 35 countries, underscores my innate belief: Where there is a will, hard work, and unbridled passion, success won't elude you!

Despite the seemingly insurmountable odds, we have managed to build a diversified conglomerate that I am immensely proud of. CG Hospitality is one such vertical that started with our joint venture with Tata Group's Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) in 2001 at the height of ethnic conflict. In retrospect, though I was keen to start my partnership with IHCL in Nepal, destiny had other ideas. I grabbed the opportunity with both hands and backed



Binod choudhary



The Fern Lonavala

my business instincts. Over two decades, the portfolio has diversified. We are looking to extend our association from 10 hotels, through the planned vision of reaching 25 properties by 2025. This is a testament to our 25 years of partnership. The new destinations include adventure experiences across the Indian Ocean and Greater Himalayan regions and wildlife escapes.

At present, CG Hospitality has a portfolio of over 10,000 keys in 12 countries across 116 destinations. With 178 properties in three continents, including Asia, Africa, and North America, plans are afoot to open another 40 properties in the coming months.

The hospitality sector in a post-pandemic world, with the uptick in travel, is facing immense opportunities. I'd like to remain invested in the hospitality space, which has opened several categories — from eco-tourism wellness resorts such as 'The Farm' in the Philippines (belonging to CG Hospitality) to wildlife adventure safaris to boutique outlets — with a special focus on sustainability.

Among all destinations globally, South Asia stands as a captivating tourist destination, weaving together an intricate mosaic of cultures, landscapes, and historical riches. India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives, boast an array of attractions ranging from the majestic Himalayan ranges, the tranquil shores of Sri Lanka and the Maldives, to the myriad historic and spiritual landmarks dotted across India and Nepal.

The opportunity for investment in South Asia's hospitality sector is immense, thanks to the region's positive momentum in tourism and its largely untapped markets. Recognizing the pivotal role of tourism in economic advancement, governments throughout South Asia are rolling out various incentives to attract investment into the hospitality industry. By investing in South Asia's hospitality industry, investors not only become contributors to the region's economic development but also play a role in defining the future of travel in some of the most culturally rich and diverse destinations globally.

Our objective has always been to develop iconic experiences and properties that sets us apart from the rest. A unique and special development that we have undertaken is the Unnati Cultural Village through the Chaudhary Foundation, in partnership with the Bill &

**Our objective has always been to develop iconic experiences and properties that sets us apart from the rest. A unique and special development that we have undertaken is the Unnati Cultural Village through the Chaudhary Foundation, in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the World Bank**

Melinda Gates Foundation and the World Bank, which has a mission to support and empower women entrepreneurs, arts and crafts, culture and sustainability.

In India, the hotel industry is poised for a significant resurgence, with projections indicating a strong demand surge over the next eight to twelve months. This upward trend is expected to continue,

with occupancy rates forecasted to reach 68-70% in FY2024. India's immense market potential, bolstered by its burgeoning young population in excess of 1.4 billion, positions it as a burgeoning global leader. The country's expanding middle class, the largest globally, underscores a compelling success narrative.

Our investments in India, encompassing 100 hotels through our stakes in the Concept Hospitality Group — which includes brands like Fern, Beacon, and Zinc, as well as our investments in Taj Safari lodges — have borne exceptional results, surpassing previous records. Concept Hospitality/Fern Hotels, a management company of CG Hospitality, has emerged as one of the largest hotel management companies in India having opened its 100th hotel in Palghar, Maharashtra, last year.

CG Hospitality, part of CG Corp Global, is poised for remarkable growth, targeting an expansion to over 200 hotels worldwide. Since 2005, the group has consistently added 15 to 20 properties to its portfolio each year. Beginning with a base of 70 hotels in 2020, the group is on a steadfast journey toward its goal, having already surpassed 150 hotels. This trajectory underscores our commitment to reach the 200-hotel milestone and elevate our management company, Concept Hospitality, to oversee 150 of those properties. By 2025, CG Hospitality anticipates operating more than 200 hotels.



Satyen Jain

## Branding is Becoming Critical to Delivering Customer Expectations

by SATYEN JAIN, CEO, Pride Hotels

As the group expanded its portfolio to include diverse properties, the necessity to refine and elevate its brands became evident. Each property boasted unique characteristics, necessitating a clear differentiation among brands to uphold the standards of excellence and personalized service. This has become important for the industry going forward.

Establishing its roots in Pune in 1987, Pride Hotels Group embarked on a remarkable journey that transformed it from a single hotel into a flourishing chain. Over the years, the brand expanded its presence across key cities like Nagpur, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Bangalore, and Kolkata. This growth culminated in the unveiling of its first Plaza hotel brand and the flagship property in Delhi, known as Pride Plaza Delhi Aerocity. Further expansion took place in leisure destinations such as Jaipur, Udaipur, Gangtok, Surat, Vadodara, Gir, Ranakpur, Rishikesh, Mussoorie, and beyond.

Today, the group boasts an impressive portfolio of 60 hotels, offering 3500 operational keys, along with 102 restaurants and 3.50 lakh sqft. of Banquet Venue.

At Pride Hotels, we attribute our journey to prominence within the Indian hospitality landscape to the unwavering trust and loyalty of our guests, coupled with the unparalleled dedication of our team members. Our brand is defined by the authentic values of Indian hospitality, characterized by warmth and personalized care, setting us apart from larger brands. Our commitment to these principles, along with our relentless pursuit of service excellence, forms the cornerstone of our brand.

As we continue to grow and evolve, it is this enduring legacy of warmth and trust that will propel us forward, ensuring that Pride Hotels remains Truly Indian and Traditionally Luxurious.

In response to this evolving landscape, Pride Hotels is now embarking on a journey of brand enhancement, establishing distinct categories to cater to the varied needs of its guests. The revamped portfolio now encompasses:



Pride Plaza Hotel New Delhi

- PRIDE PLAZA, representing luxurious experiences; these will include our properties that have classification of 5 star;
- PRIDE PREMIER, offering accessible luxury will include hotels that have a classification status of 4 star;
- PRIDE ELITE, embodying boutique allure;
- BIZNOTEL BY PRIDE, focusing on business-centric destinations will have classification status of 3 star and above.

This strategic restructuring not only provides guests with clear brand distinctions but also underscores Pride Group's steadfast dedication to innovation and guest-centricity.

In a landscape where India's travel and tourism sector is scaling unprecedented heights, fueled by economic growth, an expanding middle class with a renewed zest for discovery, and significant investments in infrastructure, the role of Indian entrepreneurs has been pivotal. At Pride Hotels Group, we recognized early on the transformative potential of this surge. Embracing the challenge, we positioned ourselves at the vanguard, steering our enterprise towards new horizons through innovative strategies and an unwavering commitment to excellence. Our journey has been marked by an agile embrace of the asset-light model,

**As Pride Hotels Group undergoes a strategic rebranding initiative, it positions itself at the forefront of the hospitality industry.**

allowing us to expand our footprint rapidly while optimizing operational efficiencies. This approach has not only enabled us to navigate the complexities of the market but also to contribute significantly to

the sector, which thrives on the dynamism of the private sector. Our aim is to redefine hospitality standards, providing tailored experiences to every guest while honoring our Indian heritage. Additionally, each brand will now incorporate both hotels and resorts, consolidating our previous separate categories into unified offerings.

As Pride Hotels Group undergoes a strategic rebranding initiative, it positions itself at the forefront of the hospitality industry. With an ambitious vision to achieve 133 hotels by 2033, Pride Hotels Group is poised to lead the way in redefining luxury and delivering unparalleled guest experiences.





Zubin Saxena



Conrad Pune Koji

## India's Moment in the Spotlight has Come: Hilton Hotels Look forward to a Bright Future

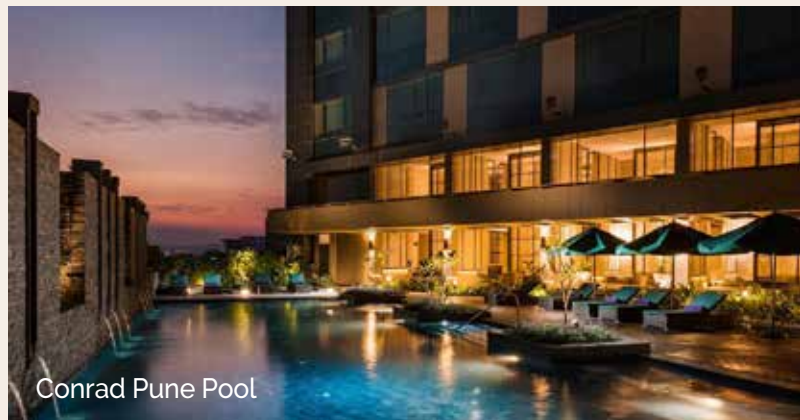
by ZUBIN SAXENA - senior vice president and country head, India, Hilton

India's hospitality sector is thriving with robust growth, fuelled by resilient performance. Last year saw a surge in travel demand driven by G20 presidency and ICC Cricket World Cup in 2023, alongside the bustling wedding season, MICE engagements, and domestic travel. The double-digit revenue surge in FY24's first half, as indicated by Investment Information and Credit Rating Agency (ICRA), underpins sector's immense potential. These developments suggest exciting times ahead for the sector and for hospitality firms like ours.

In 2024, Hilton's trajectory in India is poised for remarkable growth and significance, driven by our strategic recalibration of long-term ambitions. We anticipate double-digit signings this year. Our recent inauguration of DoubleTree by Hilton Bengaluru Whitefield marks our 26th operational hotel in India, with 19 properties in the development pipeline across 5 brands. Exciting openings are slated for this year, including Hilton Kathmandu, a new territory for us, Hilton Gurugram, Hilton Resort and Spa Hyderabad, and Hilton Garden Inn Surat.

Also, the signing of Conrad Jaipur, coinciding with HICSA24, alongside last year's announcement of debuting the Waldorf Astoria brand in Jaipur, underscore Hilton's commitment to expanding its luxury portfolio in India, particularly targeting the lucrative wedding sector in Rajasthan. More importantly, these initiatives propel us towards our goal of tripling our estate to 75 trading and pipeline hotels in the near future.

This year is also significant for Hilton India with the launch of our biggest-ever global ambassador partnership yet, featuring Deepika Padukone, now the Global Brand Ambassador for the 'Hilton. For The Stay' Campaign. This collaboration, coupled with the activation of 'It Matters Where You Stay' advertising across key Indian markets, has generated over 1 million organic social engagements and 30



Conrad Pune Pool

**We anticipate double-digit signings this year. Our recent inauguration of DoubleTree by Hilton Bengaluru Whitefield marks our 26th operational hotel in India, with 19 properties in the development pipeline across 5 brands. Exciting openings are slated for this year, including Hilton Kathmandu, Hilton Gurugram, Hilton Resort and Spa Hyderabad, and Hilton Garden Inn Surat.**

million impressions, reinforcing our brand presence, and continued focus on customer engagement.

All of this has been made possible in large part due to the dynamic and promising nature of the Indian market, particularly within the mid-scale & upscale segments. Driven by robust macroeconomics and supported by government infrastructure initiatives, India's burgeoning middle class is set to

become the fourth largest global spender on travel by 2030, offering unparalleled opportunities. As India emerges as one of the top three fastest-growing outbound tourism markets and positions itself to be the third-largest economy by 2030, its appeal for hospitality ventures is underscored, promising a bright future for the industry.

India's moment in the spotlight has come, and Hilton looks forward to a bright future. With a renewed commitment and ambitious growth strategy, we are focused on capturing key opportunities in the Indian market for the long haul.



JB Singh

## Collaboration between industry and academia is imperative for the development of a skilled workforce

by JB SINGH, President and CEO, InterGlobe Hotels

**W**e at InterGlobe Hotels always look forward to participating in the annual HISCA summit. The event holds significant relevance as a platform for the exchange of ideas and insights, as well as the recognition of excellence within our sector. Through sustained conversations at HISCA, the hospitality sector has had a distinct advantage in acquiring and sharing knowledge to drive transformative shifts in future trends in the industry. Through collaborative efforts and shared knowledge, the industry is empowered to overcome challenges, capitalize on opportunities, and foster sustainable growth.

The hospitality industry is now in a high growth phase driven by strong economic growth. Sustained economic growth will continue to drive increased spending capacity. This coupled with India's demographics, rise in event-based tourism, strong infra development linking tier II & III towns etc. is driving rapid shifts in customer preferences and spending patterns. At the same time rising costs, rapid urbanization, digital economy, shifting labor markets etc. are equally creating an urgent need to revisit past practices. Therefore, the need for quality hotels, experiential products, international but authentic

**Over the years we have constantly retooled the organization to not only mitigate development risk but also bring costs down whilst upgrading quality and design.**

and sustainable lodging preferences will be some of the themes that the industry must deal with.

Workforce is another crucial aspect and investing in talent development, skill training, and career progression opportunities will be critical. Collaboration between industry and



Industry academia collaboration with Indian School of Hospitality, Haryana



Recently opened ibis Styles Goa Vagator

academia is imperative for the development of a skilled workforce that is well-prepared for future demands. By prioritizing our people, we can ensure the industry continues to deliver quality and sustainable return on capital.

InterGlobe Hotels is deeply committed to driving innovation, sustainability, excellence and drive transformational change. Over the years we have constantly retooled the organization to not only mitigate development risk but also bring costs down whilst upgrading quality and design. High quality customer experiences, efficient use of capital and driving shareholder return continue to remain our key cornerstones.

## Brand Leela remains Committed to Responsible Hospitality

by ANURAAG BHATNAGAR, CEO, Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts

**T**he Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts portfolio comprises of 12 twelve award-winning properties with over 3500 keys in major cities and leisure destinations across India, including New Delhi, Bhartiya City Bengaluru, Bengaluru, Chennai, Udaipur, Jaipur, Gurugram, East Delhi, Mumbai, Gandhinagar, Kovalam and Ashtamudi. We have expanded our presence from



Anuraag Bhatnagar



The Leela Palace Jaipur

8 to 12 operational hotels post-pandemic, with new hotel openings in Jaipur, Gandhinagar, Bhartiya City Bengaluru, Kovalam and Ashtamudi. Our expansion plan currently includes upcoming hotels in Hyderabad, Agra, Ayodhya and Sikkim.

We currently have 5 fully owned hotels – these are all palace properties in Udaipur, Jaipur, Bengaluru, Chennai and New Delhi. The remaining 6 are managed hotels which include 4 city hotels in Bhartiya City Bengaluru, Gandhinagar, East Delhi and Gurugram; and 2 resorts in Kovalam and Ashtamudi. The Leela Mumbai continues to be a franchise.

The Leela brand is the epitome of true Indian luxury, built on the ethos of ‘Atithi Devo Bhava – Guest is God’. This has been the foundation of the brand since inception, our guiding philosophy and our brand promise. The foremost endeavour is to preserve this legacy as we grow our footprint. Keeping this in mind, we have been very mindful and strategic with our expansion plans. The idea is to maintain a balanced mix of owned and managed hotels while staying focused on the luxury quotient. For us it is not about numbers but the quality of the asset. The right hotel, in the right location with the right partner.

We continue to look at key gateway cities and marquee leisure destinations as well as heritage wellness and wildlife as segments.

As a brand committed towards promoting conscious luxury, our commitment extends beyond the opulence of our spaces to a profound connection with nature and communities, embracing conscious luxury as the cornerstone of our philosophy. We have taken some significant measures to reduce our carbon footprint, focus on holistic wellness of guests and contribute towards community development through meaningful partnerships. Our overarching goal is to minimize our environmental footprint, ensuring a brighter, healthier future for generations to come.

In the next 5-6 years, we are looking at doubling our portfolio. The Leela is and will continue to be a pure play luxury brand. Our focus will continue to remain on experiential luxury curating meaningful and transformative journeys that are an authentic representation of the essence of India and the richness within, anticipatory



The Leela Palace New Delhi

service and a distinctive lens on conscious luxury that balances opulence with responsibility.

Customer behaviour has evolved to becoming more experience centric. Today we have the HENRY consumer- high earners not rich yet, who have the desire and the propensity to spend. This consumer is living in the present.

The YOLO effect has led to prioritizing experiences over things. Travelers today are thinking of what can I experience that I haven’t experienced before? And they are willing to pay more for the same. The discerning traveller wants authenticity. To build strong brands for the future we must focus on experiences, storytelling around purpose and values, heritage and authenticity to remain relevant to our discerning customers.

Guests no longer long for escapes but rather seek connections with their surroundings. The why rather than the how has become more important. Why does this trip really matter and what will I miss out if I don’t take it? Today luxury travel and tourism are transcending material focused luxuries and comforts to include access authentic and personalized experiences that connect with the broader community. **DI**

**The YOLO effect has led to prioritizing experiences over things. Travelers today are thinking of what can I experience that I haven’t experienced before? And they are willing to pay more for the same.**



ARCHITECTURE & MASTER PLANNING

# Shaping Tomorrow

Archetype India's Pioneering  
Role in Transforming India's  
Hospitality Landscape

by LUC MANDRET

Established in 2002 by French entrepreneurs François Magnier and Pierre-Jean Malgouyres, Archetype Group has grown into a leading multi-disciplinary construction consultancy recognized globally. Offering a broad spectrum of services that include architecture and master planning, industrial and process engineering, building engineering, and project and cost management, the company has built a reputation for innovation and excellence across various sectors, notably in hospitality, real estate, and industrial projects. It boasts a portfolio featuring luxury hospitality venues, mixed-use high-rises, educational and healthcare institutions, and premier industrial facilities.

Starting with just a 10-person team in Vietnam, Archetype Group now employs over 1,000 professionals across 26 offices in 18 countries, supplemented by a wide-reaching network of esteemed partners under the Archetype Alliance in 30 countries and territories across Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America.



Pierre-Jean MALGOUYRES,  
CEO & co-Founder



Francois MAGNIER,  
President & co-Founder



Poolside : Novotel Pune

Since establishing its Indian branch, Archetype India, in 2005, the firm has made a significant impact on the country's hospitality sector, leveraging its global experience to enhance the local architectural and construction markets. Archetype India is renowned for its integration of innovative design with sustainable practices, a commitment that shines through in its hospitality projects. These initiatives not only showcase the company's dedication to creative engineering solutions but also emphasize its forward-thinking approach to environmental

sustainability, establishing new benchmarks for the industry.

### **The Expertise Behind Archetype India**

Sivakumar Shanmuganathan, Managing Director of Archetype India, whose visionary leadership has been crucial in propelling the company's growth and success in the Indian hospitality sector. With over 37 years of industry experience, Sivakumar has skillfully overseen a variety of challenging and iconic projects for international clients across multiple sectors, including industrial, institutional, commercial, hotels, hospitals, and residential spaces. His expertise in project and construction management, along with his exceptional leadership abilities, has guaranteed the smooth execution and successful completion of construction projects from their inception to commissioning.

Entrance at The Lodhi, Delhi, India



A bird eyeview of The Lodhi, Delhi, India





Sivakumar  
Shanmuganathan

**Leading Archetype India's operations is Sivakumar Shanmuganathan, whose visionary leadership has been crucial in propelling the company's growth and success in the Indian hospitality sector. With over 37 years of industry experience, Sivakumar has skillfully overseen a variety of challenging and iconic projects for international clients across multiple sectors.**

Under Sivakumar's stewardship, Archetype India boasts a diverse team of professionals, blending international and local expertise. This team, consisting of architects, engineers, and project managers, works in close collaboration to transcend the limits of traditional design and construction. They are dedicated to innovation while strictly adhering to sustainable practices.

Their collective dedication and hard work have played a pivotal role in establishing Archetype India as a frontrunner in the development of environmentally responsible and architecturally significant projects.

## Building a Greener Future

Archetype India prioritizes sustainability, aiming for projects that adhere to international green building standards, notably LEED and EDGE certifications. With a comprehensive approach to eco-friendly design, the company employs cutting-edge technologies and creative methods to boost energy efficiency, conserve water, and minimize carbon emissions. The expertise of its consultants and specialists has been crucial in the successful implementation of numerous green building projects, showcasing the firm's dedication to environmental stewardship and sustainable development.

## Archetype India's Notable Hospitality Projects

Archetype India's portfolio in the hospitality sector spans several of India's major cities, encompassing luxury projects for some of the world's leading hotel and resort brands. These projects, which range from comprehensive renovations to ground-up original designs, showcase the firm's extensive capabilities in project management, construction management, cost management, architecture and design, and sustainable building practices. Furthermore, these endeavors skillfully balance respect for historical context with a forward-looking approach, thereby establishing new benchmarks in India's hospitality industry.

The renovation of the Taj Mahal Palace in Mumbai aimed to merge the hotel's storied past with the demands of contemporary luxury. As the "premier landmark hotel of the Orient," this five-star establishment features 280 keys across six stories, covering a vast area of 26,500 square meters. The renovation focused on upgrading the hotel's facilities and infrastructure to cater to modern travelers' needs while ensuring the timeless charm and elegance that define this iconic hotel were meticulously preserved. This delicate balance between old and new underscores Archetype India's commitment to enhancing the guest experience without compromising the historical essence that makes the Taj Mahal Palace truly unique.



Lobby at JW Marriott Delhi



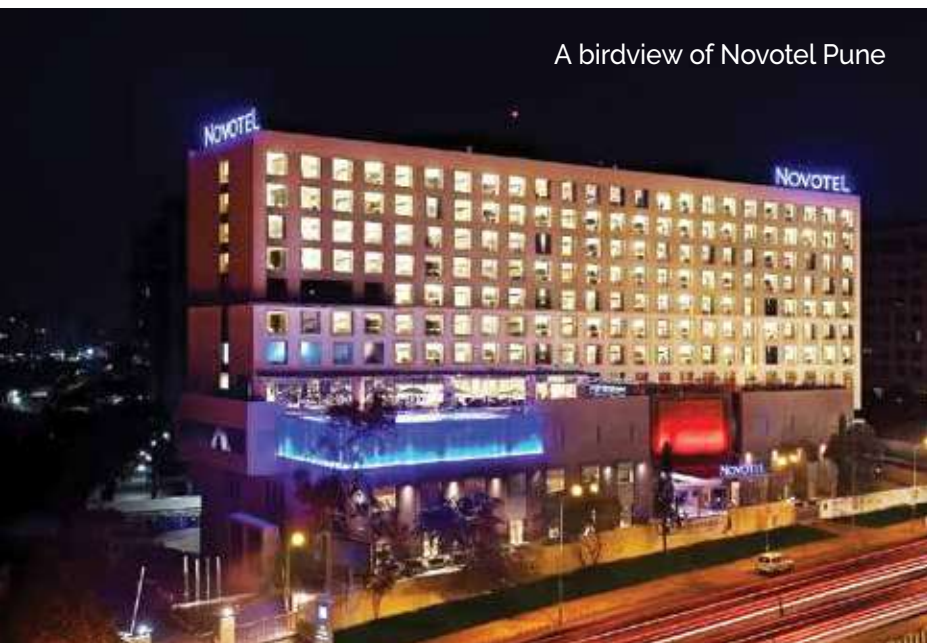
JW Marriott Delhi - front

**Archetype India prioritizes sustainability, aiming for projects that adhere to international green building standards, notably LEED and EDGE certifications. With a comprehensive approach to eco-friendly design, the company employs cutting-edge technologies and creative methods to boost energy efficiency, conserve water, and minimize carbon emissions.**

The Lodhi in New Delhi, formerly known as Aman New Delhi and once part of the prestigious Aman Resorts brand, showcases a blend of modern design and traditional Indian architecture. Archetype India served as the construction manager for this five-star hotel with 68 suites, each boasting a private pool and premium amenities, across 10 stories and a gross floor area of 46,000 square meters. Archetype India skillfully addressed the challenges of blending modern design with traditional Indian architecture, emphasizing eco-friendly initiatives including energy-efficient lighting and water-saving fixtures, demonstrating luxury and environmental sustainability can coexist.

The upcoming Four Points by Sheraton at heart of the Chennai city, Archetype India took on the roles of project and construction management while also delivering health, safety, and environment (HSE) services. This business-class hotel, which has a gross floor area of more than 10,000 square meters, houses approximately 110 keys across 12 stories. Working in close partnership with the client, the project is on the verge of completion within the budget upholding the highest standards of quality and safety, alongside implementing sustainable features like green roofs and rainwater harvesting systems. The Hotel is planned for soft opening by June 2024.

The Novotel and Pullman hotels in Aerocity, New Delhi, are prime examples of Archetype India's prowess in managing large-scale, multi-faceted hospitality projects. Positioned near the Indira Gandhi International Airport within a vibrant commercial and retail enclave, these establishments are the result of a strategic collaboration between the international hospitality leader Accor, Indian conglomerate InterGlobe Enterprises, and real estate developer Pacifica. The development features a four-star Novotel hotel and the five-star Pullman hotel, both of which share a three-level basement dedicated to parking



A birdview of Novotel Pune



Novotel Aerocity

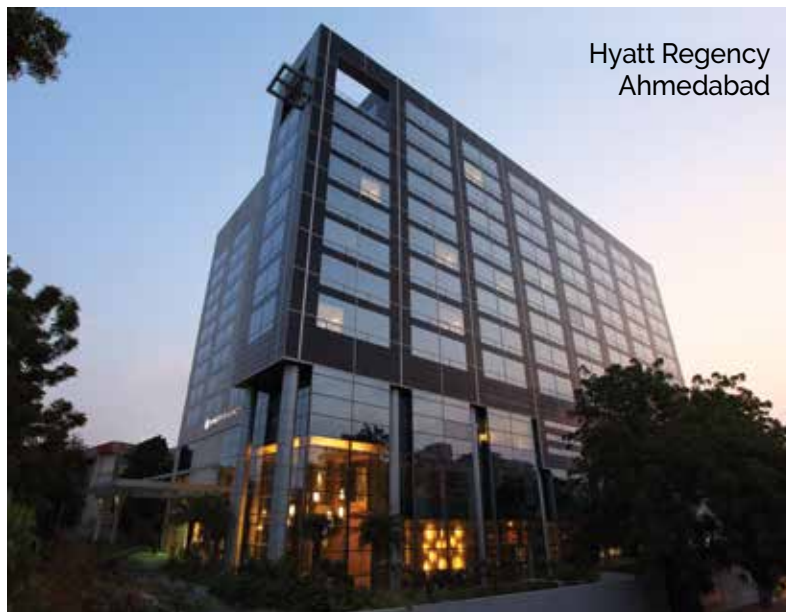


Pullman Aerocity





Four Points Sheraton,  
Chennai



Hyatt Regency  
Ahmedabad

**Under the guidance of a passionate leadership team and through a series of iconic projects, Archetype India has significantly influenced the future of the built environment, particularly within India's dynamic hospitality sector. The firm's commitment to marrying innovative architectural and engineering solutions with sustainability principles has marked its distinct position as an industry leader.**

and essential back-of-house operations, alongside a specialized room for mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems. Spanning nine floors with an expansive total gross floor area of 100,000 square meters, the initiative highlights Archetype India's capability to execute substantial projects with precision and unwavering attention to detail.

Similarly, the JW Marriott Hotel New Delhi Aerocity, another notable project in proximity to the Indira Gandhi International Airport, underscores Archetype India's proficiency. Tasked with project and cost management responsibilities for this premier hospitality

development, Archetype India played a pivotal role. The five-star hotel, completed in 2012, spans seven floors and provides 526 guestrooms, with a total gross floor area of 90,200 square meters. Through effective collaboration with stakeholders, Archetype India achieved the project's completion on schedule and within budget, integrating sustainable design features such as green roofs and rainwater harvesting to enhance environmental efficiency.

Developed by Belaire Hotels, a joint venture between Accor and India Blue Mountain, the new four-star Novotel Hotel in Pune's main business district is designed by DP Architects of Singapore. It features 280 rooms and a host of amenities across a podium and nine floors, covering a gross floor area of 23,200 square meters. Entrusted with full project and construction Management services, Archetype India aims for completion within 29 months, facing challenges such as extensive excavation in rocky terrain. The hotel will also incorporate eco-friendly elements such as energy-efficient lighting and water-saving fixtures.

Lastly, the Hyatt Regency, located on the bustling Ashram Road in Ahmedabad, presents an array of exceptional amenities. These include versatile banquet and meeting spaces, dining options, a swimming pool, a spa, and a state-of-the-art fitness center. This four-star hotel encompasses 271 rooms over 13 floors, covering a total gross floor area of 35,000 square meters. The successful completion of this project was significantly enhanced by the Archetype Group's proficiency in project and cost management, ensuring the delivery of a premier hospitality experience.

## **Industry Leadership Through Innovation and Sustainability**

Under the guidance of a passionate leadership team and through a series of iconic projects, Archetype India has significantly influenced the future of the built environment, particularly within India's dynamic hospitality sector. The firm's commitment to marrying innovative architectural and engineering solutions with sustainability principles has marked its distinct position as an industry leader.

Notably, its dedication to green building practices and pursuit of environmental certifications are creating pathways for a more sustainable and inclusive future. Offering comprehensive services in architecture and design, project and cost management, and engineering, Archetype India is actively shaping tomorrow, project by project. **DI**



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# What Makes a Hotel Iconic? Defining Moments and Unique Renderings!



by RAJIV KAUL

As per Oxford dictionary, iconic is regarded as a representative symbol, or as worthy of veneration and especially acknowledged for distinctive excellence.

In my four decades plus journey with luxury hotels, I have been fortunate to be General Manager of two iconic grande dames - The Mena House Oberoi, Cairo (135 year-old palace with sweeping vistas of the great pyramids of Giza) and the legendary Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai. Both these hotels were century plus old palaces with stunning location and views, great architectural beauty and design, historical significance capturing the grandeur of a bygone era. Later, I was also privileged to launch The Leela Palace Udaipur (rated in 2019 by Travel and Leisure, US as Top Luxury hotel in the world) and award winning The Leela Palace New Delhi - both of which could also qualify as modern icons, since they have redefined luxury hospitality benchmarks.

However, aside from the historical significance and heritage, what separates the grande dames from their peers was their amazing emotional connect, cultural impact and lasting legacy – a confluence of magic, mystery and magnificence which made them deeply beloved of guests around the world.

So, what all does it take to climb the totem pole from being a “Great” hotel to “Legendary” to becoming “Iconic”?

■ **Rich History, heritage and influence:** Iconic hotels have stood the test of time, garnering a rich personal history and heritage. The Taj Mahal, Mumbai and The Waldorf Astoria, New York have shaped trends, set new standards, pioneered new concepts, introduced innovative amenities, or created unique experiences for guests. For nearly a century, these icons have been trend setters with a lasting impact and stand tall today as enduring symbols for luxury hospitality.

■ **Signature Architectural and design:** Iconic hotels typically feature unique and striking architecture and design aesthetic which makes them instantly recognizable, visually distinctive and memorable – historical building (The Fullerton, Singapore), Grand palace (The Taj, Umaid Bhavan) or a modern skyscraper (Burj al Arab, Dubai) that push the boundaries of convention and imagination.

■ **Legendary service:** Service delivery is a key component to providing exceptional experiences and delighting guests. Iconic hotels, to preserve their hard-earned reputation for service excellence, emphasize more on staff selection and training for proactive, intuitive service which is personalized to each guest, creating a sense of exclusivity and old-world charm.

■ **Beacon of luxury and elegance:** A defining feature of iconic hotels

**In the increasingly competitive landscape of luxury Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, some hotels stand apart with a hallowed iconic status, which perhaps is the apex badge of honour in the hospitality constellation. Their fabled reputations are magnets drawing discerning travellers, seeking a hotel with that “X” factor that heightens the romance of travel, setting the stage for unforgettable experiences.**



Iconic Taj Mahal Mumbai



Iconic Waldorf Astoria New-York

is their deep commitment to luxury and elegance, showcasing extraordinary physical attributes- from opulent furnishings to lavish décor, grand lobbies, exquisite accommodations, spectacular spas, and world class amenities. Iconic hotels have long remained symbols of timeless elegance and an enduring refence for luxury, grandeur and sophistication, e.g. The Dorchester, London, Hotel de Crillion, Paris and The Peninsula, Hong Kong.

■ **Strong emotional connect:** Hotels after all are not just pretty inanimate buildings. As living shrines of hospitality, service excellence, luxury and elegance, they evoke strong emotions in guests. Iconic hotels occupy not just mind space but also heart space. I have seen weddings postponed only because the Crystal Room at The Taj Mahal Mumbai was not available. The event cannot be held elsewhere as this was the sole venue for their family weddings for 3 generations!!

Iconic hotels also have the ability to stir up a range of powerful feelings in guests of awe, nostalgia, enchantment and inspiration – magically transporting them to another realm e.g. the Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur and Leela Palace Udaipur where on arrival you feel as if you have stepped into a charmed fairy tale world.

■ **Cultural Impact and lasting legacy:** Extensively featured in popular media, literature or art, these hotels become woven into the fabric of the community as landmarks in their cities, admired for their contribution to the local culture and heritage. The Ritz in Paris is synonymous with Parisian luxury and sophistication and has been immortalized in countless movies, books and works of art and music, making it a cultural icon and a must visit destination for travellers seeking a taste of city’s glamorous past. The Taj Mahal, Mumbai has a formidable art collection which chronicles the story of Indian masters of modern art and is the undisputed cultural ambassador of the city.

■ **Celebrity guests and anecdotes:** Ultimately a hotel is only as good as the guests it serves and having attended to the rich and famous for decades, these iconic hotels have built an adoring celebrity fan club. Their anecdotes continue to perpetuate their fame and iconic status, as evidenced by Spencer Tracy’s legendary endorsement of The Savoy, London “When I die, I would rather go to The Savoy than heaven” and Mandarin Oriental’s long running “I am a fan” advertising campaign. Also it is customary to christen hotel suites after famous guests who have stayed there - Churchill and Montgomery suites at Mena House, Cairo; Somerset Maugham at The Oriental, Bangkok; Coco Chanel suite at The Ritz, Paris.

■ **Signature experiences:** Many iconic hotels curate unique, unforgettable experiences and enchanting signature rituals to forge unforgettable memories for their guests – e.g. the airport pick up in a Rolls Royce at The Peninsula, Hong Kong; rose petal shower welcome at Leela

**Aside from the historical significance and heritage, what separates the grande dames from their peers was their amazing emotional connect, cultural impact and lasting legacy – a confluence of magic, mystery and magnificence which made them deeply beloved of guests around the world.**

Palace, Udaipur; the evening Ganga Aarti at Ananda in the Himalayas.

■ **Epicurean excellence:** Known for their exceptional dining experiences (Michelin rated restaurants) and celebrated bars which often have been the birthplace of much loved signature cocktails (Singapore Sling at Raffles, Singapore and Bloody Mary at St Regis, New York); elaborate rituals and ceremonies (afternoon tea at Hotel de Crillion, Paris) or the daily 6.30pm champagne ritual at St Regis (of opening the bottle using a sabre, instead of popping the cork).

Iconic hotels are much more than just places to stay. They are distinguished and celebrated hospitality landmarks, beacons of excellence, symbols of luxury, and destinations in their own right. They have defined and transformed the landscapes of their respective cities, etching an indelible mark onto the world stage - much revered by discerning guests, industry professionals and the wider public. **DI**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rajiv Kaul is an eminent hotelier who has worked extensively across the hospitality industry. Trained at Oberoi Hotels, under the watchful eyes of none other than PRS Oberoi, Kaul also worked at The Taj Mahal, Mumbai for a while and then became President, Leela Hotels and Palaces.



**India's super-rich vegetarians want more than paneer. So, high-end chefs now offer exotic mushrooms, creamy cheeses, hard- to-find veggies and more. Bless the bounty.**

by VIR SANGHVI

India may have the world's highest proportion of vegetarians as a percentage of the population. And though all Indian vegetarians are not economically better off than Indian non-vegetarians, a remarkably high proportion of rich people in India are vegetarians. I reckon that the majority of Indian multi-millionaires and billionaires are vegetarians.

And yet, when we talk about restaurant food in India, very few fresh vegetables are involved. Paneer is a favourite. Gobi goes on kebab skewers. The cheapest vegetables in the market go into a Navratan korma.

But what about restaurants that serve other cuisines? How do they cope? Sometimes, they take the same route as north Indian restaurants: instead of chicken Manchurian, they make gobi Manchurian at Chinese restaurants. Or they take the Navratan korma approach. The cheapest vegetables are mashed up, deep fried, put in a thick gravy and served as Chinese food.

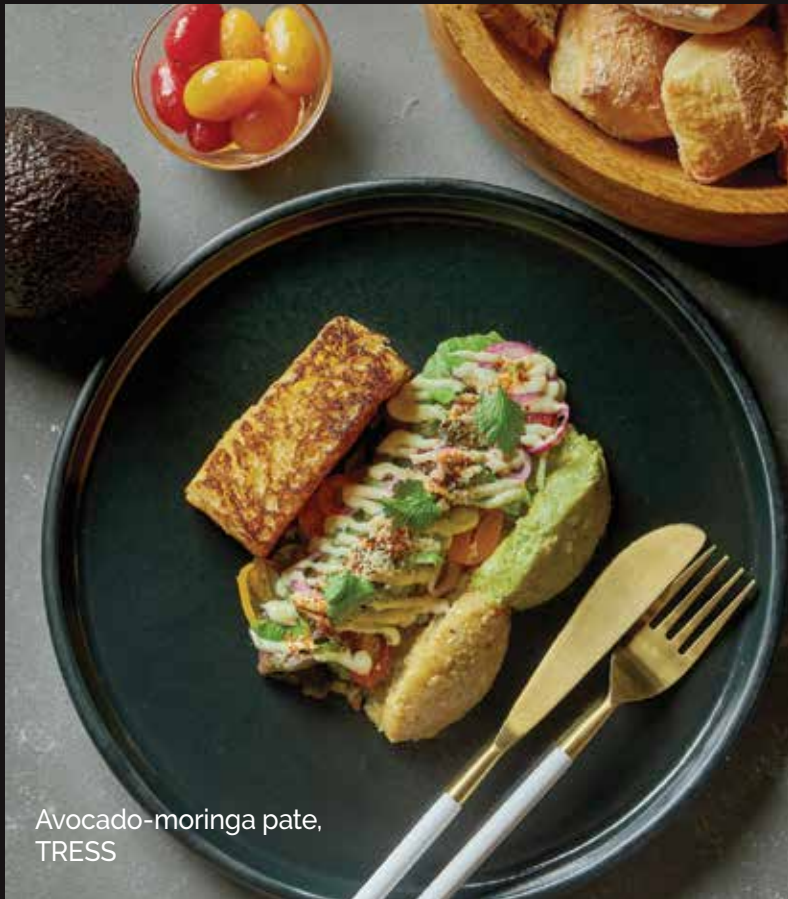
## Going High-end Vegetarian with Vir Sanghvi



But as India gets richer, wealthy vegetarians do not want to feel like second-class diners eating sanitised versions of non-vegetarian dishes. They want an experience that rises above the meals offered to non-vegetarians or at the very least, one that is in the same league.

So, how can restaurants that serve European food cope? Usually, they go the so-called Italian route. Something like 95% of all Italian restaurants in India are pizzerias, with a basic pasta menu tagged on. But for others who have higher culinary aspirations, it can be more difficult.

Chefs have now identified certain ingredients that vegetarians will nearly always like. Cheese is one example. The trick is to avoid any cheese with character. Blue or smelly cheeses are out. Mild parmesigiano, cheddar and gruyère work as flavours or salad ingredients, as does mozzarella.



Avocado-moringa pate,  
TRESS



Vegetarians have been suspicious of mushrooms. And even now, says Jatin Mallick, the chef-partner at Delhi's highly rated Tres, there is resistance to mushrooms from old-style vegetarians. But there is a new generation that likes, say, Portobello mushrooms.

But a new favourite has emerged over the last few years: Burrata. This is not a traditional cheese and was invented in the 1920s as a by-product of mozzarella-making. Now, it is a globally popular fresh cheese and has a creamy taste that Indians love and has no fermented cheese flavour.

It is not a cheese with a long shelf-life, so it has to be fresh. Fortunately, cheese makers all over India have worked out that there is more money in burrata than in, say, a ripe Camembert, so it is easily available and has become the favourite cheese for people who don't really like cheese.

A second vegetarian favourite is asparagus. But we are more in love with the idea of asparagus than with asparagus itself. Most Indian asparagus is usually too fibrous or too under-flavoured. But it is easy to import Thai or Chinese asparagus (via Thailand). This kind of asparagus is thin and best used in Oriental cuisines, where the sauces give it a flavour boost, and it remains extremely popular in the Indian market.

Fresh truffles (left) are expensive, but there is a growing market for them. It is easy to import Thai or Chinese asparagus (right) via Thailand. It is thin and best used in oriental cuisines where the sauces give it a flavour boost.





Varun Tuli

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Peruvian asparagus

In Europe, asparagus is a seasonal vegetable prized for its flavour. In England, the asparagus season lasts for only a few weeks (around May-June) and chefs go crazy finding new ways to make the most of the highly flavoured stalks. But the asparagus we eat outside of Europe may be Peruvian. Peru is now the second-largest asparagus grower (China is number one). Its production is not seasonal and it costs less than half of seasonal European asparagus. Peruvian asparagus can be thick, though it lacks the same deep flavour.

Put thick stalks of Peruvian asparagus on an Indian menu and vegetarians will head directly for it.

Traditionally, vegetarians have been suspicious of mushrooms. And even now, says Jatin Mallick, the chef-partner at Delhi's highly rated Tres, there is resistance to mushrooms from old-style vegetarians. But there is a new generation that likes, say, Portobello mushrooms. Mallick thinks that he will soon be able to put more on the menu.

Rich vegetarians all love one particular fungus, perhaps because they don't think of it as a mushroom, and that is the truffle.

Long before Aditi Dugar became famous as the owner of Mumbai's celebrated Masque restaurant, she founded Sage & Saffron, a boutique vegetarian catering operation that is a favourite of the rich. Dugar started putting truffles on her catering menus much before they became popular in India. They were a hit right from the start.

But fresh truffles are expensive. Mallick has guests who ask for truffle oil by the side when they order a meat dish and others who want bottled black truffles shaved over their food. Bottled truffles usually have no taste and truffle oil is a nasty synthetic petroleum-derived product that has never been near a real truffle and doesn't even taste of truffle. But its popularity grows in India by the day — not just with vegetarians but with non-vegetarians too.

Both Mallick and Dugar say that they have nothing against truffle oil ("It's just a flavoured oil," says Dugar) or its fans but of course, they much prefer real truffle.

And then there is the avocado craze, which I wrote about here five years ago. I won't repeat myself except to say that I suspect one reason why rich vegetarians love avocados is because they are buttery and creamy (i.e. they have a high fat content). The same impulse that leads people to like burrata is probably at work here.


Don't rich vegetarians like anything that is purely Indian?

Well, yes, they do. I spoke to Varun Tuli who (along with Ritu Dalmia) rules the upmarket wedding catering market. Varun says that the very rich have moved beyond asparagus and avocado. They want high quality Indian vegetables sourced from the best places. They want



the sweet little peas that grow in Jaipur during a brief season. They want the best rajma, sourced from particular districts. Just to say 'The rajma is from Jammu' is not enough any longer. They want ponk (a sort of millet that is popular with Gujaratis). If it is the season, then there has to be fresh choliya on the menu.

Varun sent me one set of wedding banquet menus (all vegetarian) and I was stunned by the range of dishes on offer. Says Aditi Dugar, "People now want heirloom vegetables and the finest versions of the flavours they grew up with."

So perhaps tastes are changing. And F Scott Fitzgerald was right. The rich are different from us. They have better vegetables. 

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vir Sanghvi is a senior journalist who has worked extensively with The Hindustan Times. He is a well-respected author and commentator, and a television presenter. He is well known for his contributions on food, both Indian and international. He has worked closely with India's hospitality industry, known as a foodie and guided many a leading chef. The above article first appeared in HT City; reproduced here with consent of the author.

# In a People's Industry, the Biggest Challenge is Finding the People



*In Conversation with* **DILIP PURI**,  
*formerly a Starwood stalwart, and an Oberoi  
alumni*

**O**n a recent visit to Goa, staying at an iconic star property, one came across multiple young staff on training, on very meagre stipends, with canteen food that appeared like dole, I was sad and disappointed. Is the industry only looking after the top end of its staff? As one looks around, even among the big chains, often there is a sharp difference in service quality in smaller towns and properties. It's the

crying need of the hour. Hotels must be seen as a preferred industry to work in, which was once the case. Today's youth is not longer looking at the glamour, the sheen, but the duty hours, the pay check at the end of the month, and advancement in careers.

One big change in recent years has been the birth of ISH, founded by Dilip Puri, formerly a Starwood stalwart, and an Oberoi alumni. He has spent the last few years understanding the needs and providing international level education for young aspiring students. But his numbers are small, we perhaps need a hundred of such institutions across the country.

In this brief interview with Dilip, we touch upon some of the questions, perhaps the fringes of the problem. A more concerted effort is required by both government agencies as well as the industry itself.

Here are the highlights of this brief exchange:

## **Primary employment challenges faced by the Indian hospitality industry**

Despite exceptional growth, the Indian hospitality industry is facing multiple employment challenges. These include a shortage of skilled professionals, high employee turnover rates, and the absence of standardized training programs. Hospitality professionals are being poached not by competitors, but by different sectors. Furthermore, there is a notion that the hospitality sector offers low-paying and menial employment options, which makes it challenging for employers to draw and retain talent. These prevailing challenges significantly impact the industry's ability to address the booming demand for hospitality services in the country. A larger number of students graduating from Hospitality schools are finding better employment opportunities with other sectors such as retail, real estate, e-commerce, start-ups.

## **Gaps between hospitality education and jobs in the industry, and how can these gaps be filled?**

One of the primary gaps between hospitality education and jobs in the industry is the absence of practical training. While hospitality

**One big change in recent years has been the birth of ISH, founded by Dilip Puri, formerly a Starwood stalwart, and an Oberoi alumni. He has spent the last few years understanding the needs and providing international level education for young aspiring students. But his numbers are small, we perhaps need a hundred of such institutions across the country.**



courses deliver theoretical knowledge, they must train students for the real-world challenges they will encounter in the industry. To bridge this gap, extensive collaborations between hospitality education institutions and industry partners such as renowned hotel chains are required to deliver hands-on experience and internships. A better experience during internships will help retain young people within the industry. This will not only allow students to garner practical experience but also allow them to network with potential employers and enhance their chances of securing employment after graduation. Another crucial gap is the disparity between the skills instructed in hospitality education institutions and the skills required by employers. To address this, hospitality schools should consistently update their curriculum and teaching methodologies to ensure that graduates have the most in-demand skills and knowledge.

### **Strategies that the hospitality industry can adopt to attract and retain skilled workers in India?**

There are several measures that can be adopted to attract and retain talent, including offering attractive salaries and perks such as health insurance, paid leaves for work-life balance and other incentives. The sector should also emphasise offering opportunities for career advancement via training and development programs. In addition, a positive work culture can be fostered by recognising and rewarding the professionals for their hard work and accomplishments. And most importantly, deliver an exceptional internship experience so that these students are enthused and motivated to join the industry.

### **The future of employment in the hospitality**

Despite the challenges, the future of employment in the hospitality industry is promising. With an unprecedented demand for personalised experiences and high-quality services, there is a growing demand for skilled professionals across hotels, restaurants, resorts etc. However, with the rapid integration of emerging technologies like AI coupled with other trends, it is essential for hospitality students and professionals to consistently learn and upskill to stay relevant and thrive in this promising sector. With India poised to emerge as the growth engine of the world, the hospitality sector will witness multi-fold growth in the coming years.

### **Long-term implications of employment challenges**


If the industry does not work towards changing the perception of being an over worked and underpaid sector, it will continue to detract young students to opt for hospitality as a career. This will have a direct



**Despite the challenges, the future of employment in the hospitality industry is promising. With an unprecedented demand for personalised experiences and high-quality services, there is a growing demand for skilled professionals across hotels, restaurants, resorts etc.**

impact on product and service quality in the future, given the fast-paced growth in hotel development and openings.

### **Other aspects regarding employment**

The hospitality sector is one of the most dynamic industries in the globe, and aspirants should be prepared to navigate its opportunities and complexities. Moreover, a positive attitude, strong work ethic and excellent soft skills can go a long way in ensuring a rewarding career in this industry. It is also essential for hospitality aspirants to enrol in a prominent hospitality education institution to acquire the right skills and knowledge and benefit from its global network and legacy. Furthermore, gaining practical experience via internships is crucial for aspiring professionals to excel in this domain. 

# Institutional Investors Bet on an Optimistic Future for Indian Hospitality



by NIKHIL SHAH

**H**ow are the evaluations stacking up for the hotel industry?

In the wake of COVID-19, the hospitality sector has witnessed a remarkable resurgence in both revenue and performance. Previously, the considerable disparity between Replacement Cost and EBIDTA Multiple has narrowed as operational efficiency has improved. Notably, rates for upper upscale or higher category hotels, which previously ranged from \$120 to \$140, have surged to \$180 to \$200+, consequently augmenting hotel values via the earnings method.

This year has seen several prominent ho-

tel companies going public, capitalizing on favorable market conditions, and enjoying robust valuations.

Furthermore, cost optimization initiatives have significantly bolstered performance, with energy-saving measures and reduced wages due to a decrease in the employee-to-room ratio playing pivotal roles. Some leading hotel companies have achieved annual EBIDTA exceeding 40%.

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*If you buy now, is it sustainable for hotels?*

The hospitality industry operates in cycles and demands a long-term commitment, ideally spanning at least 20 years. Conceptually, a hotel resembles a perpetual bond; if strategically located and equipped with the right amenities, it has the potential to generate returns for decades to come.

India roughly has 200,000 hotel keys, comprising 75% of the inventory found in cities such as Las Vegas and Dubai, which boast over 150,000 keys each.

Currently, the hospitality sector is experiencing an upswing, projected to persist for the foreseeable future. Despite the signup of new properties, the operationalization of such ventures typically takes 4 to 5 years. Furthermore, the prevailing demand for hotels surpasses the rate of supply, suggesting that sustainability should not pose a significant challenge.

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### *What's the deal around business and leisure destinations?*

In business-oriented locations, it is advisable to explore the acquisition of existing hotels experiencing operational challenges, preferably those already operational or nearing completion. This strategy is particularly prudent given the high cost of land in such areas. Additionally, Average Room Rates (ARR) in business locations tend to be range-bound, often limited by the rates charged by market leaders or luxury hotels.

Conversely, leisure destinations offer ample opportunities for hotel development due to the availability of land. Given the prevalence of large-scale MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) events, many hotel and resort developers are opting to construct banquet facilities to cater to weddings and other social gatherings. Furthermore, leisure destinations typically exhibit greater potential for ARR growth compared to business hotels, as choices are often more limited in these areas.

### *Are there deals happening specifically with hotels in mind to build?*

The hotel industry in India has witnessed a marked surge in transactional activity. Previously, only a handful of deals surpassing 100 crore rupees would materialize, but now such substantial transactions have become more commonplace.


Existing hoteliers are displaying a keen interest in acquiring or constructing properties, marking a shift from the pre-COVID era when the majority of hotel development endeavors were undertaken by newcomers rather than established hoteliers. Notably, hotel companies have expanded their development teams to facilitate the signing of more properties, while (IPCs) have also established hotel transaction divisions to capitalize on opportunities within the hospitality market.

### *Do you see these land rates sustaining themselves or coming down?*

Land rates are anticipated to remain relatively high overall. However,

**Land rates are anticipated to remain relatively high overall. However, with the rise in Average Room Rates (ARR), the economic landscape is becoming increasingly favorable for institutional investors to participate in the market.**

with the rise in Average Room Rates (ARR), the economic landscape is becoming increasingly favorable for institutional investors to participate in the market. The exception to this trend may be observed in the city centers of metropolitan areas.

In contrast, leisure destinations and Tier 1 and 2 cities where land costs represent no more than 30% of hotel development expenses present an attractive proposition for land acquisition. Additionally, in metropolitan areas, long-term lease options, such as those offered by public-private partnership (PPP) entities like the Airport Authority, provide hotel owners with viable solutions for partnering and hotel development. 

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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# “Check-Out Time: Why Sustainability in Hospitality Spells an Existential Crisis?”

**Is “Green Hospitality sufficiently navigating the Existential Crossroads of Sustainability, or is the future of hospitality adequately Sustainable, Responsible and Profitable? These are current questions occupying the minds of the senior leadership.**



By **TUSHAR NARULA**

**A**s the world grapples with the consequences of climate change, industries are under increasing pressure to integrate sustainability into their core strategies, driven by regulatory mandates and the need to safeguard reputation and brand integrity.

The hospitality industry, integral to economic vitality and cultural enrichment, now faces the imperative to mitigate its environmental impact. Driven by rising global demand and expansion ambitions, governments are tightening regulations to address the sector’s environmental footprint. This imperative isn’t just about compliance; it’s also a strategic necessity for businesses to thrive in a changing market.

For hotel chains and the hospitality business stakeholders, embracing sustainability is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity for the success and resilience of the business in an increasingly resource-constrained world. In this pivotal moment, the industry’s response will shape its future trajectory and its broader impact on the planet.

This article explores the urgent need for global hotel chains to embrace sustainability across their value chains and also looks at key recommendations that aid this transformation to a more responsible business.

### **The state of the industry - Balancing growth and responsibility**

The global hotel and resort industry market is expected to generate a revenue of US\$446.50 billion in 2024. It represents a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 3.32% from 2024 to 2028. It is projected to continue its positive momentum into 2024, building on the recovery that began in earnest in 2023.

According to JLL’s Hotels & Hospitality Group, the industry demonstrated remarkable resilience with revenue per available room (RevPAR) fully recovering and even surpassing 2019 levels by 12%. This recovery is attributed towards increasing disposable incomes, growing urbanization, and expanding global business travel. The industry’s growth has also been marred by its significant environmental and societal footprint.

The industry’s reliance on carbon-heavy construction, energy-dense operations, and fossil fuels has cast a shadow over its environmental credentials. Only 21% of hotels use on-site renewable energy highlighting a massive sustainability gap. Furthermore, the hosting of large-scale events and the impact on local ecosystems and indigenous communities add to the industry’s environmental challenges. It is reliant on natural resources and confronts the urgent challenge of unsustainable and conspicuous consumption some. According to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), the share of renewable energy in the global hotel industry is expected to reach 25% by end of 2023.

### **The business imperative of adoption of sustainability leading to mitigation and achieving Net Zero targets**

■ **Cost Optimization:** By implementing best ESG practices, hotels can reduce costs across their value chains. Sustainable technologies and resources in design, operations, and management processes lead to significant savings and add to long-term value to the related enterprise.

■ **Risk Mitigation:** The industry’s vast supply chains are vulnerable to climate-induced events and regulatory shifts. Proactive ESG strategies safeguard revenues and fortify brand reputation, aligning with evolving investor expectations and policy landscapes.

■ **Investment Opportunities:** Compliance with sustainability norms opens doors to government incentives and investor interest. Benefits span tax incentives for eco-friendly construction to grants and insurance premium reductions, fortifying financial viability.

■ **Expanding Consumer Market and Gaining a Competitive Advantage:** The changing consumer behavior and increasing environmental consciousness create an opportunity for the industry to tap into the emerging market of eco-conscious tourists.

*The Role of Eco-Tourism in Hospitality:* Eco-tourism plays a pivotal role in the promotion and thriving of the hospitality industry. With changing consumer behavior and a growing willingness to protect the environment, global hotel chains have an opportunity to tap into the emerging market of eco-conscious tourists. Hotels can enhance the guest experience by integrating natural elements and obtaining green certifications. The global eco-tourism market has reached US\$ 172.4 billion indicating strong willingness of the adoption of sustainable travel incentives by the consumers. Sustainability is becoming a crucial aspect of customer expectations. Failing to align with eco-conscious values risks alienating a significant demographic and jeopardizing profitability.

## The blueprint to a greener future

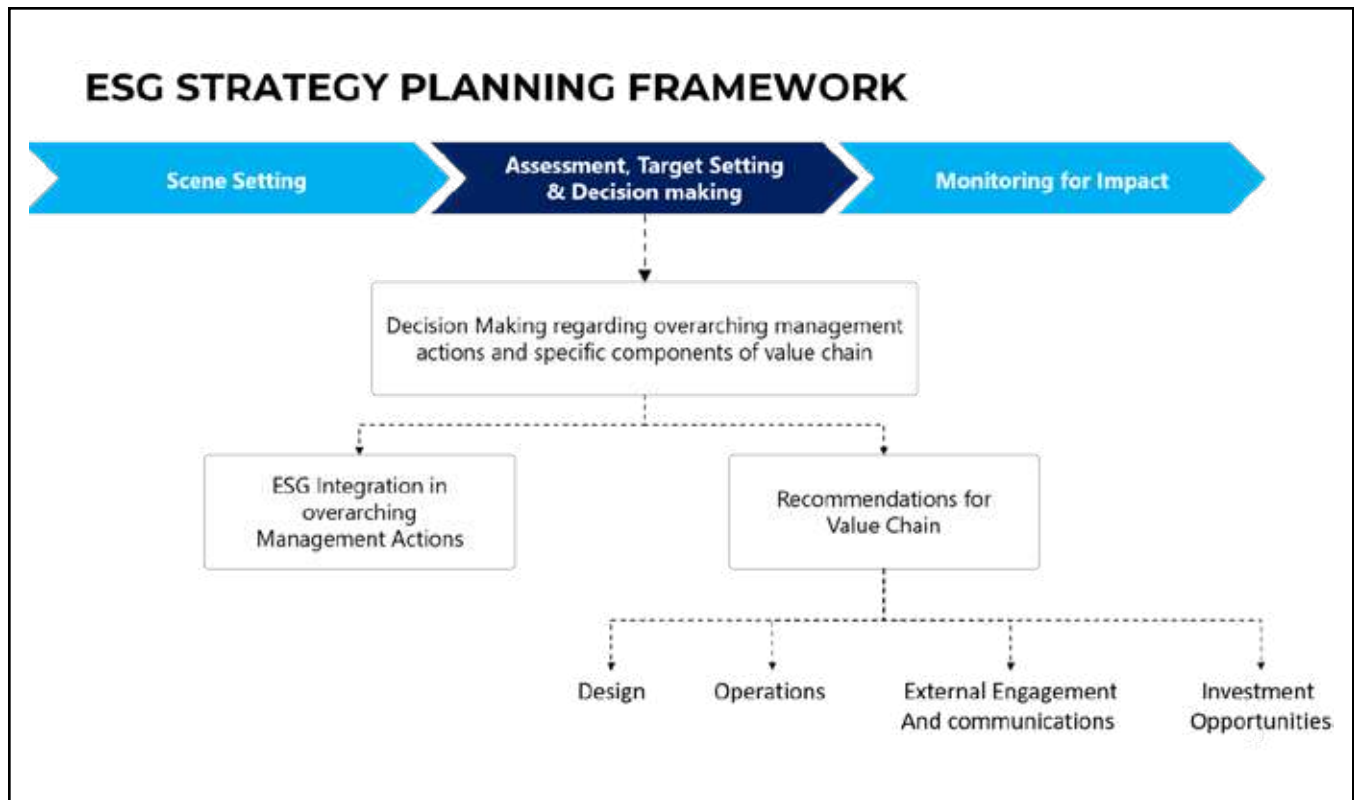
To combat the vast variety of exposures and different hierarchical structures, global hotel chains launch comprehensive programmes and ESG frameworks in order to prioritize the main issues in their value chains and analyze strategic position, choices and actions. It is important to have holistic factors into consideration around the hospitality value chain such as design, operations, external engagement, investment and

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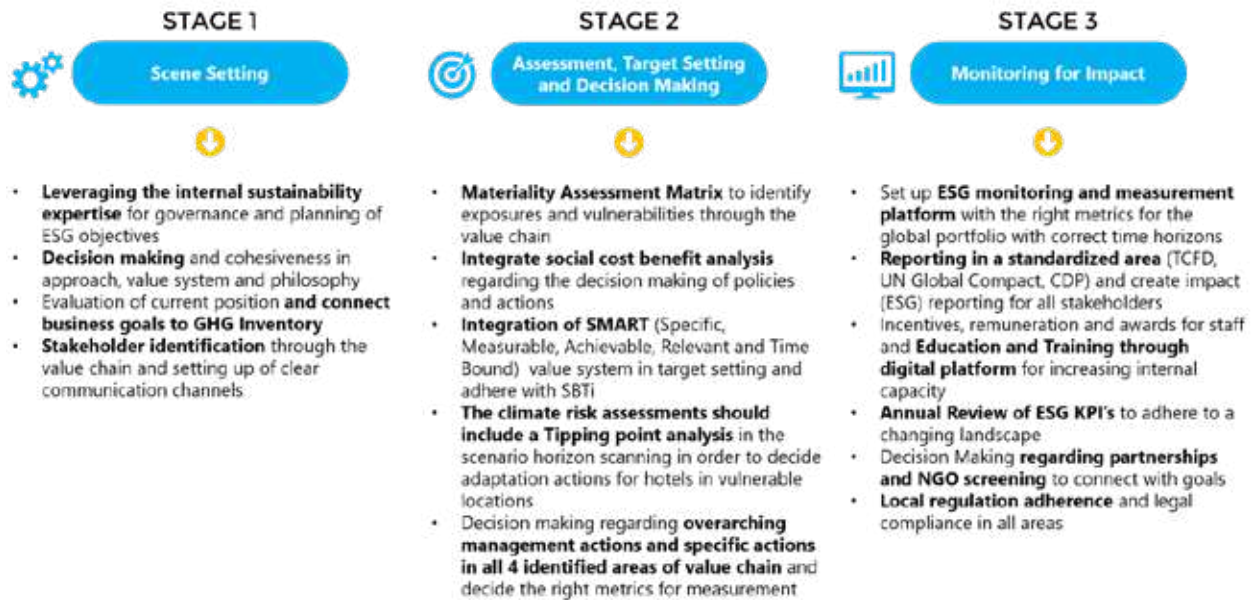
carbon offsetting opportunities.

The ESG strategy planning framework highlights the 3-stage pathway as broad-ranging recommendations that provide structure and aid decision making for a variety of industry players for each of the three stages. This is also supplemented by an overarching management map that highlights the crucial role of leadership in navigating execution around systematic ESG integration.

In the creation of the above recommendations, the ESG strategy planning framework attempts to navigate a coherent pathway and provide knowledge assets to structure an ESG strategy that significantly improves internal capacity and organizational culture. It further aims to include important climate metrics in environmental considerations and make deci-




## 3 Stage Pathway of ESG Integration



## OVERARCHING MANAGEMENT ACTION MAP



sions according to science-based targets. Lastly, it strives to create systemic changes that allow standardization and monitoring of impact creation for a more sustainable future.

As the hospitality industry evolves, a commitment to sustainability is no longer optional but an imperative for long-term success and profitability. Embracing responsibility today ensures a brighter and more environmentally conscious future for global hotel chains. 



### ABOUT

Tushar Narula, an experienced sustainability advisor and climate change expert, seamlessly merges ESG principles with high-value investments. Through extensive collaboration and research with industry leaders, he fosters positive policy and decision-making to advance net zero goals. Discover more about his background and early contributions at [www.tusharnarula.in](http://www.tusharnarula.in)



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# Marriott Bonvoy

## A successful industry case study: unlocking a loyalty programme like Marriott Bonvoy



by TEAM MARRIOTT

**A**t the heart of the success of the Marriott Bonvoy programme is the incredibly strong, diverse, and growing portfolio of over 30 brands ranging from midscale, to select service, to extended stay including serviced apartments, premium and luxury brands. Each of Marriott Bonvoy's offerings has a distinctive point of view, and with its rapidly expanding global presence, spanning 8,800 hotels, there is an offering and a place to stay for every traveler and every trip purpose. Marriott Bonvoy, the company's loyalty program, continues to expand with exciting new offerings tailored to meet diverse travel needs.

Marriott International is celebrating a significant milestone, marking 25 years of successful operations in India. Marriott boasts 148 hotels in India and 160 hotels in South Asia, offering over 28,000 rooms and showcasing 17

distinctive brands across 40+ cities. The company has reported exceptional growth throughout 2023 and the beginning of 2024, evidenced by 28 new signings that will contribute over 4,600 rooms to its pipeline. In early January 2024, Marriott introduced the Moxy brand to South Asia, with plans for 13 additional hotels to open in key primary and secondary markets across India. With a burgeoning middle class and increased disposable income, Marriott remains optimistic about the future of travel.

Marriott Bonvoy marks 5 years since its inception and has hit the 200M+ member globally, with 6 million members in India. People today are seeking community and connection by engaging in shared experiences. With its unrivaled array of carefully curated experiences and exclusive access to the world's biggest events, such as the Ed Sheeran 2024 India Tour, Taylor Swift | The Eras Tour, sleepover in a decked-out suite at the Super Bowl, Australian Open where fans joined clinics with Australian tennis legends; and racing around the circuit in a Mercedes-AMG Petronas F1 Team car. Marriott Bonvoy is more than a traditional hotel loyalty program giving members access to the best in entertainment, sports, arts, culture, culinary, wellness, and more, redefining the way people connect and explore the world.

Through Marriott Bonvoy Moments, we offer once-in-a-lifetime opportunities all over the globe. As Official Loyalty Partners to the Ed Sheeran 2024 India Tour, Marriott Bonvoy members got access to unique experiences. Marriott Bonvoy Moments is the platform where members could use their points earned from travel and everyday activities to redeem exclusive experiences. Members could redeem their points for never-done-before guided site tours one day before the concert, while they were also awarded Marriott Bonvoy Lounge passes that gave them elevated viewing access to the concert. This strategic partnership also gave fans and music lovers the opportunity to participate in an exciting sweepstakes with simple registration to the Marriott Bonvoy program.

By leveraging the size and power of the Marriott Bonvoy portfolio and loyalty program, Marriott continually evolves and innovates adding value for members, while simultaneously providing sustained

**By leveraging the size and power of the Marriott Bonvoy portfolio and loyalty program, Marriott continually evolves and innovates adding value for members, while simultaneously providing sustained profitability for owners and franchisees through increasing revenue and decreasing costs.**

profitability for owners and franchisees through increasing revenue and decreasing costs.

In August 2023, Marriott Bonvoy in collaboration with HDFC Bank launched India's first co-brand hotel credit card- the Marriott Bonvoy HDFC Bank Credit Card. The card leverages



the strengths of the two brands, offering consumers an unprecedented array of travel benefits, including Silver Elite Status with Marriott Bonvoy, that comes with benefits such as priority late checkout, exclusive member rates, Marriott Bonvoy bonus points and much more.

Marriott Bonvoy on Wheels (MBOW) has done exceptionally well in India. We have seen an extremely positive uptake in terms of revenue in the food delivery spaces. Since its launch, the platform has been adapting to various global trends and consistently looking for ways to maintain momentum and achieve high engagement levels with customers and guests alike. The service is currently available across 30 cities and close to 90 hotels Pan India.

Masters of Marriott Bonvoy brings culinary maestros from around the globe to Indian audiences, is one of the biggest celebrations of world-class F&B experience. Launched in early 2019, Masters of Marriott Bonvoy partnerships are not only an effort to bring global gastronomic excellence to India but also an opportunity to realize the culinary vision of world-renowned chefs. With the vision of bringing global excellence right to our plates, Masters of Marriott Bonvoy has hosted legendary Chefs such as Heston Blumenthal, Massimo Bottura, the Sühring Twins from Bangkok, and the recently concluded association with Dhamaka from New York – Feb 2023. There is an exciting line-up of global chefs and exclusive dining experiences coming up in 2024.

Shaadi by Marriott Bonvoy launched in 2016 'with the intent of personalizing a complete wedding experience, from the perfect venue and décor to great food and hospitality. This attitude more evident than when we host weddings. 'Shaadi by Marriott Bonvoy Reimagined' is now taking this legacy forward, making wedding experiences more specialized and luxurious. Here, offerings are enhanced with a renewed approach that focuses on personalization and curation, ensuring that each wedding

**'Shaadi by Marriott Bonvoy Reimagined' is now taking this legacy forward, making wedding experiences more specialized and luxurious. offerings are enhanced with a renewed approach that focuses on personalization and curation.**

is a truly unique and unforgettable experience. It is a testament of our commitment to our customers, demonstrating that their special day is just as significant to Marriott as it is to them.

Good Travel with Marriott Bonvoy offers guests meaningful travel experiences and opportunities to forge first-hand connections with local communities and the environment. 16 active resort & city hotels are part of the programme across South Asia Experiences are pre-dominantly focused on Community Engagement and Environmental Protection. E.g., JW Marriott Mussoorie Walnut Grove Resort & Spa supports afforestation through plantation drives. The Sheraton Grande Chennai Resort & Spa has adopted a village school and takes care of all educational requirements for 25-30 children annually. The W Goa works with guests and locals to maintain the upkeep of 400+ year old Chapora Fort, built by the Portuguese. **DI**

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