



# ENGAGE

June - July 2024 | Volume 4 | Issue 3

A photograph of a modern, multi-story hotel building with large glass windows and balconies, situated on a rocky coastline. The building is illuminated from within, and the interior is visible through the glass. In the foreground, there is a swimming pool with lounge chairs. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, indicating sunset or sunrise. The overall scene is serene and luxurious.

## *Emerging Trends in* **HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY**

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## From the President's Desk



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

The recent travel boom has ignited high demand for hotel rooms in major cities and towns, leading to increased occupancies and Average Room Rates (ARRs). Early this year, ratings agency Crisil, in an analysis of branded hotel companies with 70,000 rooms across various segments, said the industry would see healthy revenue growth of 11-13% this fiscal year (2024-25) after strong, 15-17% growth in the last fiscal. This upward trend is driven by many factors such as the rise in domestic air travel, expansion of airports, construction of numerous four-lane highways, digitisation, and rising middle-class affluence.

However, the industry continues to face significant challenges in finding and retaining skilled talent. The surge in tourism has amplified the need for new team members. To address this, it's important to intensify efforts to attract and develop a skilled workforce by offering benefits, and up-skilling opportunities. Students are required to understand all aspects of operations so that they can respond to any situation with ease and speed. Also, candidates must possess profound people skills as the service industry is pivoted around people.

AI and machine learning have revolutionised self-check-ins, loyalty program customisation, website optimisation, automated reservations, and dynamic pricing management. These technologies support the industry, which is essentially people driven, to further develop the degree of personalisation of guest experiences and in enhancing customer engagement.

In today's times of online bookings travel portals and a tech-savvy generation, travellers tend to book closer to their travel dates and the booking lead times are getting shorter. In addition as many people continue to work from home and with a lot of roles getting converted to hybrid mode not requiring a physical presence of the employee in the office, workcations are still popular. AI and tech solutions have become crucial in analysing the rapidly changing trends, forecasting demand, and evolving pricing strategies.

Sustainability remains a cornerstone of the sector. Companies are encouraged to adopt sustainable design practices and initiatives that promote environmental and social responsibility. Hospitality groups are increasingly embracing sustainable building and waste management techniques from the project stage of hotels. Guests too are becoming increasingly conscious of sustainability and factoring them into their decision making process while selecting hotels.

According to the Vision 2047 report instituted by the Hotel Association of India (HAI), the sector's contribution to GDP is expected to reach \$1 trillion by 2047, creating 50 million direct and indirect jobs. Ease of doing business is critical to realise the vision. The luxury segment will boom with higher disposable incomes, while budget-conscious travelers will drive demand for affordable accommodations and homestays. Experiential travel will gain further momentum. Technology and sustainability will shape the future of hospitality, blending global trends with unique local characteristics.

In this Issue, we have collated leading experts' views on trends and opportunities in the sector. and hope that they will provide valuable insights to readers-hoteliers and travellers alike.

As we navigate these exciting times, the industry must continuously innovate and adapt to meet evolving traveller preferences, ensuring a dynamic and promising future. **HAI**



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Cover Design: Vaibhav Suri

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## HAI member hotels celebrate 26th World Environment Day



The Hotel Association of India (HAI) celebrated 'HAI World Environment Day' on June 5 to raise awareness about the restoration of Planet Earth. During the 26th HAI World Environment Day this year, member hotels such as the IHCL, ITC Hotels, Oberoi Group of Hotels, The Park, Lemon Tree, and others, organised and participated in awareness towards waste segregation, tree plantation drives, cleanliness drives, distribution of seeds and saplings, awareness walks, slogan writing competitions, and so on, involving guests, associates and team members. This initiative is part of a broader effort to impart the importance of sustainability.

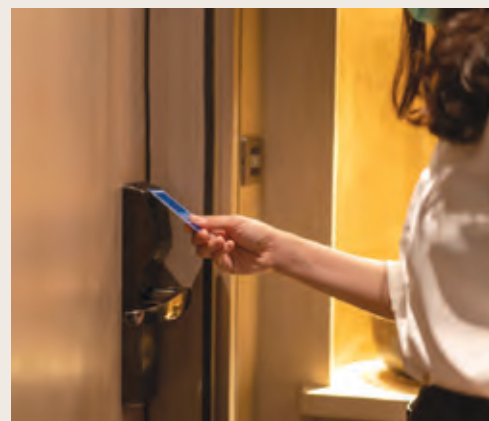
## HAI welcomes new Tourism ministers

The Hotel Association of India (HAI) welcomes Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Tourism Minister, and Shri Suresh Gopi, Minister of State, Tourism, with renewed hope, and a commitment to work together to take Indian Tourism & Hospitality to the next level. Speaking on the new ministerial appointments Mr K.B. Kachru, President, HAI, and Chairman—South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, said, "The HAI felicitates and welcomes the newly appointed Tourism Minister, Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and conveys its wholehearted commitment and support to the India tourism vision 2047."



## 146 BRANDED HOTELS SIGNED

The Indian hotel industry signed 146 branded hotels between January and May this year. This was up from 110 branded hotels signed during the same period last year. More than 14,000 keys are now under development, a monthly report by hospitality advisory services firm HVS Anarock showed. Among the hotels signed during this period are Sofitel Jaipur Jawahar Circle, Vivanta Indore, Gateway Sarnath, and a Taj-branded hotel in Pushkar.



## Ras Al Khaimah offers free visas for MICE, weddings

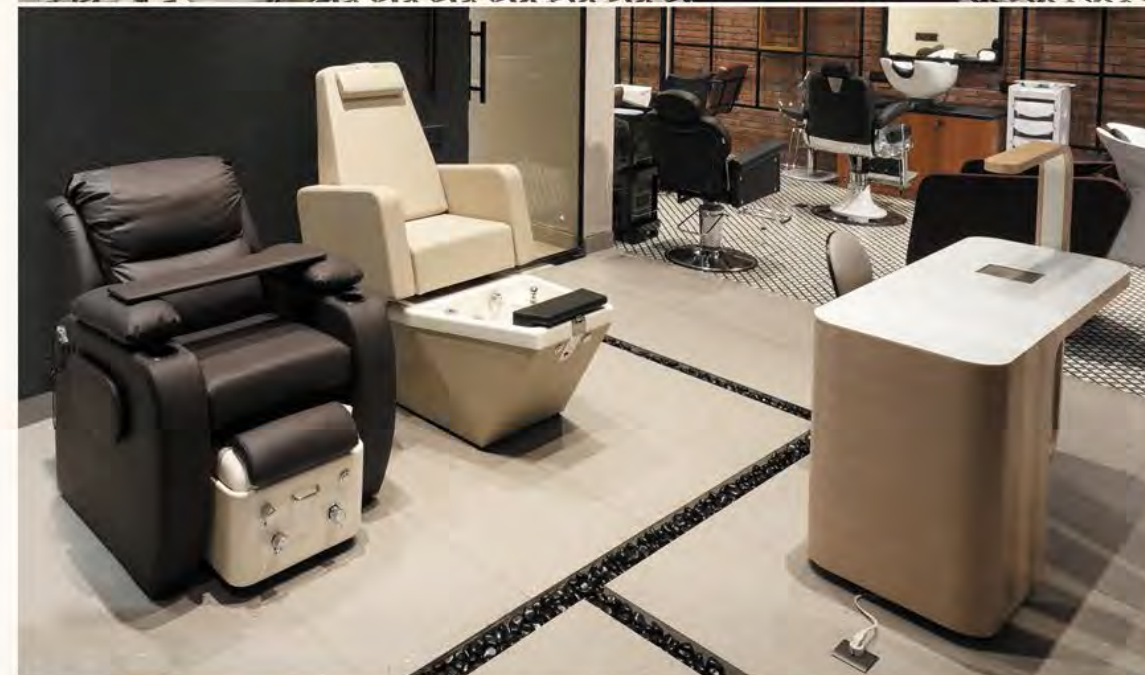
The Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA), UAE, has introduced complimentary visas for MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) and wedding events for Indians. The initiative will run from July this year to March 2025. "This incentive will enhance Ras Al Khaimah's appeal as a premier destination for Indian MICE and



wedding events. We saw a 23% growth in MICE revenue and 103% increase in wedding-related revenue in 2023," said Iyad Rasbey, vice president of destination tourism development at RAKTDA. The emirate witnessed a 20% increase in the number of Indian visitors in 2023.

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# Dear FM, Hospitality sector can be the emerging sector for GDP Growth & Employment Generation

HAI's Budget recommendations to the finance ministry are tailored to boost investment in the sector that's a key pillar for inclusive and sustainable growth of the economy.



**T**he hospitality and tourism industry is the world's largest employer. Its low entry barriers offer opportunities for both skilled and unskilled workers. Women comprise 54% of the workforce in this industry, compared to 39% globally. In India, it is one of the largest service industries, contributing 8% to the GDP and generating around 10% of employment. Supporting this sector is crucial for economic stability. According to the Vision 2047 report by the Hotel Association of India (HAI), the hospitality sector's GDP contribution is expected to reach \$1 trillion by 2047, creating 50 million jobs. A robust hospitality sector is essential for promoting tourism - a key pillar of the economy. Thus, ease of doing business is vital for the sector.

The industry seeks reforms in the upcoming Budget to attract investment, including

granting infrastructure status uniformly to all hotels, which would eliminate geographical biases and enhance growth and accessibility. This game-changer move would facilitate long-term loans at affordable rates. HAI also advocates for more stimulus packages and government incentives to meet the target of 100 million foreign tourists arrivals, and 20 billion domestic tourists by 2047.

While the hospitality sector stimulates economic growth, it is capital-intensive with high operating costs, leading to significant losses during downturns. Of late, there have been increased costs for sanitisation, social distancing, and other protocols that were made mandatory post Covid-19.

The upcoming Budget is an opportunity to unlock the potential of India's hospitality sector. Key policy changes can enhance its contribution to India Vision 2047, shifting

## BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

- Infrastructure status: HAI's key policy recommendation is that the Centre accord the status of infrastructure to hotels. This will allow them access to softer finances at better interest rates with longer periods for re-payment thereby attracting investment.

- Lowering corporate income tax rate to ease the financial burden on businesses and encourage growth

- Increasing the exempt income limit for taxation to Rs 6-7.5 lakh to boost domestic savings and spending on travel and accommodation

- Maintaining the Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT) at the

introductory level i.e. 7.5% without surcharge and cess, as the current rate is considered high.

- Deduction u/s 35AD. HAI advocates for continued deduction to incentivise investment in the industry, especially in rural and semi-urban areas.

- Allowing hotels to carry forward business losses for more number of years than permissible currently

- Removing of petroleum goods and liquor from VAT and Excise regime to GST instead is another change that can help hotels reduce costs and improve revenues

- A single window clearance – a

digital platform for all hotel NoCs, licences and permissions is the key recommendation for improving ease of doing business

- Under the Foreign Trade Policy HAI has recommended that hotels continue to receive benefits under the SEIS that have been discontinued from 2019. Hotels earn valuable foreign exchange. To maintain standards that a global traveler is accustomed to, hotels also require to import many goods. SEIS and EPCG scheme benefits will aid hotels in doing so

- Although GST related requests are not examined as part of annual Budget, HAI voiced the key GST recommendations that are to do with lowering of GST rate from the current 18% to a level that is better aligned with other Asian countries. Delinking of GST rate in restaurants located in hotels from room tariffs, providing a level playing field to hotel restaurants and standalone restaurants and defining the place of supply for MICE to the location of the corporate office rather than the location where the convention is held are some other expectations from the government.



the perception of hotels from luxury goods to essential economic drivers.

The hotel industry appreciates the government attention that it has received in the last decade. It looks forward to the intent being translated into action. There is a sense of urgency as India ups the pace of reforms for exponential growth in the Amrit Kaal period. In addition to the contribution to GDP and jobs, hotels add to the location's infrastructure facilitating the promotion of business and

tourism while raising the standards of living of the people in the region.

HAI urges the Government to consider the above mentioned reforms in the sector at the earliest.

HAI is happy with the patient hearing it received at the pre-budget consultations that it was invited for by the Ministry of Finance recently. The above reforms if accepted will go a long way in boosting the sector. **HAI**



# Chatterati



## ZUBIN SAXENA: A VISIONARY LEADER AND A DEDICATED FAMILY MAN

**D**isciplined and detail conscious in both personal and professional life, Zubin Saxena, Senior Vice President & Country Head India, Hilton, is an early riser who prides himself on being hands-on at work. With a personal mantra of excellence, he strives to bring the best of himself to every endeavour.

As a passionate hotel enthusiast, Zubin has visited over 5,000 hotels worldwide and stays updated on industry trends and design. His fascination with architecture, culture, heritage, and the legacy of old forts and palaces complements his professional interests.

In his free time, Zubin enjoys playing golf and baking with his 11-year-old daughter, where he happily assumes the role of her junior chef. Despite his many pursuits, Zubin believes in the importance of making new friends and maintaining long-term connections. His life is enriched by a close-knit circle of friends and mentors, with some relationships spanning 35 years.

Caricature by Anthony Lawrence

## India makes e-tourist visas free for Malaysia

India has made its e-tourist visas free for Malaysian nationals. With this, passport holders of Malaysia will be able to obtain a 30-day double entry e-tourist visa for free between 1 July 2024, till June 30 next year. In a press release, the Indian High Commission in Kuala Lumpur said that the visa fee waiver would not be applicable on paper or regular visas. Malaysian nationals applying for any other e-visa category will also need to pay the fee for their respective visas. The move comes after Malaysia made entry visa-free for Indian passport holders till the end of 2024. India has also issued a similar visa fee waiver for Thai passport holders for 30-day single/double entry e-tourist visas for the next six months.

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# Indian hospitality is in the midst of a transformative phase

**Anil Chadha**, Chief Executive, ITC Hotels, writes on the powerful role of the Hotel sector in India's growth story.



*"The future depends on what you do today."*

-Mahatma Gandhi

**I**n the realm of hospitality, a dynamic sector shaped by shifting tides, the Indian industry shines with resilience—a testament vividly illuminated in its remarkable recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic phase. Like every industry, hospitality too has witnessed ebbs and flows. As occupancy rates surge now, the sector enters a phase of unparalleled growth and promise.

The industry is experiencing a transformative phase, that is reshaping

how hospitality services are delivered, enhancing the overall guest experience, and creating new opportunities for growth and innovation.

## Sustainability is Supreme

We cannot be individually well in a society that is unwell. Sustainability weaves together the delicate balance of environmental stewardship, social responsibility and economic viability. It holds paramount importance in the hospitality industry as it addresses the pressing need to balance green goals with business operations. It has become a significant consideration for eco-conscious travellers. People are seeking ways to minimise their carbon footprint, support local communities, and preserve natural habitats.

Sustainability remains the guiding principle driving all our initiatives and we continue to create world-class luxury experiences in harmony with the environment and society and support the health of our communities. ITC Hotels currently has 23 LEED Platinum hotels and are also the first 12 hotels in the world to receive LEED Zero Carbon Certification and the first 4 hotels in the world to be LEED Zero Water Certified. Our efforts also go in energy-efficient infrastructure, waste reduction, and water conservation practices. ITC Hotels has already achieved much ahead of time, the 2030 carbon emission targets as



The Iconic ITC Grand Bharat



Durga Art Installation at ITC Royal Bengal embodies the local ethos

envisaged in the COP21 Paris Agreement.

We have just opened our first international hotel in Colombo, the ITC Ratnadipa, an architectural marvel, already a LEED Platinum-certified property adorning the Colombo skyline. We are exploring other markets and geographies too.

## Delight in Domestic

The recent emergence of diverse travel trends heralds a vibrant era for the Indian hospitality industry. With an increasing emphasis on experiential travel, there is a



Dynamic Plaque, Air purification systems at ITC Maurya

**We cannot be individually well in a society that is unwell. Sustainability weaves together the delicate balance of environmental stewardship, social responsibility and economic viability. It holds paramount importance in the hospitality industry as it addresses the pressing need to balance environmental stewardship with business operations**

growing demand for immersive cultural encounters and unique, personalised experiences. We see a notable shift towards domestic travel, with trends such as staycation, bleisure travel (a blend of business and leisure travel), wellness tourism, spiritual tourism, and so on, providing the sector a renewed dose of exuberance.



Additionally, the rise of digital nomadism and remote work has spurred a demand for extended stays and co-working spaces within hotels, catering to a new breed of long-term guests. Offbeat destinations along with tier-2 and 3 cities are also gaining popularity. Boutique hotels in these locations offer an intimate ambiance and customised services catering to travellers seeking authenticity and a deeper connection. As travellers prioritise meaningful and customised experiences over generic luxury, boutique properties are set to become a cornerstone of the leisure travel industry.

**Leveraging the Asset Right Growth strategy**

ITC Hotels has strategically embraced the Asset Right Growth strategy, marking a significant milestone with our launch of new brands. By expanding our portfolio to include distinct brands catering to diverse market segments, we have tapped into evolving consumer preferences and market dynamics. Each new brand is meticulously crafted to offer unique experiences, from luxury to mid-scale accommodations, ensuring a tailored approach to different traveler demographics and exemplifying our commitment to excellence and sustainability, setting a benchmark for the industry.

Recognising the distinct consumer preferences, we launched two new hotel brands: Storii and Mementos, each tailored

**The rise of digital nomadism and remote work has spurred a demand for extended stays and co-working spaces within hotels. Offbeat destinations along with tier-2 and 3 cities are also gaining popularity. Boutique hotels strategically located in these locations offer an intimate ambiance and customised services that cater to travellers seeking authenticity and a deeper connection.**



Storii Solan embodies ITC Hotels asset right growth ‘Storii’



Uber Luxurious Mementos Jaipur

to cater to different audience segments and provide bespoke experiences. With the launch of these brands, we have also opened the opportunity for owners of various properties to partner with us to enjoy world-class distribution, best-in-class loyalty program benefits, and other inherent operational strengths and efficiencies.

Through these brands, we have expanded our presence in many more destinations including tier 2 and tier 3 cities, exclusive locations, curating unique offerings specific to each property.

Our multifaceted approach focuses on expansion, innovation, sustainability, and customer-centricity to capitalise on the opportunities presented by this dynamic market.

There is immense scope for scaling and upgrading existing properties to serve a

demographic that prioritises top-notch hospitality services over price. Lack of adequate skill set is one pressing concern in this growth stage, and it is imperative to address the gaps in the workforce.

**Cuisine, Culture & Travel Trends**

Modern adventurers are increasingly drawn to immersive local culinary experiences that offer a window into the cultural soul of a destination. Beyond mere sustenance, these experiences weave together flavours, traditions, and stories that encapsulate the essence of a place. From farm tours to food walks and interactive culinary curations that focus on superfoods, seasonal produce, and the powerful ‘millet grains’, this space is witnessing interesting storytelling that brings back the magic of forgotten recipes. Each meal becomes a journey of discovery, connecting travelers with the history, customs, and daily life of the locals.

**Advancing Technology and Innovation for Tomorrow**

Technology is playing a crucial role in the evolution of the hospitality sector, propelling it towards new frontiers of guest experience and operational efficiency. AI-powered chatbots are creating access to a store of information. Innovations such as virtual reality are transforming how guests preview destinations and hotels before booking. Technology will be a stronger enabler in not just helping us tell our stories better but also

**Leadership In Sustainability**

ITC Hotels was awarded the 2021 USGBC Regional Leadership Award by the U.S. Green Building Council. This is a global recognition that celebrates organisations around the world who are using green building and sustainable practices to improve the quality of life for those around them.

in innovating customer solutions and guest-friendly value propositions.

The hospitality industry is one of the leading employment-generators in the country and its role in the India growth story has been pivotal. By embracing these changes and addressing the accompanying challenges, it is well-positioned to capitalise on a number of tailwinds like penetration opportunities in smaller towns and cities, rebound in foreign tourist arrivals and the demographic dividend. As the landscape evolves, staying ahead of trends and focusing on delivering exceptional, personalised experiences will

be the key to success in this vibrant sector.

**The India growth story stands out as an indicator of the immense potential of Indian enterprises and the thriving business ecosystem which has helped power the economy and unlock growth opportunities. Tourism is in the midst of a transformative phase, a propellant for Viksit Bharat.**

At ITC Hotels, we strive to maintain the highest standards of hospitality and cater to the changing needs of our guests, providing seamless leisure and business experiences. For seven consecutive years, ITC Hotels has been adjudged as the Best Luxury Hotel Chain in India by Travel + Leisure. We endeavor to showcase memorable indigenous experiences through all our brands: ITC Hotels, Mementos, Welcomhotel, Storii, Fortune and WelcomHeritage.

Lastly, I would like to add this quote by French philosopher, Romain Rolland. “If there is one place on the face of Earth where all the dreams of living men have found a home from the very earliest days when man began the dream of existence, it is India.” **HAI**





# OPPORTUNITIES & TRENDS

The hospitality industry has always led the way in adapting to evolving trends and meeting customer preferences. From advanced reservation systems to personalised guest experiences, technological advancements have been pivotal in shaping how hotels, resorts, and other hospitality businesses deliver their services. In this dynamic sector, staying ahead requires a keen understanding of the trends defining its future. The sector is resonating with new-found focus on wellbeing, digital is being mainstreamed, tier 2/3 cities are now being seen as prime growth markets.

Read on for what experts have to say on the opportunities and trends of this vital cog in the country's economy.

**Team HAI Engage**



## WEDDINGS & MICE ARE UP: JLL

JLL's Hotel Momentum India (HMI) Q1 2024 report says that factors such as an increase in corporate travel, weddings, and Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) demand at the end of FY24 have contributed to a strong performance of the sector. The Indian hospitality sector continued to witness growth in the first quarter of the ongoing year, primarily driven by an **8.5%** rise in average daily rates, resulting in an **11.4%** increase in revenue per available room (RevPAR).





Wedding

The hospitality industry is evolving rapidly, embracing a range of new trends to meet the demands of a diverse clientele seeking memorable and transformative experiences. From hyper-local excursions to tech-driven conveniences, hotels are adapting to create unique and personalised journeys for their guests. Technological advancements are reshaping every aspect of the guest experience, from booking to checkout. AI-driven personalisation enhances the guest's journey by tailoring room preferences and streamlining booking processes, while also optimising staff scheduling for more efficient services. Innovations such as VR tours offer realistic previews beyond static images, and IoT sensors automatically adjust room conditions based on guest preferences, creating a seamless and customised experience.



Delhi Mumbai Expressway



AI based



Front desk



Travel &amp; Tourism

However, it is essential to balance technological innovations with the human touch that defines hospitality. While tech tools improve operational efficiency, they complement rather than replace the personal connection provided by attentive staff. A genuine smile from a concierge who remembers your name or the thoughtful service of a staff member who goes above and beyond cannot be replicated by technology alone. This synergy of tech and human touch not only meets but exceeds guest expectations, fostering loyalty and setting new standards of hospitality excellence in an increasingly tech-savvy world.

As the industry continues to innovate, maintaining this balance will be crucial in delivering the exceptional, personalised service that guests have come to expect. By combining cutting-edge technology with the warmth and care of human interaction, the hospitality sector is well-positioned to create unforgettable experiences that resonate with guests long after their stay.





**KB Kachru**, president, HAI & chairman, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group observes that the sector is seeing steady growth post-pandemic and continues to play a crucial role in the country's economy. The government's focus on promoting 50 new destinations is helping boost tourism, with nearly 95% of leisure locations performing well. While we faced temporary challenges like elections and seasonal weather conditions recently, the industry remains optimistic about making India a prominent international destination. Domestic tourism is thriving, especially in the luxury segment and destination weddings at key locations. "We need to focus on marketing India globally while being mindful of over-tourism. There is a growing recognition that tourism and hospitality can significantly contribute to economic growth. The Vision 2047 report by HAI suggests that the hospitality sector's contribution could reach \$1 trillion by 2047, highlighting its potential to drive India's economic development."

"Everyone in the industry needs to find new ways to grow sustainably. By focusing on our strengths and collaborating, we can continue to build on the progress we have made and help position India as a top destination for tourism and hospitality."

"One of the primary challenges is the need for more states to grant industry status and benefits to tourism and hospitality sector, which is currently available in only 11 states. Similarly, granting of infrastructure status by the centre is crucial as it enables the industry to attract domestic and international investments by offering the ability to borrow money at reasonable interest rates. While airports enjoy this status, hotels do not, which hampers the development of sufficient accommodations and facilities necessary for a destination to



"We need to focus on marketing India globally while being mindful of over-tourism. There is a growing recognition that tourism and hospitality can significantly contribute to economic growth. The Vision 2047 report by HAI suggests that the sector's contribution could reach \$1 trillion by 2047, highlighting its potential to drive India's economic development."

**KB KACHRU**  
President, HAI, Chairman,  
South Asia, Radisson Hotel  
Group

thrive. Additionally, there is a need to review outdated regulations such as The Sarais Act of 1867, which no longer align with contemporary needs and realities."

Establishing a strong public-private partnership (PPP) with the government is another key focus. This collaboration can facilitate easier visa processing and global campaigns to promote India as a preferred destination. Strengthening HAI State Chapters is crucial to ensure all regions benefit from the hospitality sector's contributions to GDP growth.

Regarding the main trends, he says, travellers are seeking out hotels and resorts that prioritise sustainability. This trend aligns well with the rise of experiential travel, where travellers are increasingly seeking authentic and immersive experiences that allow them to connect with the local culture and environment.



Radisson Blu Plaza Hotel Mysore



Radisson Resort &amp; Spa Lonavala



Radisson Blu Hotel Guwahati



Another important trend is the exploration of untapped destinations. With travellers becoming more adventurous and seeking new experiences, undiscovered locations or hidden gems are gaining popularity. This trend has presented us with the opportunity to expand our footprint into emerging markets. Personalisation too continues to be a key trend driving the sector forward. Additionally, a majority of the hospitality players in India are at the forefront of integrating cutting-edge technology to enhance customer interactions and streamline operations. "The adoption of technology will create new job opportunities and roles within the hospitality sector. As hotels implement advanced systems, there is a growing demand for tech-savvy professionals who can manage, maintain, and innovate these technologies. Training and upskilling programs are essential to equip existing

employees with the necessary skills to work alongside AI and other technologies effectively. In this way, technology complements the human element rather than replacing it, ensuring that the sector continues to thrive as a people's business while embracing the benefits of technological advancements," he says.

**Patu Keswani**, chairman & MD, Lemon Tree Hotels, says, "With the post-pandemic boom in the sector, there has been a high demand for rooms in major cities and towns. As a consequence, we have witnessed an increase in occupancies and ARR's, and this trend is expected to continue. Apart from the government's infrastructure push, the rapid growth in mid-sized and large SUV sales are an indicator of rising middle-class affluence, and we can hope for a potential parallel growth in mid-market and luxury hotel demand."



"While technology can enhance efficiency, the essence of hospitality lies in human interaction and empathy. Striking a balance between tech and human touch is vital. Though some job roles may evolve or diminish, the human element remains irreplaceable."

**PATU KESWANI**  
Chairman & MD, Lemon Tree Hotels

He says that the availability and size of the talent pool currently does not match the industry requirements. Hotel chains are boosting efforts to attract and build skilled workforce by offering benefits, apprenticeship and leadership programs, and upskilling opportunities. With fast digital adoption, AI, ML and other tech solutions can be used for self-check-ins, customisation in loyalty programs, website optimisation, automated reservations, dynamic pricing management, and so on, allowing time to the workforce to interact with guests and provide personalised services.

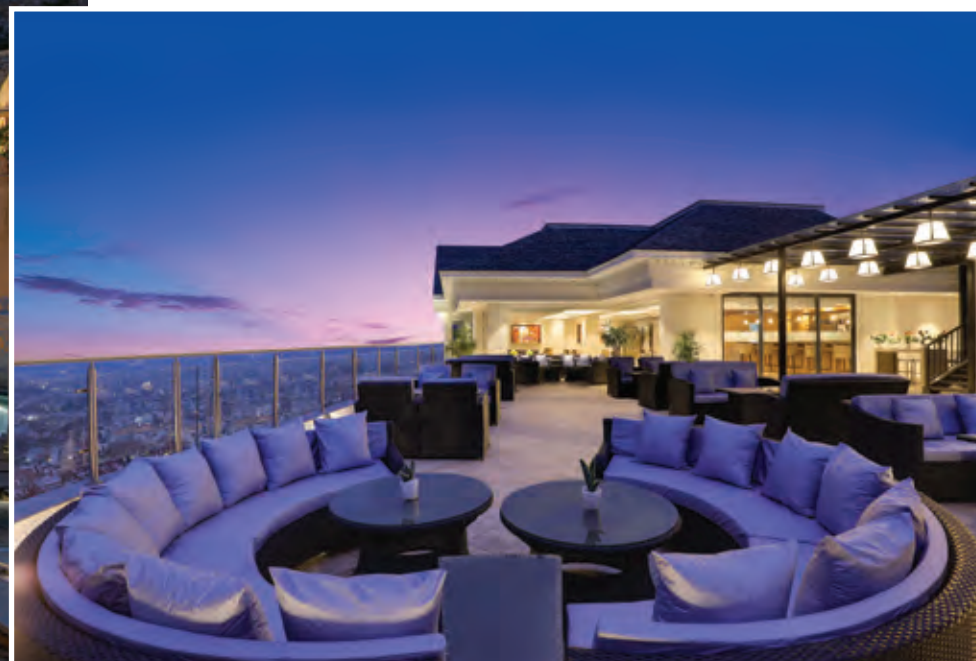
Among some broad trends, he says, are shorter planning and booking windows. Earlier, travel was planned and booked weeks in advance and was generally centred around seasonal travel. Hoteliers also used a more traditional approach to predict and meet demand, using historical data and seasonality to project demand. Today, with the growth of staycations, long weekend road trips, hybrid work modes allowing for workcations and travel on weekdays, demand pickup is seen much closer to the travel date.

AI and tech solutions are being used to quickly pick up trends, forecast demand and assist with pricing strategies. He says that while technology can enhance efficiency, the essence of hospitality lies in human interaction and empathy. Striking a balance between tech and human touch is vital.

He points out that to appeal to world citizens, who are in sync with the requirements of the planet, hospitality groups are increasingly adopting sustainable building and waste management techniques. Today, as guests have grown more conscious, a hotel's sustainability practices impact decision-making and purchase behaviour.



Aurika, Udaipur, Lemon Tree Hotels



Lemon Tree Hotels, Udaipur



“The surging demand for value-driven, tailored experiences has prompted both hotel giants and small-scale accommodations to adopt creative itineraries as part of their strategies in connecting travellers to bespoke experiences. Factors like diversity and shifting consumer preferences present key challenges, but they also drive businesses to think outside-the-box and grow.”

**RANJU ALEX**  
Area Vice-President,  
South Asia,  
Marriott International



interest among pockets of travellers wanting to explore smaller cities and offbeat destinations that go beyond popular tourist hubs. What we are also witnessing is the increase in Gen Z Indians gaining upward mobility and seeking conveniences while travelling, opening even more avenues for local and international hotel groups to innovate. The future is bright for the industry,” she says.

The industry is highly competitive, she adds, spurring innovation among local and international chains to maintain their edge. “In South Asia, for example, we cater to varied consumer preferences and cultural nuances across different countries. Along with the diverse types of travellers, there is significant growth potential in fine-tuning our offerings while upholding global standards. Also, the region’s expanding middle class, rising disposable income, and increasing business and leisure travel create a favourable environment for a hotel’s growth. The surging demand for value-driven, tailored experiences has prompted



JW Marriott Hotel, Khao Lak, Phuket, Thailand

both hotel giants and small-scale accommodations to adopt creative itineraries as part of their strategies in connecting travellers to bespoke experiences. Overall, factors like diversity and constantly shifting consumer preferences present key challenges, but they also drive businesses to think outside-the-box and grow.”

From an APAC perspective, she says, the sector is poised to recover to 2019 levels, with ease of travel among countries and travellers checking off destinations from their bucket lists. There is also technology which plays a pivotal role not only in streamlining operations but also in personalising guest experiences through the strategic use of AI and data analytics. Lastly, sustainability has evolved from a mere trend to a key differentiator, with travellers gravitating towards hotels that prioritise eco-friendly practices.

“Today’s discerning traveller seeks experiences that transcend the traditional hotel stay. A comfortable bed and a scenic view just don’t cut it anymore. Loyalty programs are evolving too, moving beyond reward points to offer something truly special. Recognising this trend, we are dedicated to providing unforgettable experiences through our loyalty program, Marriott Bonvoy. From curated weddings with Shaadi by Marriott Bonvoy to exclusive access to iconic concerts like the Ed Sheeran Tour, we offer a range of exciting offerings. Masters of Marriott Bonvoy brings to life bespoke and unforgettable dining experiences with globally renowned master chefs such as Michele Pascarella and Virgilio Martinez. Experiences are the cornerstone of modern travel, and Marriott strives to be on top of the game by delivering them,” she says.



"The evolving preferences of modern travellers towards experiential and sustainable tourism, the rise of digital platforms, overcrowding at popular tourist destinations causing environmental degradation, inadequate infrastructure, safety and security of tourists, are some of the challenges the sector is facing."

**JK MOHANTY**  
Managing Director,  
Swosti Group



**JK Mohanty**, managing director, Swosti Group, agrees. "There is a shift towards sustainable and personalised tourism products. With the rising penetration of social media, the expectations of guests have also becoming higher with regard to services, quality and amenities," he says.



Swosti Chilika Resort, Odisha

He says that the most important challenge the industry is facing today is acute shortage of trained and skilled manpower. Tourism as a subject, should be taught, right from the school stage, he says.

Further, the evolving preferences of modern travellers towards experiential and sustainable tourism, the rise of digital platforms, overcrowding at popular tourist destinations causing environmental degradation, inadequate infrastructure, safety and security of tourists, are some of the challenges the sector is facing.

However, there are numerous opportunities for budding entrepreneurs. Technology integration such as AI and VR are enhancing personalised experiences and streamlining operations. Growth of sustainable and rural tourism creates vast opportunities for local communities. Post-pandemic, the trend of wellness tourism presents opportunities for destinations to cater to health-conscious tourists seeking rejuvenation, relaxation and holistic well-being.

He observes that the Indian hospitality industry has some similarities with the global hospitality industry like providing excellent customer services, a variety of accommodations, food & beverages options, and personalised services. However, there are some key differences. "The major difference is the emphasis on traditional hospitality practices in India, the concept of Atithi Devo Bhava (Guest is God). Another key difference is India's rich cultural heritage and diverse regional cuisines."

"At Swosti Group of Hotels & Resorts, we prioritize getting to know our guests and their preferences to enable us to make their stay memorable by catering to their specific needs and desires. From room amenities to local cuisines, we strive to create personalised experiences for our guests. We regularly gather feedback to identify areas for improvement and innovation and implement them to ensure that the Group remains at the forefront of providing exceptional experiences for our guests during their stay," he says.

**Sanjay Sethi**, managing director and CEO, Chalet Hotels, says, "The sector is experiencing a significant resurgence. The overall increase in both domestic and international tourism is driving strong demand. Travellers are eager to explore new destinations and revisit their favourite ones, leading to a robust growth



"Providing individualised experiences through data can increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. In a crowded market, we can differentiate ourselves with specially designed services and special offers. Offering hybrid meeting spaces, allowing for flexible cancellation policies, and offering a variety of lodging options will allow you to attract a wider clientele, including long-term visitors and remote workers."

**SANJAY SETHI**  
Managing Director & CEO,  
Chalet Hotels





Courtyard by Marriott Aravali Resort, Delhi NCR

in occupancy rates across the board. From a supply perspective, while new properties are being developed, the pace has been measured. Notably, the positive Average Room Rate (ARR) trends we have been observing are a clear indicator of the industry's health and resilience. These rates reflect both the increased willingness of guests to spend on quality experiences and the value they perceive in our offerings. This demand-supply arbitrage is pointing towards a longish upcycle."

He points out some key opportunities: "As metros remain strong, untapped tier 2/3 markets present new frontiers for immersive hospitality experiences. These cities show promising development potential, driven by rising disposable incomes and a demand for unique and personalised stays. Moreover, today's visitors demand more individualised experiences, flexible scheduling, and cleaner accommodations. Meeting these demands requires ongoing service investments and adaptation. Providing



individualised experiences through data can increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. In a crowded market, we can differentiate ourselves with specially designed services and special offers. Offering hybrid meeting spaces, allowing for flexible cancellation policies, and offering a variety of lodging options will allow us to attract a wider clientele, including long-term visitors and remote workers."

He says at Chalet Hotels they try their best to leverage these opportunities, embrace innovation, and adapt to changing consumer preferences to deliver exceptional guest experiences and drive sustainable growth.

**Zubin Saxena**, senior vice president and country head, India, Hilton, believes that India's macroeconomic environment is also a critical driver of success. The burgeoning middle class is propelling increased expenditure, setting the stage for ongoing growth. "As reports suggest, by 2030, India is expected to become the fourth-largest spender on travel worldwide. This impressive trajectory is further supported by the country's rich cultural diversity, which continues to attract global visitors and fuels trends like spiritual tourism. The government's infrastructure push to develop tourism hubs are further bolstering this growth. The hotel industry is benefiting from a constellation of factors. The outlook for 2024 and beyond is incredibly promising."

Hilton's Annual Trends Report 2024 highlights key consumer trends anticipated to define travel in the coming year. "Data from our global study points to an emerging generation of travelers who are pursuing travel that will enable them to better understand their identity. 77% of APAC travelers (82% in India) are seeking to better understand their own heritage through travel, with 75% (85% in India) looking to learn more about other Asian cultures. Dubbed as the 'GenerAsian traveler', these are Asians who are expressing a growing confidence for self-exploration and are seeking a deeper understanding of their own cultural and ancestral heritage through travel." He highlights some broad trends:

#### •Slow travelling and winding down

Personal wellness matters to today's travellers, especially Gen Zs who are most intentional about winding down. So, they are looking to engage with products and brands aligned with this better-for-you imperative.



"The government's infrastructure push to develop tourism hubs are bolstering growth. The hotel industry is benefiting from a constellation of factors. The outlook for 2024 and beyond is incredibly promising."

**ZUBIN SAXENA**  
Senior Vice President & Country Head, India, Hilton

#### •Investment in Sleep Quality

Travellers are increasingly prioritising personal wellness, particularly focusing on achieving better sleep while away from home. In 2024, there will be a heightened demand for products and brands that support this wellness imperative.

#### •Connectivity and Personalisation

80% of global travellers surveyed said it's important to be able to book their trip entirely online, with 86% of Millennials and 83% of Gen Zs leading the charge.





#### • Food & Beverage emerging as a unifying passion point

88% of Asian respondents consider exploring local and traditional food and beverage as most important to them when it comes to the types of experiences they seek during their trips. Reflecting their keen interest in local gastronomy, respondents across China, India, Japan, and Singapore ranked culinary experiences as the top budget priority for their travel plans next year.

#### • Redefining Business Travel

Shifts in traveler profiles, trip durations, destinations, and purposes have prompted the industry to adapt. As businesses redefine their travel strategies, hospitality providers are responding by catering to changing business travel needs. "Much like global trend, Indian brands are also prioritising sustainability and leveraging technology to personalise the guest experience. I am really proud to say that at Hilton, we adeptly use consumer insights to offer a host of solutions tailored

to these changing trends and demographic preferences through our offerings and customer touchpoints. However, the Indian market has its own story. Unlike established global tourism destinations, India is experiencing strong growth in domestic travel, particularly in smaller cities. This presents a unique opportunity for expansion within the country," he adds.

JLL's Hotel Momentum India (HMI) Q1 2024 report mentions that factors such as an increase in corporate travel, weddings, and Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) demand at the end of FY24 have contributed to the strong performance of the sector. "The Indian hospitality sector continued to witness growth in the first quarter of the ongoing year, primarily driven by an 8.5% rise in average daily rates, resulting in an 11.4% increase in revenue per available room (RevPAR)," the report mentions. The industry is truly basking in the glow of unique opportunities and the government's infra push. **HAI**



## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



**Mr. K.B. Kachru**  
President  
Hotel Association of India  
Chairman - South Asia  
Radisson Hotel Group



**Mr. Puneet Chhatwal**  
Corporate Member  
(Immediate Past President)  
Hotel Association of India  
Managing Director & CEO  
The Indian Hotels  
Company Limited



**Mr. Rohit Khosla**  
Vice President  
Hotel Association of India  
Executive Vice President  
(Operations),  
The Indian Hotels  
Company Limited



**Mr. Vikram Oberoi**  
Corporate Member  
Hotel Association of India  
Managing Director & CEO  
EIH Limited



**Ms. Priya Paul**  
Corporate Member  
Hotel Association of India  
Chairperson  
Apeejay Surrendra Park  
Hotels Limited



**Dr. Jyotsna Suri**  
Corporate Member  
Hotel Association of India  
Chairperson & MD  
Bharat Hotels Limited



**Mr. Patu Keswani**  
Corporate Member  
Hotel Association of India  
Chairman and MD  
Lemon Tree Hotels Limited



**Mr. Anil Chadha**  
Corporate Member  
Hotel Association of India  
Divisional Chief Executive -  
Hotels, ITC Limited



**Mr. Sanjay Sethi**  
Fellow Member &  
Hony. Treasurer  
Hotel Association of India  
Managing Director & CEO  
Chalet Hotels Limited



**Mr. Ajay K. Bakaya**  
Fellow Member  
Hotel Association of India  
Managing Director  
Sarovar Hotels Pvt. Ltd.



**Dr. J.K. Mohanty**  
Member & Hony. Secretary  
Hotel Association of India  
Managing Director  
Swosti Premium Limited



**Mr. R. Shankar**  
Member  
Hotel Association of India  
President - Corporate &  
Legal Affairs, EIH Limited



**Mr. Rupak Gupta**  
Member  
Hotel Association of India  
Managing Director  
U.P. Hotels Limited



**Mr. Shashank Bhagat**  
Member  
Hotel Association of India  
Managing Partner  
Radisson Blu Marina Hotel  
New Delhi



**Ms. Sonali Chauhan**  
Member  
Hotel Association of India  
General Manager  
IHCL SeleQtions



**Mr. M.P. Bezbaruah**  
Member (Ex-officio)  
Secretary General  
Hotel Association of India



# The Sarais Act of 1867: A Historical Relic

The Sarais Act of 1867, a colonial-era legislation, was a pioneering attempt to regulate the hospitality industry in India. It aimed to improve the conditions of inns and lodging houses, ensuring travellers had access to safe and comfortable accommodations. However, as the industry has evolved, the Act's relevance has been called into question.

**By Team HAI Engage**



**T**he Sarais Act of 1867 was enacted during the British colonial rule with the intention of standardizing the operations of Sarais' and inns across India. These establishments were vital for travellers navigating the diverse landscape of colonial India. The Act defined 'sarai' as any building used for sheltering and accommodating travellers and 'Keeper of 'Sarai' as the individual responsible for its management.

This Act was comprehensive, covering the registration of Sarais, maintenance, cleanliness, provision of essential amenities like water and sanitation, and the duties of the keeper. Penalties for offences were modest, reflecting the era in which the Act was conceived.

## Obsolescence in the Face of Modern Legislation

The Law Commission of India, in its 248th report, recommended the repeal of the Sarais Act, citing its outdated provisions. The Act's penalties have lost value due to inflation, and its duties are limited in scope, failing to address modern industry realities. It does not account for technological advancements or

provide for safety measures in case of accidents or disasters.

The Sarais Act's provisions regarding cleanliness and hygiene are overshadowed by more comprehensive state legislations like the Shop and Establishment Acts. These Acts cover a wide range of requirements, including proper ventilation, lighting, and safety measures against fire, which are essential for maintaining a safe environment.

Moreover, the Act falls short in addressing the licensing and regulation of food businesses, which are now governed by the Food Safety and Standard Act, 2006. The central Act, along with state and municipal bye-laws, provides a more robust framework for food regulation, making the Sarais' Act's provisions on food irrelevant.

The government has made strides in repealing archaic laws through Repealing and Amending Acts, but the process is time-consuming and often overlooks certain Acts. An alternative approach suggested by the Law Commission is the implementation of a sunset clause, which would automatically repeal laws after a specified period unless reauthorised by the legislature.

The Sarais Act of 1867 stands as a testament to India's historical legislative efforts to organize the hospitality industry. However, its time has passed. The industry has grown, and with it, the expectations of travellers. Modern laws and regulations have taken over the mantle of ensuring safety, comfort, and standardization in the hospitality sector. It is now time for the Sarais Act to make way for a more contemporary legal framework that can cater to the dynamic needs of India's ever-evolving hospitality industry.

## RELEVANT DATES

Several dates are significant in the context of the Sarais Act of 1867 and the evolution of legislation in India's hospitality industry:

### ▼ 1867

The Sarais Act was enacted during the British colonial rule to regulate and maintain standards in inns, lodgings, and sarais across India. It aimed to improve the overall travelling experience by ensuring safe and comfortable accommodations for travellers.

### ▼ 1971 and 2016

These years are mentioned in relation to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in India, which reflects the rate of inflation. The CPI was 4.7 in 1971 and increased to 153 in 2016, indicating a significant rise in prices. This is relevant because the penalties prescribed in the

Sarais Act have not kept pace with inflation, rendering them ineffective in modern times.

### ▼ 2014

The 248th Law Commission report was published in Sept. 2014, recommending the repeal of the Sarais' Act along with other obsolete laws. The report highlighted the need to remove outdated legislation to provide relief to citizens and businesses.

### ▼ 2015

The Repealing and Amending Acts of 2015 were passed, repealing over 125 obsolete Acts in May alone. This was part of an ongoing effort by the government to clean up the statute books and remove redundant laws.

### ▼ 2001 and 2016

In 2001, 357 Acts were made redundant, and in 2016, the

Repealing and Amending Act repealed 295 Acts and made minor amendments in 2 statutes. These actions demonstrate a concerted effort by the government to periodically review and repeal outdated laws.

### ▼ 1961, 1979, 1984, 1993, and 1998

These years correspond to various reports by the Law Commission of India that recommended the repeal of particular laws. The commission has been instrumental in identifying obsolete laws that could be repealed.

Each of these dates marks a significant milestone in the lifecycle of the Sarais' Act and the broader legislative landscape in India, reflecting a continuous process of legal review and reform to keep pace with the changing times.



### Is it mandatory to register for the Sarais Act ?

Yes, according to the Sarais Act of 1867, it is mandatory for the owner of a sarai to get the establishment registered in the district as a sarai. The Act makes it compulsory for the keeper of the sarai to register it with the district magistrate, after which they are allowed to accommodate lodgers. This registration process is essential for the legal operation of Sarais and ensures that the establishments adhere to the regulations set forth by the Act.



### What modern legislations are currently governing the hospitality industry in India?

The modern hospitality industry in India is governed by a variety of legislations that have replaced or supplemented the outdated Sarais' Act of 1867. Some of the key legislations include:

#### Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006

This central act regulates the food business in India, ensuring the safety and quality of food served in hotels and restaurants.

#### Shop and Establishment Acts

These are state-level legislations that regulate the working conditions of employees and the day-to-day functioning of establishments, including provisions for cleanliness, hygiene, and safety measures.

#### Tourism Act

This act is aimed at promoting and regulating tourism in India, which includes the regulation of guesthouses, hotels, and travel agencies.

#### Hotel and Restaurant Licensing Regulations

These regulations ensure that hotels and restaurants operate with the necessary licenses and adhere to quality standards.

#### Consumer Protection Act

This act protects the rights of consumers, including tourists, and addresses any grievances submitted by visitors.

#### New Delhi Municipal Council (Regulation of Hotels, Lodging houses and Similar Places) bye-laws, 2006

This is an example of a municipal bye-law that specifically addresses the regulation of hotels and lodging houses within the jurisdiction of New Delhi.

#### Maharashtra Regional and Town Planning Act, 1966

This act, along with other state-specific legislations, takes into account the proper infrastructural requirements for commercial establishments.

These modern legislations provide a more comprehensive and up-to-date framework for the regulation of the hospitality industry, ensuring that establishments meet current standards for safety, hygiene, and consumer protection. **HAI**

# Threats and Trends in Hotel Safety

Safety is a fundamental aspect of the hospitality industry, intricately linked with guest satisfaction and experience. **Dr Lalit R. Gabhane**, Director General, National Safety Council of India, writes on how to ensure a safe environment for guests and staff at hotels.



**T**he hospitality sector, encompassing hotels, resorts, and other accommodation facilities, plays a crucial role in the global economy by offering comfort, luxury, and essential services to travellers and tourists. However, this sector faces significant risks, particularly concerning the safety of guests and staff, due to fires and other hazards. Safety is a fundamental aspect of the hospitality industry, intricately linked with guest satisfaction and experience. Ensuring the safety of guests, staff, and property is paramount, requiring stringent measures, advanced planning, and continuous training.

For hotel guests, safety includes not only protection from physical harm but also a sense of security and well-being. The importance of safety in hotels cannot be overstated, as it directly impacts guest satisfaction, loyalty, and the reputation of the establishment.

Many fatal hotel fires including a fire at Milwaukee Wisconsin USA Hotel fire in 1883, the Winecoff hotel in 1946, MGM Grand Las Vegas and Dupont Plaza in 1980s, Siddharth Continental Hotel fire in Delhi in 1986 and other recent hotel fires have taught us lessons on importance of safety in hotels. Every elite guest or traveller who checks into a hotel, is concerned about safety.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF SAFETY IN HOTELS

#### Trust and Brand Reputation

Trust and reputation are crucial factors for the hotel to stand out in the competitive market. Guest safety is paramount in building and maintaining trust between the hotel and its guests. A hotel known for prioritising safety and security is more likely to attract and retain customers. Positive word-of-mouth and reviews can significantly enhance a hotel's image, while any untoward incident compromising guest safety can lead to severe reputation damage to the hotel.



### Legal and Ethical Responsibility

Any untoward incident in a hotel can have very serious legal complications for the hotel management and owners. Hotels are legally obliged to provide a safe environment for their guests, staff and service providers. This includes complying with local and international safety regulations and standards. Beyond mere legal requirements, there is an ethical responsibility to ensure that guests feel secure and protected during their stay, and check out of the hotel with great memories of their stay.

### Guest Experience and Satisfaction

A significant part of the guest experience is feeling safe and secure, besides the room comfort and good F&B service. When guests do not have to worry about their safety, they can relax and enjoy their stay.

### Business Continuity and Financial Stability

Ensuring guest safety is also crucial for business continuity. Safety incidents can lead to operational disruptions, financial losses, and increased insurance costs. By investing in robust safety measures, hotels can prevent such incidents and maintain steady operations.

### MEASURES TO TAKE FOR SAFETY

There are several risks associated with hotel operations. The main risks and control measures are enumerated below:



#### Fire and Life Safety

Fire and life safety is a critical concern in hotels. Most hotel building are of high-rise category and



present very serious risks to their occupants. Hotels have very high combustible loads due to the requirements for interiors and services. Ensuring proper fire prevention, detection, fire compartmentation and response systems can save lives and minimise property damage. This includes:

- Smoke Detectors and alarms in guest rooms, back of the house areas, guest contact areas and other common areas for early detection and communication.
- Fire extinguishers and sprinkler systems.
- Minimum two, fire exit staircases accessible from all areas to exit the hotel in case of a fire emergency.
- Adequate fire compartmentation with fire walls, fire doors and fire dampers etc to restrict the spread of fire.
- Evacuation plans clearly posted and communicated to guests, with staff trained in emergency procedures.



#### Security

Preventing unauthorised access and ensuring personal security is vital. Effective security measures include:

- **CCTV Surveillance:** Monitoring common areas and entry points.
- **Access Control:** Using key cards or biometric systems for guest rooms and restricted areas.
- **24/7 Security Personnel:** Trained to handle emergencies and assist guests.



#### Health and Hygiene

Measures to ensure a hygienic environment include:

- Regular cleaning and disinfection, especially in high-touch areas.
- Hand sanitiser stations placed in common areas.
- Health screening protocols, for staff and, if necessary, guests.
- **Safe water and food:** Ensuring clean water supply and hygienic food preparation.

#### Safe Infrastructure

Ensuring the structural integrity and safety of hotel facilities is essential. This includes:

- **Building Maintenance:** Regular inspections and repairs.



#### Elevator Safety:

Regular maintenance and emergency protocols.

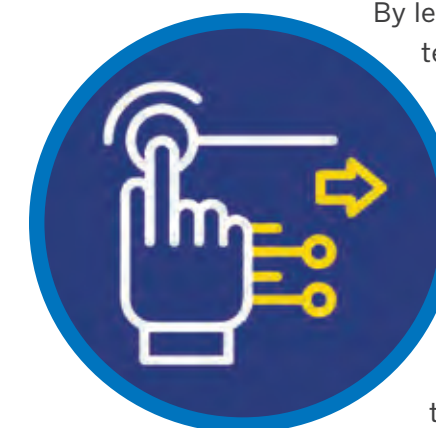
#### Guest Awareness and Education

Informing guests about safety measures and protocols enhances their security. This can be achieved through:

- **Welcome Briefings:** Providing safety information upon check-in.
- **In-Room Safety Information:** Including emergency contacts and evacuation routes.
- **Staff Assistance:** Readily available to answer any safety-related queries.



### Technological Advancements in Guest Safety



By leveraging advanced technologies, and enhancing cybersecurity, hotels are not only meeting regulatory requirements but also exceeding guest expectations for safety and security. As these trends continue to develop, the hospitality industry will likely see even more innovative solutions aimed at creating a safe and secure environment for all guests and staff.

#### Some of the new technologies and innovations available in the market are:

- Mobile Apps, allowing guests to access safety information, contact hotel security, and receive emergency alerts through the mobile apps.
- Smart Room Controls for enabling guests to control room access and monitor their environment.
- AI and IoT for advanced surveillance and real-time threat detection.

The importance of safety for hotel guests goes beyond regulatory compliance; it is a fundamental aspect of the guest experience and crucial to the success of the hospitality business. Current trends in hotel safety demonstrate a dynamic and proactive approach to meeting the evolving needs and concerns of modern travellers. By prioritising safety through comprehensive measures, technological integration, constant vigilance, and third-party safety certifications, hotels can create a secure environment that boosts guest satisfaction and loyalty. **HAI**



# THE JEWEL OF THE SOUTH

In this Issue, we travel through the diverse and spirited state of Andhra Pradesh, known for its food, culture, heritage and a superbly modern side.

BY RIAAN JACOB GEORGE







Ramakrishna Beach

**T**he south Indian state of Andhra Pradesh is a hotbed of culture, heritage, food, art and history. Given its strategic location on the peninsula, Andhra Pradesh has always played an important role in the history and geo-political dynamics of the subcontinent. From the bustling port of Visakhapatnam, the thriving chilli trade of Guntur, the Mangalagiri weaves, the ever-changing skyline of Amravati, to the Buddhist sites around Srikakulam, there are so many layers to discover. Today Andhra Pradesh is reinventing itself as a major hub of tourism, with all sorts of visitor profiles coming here for different reasons. History buffs come here for



Ketavaram Rock Paintings



Undavalli Caves Munis



Museum

**From the bustling port of Visakhapatnam, the thriving chilli trade of Guntur, the Mangalagiri weaves, the ever-changing skyline of Amravati, to the Buddhist sites around Srikakulam, there are so many layers to discover**

traces of former kingdoms, foodies want to discover its unique culinary scene, and nature enthusiasts want to explore the great outdoors in places like the village of Tyda. Or maybe even indulge in some experiential learning at the Tribal Museum in Araku (where the coffee is really good too). In fact, there are so many different influences in this state that it renders the experience complex yet fascinating. For



Bheemili Beach



● Destination

History buffs come here for traces of former kingdoms, foodies want to discover its unique culinary scene, and nature enthusiasts want to explore the great outdoors in places like the village of Tyda

instance, Bheemunipatnam or Bheemli, is a former Dutch colony. People visit this area, just outside Visakhapatnam for its beaches, but if you dig deeper you will find remnants that the Dutch have left behind, the ruins of a fort, a Dutch cemetery and a coat of arms. Today, people come here for the serenity of its waterfront stretch.

Must-explore

We absolutely love the streets of Visakhapatnam, also known as Vizag, which is the largest and most populous city in Andhra Pradesh. Given its location as an important port, it has a diverse demographic and interesting architecture and culture to behold. The Kursura Submarine Museum is definitely a highlight of the city, which is strategically located between the Eastern Ghats and the Bay of Bengal. The city is dotted with lovely beach stretches, including the famous Ramakrishna Beach. Cultural spots abound in the city, like the Kali Temple, with its elaborate architecture, and the Visakha Museum, a colonial-style bungalow, famous for its maritime displays.

Another city that is definitely worth a visit is Guntur, known for its famous chillis by the same name. It is 30 kms south of the state



Kodai Resort Hotel



Guntur Dry Chilli



Undavalli Cave Temple



VMRDA INS Kursura Submarine Museum

capital Amaravati, and is part of the Andhra Pradesh Capital Region. It serves a major export hub for chilli, cotton and tobacco and boasts the largest chilli market in Asia. While visiting this city, there is much to discover here such as the Kondaveedu Fort, the Amareswaraswamy Temple and the Undavalli Caves. The city of Guntur is definitely worth a day trip or an overnight stay as there is a thriving culture here. Another destination that must be explored is the city of Srikakulam, which is particularly interesting for its Buddhist sites. It is an important hub for Buddhist tourism with places like Salihundam, Kalinga Patnam, Dabbaka Vaani Peta and Singupuram, among others. Don't forget to



Belum Caves

make a detour to Salihundam, which features stunning stupas cut within the rocks, featuring inscriptions and marvellous statues of Lord Buddha, Jain Tirthankaras and other spiritual deities. It's interesting to note that the second sun temple in India (after Konark), is found here. This is the Arasavalli Sun Temple, said to be installed by the sage Kasyapa. Located on the banks of the river Tungabhadra, the city of Kurnool is an offbeat destination to explore as well. Heritage lovers will be fascinated by the Ketavaram rock

Andha Pradesh Tourism Initiative

One of our favourite tourist highlights of the state is the quaint village of Tyda, which has been rendered famous by the Jungle Bells Camp. This is an ecotourism resort managed by AP Tourism and Forest Department in collaboration. The surrounding flora and fauna, as well as the magnificent landscapes have been showcased so beautifully, right here in the Eastern Ghats. Travellers can enjoy a host of immersive nature experiences such as bird watching, trekking and hiking, while you live in rustic log huts and tree huts, enabling a truly experiential way to see the destination. Tyda is a great place to enjoy a digital detox given the absence of mobile network and high-speed internet in the area. If you are looking for more creature comforts, Mountain View Resorts in Sivalingapura features hotel-like suites.





Rishikonda Beach, Visakhapatnam

### Cultural hotspot

Andhra Pradesh is home to a thriving culture. If you have time, explore a Kuchipudi concert if you enjoy classical dance forms. Carnatic music is extremely popular here so at any point in time, you will be able to catch a performance in Visakhapatnam or Guntur. In addition, Andhra Pradesh is known for its range of exquisite textiles. Ladies flock from across the country to the saree shops of Andhra Pradesh to get their hands on the famous Venkatagiri sarees, which are known for their unique weaving style and long history. Closely linked to the Jamdani weaving heritage, the state's Upada silks are highly prized and are increasingly rare. In addition to music, dance and textiles, food also plays an important role in this state and it has its own unique blend of robustly spiced cuisine. Telugu cuisine features a host of different influences. The famous vegetarian Andhra bhojanam thali, pesarattu, along with the fiery fish curries found in the coastal region are quite different from the rest of south India.



Kuchipudi Dance



Andhra Bhojanam



Mangalagiri Saree



Kondaveedu Fort

paintings, situated 18 kms outside the city, while the Belum Caves are worth discovering as well. There are remnants of Buddhist and Jain history in these spots. And finally, do not miss Chittoor, which is historically linked to the legendary scholar and witty cartoon character, Tenali Rama. Chittoor city is particularly charming, with lots of greenery and picturesque spots such as the Kaigal waterfalls. The Vinayaka Temple is situated just over 10 kms from the city. A lot of wildlife enthusiasts come to Chittoor to explore the Koundinya Wildlife Sanctuary, 50 kms from here, where you can spot cheetah, antelope and elephant.

### A touch of heritage, Mangalagiri

The town of Mangalagiri is the artistic centre of Andhra Pradesh as it houses some of the most skilled artisans in the state. The famous Mangalagiri handwoven textile is instantly recognisable with its Nizam border and dates back 400 years, certain reports say. The Mangalagiri sarees feature zari on the border and do not have designs woven onto the body. Today, the craft is kept alive by artisans who have inherited this tradition for generations. **HAI**



# Six Years to Global Goals and Tourism

The UNWTO caption on global tourism reminds the world that the great milestone for mankind, the Sustainable Development Goals, is around the corner. And Tourism has a vital role to play in this goal.

**By MP BEZBARUAH**  
Secretary General, Hotel Association of India



**T**his is the caption of a recent UNWTO release on global tourism trends. It reminds the world that another milestone for mankind—the Sustainable Development Goals—is around the corner. It also goes on to identify the transformative role of tourism in achieving those goals.

Trends in tourism and hospitality can be discussed in two dimensions—micro and macro. The micro issues like occupancy, revenue, profitability and so on are important for the industry. Fortunately, the trends in most of the indicators have been positive, and all future assessments also show positive trends. The data shows that international tourism reached 97% of pre-pandemic levels in the first quarter of 2024. More than 285 million tourists travelled internationally in January-March, a 20% increase on the previous year, with the sector on track to grow by 2% above 2019 levels by the end of 2024. One World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) report says that travel and tourism's economic contribution will reach an all-time high of \$11.1 trillion in 2024 and an increase of more than 13.6 million jobs in the sector. The industry will have to ensure that the advantage does not slip away. The macro issues largely influence and

**The data shows that international tourism reached 97% of pre-pandemic levels in the first quarter of 2024. More than 285 million tourists travelled internationally in January-March, a 20% increase on the previous year, with the sector on track to grow by 2% above 2019 levels by the end of 2024**

shape the micro-outcomes, and therefore, it is important to take a comprehensive management view of all the issues. Hospitality is a component of the broader tourism landscape and therefore the issues relevant to tourism in general will impact the hospitality sector.

Even as the tourism and hospitality industry were recovering from the effects of Covid-19, it was clear that the future would not be what it was. There was a broad agreement that in the short run, concern for sustainability, changing consumer behaviour, safety and health security, overarching influence of technological changes—are some of the issues that would make a difference. Most consumer studies show cultural engagement is the key deciding factor, as also environmental considerations. Communities should play a more prominent role in tourism experience of visitors. These are fundamental changes which have shifted attention to rural destinations, as well as places off the beaten track. Future hospitality sector investment plans will need to keep this trend in consideration.

The other unmistakable trend is the digital transformation. An early study by Ipsos for Google showed that the travellers are spending up to 71% of their time researching online. While incredible developments in technology have empowered the consumer to make considered choices, it has also benefitted and strengthened the management system of the industry. Overwhelming digital adoption has helped in reducing costs, increasing operational efficiency, managing profit rather than revenue, and more important, enabled intensive and personalized interface with the customer. Imaginative use of technology, for example, helps a hotel to have centralised and customised data about guests, allows the hotel to decide customer-specific business decisions, like pricing, services and so on. Fortunately, access to technology has become more democratic,





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bridging the gap between the 'haves' and 'have nots' though this problem still remains, and needs attention in the future.

These changes have become part of tourism and hospitality existence. However, we live in a dynamic world and the trends cannot be viewed with a static lens. The World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Development Index (TTDI) 2024 lists a number of new challenges like persisting inflation, high interest rates, volatile oil prices and disruptions to trade, that continue to translate into high transport and accommodations costs. Conflict, geopolitical tension, climate change, are also important downside risks for international tourism. At the same time growing inequality and uneven spread of technology have emphasized the importance of inclusive growth.

These are daunting challenges. And on top of that are the worries on Sustainable Development Goals targets—which as WEF says, had promise of a shared blueprint for peace, prosperity, people and planet by 2030. That promise, as UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres reminds us, "is in peril".

In such a situation, another happy new trend is, as described by WEF, the wider recognition of the significant benefits tourism can offer and that tourism can help deliver a better future. The challenges that hinder full utilization of the potential, are now more widely recognized than ever. It is firmly on the agenda of the UN, G20, G7 and the World Economic Forum. The fundamental question however remains—how to unlock this potential of tourism.

The agenda for unlocking the potential will be country specific. WEF has identified an action agenda. It is generic and every country will have to mould its agenda to suit

At present 49 pre-construction, 27 pre-opening license /approvals are required which should be rationalised. Similarly, incentives in the form of infrastructure status and industry benefits to the hospitality sector will go a long way in unlocking the tremendous potential of tourism in India

local conditions. Some of the suggestions are:

- Providing greater value for nature conservation efforts
- Leading on the energy transition
- Driving responsible consumption
- Investing in skilled, inclusive and resilient workforces
- Putting local communities at the centre of T&T development
- Strategically managing visitor behaviour and infrastructure development
- Encouraging cultural exchange between visitors and the local community
- Adopting technology for sustainable and resilient T&T management
- Bridging the digital divide and creating opportunities.

At best such a list is only illustrative. India starts with an advantage so far as conceptual framework is concerned. The government has already laid out the plan for making tourism a pillar of development based on convergence of all the stakeholders, strategic development as a business plan in mission mode, strong PPP and community participation. It now remains to be implemented vigorously.

Another happy news is that UN Conference on Trade and Development World Investment Report 2023 shows that global foreign direct investment across all sectors, tourism included, reached approximately \$1.37 trillion that year, marking a modest increase of 3% from 2022. Here is a great opportunity for India to partake of this and make its "ease of doing business" attractive. At present 49 pre-construction, 27 pre-opening license / approvals are required which should be rationalised. Similarly, incentives in the form of infrastructure status and industry benefits to the hospitality sector will go a long way in unlocking the tremendous potential of tourism in India.

"Given that T&T has historically accounted for a tenth of global GDP and employment, decision-makers in the sector and beyond must recognise the need for strategic and holistic approaches if they are to properly navigate increasingly complicated conditions and unlock T&T's great potential to provide prosperity for communities around the world" — WEF's The Travel & Tourism Development Index (TTDI) 2024. **HAI**

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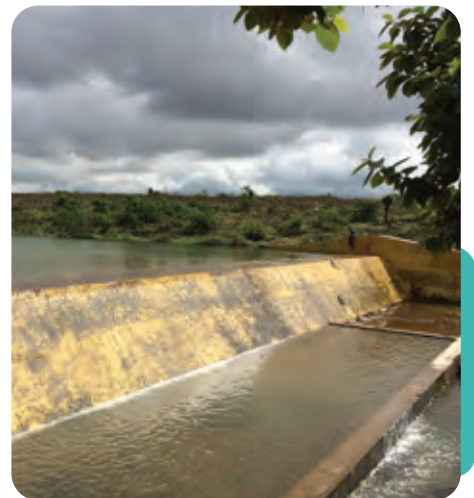
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