

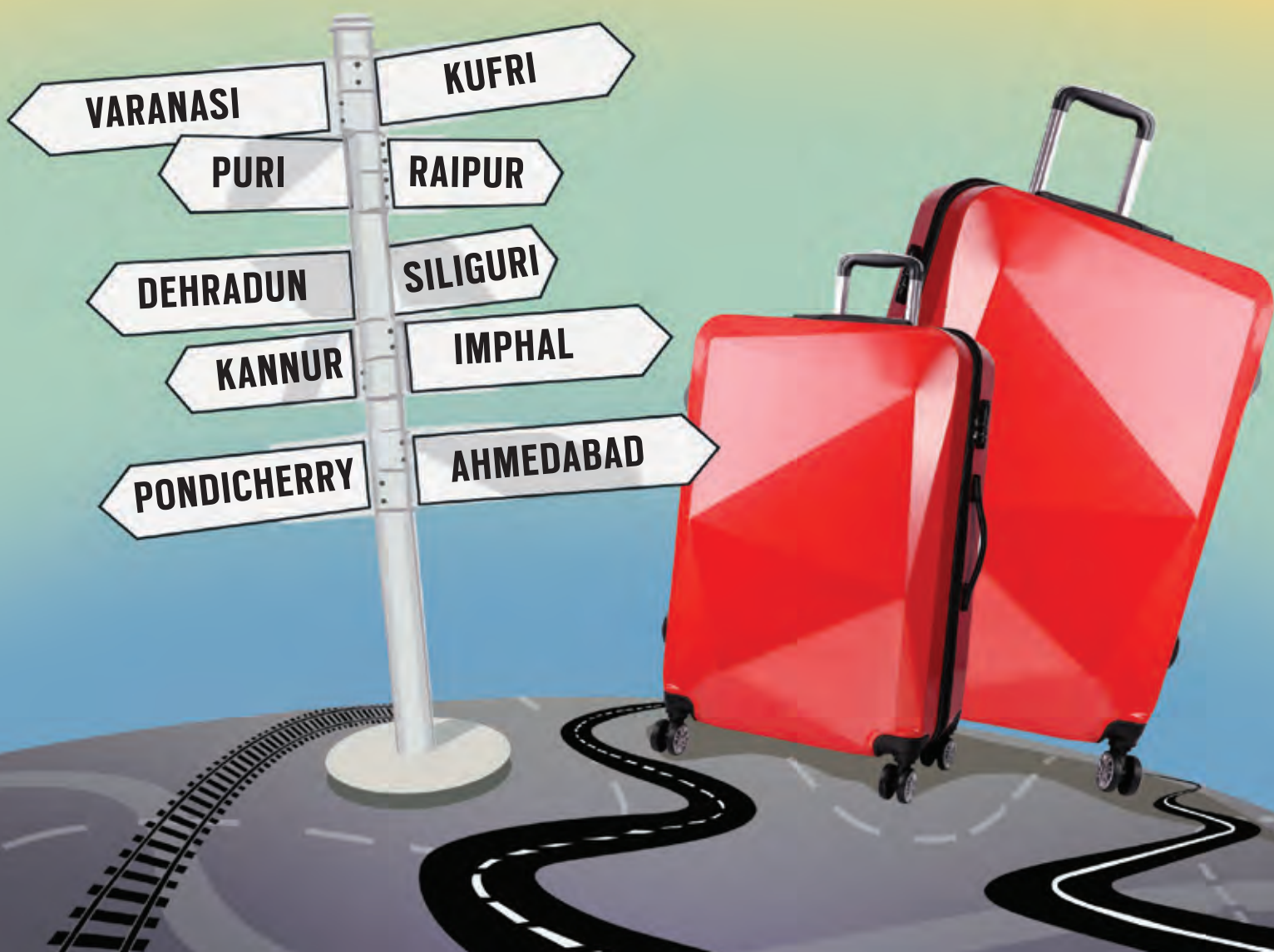


ENGAGE

January - February 2022 | Volume 2 | Issue 1

Desi Vibes

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Regional Footprint





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From the President's Desk

The devastating impact of the pandemic will stay with us in our collective memories for decades to come. But, like with everything else in life, the show must go on. As commerce pushes forward and moves beyond the crisis, travel and tourism too will show strong revival, with the united efforts of all stakeholders.

As the budget laid out a blueprint to steer the economy, HAI was at the forefront, making representations to the government with the industry's long standing demands. The fillip to infrastructure will indirectly support travel and tourism, and the government's move to extend the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) up to March 2023 and earmark an additional Rs 50,000 crore for hospitality and related sectors is a step in the right direction. However, we remain hopeful for more direct interventions to position the sector for growth.

The industry now looks ahead and gets ready to face the new environment that is emerging. Given India's rich cultural and historical heritage, variety in ecology, places of natural beauty spread across the country, tourism in India has significant potential. Its travel market is projected to reach US\$ 125 billion by FY27 from an estimated US\$ 75 billion in FY20.

With domestic demand leading tourism, there is an exponential increase in experiential categories such as off-beat holiday spots, wellness breaks, alternate accommodations and culture and local activities. India is now re-exploring domestic locations — and this is a big segment of opportunity for regional tourism. Many new circuits and destinations have shone on the tourism map in the last two years and more have the potential to leave their mark.

Adapting to factors that are shaping the future of the hospitality, projects under development will also need to reconsider their planning and business models and adjust to the new age of travel. On the other hand, regional growth can impact tourism in a big way. The more the tourist footfall in a region or area, the more it needs to be developed and thus development has to be across all fields and sectors of travel, be it historical places, hotels, nature reserves, roads or airports, railways connections and environments. Such progress can be of special significance in marginal areas that are relatively isolated, economically under developed and have unemployment challenges. Some hotels are expanding their regional footprint, as explained in our lead story of this Issue.

Moreover, with international travel resuming, travellers will have newer options to discover all that India has to offer and regional markets would have found newer audiences.

Let us work together to build a new chapter in India's tourism history.

Wishing you all great tidings. **HAI**



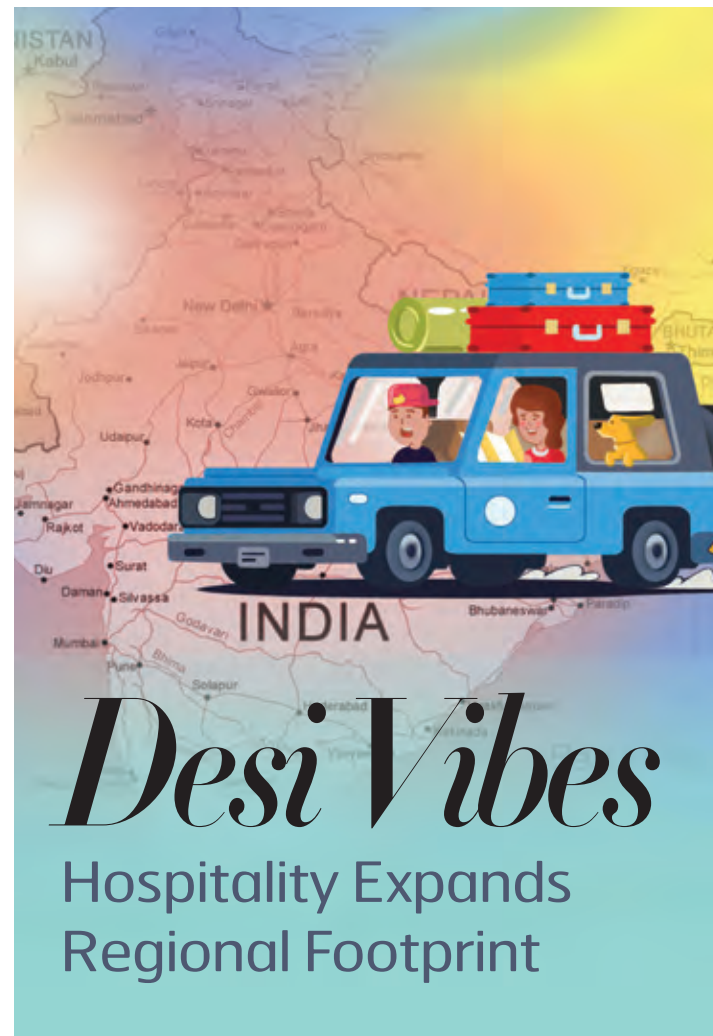
PUNEET CHHATWAL
President, Hotel Association of India
MD & CEO, The Indian Hotels Company Limited

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KB Kachru, Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, is an industry doyen. He has steered one of the leading hotel companies in the country, setting new benchmarks in Hospitality, and pioneering growth in metro cities and Tier II & III locations. He talks on the emerging trends.



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Emerging Stronger from the Covid Crisis



It's important to adapt swiftly to the changing environment to achieve the sector's full potential. Hoteliers who can think outside the box and implement unconventional business ideas will stand out.

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UTTARAKHAND:
Soulful Meanderings

There is so much in the charming hill state to see and experience, so much enterprise to admire, and, most of all, so much to feel soulful affinity with. The abode of the Gods, as it's called, is breathtaking in many ways. A visit can help you rejuvenate, with a renewal of perspective, and a broadening of outlook. Completely unmissable!



The Last Word

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Ring out the old,
Ring in the New

The industry has faced yet another year of struggle, battling misconceptions, unforeseen circumstances and different pandemic waves. Embracing automation, pivoting to sustainable practices and vast skilling/reskilling will help to rebuild faster.



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Govt. extends Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme



The hospitality sector got a special mention in Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharam's budget speech. The government has extended the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) up to March 2023, and its guarantee cover expanded by Rs 50,000 crore, to a total of Rs 5 lakh crore with the additional amount being earmarked exclusively for hospitality and related sectors.

ePassport

The introduction of the revolutionary ePassport will boost international travel and kickstart faster revival. This is also expected to reduce the

time spent at immigration counters globally which is usually longer due to physical checks of all traveler related details. The ePassport will also help in reducing the circulation of fake passports.

Infrastructure Development

The infrastructure proposals will help the entire tourism eco-system in the long run. Therefore, the focus on infrastructure development, the National Ropeways Development Programme, plan to develop 400 new generation Vande Bharat trains and expansion of national highway network by 25,000 kms, by 2022-23 under the Gati Shakti scheme, is a welcome sign.

The Drone Shakti scheme to promote start-ups and Rs 6,000 crore allocated to boost MSMEs are also promising measures.

The Indian Hotel industry is one of the biggest employers of human resources in the country, employing 10 per cent of the total employment directly and millions indirectly, providing 8% of the GDP. It provides jobs to 4.5 crore people and livelihoods to around 16 crore people in total. The industry is reeling under the repeated pandemic waves, and so the new measures announced along with relaxations of restrictions should provide the much-needed relief. **HAI**

Incredible India

Ministry of Tourism
Government of India
Eastern Regional Office, Kolkata

75
Azadi Ka
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SUNDERBAN
NATIONAL PARK
WEST BENGAL



SUN TEMPLE,
KONARK
ODISHA

Tourism gets industry status in Rajasthan

The tourism and hospitality sector will be accorded the status of the industry in Rajasthan. Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot announced in the state budget, saying it has been a long-pending demand and the decision will give support to the sector. He further launched the Rajasthan Rural Tourism Scheme to promote tourism in rural areas.



Raising tourism GST concerns

FAITH, the policy federation of all the national associations representing the complete tourism, travel, and hospitality industry of India (ADTOI, ATOAI, FHRAI, HAI, IATO, ICPB, IHHA, ITTA, TAAI, TAFI) has requested the Union Tourism Minister to take up the GST rates issues of tourism, travel & hospitality with the Group of Ministers (GoM) evaluating the entire GST rates structure.



SaffronStays clocks in 200 private vacation homes across India

SaffronStays, a seven-year-old network of private vacation homes across the country, has reached a milestone count of 200 homes. Of these, 60 homes were added in the last four months (Oct '21 to Jan '22), accounting for a 43% growth during this period.

From heritage homes to luxurious beachfront getaways, lakeside-riverside villas, homes with Grecian whites, and infinite valley view villas among several others, the brand has a collection of exclusive homes with a variety of experiences. Talking about the expansion, Devendra Parulekar, Founder, SaffronStays, said, "While 2020 was about surviving Covid-19, and 2021-22 was about deepening and focussing on a cluster approach in an independent market like Maharashtra, and constantly raising our service and quality standards, 2022-23 will be all about pan-India expansion, without compromising on the quality of experience that guests love us for. Our plan is to continue adding 15 to 20 homes a month in 16 chosen sectors across seven Indian states."

However, the brand's growth is not just limited to quantitative progress. In the last two years, SaffronStays has also taken the time out to work on its quality. For instance, it introduced the 'House of Brands' concept, which focuses on structuring the homes under three categories – SaffronStays, Signature & X Series.



Thomas Cook India, travel operators have witnessed a fourfold rise in the number of queries in the past 15 days. Customers have started planning their summer holidays, with Europe, in particular, seeing high demand, the company said. Rajiv Kale, president and country head, holidays, meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE).



Travel cos eye summer of revival in international tours

With countries easing border restrictions and India set to resume scheduled interna-

tional flights from 15 March, travel companies expect a rush this summer. According to

Omicron hits hotel businesses, but fails to dent expansion plans

Loss due to booking cancellations and slowdowns are anticipated to run into Rs. 200 crore, if not more, for the industry, as per various analyst estimates

Hotels and hospitality majors are keeping their fingers crossed as they prepare for the "sharp V-shaped recovery towards the latter half of Q4-FY22" (and into FY23) once Omicron-led disruptions settle. A plunge in occupancies — to 10-30 per cent — has however, not deterred companies from going ahead with scheduled expansion plans.



Loss due to booking cancellations and slowdowns are anticipated to run into Rs. 200 crore, if not more, for the industry, as per various analyst estimates.

A top official at one of India's ma-

ior hotel chains said Omicron-driven dip in consumer sentiments saw businesses come down to 50-60 per cent levels over what it witnessed during the October-December quarter.



CHEF'S SPECIAL RECIPES, NOW MADE EASY!



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Our Italian Range

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“Consumer behavior has evolved, leading to newer trends”

KB Kachru, Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, is an industry doyen, steering one of the leading hotel companies in the country, setting new benchmarks in Hospitality, and pioneering growth in metro cities and Tier II & III locations. He talks on the emerging trends:

What is Radisson's unique contribution to the Hospitality scene in India?

At Radisson Hotel Group, we've spent the last 20 years adding value to India's hospitality ecosystem through empathy, transparency, and our “Yes I Can!” spirit. Our philosophy is inspired, imaginative, and focused on guests' well-being and making them feel at home.

Today, we have 104 hotels in India and are present in more than 60 locations including all major metro cities and Tier-II centres with good connectivity, trade, and tourist interests. We are dedicated to delivering a high-quality experience to our guests while driving successful businesses for our owner partners. Through years of operations, we've created thousands of job opportunities and with a healthy pipeline of 12 to 15 openings every year, we are working towards creating over 6,000 new job opportunities in the next three years.

We are focused on training our staff and equipping them with resources and educational materials to upskill them. All these efforts have helped us retain and grow consumer confidence. We continue to work towards strengthening the hospitality ecosystem in India by building inroads in Tier II, III, IV cities and developing them as tourist hubs in the near future.

How has the Group handled the Covid setback?

When the pandemic broke, we put Safety and Flexibility at the core of our strategy.



We implemented a 20-step protocol for hotels and a 10-step protocol for meetings and events in partnership with SGS – the world's leading inspection, verification, testing, and certification company.

The swift implementation of our India Unification Plan has worked very strongly in our favour during the pandemic. It's our operational architecture to derive excellence and create value for every stakeholder. We introduced 20 initiatives across Operations, Guest Experience, F&B, People & Procurement.

Simultaneously, we launched a slew of new service offers such as contactless check-ins, digital menus, individually packaged hygienic food, and healthcare training to adapt to the “new normal”. Most aspects of guest service, relationship management, and asset utilization have been reimagined and are being integrated with technology solutions.

What are the expansion plans?

We represent one of the most widely connected domestic networks in India today. We are present within a 4-5-hour drive across the length and breadth of the country--this is a key strategic advantage

for us. The Group has been growing at an exceptional momentum with plans to open over 60 hotels in the next five years.

A significant size of our portfolio caters to the leisure segment, with our hotels being market leaders in many destinations like Alibaug, Karjat and Mamallapuram. We are devoted to strengthening our presence in key leisure destinations.

We introduced two new brands in 2021: Radisson Individuals, with the first hotel announced as Classic Grande Imphal, a member of Radisson Individuals and Radisson RED in India with the first Radisson RED hotel in Chandigarh, Mohali. With Radisson Individuals, our newest affiliation brand, we have been equipped with speed to market. The brand will help us expand our portfolio and go into newer destinations and explore newer investor relationships. Radisson RED will support our repositioning efforts and our expansion plans into the leisure market and usher in a new culture of unconventional, bold and unique hospitality.

We have a robust pipeline for the future and will continue our growth trajectory with 12-15 hotel signings and 10-12 hotel openings every year.

With Radisson Individuals, our newest affiliation brand, we have been equipped with speed to market. The brand will help us expand our portfolio and go into newer destinations and explore newer investor relationships

What can add momentum to market recovery and how should hotels tap this opportunity?

The hospitality industry has displayed great resilience and optimism to overcome unprecedented challenges brought by the Covid-19 outbreak. Although the industry was adversely impacted by the imposition of the lockdown, hotels are now prepared to host their guests once again by transforming the hospitality landscape to meet the ever-changing consumer trends and expectations.

Hotels are investing in enhancing their preparedness through advanced technological solutions, refined skillsets, and a safety-focused approach to meet the current needs of the customer. While our staff continues to operate post being fully vaccinated, we need to ensure that guests are abiding by safety guidelines. Implementing workplace protocols to enhance hotel hygiene will play a crucial role in the new normal. Multiple hotel chains have significantly invested in collaterals to communicate with their guests at every touchpoint, right from arrival to dining, to even the rooms. Hoteliers are also mandating digital display screens across the hotel premises to ensure that visitors are adhering to safety and social distancing guidelines.



Quick Take

Your inspiration?
Mr MS Oberoi

Advice for aspiring hoteliers?
Stay agile, stay grounded, and develop a sixth sense for anticipating the needs of your guests.

Five places to visit in India
Kashmir
Mahabalipuram
Jodhpur
Pondicherry
Varanasi



A favourite quote?
“Raise your words, not voice. It is rain that grows flowers, not thunder.” – Rumi

Favourite holiday destination?
My hometown – Kashmir. It allows me to be one with nature.



What are the big trends in Hospitality now?

The consumer today is more aware and thus looks for value driven experiences with safety and hygiene being a top priority. Over the years, consumer behavior has evolved leading to the emergence of newer trends across the globe and as a result, the industry is constantly innovating to meet the demands of new-age consumers.

Domestic hotels are getting a boost with “workcations” becoming a new trend. Tourists are opting for unexplored local and domestic destinations while walking and cycling clubs are becoming new ways of exploring a city. The rise of domestic tourism since the onset of Covid-19 has remained a strong business aggregator for the industry. Leveraging and propagating the benefits of India’s natural environment, its wellness systems, naturopathy, Ayurveda, the practice of Yoga, meditation and promoting Indian traditional cuisine, will continue to be an asset in this journey towards recovery.

Leisure travel will lead the comeback in the tourism and travel sector. Leisure travel will continue leading the industry towards recovery but what will solidify this trend is embedding consumer trust by consistently assuring reliability in terms of safety and hygiene. As guest behaviours and needs evolve and bring permanent changes to business environments, we must be prepared to exceed their expectations.

Growing demand for mid-scale and luxury hotels for weddings. Restrictions and limitations on social gatherings have

With a healthy pipeline of 12 to 15 openings each year, we are working towards creating over 6,000 new job opportunities in the next three years

resulted in Indian weddings getting leaner. This has led people to opt for trusted names in the hospitality sector within India.

Travel has become more individualized. Personalization will remain the most important way to deliver delight, long after the pandemic is behind us. Moving ahead, technology will be a concrete and fundamental solution to achieve the goal of attaining contactless hospitality. Sustainable practices paired with viable commercial strategies, will be the strongest pillars that hold the industry above waters during these times.

What transformations have you seen in the industry over the last two-three decades?

In the past 20 years, many facets of the hotel industry have shifted, to adapt to new technology and changing consumer behaviour, which has, in turn, changed how hoteliers conduct business. The dot-com boom was the first aggregator in this transformation.

Today, the end-to-end journey of a guest is managed online. Early 2000 also marked the inception of Online Travel Agencies (OTAs), which not only reduced the turnaround time to plan and execute a trip but also made travel accessible to the masses. This ultimately encouraged more

and more people to undertake travel.

Another interesting development took place in the beginning of the 21st century that can be easily called the turning point in the history of the hotel industry in India. It was during this period that many renowned international chains entered the field, and many big Indian players subsequently upped the ante sensing competition. This also led to a shift from the focus on luxury hospitality in select destinations to the surge in affordable travel with wide offerings in many Tier-II and III cities. The growth of the MICE segment has also become

a major game-changer over the years. The Indian hospitality industry has taken several strides towards developing a robust MICE facility and today its contribution reflects heavily in the bottom line.

Lastly, the shift in the mindset of the Indian audience to immerse themselves in the culture, traditions, and language of a place. Today, guests want to see the “real” side of the destinations they visit. Guests today want an experience that feels local, secure combined with the comforts and dependability offered by an international brand of repute.

What green initiatives have been undertaken at the Radisson?

Radisson Hotel Group has been doing its bit to reverse climate change and has always showcased a commitment towards the environment by being a responsible corporate entity. I am happy to share that we recently partnered with SunFuel and added one more amenity – the provision of captive EV Charging Stations across all our hotels in India. All RHG partner hotels will be made EV-friendly at the chain level.

As the group grows, with 100+ hotels in India and counting, it is even more important that we at Radisson Hotel Group stay true to our roots and values. With this new offering, we have not merely added one more amenity to our hotels but have created a visible EV-charging infrastructure that will catalyze behavior modification among non-EV-users – prompting them to consider choosing an electric car in their next purchase. **HAI**



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Make products in a way that builds a circular and inclusive economy.



POSITIVE CHOICES

Inspire people through our foods and beverages brands to make choices that create more smiles for them and the planet.





Regional Forays

A growing number of leisure hotel chains, that previously counted on foreign tourists, have now shifted gaze to tap the potential of domestic tourism. They are expanding their footprint in Tier II and Tier III cities. With promise of better roads and infrastructure, remote areas too have a better chance of welcoming big players now. Travellers, who will risk a post Covid-19 journey, will look out for quality leisure stays even in small towns and cities that earlier did not have too many leisure stay options. Desi travel offers a big zone of opportunity to hotels.

BY NITI SINGH

Radisson Blu Hotel
Guwahati



T

he Hospitality sector is facing its worst crisis ever, with many Hotels finding the going tough with virtually no visitors for months. Many have shut down. The industry has reported losses of Rs 1.40 lakh crore, and around five crore jobs have been lost due to the pandemic. The first lockdown and the restrictions shut down the sector for nearly eight months. The respite after the second wave proved short-lived as the third wave again dashed hopes. Moreover, there have been additional burdens related to sanitising of premises and fresh trainings for staff concerning new protocols in socially distanced times. All hotels have been forced to rethink their plans.

When faced with challenges, a better perspective is to see the glass half full. Due to Covid restrictions, the 2.5 crore people who were travelling abroad from India suddenly became a huge source market. The rise in alternate accommodation, workcations, long stays, weekend breaks and villa tourism are the new ways Indians are exploring their country. In line with Prime Minister Modi's call for "DekhoApnaDesh", there has been enough government interest in propelling

"Our primary focus will be to open more leisure destinations and strengthen our domestic network... Nearly 60% of our development pipeline constitutes our mid-segment brand over the next three years"

ZUBIN SAXENA

MD & VP Operations, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group



regional tourist circuits. The government has announced to develop 17 iconic tourist sites in India into world-class destinations. These include Taj Mahal and Fatehpur Sikri (Uttar Pradesh), Ajanta & Ellora (Maharashtra), Humayun's Tomb, Red Fort and Qutub Minar (Delhi), Colva (Goa), Amer Fort (Rajasthan), Somnath and Dholavira (Gujarat), Khajuraho (Madhya Pradesh), Hampi (Karnataka), Mahabalipuram (Tamil Nadu), Kaziranga (Assam), Kumarakom (Kerala) and the Mahabodhi Temple (Bihar).

There are plenty of options for domestic tourists. There are old nooks and corners in small cities, or remote hill towns, where life goes on in the slow lane, where one can seek relaxing moments, to rest and recuperate. Or, one may just visit old towns and discover small joys of drinking tea with the locals, interact with craftsmen, gaze at the stars.

The pandemic has made it necessary to reimagine all sectors and to pivot in a contactless world. Thematic creatives on niche tourism products are being used in campaigns now to cater to diverse consumer interests. These include TV commercials on

The Radisson Group has introduced new menus, and added leisure activities like star-gazing, zorbing, floating breakfasts, speedboat transfers, champagne welcome, and so on, at their beach-facing properties

yoga, wellness, wildlife, luxury, cuisine and local delights. Both big and small Hospitality groups are turning their gaze towards desi visitors, who may be looking for short stays close to home. Despite the pandemic setback, there are still some Hotel chains that have not shelved expansion plans.

The Radisson Hotel Group, for instance, opened their 100th hotel in India in 2021. This year their plan is to offer more leisure destinations and strengthen the domestic network with openings in Goa, Pondicherry, Kufri, Kumbalgarh and Nathdwara.

Says Zubin Saxena, Managing Director and Vice-President Operations, South Asia–Radisson Hotel Group: “We plan to open more leisure destinations and strengthen our domestic network. We have been early entrants in many Tier II and Tier III markets and more than 50% of our business comes from non-metros. We are also looking at expansion in Tier III, IV, and V centres that offer strategic business opportunities.”

He adds: “Nearly 60% of our development pipeline constitutes our mid-segment brand over the next three years. We will continue enhancing our portfolio with brands like Radisson Individuals and Radisson RED.”

He says that personalisation will remain the most important way to deliver delight, long after the pandemic is behind us. “Sustainable practices paired with viable commercial strategies will be the strongest pillars that hold the industry above waters during these times. The rise of domestic tourism since the onset of Covid-19 has remained a strong business aggregator for the industry,” he adds. Saxena says they are adding new menus and leisure activities like star-gazing, zorbing, floating breakfasts, speedboat transfers, champagne welcomes, and so on, to delight the domestic tourist.

Lemon Tree is planning hotels in Agra, Bokaro, Rishikesh, Shimla, Sonmarg, Trivandrum, Ludhiana, Gulmarg, Darjeeling, and Ahmedabad in the coming two years. Vikramjit Singh, President, Lemon Tree Hotels Limited, says it makes economic sense to develop hotels in smaller towns and cities. “They are far more resilient and have seen demand come back much faster. We are aggressively targeting growth in Tier II and III locations in an asset-light fashion.”

According to Singh, the surge in regional growth is because guests now prefer to take small breaks in or near the cities they reside in. “Staycations are a big business segment today and will give city hotels the much-needed filler business on weekends. With people being locked up in their homes, OTT platforms provided the much-needed relief and with that emerged



Radisson Resort & Spa Lonavala

“The surge in regional growth is because guests now prefer to take small breaks in or near the cities they reside in... smaller cities are more resilient and have seen demand bounce back faster”

VIKRAMJIT SINGH
President,
Lemon Tree Hotels
Limited



Rest Assured Initiative at Lemon Tree Hotels

Lemon Tree is planning hotels in Agra, Bokaro, Rishikesh, Shimla, Sonmarg, Trivandrum, Ludhiana, Bokaro, Gulmarg, Darjeeling, and Ahmedabad in the coming two years

Espire Hospitality aims to have 20 hotels in their portfolio by the end of 2023. Country Inn Tarika Riverside Resort at Jim Corbett is the brand's second resort in the region and they are set to expand their footprint in over 12 other locations this year, including Goa, Dehradun, Mussoorie, Varanasi and Vrindavan.



Country Inn Tarika Riverside Resort, Jim Corbett

the movie crew business for hotels. Hotels being used as workspaces is another big trend now,” he says.

He points out that there's a difference in running hotels in Tier II cities compared to the metros. “We have seen that the recovery in Tier II & III cities has been faster. The hotels in these cities are not dependent on the IT sector for their business. Moreover, these cities rely on the SME/MSME segments and this has seen robust recovery. Marriages and small party events too have been a big contributor to local business as restrictions have been relaxed in smaller towns earlier compared to the metros due to lower infection rates.”

As tastes and preferences are evolving, another area they have tapped into is day-use accommodation and work areas with business facilities and high-speed WIFI for short stays, and for those for whom it may not be convenient to work from home, due to personal reasons or infrastructure limitations. “These days, WFH could mean work from hotel too. Thus, we are exploring the ‘bleisure’ market,” says Singh.

Says Akhil Arora, Chief Operating Officer, Espire Hospitality, the owning company of Six Senses Fort Barwara and Country Inn Hotels and Resorts: “We foresee an increase in domestic tourism and are targeting leisure markets that have shown consistent demand over the years and have limited seasonality variances, like Goa, Udaipur, Rishikesh and Jim Corbett. While full recovery of the hospitality industry will take time, leisure locations such as ours will bounce back sooner,” says Arora.

They aim to have 20 hotels in their portfolio by the end



“We foresee an increase in domestic tourism and are targeting leisure markets that have shown consistent demand over the years with limited seasonality variances, like Goa, Udaipur, Rishikesh and Jim Corbett”

AKHIL ARORA
COO, Espire Hospitality

Mayfair Hotels & Resorts offers curated private dinners that can be organised at exclusive areas of the properties. At Mayfair Tea Resort, Siliguri, guests may experience the entire process of tea making, from the garden to the cup



Mayfair Gangtok



"There is an increase in the number of groups taking breaks at our resorts in the Siliguri-Darjeeling-Kalimpong-Gangtok circuit, and at Puri and Gopalpur-on-Sea. Our hotels at Bhubaneswar and Raipur have also seen more visitors"

POOJA RAY

Managing Director, Mayfair Hotels & Resorts

of next year. Their recently opened Country Inn Tarika Riverside Resort, Jim Corbett, the brand's second resort in the area, and are planning hotels in Goa, Dehradun, Mussoorie, Varanasi and Vrindavan.

Mayfair Hotels & Resorts is bolstering presence in the East and Central India with more properties in Guwahati, Darjeeling, West Bengal and Odisha. In addition to this, they will be relocating their presence in Goa with a property on the beach at Morjim.

"There has been an increase in the number of groups taking breaks at our resorts in the Siliguri-Darjeeling-Kalimpong-Gangtok circuit, and at Puri and Gopalpur-on-Sea. Our hotels at Bhubaneswar and Raipur have also seen more local visitors choosing to stay for not just weekends, but weekdays too," says Pooja Ray, Managing Director, Mayfair Hotels & Resorts.

At Mayfair Tea Resort, Siliguri, they offer the unique experience of witnessing the entire process of tea making, from the garden to the cup. Additionally, they are launching their own signature Mayfair blend of teas, a small part of the Mayfair experience that guests can take home. The Mayfair Lake Resort at Raipur offers a unique cruising experience where guests can enjoy sunsets on Jhanjh Lake, on which the resort is located. Cultural and offbeat custom tours are also arranged at the properties.

The Kerala-based CGH Earth, that operates 16 boutique hotels, resorts and ayurvedic centres, focusses on experiential holidays. Michael Dominic, CEO, CGH Earth Experience Hotels, says: "Our market was almost 80% international during pre-Covid times. Due to the pandemic, the focus is on the domestic market, and we have seen the emergence of a large population of the Kerala market holidaying with us. This was not the case earlier. We have been promoting Long-stays and Private Holidays with CGH Earth. Our pet-friendly hotels encourage people, who cannot leave home without their pets to stay with us."



"Our market comprised 80% international visitors during pre-Covid times. Due to the pandemic, the focus is on the domestic market, and a larger population of the Kerala market is holidaying with us now"

MICHAEL DOMINIC

CEO, CGH Earth Experience Hotels



CGH Earth Experiences

The journey too counts. India has been ranked among the top ten countries in the world for the best cross-country road trips in a survey conducted for 118 countries by Holidu, the vacation homes aggregator



The Swosti Group of Orissa is all set to get a new address with the latest offering, the 125-room Swosti Premium Beach Resorts, the first five-star premium luxury beach resort at Sipasurubuli, Puri. The highlight of the property is a state-of-the-art wellness spa and gym and a Sky lounge bar, situated at a height of 150ft above ground level, overlooking the Bay of Bengal. "The new Swosti Premium Beach Resorts will give direct employment to 375 people and indirectly employ around 700 people," says JK Mohanty, CMD, Swosti Group. He says the Hotels situated in tier II cities, beaches, lakes and eco resorts are doing better than the metros where rate competition is a drawback. To capitalise on the domestic tourism boom, they have given a new look to Swosti Premium.

To boost Hospitality and Tourism, many historical sites and monuments can be buzzing with cultural and entertainment activities, with events that cause no harm to monuments, and yet allow people a memorable experience. Some of these monuments were opened for adoption in 2017 under the Ministry of Tourism's Adopt a Heritage scheme and the Red Fort was adopted by the Dalmia Group, the Qutub Minar and the Ajanta Caves by Yatra Online, and so on. Many big chains are thus eyeing the regional tourism markets.

Travelling is just not about the destination, the journey is equally important. To mark moments that matter, it is the detailing that counts. Roads and infrastructure, timely arrival and departure of flights and trains, hotels and lodges, connectivity and access,

"Hotels in tier II cities, beaches, lakes and eco resorts are doing better than the metros where rate competition is a drawback.

The new Swosti Premium Beach Resorts will give direct employment to 375 people and indirectly employ 700 people"

JK MOHANTY
CMD, Swosti Group



ATMs, forex houses to convert foreign currency to rupees, outlets accepting credit cards, certified tourist guides and medical facilities, all go a long way in building tourist confidence. India has been ranked among the top ten countries in the world for the best cross-country road trips in a survey conducted for 118 countries by Holidu, the vacation homes aggregator. The survey was conducted by analysing a variety of factors that anyone looking to plan a road trip will deem important and identified which countries around the world rank the best for these factors. United States was at the top position, Mexico ranked second while Canada occupied the third spot.

Thus, a growing number of small and big hotel chains are enhancing their regional footprint, to encourage local travel. Travellers who will risk a post Covid-19 journey will look out for enjoyable, leisure stays, in safe and hygienic surroundings. **HAI**



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By Mandeep S. Lamba
President (South Asia),
HVS ANAROCK

Emerging Stronger from the Covid Crisis

It's important to adapt swiftly to the changing environment to achieve the sector's full potential. Hoteliers who can think outside the box and implement unconventional business ideas will stand out.

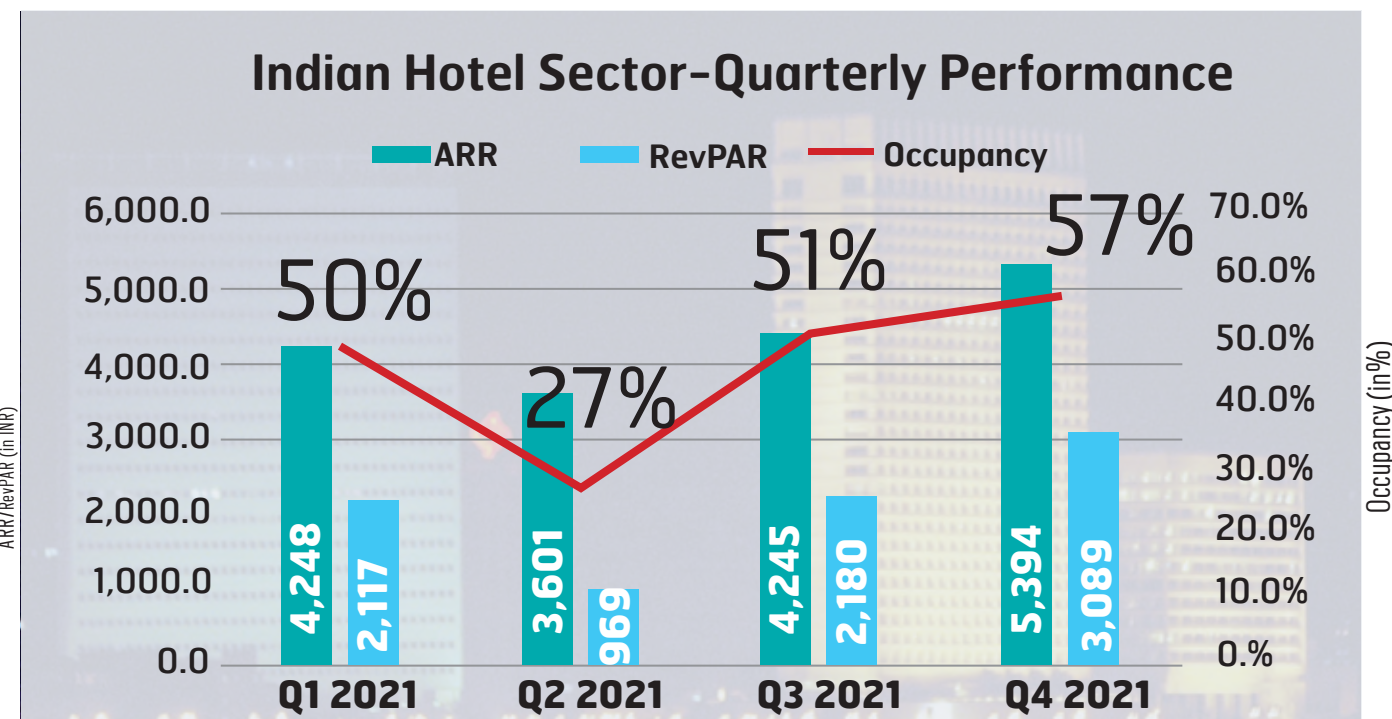
The Indian hotel sector has experienced unparalleled highs, lows, upheavals, and learnings over the previous two years. The sector has come a long way, emerging stronger than ever before, from being caught off guard during the first wave, resulting in single digit occupancy and almost-zero cashflows at most properties, to being more agile, thinking outside the box, and accepting new ideas faster than ever before. To stay afloat, hoteliers have

focused on alternative customer segments and diversified into non-room ancillary revenue streams. Furthermore, their emphasis on cost-cutting and leaner operations, as well as faster technology adoption, will assist the industry achieve higher efficiency even in the future.

These factors helped the sector make steady progress towards recovery in 2021. India-wide occupancy rate for 2021 was 42-46%, with average rates ranging from INR4,300 to INR4,600, resulting in a 24-27% increase in RevPAR over the

previous year.

However, as Covid-19 keeps throwing the sector a few curveballs from time to time, continuing to apply the lessons learned over the last two years and adapting swiftly to the changing environments has become critical to achieve the sector's full potential. Hoteliers who can think outside the box and implement unconventional business ideas will stand out. Here are some trends that we expect will pick up steam going forward.



Source: HVS Research

Domestic tourism will remain the knight in shining armor

Domestic leisure tourism is now being accorded the respect it has always deserved, with hotel companies refocusing their efforts on expanding their foothold at leisure destinations. Even upscale and luxury hotels that previously concentrated on inbound foreign tourists have shifted their focus to the domestic leisure segment, since leisure travel rebounds faster than business travel during a crisis. About 39% of the total hotel signings by keys in 2021 were in leisure destinations compared to 30% in 2019, while business destinations accounted for only 54% of the

Domestic leisure tourism is now being accorded the respect it has always deserved. About 39% of the total hotel signings by keys in 2021 were in leisure destinations compared to 30% in 2019, while business destinations accounted for 54% of the signings by keys in 2021 compared to 63% in 2019



signings by keys in 2021 compared to 63% in 2019.

This trend is expected to accelerate in future, since the potential in domestic leisure segment continues to be untapped, with several emerging tourist places in India still lacking adequate infrastructure, especially high-quality branded hotels. The government has announced major investments in the country's road and rail networks, along with plans to privatize airports in Tier 2 & 3 cities, which will help improve regional and last-mile connectivity to several emerging tourist destinations and encourage hoteliers to tap further into this underserved segment.

Focus on ancillary revenue streams will increase

The hotel sector has generally lagged other travel-related industries when it comes to generating ancillary revenue, focusing mostly on a few additional services such as F&B and spas. However, when room revenue became negligible during the peak of the pandemic, the hotel sector was compelled to find new ways to utilize their assets, resulting in the creation of a host of ancillary revenue streams such as food delivery and DIY meals to name a few. For instance, QMIN, the e-commerce food delivery platform set up by IHCL has done a massive INR 58 crore GMV in the first nine months of the current financial year.

Hoteliers have now understood the true potential of ancillary revenues in growing the top line and should take advantage of the massive untapped potential by utilizing existing infrastructure for newer business opportunities. This could include having dedicated area for co-working spaces, monetizing car parking spaces, deploying electric vehicle (EV) charging stations, leasing kitchens for cloud kitchen requirements during non-peak hours and other similar space and service optimization. Customer engagement and brand loyalty will improve because of this strategy, as will real estate revenue per square foot.

Moreover, hoteliers should continue their efforts on alternative customer segments such as Staycations, which became a means



of survival during the pandemic, and have the potential to become a long-term opportunity. It can help offset seasonality by increasing occupancy in leisure destinations during the off-season and at city hotels on weekends. Staycations, if properly advertised and packaged, can become a crucial differentiator for a hotel, helping generate additional business even after the pandemic.

Flexible hotel design will become popular

Flexible design with increased efficiency is the way forward for hotels in the post-Covid era, as hoteliers invest in best practices and adopt the necessary changes to bounce back stronger post the

pandemic. As hoteliers lift their cleanliness game for the post-pandemic traveller, we foresee fundamental changes in guest rooms — simple aesthetics, use of easy to clean/sanitize, anti-germ materials and floors, and so on. Moreover, after adopting digital keys and menus during the crisis, several hotel companies are now evaluating other technological aspects to revamp their properties to remain relevant in today's fast-changing world. Overbuilding and overspending on hotels have long been a concern in the industry, but we now expect that to change.

Alternative accommodation's popularity is expected to increase manifold

Traveller preferences have changed in the last two years, with several tourists now preferring vacation home rentals and homestays as alternatives to hotels and resorts. These segments provide travellers privacy, security, flexibility, and convenience of a private lodging along with the pleasures and comfort of a hotel, especially for those traveling in small groups or with families and pets. These segments, however, are still highly unorganized with the presence of very few branded hospitality players, especially in the upscale and luxury segment. As a result, new players are likely to enter these segments, particularly for expansion in underserved leisure destinations, due to lower overhead costs and higher profitability than a hotel. IHCL, for instance, has introduced the brand amā Stays & Trails to foray into the country's fast-growing homestays market. Similarly, leading international hotel companies have already diversified into the vacation rental space globally and it is only a matter of time before they do so in India as well.

Sustainability will become more than a buzzword

India plans to become carbon-neutral by 2070, a goal that necessitates unparalleled collaboration across industries, including tourism & hospitality, which are not only victims of the climate crisis, but also major emitters and contributors to global warming. As the sector continues its recovery from the Covid crisis, it has an opportunity to step-up climate action to move toward a greener, more sustainable future.

Finally, sustaining positive travel sentiment and traveller confidence are crucial steps on the road to recovery. The hotel sector has all the necessary Covid-safety tools and policies in place. The sector, however, needs to ensure that the safety standards are followed to the letter by employees and guests alike, even when Covid cases have reduced, and business is excellent. Safety, cleanliness, and hygiene are here to stay, and even a single incident of negligence can jeopardize the entire industry's reputation and growth. **HAI**

**THE EXTRAORDINARY CAN BE WITNESSED
BUT SELDOM DESCRIBED.**

Be it the Northern Lights or The Louvre, there are some experiences that are so enriching that their grandeur can only be witnessed by one and can never be truly described in all their essence. Then again, there are some experiences that are above and beyond the wonders of the world, that even those used to the finest luxuries will feel privileged to experience.

ENJOY RESPONSIBLY

ROYAL SALUTE

INTERNATIONAL

New flagship for Pullman in Paris

Nearly 957 suite rooms and apartments have been renovated between the 8th and 32nd floors. The standard room offers 22m² of private space and up to 60m² for the apartments.



The arrival of this renovated property has allowed the Accor group to integrate a new F&B offer for the first time in Europe:

- Umami Burger (launched in Los Angeles), which will seat up to 280 people in 800 square meters from 6:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m., with a special offer for children on weekends and a delivery service/click&collect
- Fi'Lia, which will open in March, with a focus on Italian cuisine
- The Skybar with a view over Paris on the top floor of the tower, where Guillaume Guerbois is the bar manager
- A bar area located in the lobby will also open soon

Argentinean chef Rafael Casás is taking over as head of the property's restaurant division, continuing a career that was 100% in the hotel industry. He is committed to promote regional cuisine.

Another strong gesture on the part of the owner and the brand, a completely redesigned meeting space that returns to the heart of the property on the 3rd and 4th floors. 50 modular meeting rooms, indoor and outdoor spaces available. A 742m² ballroom with 7m high ceilings, an 800m² green terrace and a 1500m² interactive zone. These are all spaces with a strong identity that reflect the desire to regain an important place in the Parisian event market.

The property is part of the redesign of the neighborhood with the birth of Les Ateliers Gâté, supported by Unibail Rodamco Westfield, which includes stores, restaurants and services (nursery, co-working with Wojo), offices and housing, a library, a parking area and finally a 5,000 sq.m. Food Court with 35 counters on three levels, making it the largest in Europe. More broadly, the Montparnasse Tower and its neighborhood will also be redeveloped between now and the 2024 Olympic Games.

UK backs sustainable cooling in Indian hotels

Six new cooling technologies are to be trialled at hotels in India, backed by up to \$500,000 in funding from the UK government.

Six cutting-edge innovators have been selected to partner with Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL), to pilot new cost-effective, climate-smart cooling technologies, as part of the International Finance Corporation's (IFC) TechEmerge programme.

The IFC programme, which is funded by the UK Government's International Climate Finance (ICF), matches innovators across the world

with leading companies in emerging markets to accelerate the adoption of solutions that make cooling more affordable and energy-efficient, while mitigating greenhouse gas emissions.

The technologies – five being developed by Indian companies and one by an Israeli company – are being piloted at seven IHCL Taj hotels over the next 12-18 months.



Nobu hospitality to debut hotel and restaurant in Santorini

A new luxury scheme is coming to the beautiful island of Santorini in the Cyclades.

Nobu Hospitality has announced plans to open Nobu Hotel and Restaurant Santorini in spring 2022. It comes after the global luxury lifestyle brand struck a long-term management agreement with conglomerate MonteRock International.

Alfredo Longo, CEO of MonteRock International, said: "We are really proud of the rock-solid collaboration we are having with Nobu brand throughout the years, and we are now more than delighted to expand together in the hospitality industry. In this incredible 'canvas' such as the island of Santorini, the finest of what Nobu lifestyle and cuisine have to offer would be served in a 'picture-perfect setting', catering to every need at the highest standards."

Nobu Hotel and Restaurant Santorini will be the brand's 26th hotel around the world and tenth in Europe alone.

A clifftop retreat

Guests can expect to find an expansive hospitality offering that includes a Nobu restaurant, dual-level infinity pool and full-service spa, as well as a fitness centre and five luxury pool villas. From its clifftop location in Imerovigli, just 20 minutes away from Santorini (Thira) International Airport, the hotel will provide panoramic views of both the caldera and the Aegean Sea.

Trevor Horwell, CEO of Nobu Hospitality said: "We are very excited to be coming to Santorini and to work with the local community on this exciting project."

"Santorini is one of the most highly regarded destinations in the world with its rare beauty, famed for its distinctive cuisine, whitewashed architecture set with a backdrop of steep cliffs, and dramatic sunsets lighting the sea and sky. We look forward to inviting locals and international travellers alike to experience the Nobu lifestyle in this special destination."

Destination



UTTARAKHAND

Soulful Meanderings

There is so much in the charming hill state to see and experience, so much enterprise to admire, and, most of all, so much to feel soulful affinity with. The abode of the Gods, as it's called, is breathtaking in many ways. A visit can help you rejuvenate, with a renewal of perspective, and a broadening of outlook. Completely unmissable!

By Pramati Anand

UTTARAKHAND is often referred to as "Devbhoomi" or the land of gods, due to the numerous Hindu temples and pilgrimage sites found across the region. But the surreal beauty of the Himalayas is its biggest attraction. The mountain state is also home to the breathtaking Valley of

Flowers National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site; the mighty Nanda Devi, the second-highest peak in India; Jim Corbett, famous for having the highest number of tigers among Indian national parks; the Kedarnath temple, the holiest shrine of Lord Shiva; pristine treks like Brahmatal, Ali Bedni Bugyal, Kedarkantha; the snow-covered slopes of Auli, and many other

breathtaking vistas! The hill folk are simple people, but nearly all have access to organic cropping, and live a healthy life amid pine-scented air. The variety in cuisine and local festivals make it a place to visit again and again. There are no full stops to Uttarakhand. There's enough to stir everyone's interest. A look at some outstanding vignettes from the state:



GANGA AARTI AT HAR KI PAURI

The sacredness associated with the Ganga river is celebrated with a beautiful spectacle - the Ganga aarti. On the ghats of Har-ki-Pauri, in Haridwar, priests hold large fire bowls in their hands while the temple bells ring and the area bursts into chants and devotional hymns. Thousands of people come here to witness and seek the blessings of the river. A carpet of flowers and diyas float onto the river at dusk, and the fire illuminates the night sky. The aarti happens daily, from 6-7 pm, and is an unforgettable experience.

The sacredness of the river Ganga is celebrated with a beautiful spectacle -- the Ganga aarti. On the ghats of Har-ki-Pauri, in Haridwar, priests hold large fire bowls in their hands while the temple bells ring, and the area bursts into chants and devotional hymns



Haridwar-Photo: Rishu Bhosale



Ganga Aarti at Haridwar



Kedarnath- Photo: Akshay Syal

CHAR DHAM YATRA

The Char Dham Yatra is the journey that Hindu pilgrims take to visit the four holy temples of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri. They are all located in the Garhwal Himalayas. The pilgrimage is believed to help attain the ultimate goal of life, Moksha, or liberation from the cycle of birth and death. The significance of the journey is not just for practicing Hindus, but for anyone who seeks a deeper meaning, who is a seeker at heart. Standing tall at an elevation of 11,755 ft above sea level, the Kedarnath temple is an architectural marvel. Stones are interlocked with each other using iron clamps and without mortar. It has been standing rock-solid for more than 1000 years, and is claimed to have been under snow for more than 400 years during the ice age. The abode of Lord Shiva, as it is also called, is a breathtaking sight, as are the other four temples in the pilgrimage circuit.



Holi- Photo: Yogendra

KUMAONI HOLI

Perhaps, the best kind of travel is the one that opens the heart, where you embrace the people, their beliefs, and the culture that you are exposed to. Holi throughout north India is a mélange of colours, but holi in the hills, especially Kumaon hills, is more about the people and their music!

Travel to any part of Kumaon, and go off the beaten path; explore homestays, or just travel to villages where people come together for several days to celebrate. The uniqueness of the Kumaoni Holi lies in it being a musical affair in the form of Baithki

Holi, Khari Holi, and the Mahila Holi. Baithki Holi (sitting Holi) is a form of musical gathering starting from the day of Basant Panchmi, held across Kumaon till Dulhendi, or the last full moon day of the lunar month Phalguna. The Baithaki Holi songs are based on Classical Music with a heavy influence of Kumaoni folk music traditions.

Khari Holi (standing Holi) is filled with energy, and lots of dancing. The songs of the Khari Holi are sung by people sporting traditional white attire, while

dancing in groups to the tune of ethnic musical instruments like the Dhol and Hurka.

Mahila Holi is an exclusive affair for women, to come together and celebrate all the hues, of life, and nature!

Phool Dei, is another beautiful festival that welcomes springtime with young girls plucking the first flowers of the season and placing them on the doorsteps of their house. The entire hill community comes together to celebrate it with song and dance!

ADVENTURE TREKS

Uttarakhand is not just a cultural and spiritual haven but is as full of adrenaline-pumping activities, and raw pristine nature that can only be reached by taking the road less travelled - trekking along precarious yet stunning routes, that expose you to nature in its rawest and most exhilarating form.

Every turn you take in the mighty Himalayas will offer you a new vision. There are innumerable trek routes in Uttarakhand, for every level of trekker, and every season - yet there are few that are worth exploring.

The Valley of Flowers Trek: In 1980, the Indian government created the Valley of Flowers National Park, and later in 2002, it was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A carpet of flowers dancing in myriad hues will overwhelm your senses there.

The valley is accessible only between June and October and the best time to visit it is between July and mid-August



Trekking in Uttarakhand- Photo: Tejashvi Verma



Valley of flowers trek



Auli - Photo: Aniket Mandish

Uttarakhand is not just a cultural and spiritual haven, but is also full of adrenaline-pumping activities, and raw pristine nature, that can be experienced by taking the road less travelled -- trekking along precarious yet stunning routes, that expose you to nature in its rawest, most exhilarating form



Rafting in Rishikesh-Photo: Narinder Pal

when it is in full bloom. The nearest road is at Govindghat from where you trek 16km to reach the Valley of Flowers. For people looking for longer treks, organizations like Indiahikes have options for 6-day-long treks that take you to an altitude of 14,100 feet till Hemkund Sahib, from 6,234 ft at Govind Ghat. Pindari Glacier Trek, Kedarkantha Trek, Brahmatal Lake Trek, Har Ki Dun- Ruinsara Tal Trek are other treks too offer breathtaking vistas.

Rishikesh is a hub for adventure sports such as river rafting, bungee jumping, rappelling, mountain climbing, while Auli is the place for snow lovers. A landscape covered in white, with pristine slopes rolling in every direction makes Auli one of the best skiing destinations in India.



Jim Corbett- Photo: Jeshika Sinojia



Devprayag- Photo: Ashwini Chaudhary

JIM CORBETT NATIONAL PARK

Uttarakhand has around six National Parks, seven Wildlife Sanctuaries, and one Biosphere Reserve. It is home to rare species of plants and animals, many of which are protected by sanctuaries and reserves. One of these is the tiger reserve at Jim Corbett. Jim Corbett National Park, which is a part of the larger Corbett Tiger Reserve, lies in the Nainital district of Uttarakhand. It is the only

national park in India where you may stay overnight inside the Jungle. Get ready for an early morning jeep safari, slowly crawling through the mysterious morning mist and rare sightings of birds and animals in absolute wilderness. A hotspot for a lot of wildlife photographers and enthusiasts, a trip to Jim Corbett is as adventurous as it's relaxing.

DELIGHTFUL SECRETS

If you are gastronome, a trip to the Kumaoni Farm Cafe should be on your list. Located on a hilltop, this place offers a stunning view of Bhimtal and the mountain range, while you sit around the hearth and watch the locals cook a sumptuous traditional Kumaoni thali. Make sure you have a prior reservation as this place only takes bookings. There are so many beautiful hamlets that never demand any attention to themselves or the people who inhabit them, but are sanctuaries for travellers who just

want to re-connect with nature or spend some quiet time with their families breathing in the crisp mountain air. Nestled amidst pine trees in the Garhwal Himalayas, Lansdowne is an absolute retreat from city life as is the hamlet of Kausani, in the Kumaon Himalayas which gives an impeccable view of the Panchachuli Peaks, Mt Trishul, and Nanda Devi. There is no set route to follow in the land of the gods, turn anywhere and you'll find that magic awaits you.

Perhaps, the best kind of travel is one that opens the heart, where you embrace the people, their beliefs, and the culture that you are exposed to. Holi throughout north India is a mélange of colours, but in the hills, especially in Kumaon, it's more about the people and their music!



Traditional Kumaoni Thali



Kumaoni Dance- Photo: Vijay Kumar Gaba

HOW TO REACH

AIR: There are two airports: Pantnagar Airport at Pantnagar in the Kumaon region; Jolly Grant situated in Dehradun is better connected to Delhi and other cities.

RAIL: Some important junctions include Haridwar, Dehradun, Rishikesh, Nainital, Kotdwar, Kathgodam, Pauri as well as Udham Singh Nagar.

ROAD: Roadways offer the best connectivity in the state. There are well-connected highways like **NH 108, NH 109, NH 119, NH 121, NH 123, and NH 72A** that connect the state with other parts of the country.

Ring out the old, Ring in the New

The industry has faced yet another year of struggle, battling misconceptions, unforeseen circumstances and different pandemic waves. Embracing automation, pivoting to sustainable practices and vast skilling/reskilling will help to rebuild faster.

By MP BEZBARUAH

Secretary General, Hotel Association of India



"For last year's words belong to last year's language and next year's words await another voice."

– TS Eliot.

The hospitality industry so much looks forward to a new experience – another voice – in 2022 after the harrowing travails of a year that is best forgotten! The last year was a year of hope and of frustrations. In the initial stages the industry was looking at signs of revival, but soon as the prolonged pandemic and resultant close downs hit the industry, "survival" again became the predominant concern.

The year was not only of struggle but also of realization of some hard truths. The first was that tourism and hospitality, the sunrise industry, a pillar of development employing 10 per cent of the total employment directly and millions indirectly, providing 8% of GDP, must fend for itself when the chips are down. The industry encountered rude misconception that it is elitist whereas 80 per cent of the industry is composed of MSEs, and this highly capital-intensive sector is exposed to payment of statutory liabilities and revenue expenditure even when the government-imposed restrictions brought income to near zero.

HAI was constantly engaged in a continuing series of activities to create public awareness about the distress of the vital sector, to strengthen advocacy with the government at different levels, to seek meaningful relief and to forge collaboration with other industry organizations to create a single voice for the industry.

The year exposed the utter helplessness of the substantial and most vulnerable sector of the industry – the MSMEs. There was no visible policy for their relief

It soon dawned that policy making in the government is diffused. The Ministry of Tourism was sensitive to the problems of the industry and their solutions, but it was only a catalyst and the power of redressal lay elsewhere – RBI, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Commerce etc. The macroeconomic relief packages passed the sector by. Whatever little came mostly to address the problem of liquidity faced the question of implementation. The banks had their own compulsions and the fine prints stood on the way of substantive relief flowing to the needy. The states had the power to give some relief from statutory dues etc, but there was no single point of approach, each state had its own way of response. Some states did respond, though late but most did not. Again, the greatest hurdle to recovery was the multiplicity of covid protocols and their complexity, lack of cohesion between states and lack of coordination. The pandemic may peter out soon, but the flaws in the system that the experience of the year exposed should not be lost sight of while planning for future preparedness.

The year exposed the utter helplessness of the substantial and most vulnerable sector of the industry – the MSMEs. There was no visible policy for their relief. How many went under, how many forever, are not yet known. UNWTO has provided some global figures. The contribution of tourism to the global economy amounted to US\$3.5 trillion in 2019 i.e 4 per cent of world GDP and it reduced by US\$ 2 trillion in 2020 which is about 70% of the overall decline in world GDP in 2020. International tourist arrivals dropped by 73% and by the end of 2021 still remained 72% below the previous level.

Early 2021 there were hopeful signs and the industry edged up slowly. But the bad news is that tourism is not expected to return to the pre-pandemic level until 2024 at the earliest. This year therefore will see struggle for survival to continue while laying the foundation for revival should engage greater attention.

Miserable as the year has been, 2021 is looked upon as an experience to build the future. And there is plenty to draw upon.

Digitalization will no longer be a short-term fix to overcome the pandemic problems. It has become a tool for cutting-edge advantage in the price war and shift in business strategies

Various studies and surveys during this year have shown that the hospitality world has changed and that the changes are not likely to be transient. There are indications that tourism demand will surge in 2022. A reported Google study for US consumers revealed that 56% of those surveyed were likely to travel in the next two years. Significantly those surveyed spent 71% of their time researching online. Most travellers value previous experiences with the selected brand and price is a major factor as is the flexibility in booking and cancellations. A dominant deciding factor is the response of the brands to safety, health and environmental concerns. A reported study of Indian travellers done by Thomas Cook and SOTC also points to similar findings – 66% of those surveyed said that they were willing to pay extra for trust – in health and safety standards. Thus “confidence” and brand reputation are emerging as increasingly important factors in consumer choices.

There is almost unanimous agreement that digital transformation will be the most visible and enduring change to affect the industry. During the peak of the pandemic, it was used primarily for reducing physical interaction. But digitalization will no longer be a short-term fix to overcome the pandemic problems. It has become a tool for cutting-edge advantage in price war and shift in business strategies. A global survey by McKinsey of 800 senior executives in 2020 showed that two thirds of them had stepped up investments in automation. The digital experience is however going much beyond automation. For example, (a) the hotels can use digital technology to access data for proactive personalized marketing. (b) It can make the new trend of staycation a reliable, innovative and enjoyable reality. (c) It can help in easy access to consumer data base and its centralization. In fact, an Amadeus study affirms that increasing digitalization need not be in conflict with increasing personalization – which is the strength of hospitality business. With wider access to and use of expanding data base at its disposal combined with integrated technology, hotels can make customer experiences very personal and unique. (d) Digitalization is likely to be used more and more for shift from revenue management to profit management by allowing access



to shared data across business “not just in silos”. The strategic use of wider range of data and integrated technology are expected to lead to proactive decision making, increase efficiency in operation and reduce operational cost.

The world has moved fast to grab the new opportunities that use of technology offers to bring tourism back on rail. UNWTO mentions that already 12000 startups in 160 countries are working with 300 corporate partners on new tourism technologies suitable to the post pandemic realities. India is the world leader in information technology. Here is an opportunity for the hospitality sector to get together to initiate a tourism technology revolution. At the same time both government and industry together have a very urgent role of skilling the existing and new entrants in the new requirements.

Attention to skilling is assuming importance because of another phenomenon noticed in USA, Australia, New Zealand and some European countries. Globally tourism employment is expected to rise by 18% in 2022, still 10 m jobs less than the 2019 level. However, these countries have faced very serious labour shortages as recovery is in the upswing. The nature of job losses in tourism and hospitality sector is presumed to be very heavy in India but a clear picture is not yet available. In the context of high unemployment, the industry is unlikely to face labour shortages but once the industry is on the growth path redistribution of skilled personnel lost during the pandemic may be a reality. Rapid tourism development targeted by the country would lead to expansion of hospitality infrastructure and resultant growth in employment. Getting personnel skilled in the new demand for technology-oriented skills should be on top of the agenda for action.

“It is imperative that we rebuild the tourism sector in a safe, equitable and climate friendly manner,” UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said – here “we” is the key to such rebuilding. **HAI**

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