



ENGAGE

November-December 2025 | Volume 5 | Issue 6



HOSPITALITY

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&
OPPORTUNITIES**



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CREATIVE VISUALISATION
SERVING SUGGESTION



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK



K.B.KACHRU

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

The hospitality sector is inherently resilient. What began as a post-pandemic recalibration has now matured into a deeper structural shift—reshaping how people live, travel, work, and experience spaces. At the heart of this transformation lies a renewed understanding of leadership: true leadership in hospitality is not defined by scale or labels, but by how we make guests feel long after they have checked out.

Today's travellers seek more than comfort or convenience. They look for spaces that feel intuitive, personal, and emotionally resonant—places that offer a sense of belonging, trust, and care. Hospitality is no longer confined to short stays; it increasingly influences daily living, work routines, and well-being. The most meaningful experiences are those where service feels thoughtful rather than transactional, and luxury is expressed through attention, warmth, and authenticity.

This reimagining goes well beyond any single format. Sustainability is moving from intent to execution, embedded in everyday operations. Wellness is evolving from an amenity into a way of life that shapes design, food, sleep, and movement. Experiential travel is being driven by hyper-local storytelling, culinary creativity, and nature-led spaces that connect guests to place and culture. Our lead story explores these shifts in detail, while also examining how the sector has remained resilient amid geopolitical uncertainty and global disruptions.

From a business perspective, the domestic hotel sector is expected to report growth in the coming quarters, led by improving average room rates. After a subdued first half of the fiscal year—affected by extended monsoons and external headwinds—the second half is likely to see a rebound, supported by renewed momentum in meetings, incentives, conferences, and events.

As we look ahead to 2026, hospitality will become more integrated, intelligent, and experience-led. New markets will open up, wellness-centric design will influence both hotels and living spaces, and sustainability will shift from aspiration to baseline expectation. The leaders who succeed will be those who balance efficiency with empathy, technology with human connection, and growth with responsibility—creating experiences that linger in memory long after the journey ends.

Wishing you a truly glorious 2026. **HAI**

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FROM WHISPER TO ROAR: THE NORTHEAST'S MOMENT BECKONS

Once a quiet frontier, the Northeast now carries the weight of expectations as infrastructure improves, perceptions shift, and India waits to see if the region can fulfil its long-promised tourism destiny.

By **M. P. Bezbaruah**, Secretary General, HAI



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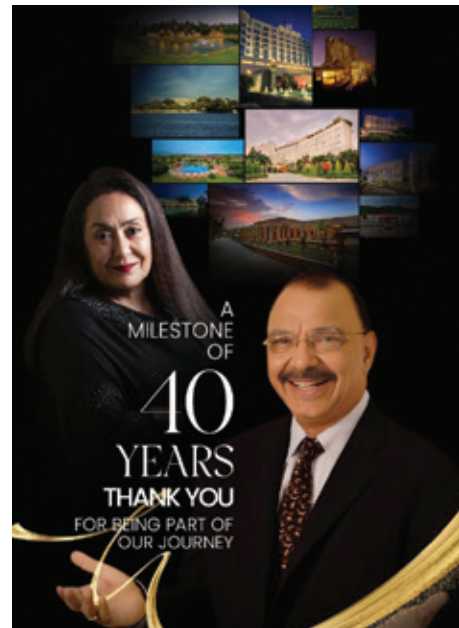
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FOUR DECADES ON, THE LALIT REASSERTS ITS INDIAN ROOTS

Marking 40 years in India's hospitality landscape, The LaLiT group says it has stayed anchored to its identity as a homegrown brand that blends culture, community upliftment and service with sincerity. Positioning itself on the pillars of *Atma Nirbhar* excellence, inclusion and responsible hospitality, the company says its four-decade journey has focused on championing Indian artisans, expanding

opportunities for diverse talent, and integrating people- and planet-first practices across its properties. From its signature "Namaskar" greeting to its emphasis on intuitive care, The LaLiT says it has aimed to create destinations that feel personal and welcoming, with guests treated "as family." "As we mark this milestone, we celebrate not just our legacy, but the countless hearts that built it," the group said in a statement.

JYOTSNA SURI HONoured



MS. JYOTSNA SURI, Chairperson & Managing Director, The LaLiT Suri Hospitality Group, was conferred the prestigious Living Legend Award at the Hospitality Horizon Top 50 Hotel Awards 2025, held at the Hilton Mumbai International Airport on Thursday, November 27, 2025.



She was felicitated by the Hon'ble CM of Delhi, **Smt. Rekha Gupta**, for her remarkable contribution to the hospitality industry.

VIKRAMJIT SINGH OBEROI HONoured



Vikramjit Singh Oberoi, Managing Director and CEO of EIH Limited (The Oberoi Group), was honoured with the prestigious Hall of Fame recognition at the Hotelier India Awards 2025. With over 25 years of experience, he has been recognised for his leadership in maintaining global standards for luxury, service, and, most notably, his role in re-engineering systems and processes within the group.

WELLNESS EXPERIENCE CENTER

A Journey Through Wellness



VIP Spa Suite Concepts



Spa Wet Area Equipments



Hydrotherapy



Designer Salon Furniture Concepts & Equipments



Luxury Spa Beds & Heated Hammam Beds



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GLOBAL HONOUR FOR IHCL'S PUNEET CHHATWAL

Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director & CEO of Indian Hotels Company Ltd (IHCL), and former HAI President, has been conferred the 101 Icon Hotelier of the World – Lifetime Achievement Award 2025. Fortune India also recognised him as India's Best CEO 2025.

In under a decade at the helm, Chhatwal has overseen a sweeping transformation at IHCL. The Taj brand has been ranked the *World's Strongest Hotel Brand* four times, the

company has delivered 14 consecutive record quarters, and its portfolio has expanded rapidly from 150 to over 590 hotels. The award recognises hospitality leaders who set new global standards through innovation and execution.

Chhatwal's focus on excellence and forward-thinking strategy has positioned IHCL as a global benchmark in the industry. Having spent most of his career in Germany, Chhatwal slips into German with ease, often quoting, "The

one who doesn't go with time goes with time," a mantra that has shaped his leadership. When he took charge of the Tata group's hospitality arm in 2017, IHCL was loss-making, burdened with ₹3,159 crore debt, and losing younger guests to global rivals. Within a week, he launched "Project Win" to restore profitability, delivering a ₹101-crore PAT in FY18. Since then, Chhatwal has accelerated IHCL's reinvention, expanding globally and pushing toward his ₹15,000-crore 2030 vision.

13TH INTERNATIONAL TOURISM MART FOR NORTH EASTERN REGION INAUGURATED IN SIKKIM

The 13th International Tourism Mart (ITM) for the North Eastern Region was inaugurated at the SAP Grounds, Pangthang, Gangtok. Jointly organised by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, and the State Government of Sikkim, the event was graced by the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, the Tourism Minister of Sikkim, and Tourism Ministers and senior officials from other North Eastern States and Central Ministries.

The International Tourism Mart is a flagship annual event of the Ministry of Tourism aimed at showcasing the immense tourism potential of the North Eastern Region—the "Ashta Lakshmi" of India—to both domestic and international audiences. Bringing together stakeholders from across India and abroad, the Mart presents the region as a unified tourism destination enriched with diverse experiences such as eco-tourism, adventure tourism, wellness and spiritual circuits, rural and cultural tourism, wildlife exploration, and sustainable community-based offerings.

This year's edition, being held from 14–15 November 2025, marks the second time Sikkim is hosting ITM after a gap of ten years. The State leveraged the platform to highlight its remarkable progress in sustainable tourism, organic farming, conservation-driven policies, Himalayan biodiversity, and vibrant arts, crafts, and cultural heritage.



MINISTRY OF TOURISM PARTICIPATES IN WORLD TRAVEL MARKET (WTM), LONDON

The Ministry of Tourism participated in the World Travel Market (WTM) London from 4–6 November with a 30-member delegation, including State Tourism Departments, UTs, IRCTC and leading inbound tour operators. The India Pavilion showcased the country's cultural richness, diverse landscapes, spiritual and wellness offerings, adventure tourism, world-class hospitality and authentic rural homestays. The participation underscores India's push to deepen engagement with the global travel ecosystem and attract higher foreign tourist footfall. States such as Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Delhi, Chandigarh, Goa, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh promoted their unique tourism experiences. The pavilion was inaugurated on 4 November by senior officials and ministers. India recorded 20.57 million international tourist arrivals in 2024, with the UK, US and Australia among the top source markets.

TOURISM INDUSTRY SEEKS SINGLE-WINDOW CLEARANCE, INDUSTRY STATUS

Tourism and hospitality industry bodies have urged the government to introduce a single-window clearance system for licences and boost overseas marketing budgets to attract more foreign tourists. The demands were raised at a pre-Budget meeting with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, attended by representatives from the Hotel Association of India, IATO, ADTOI, the Ad-



venture Tour Operators Association of India and others.

Industry groups also pressed the Centre to nudge all states to grant full "industry status" to tourism and hospitality, noting that inconsistent recognition limits access to affordable finance

and incentives.

Stakeholders sought clarity on the recent GST cut for hotel tariffs up to ₹7,500 and called for periodic review of the threshold. They also proposed an empowered National Tourism Board to strengthen strategic planning and promotion.

CHALET HOTELS UNVEILS ATHIVA



Chalet Hotels Limited (CHL) has announced the launch of ATHIVA Hotels & Resorts, a premium lifestyle hospitality brand debuting with over 900 keys across six hotels. Rooted in the Sanskrit word for "abundance," ATHIVA embodies a philosophy of joy, wellness, and sustainability. The brand makes its debut with the transformation of

the iconic Dukes Retreat in Khandala into ATHIVA Resort & Spa, Khandala, offering 147 rooms, including 11 suites, and a blend of refined luxury and authentic local experiences. Five additional properties—including a renovated business hotel in Navi Mumbai, The Resort at Aksa Beach, and three greenfield projects in Goa and Thiruvananthapuram—will transition to ATHIVA over time. "With ATHIVA, we bring the trust, credibility, and operational excellence of Chalet Hotels to a brand built for today's India—welcoming business, leisure, bleisure, and MICE guests with one consistent promise: abundant joy, wellness and care," said Sanjay Sethi, MD & CEO, Chalet Hotels.



SRIVATSA KRISHNA TAKES OVER AS TOURISM SECY

Srivatsa Krishna has taken over as Secretary, Tourism, bringing with him a distinguished academic foundation and extensive administrative experience. He holds a postgraduate degree in International Studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University, a PhD in Management from IIT Madras, and an MBA from Harvard University. Krishna has previously served as Secretary, Commerce & Industry, Government of Karnataka, and has held key roles in Urban Administration & Development and e-Governance. His experience also includes working with the World Bank Group, giving him deep insight into global development practices. His appointment is expected to bring a renewed focus on strategic planning, innovation, and destination development within India's tourism landscape.



HARIKISHORE S. IS JOINT SECY, TOURISM

The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, has announced the appointment of Harikishore S., IAS, as the new Joint Secretary. Bringing extensive administrative experience and a deep commitment to public service, he will spearhead strategic initiatives to enhance further and promote India's tourism landscape. His leadership is expected to strengthen policy implementation, drive destination development, and support the sector's continued growth and transformation.

HAI SUPPORTS CHHATTISGARH TOURISM

Hotel Association of India (HAI), the apex body representing the country's hospitality sector, reaffirmed its commitment to supporting tourism-led development in Chhattisgarh at the Chhattisgarh Tourism Investor Connect 2025. In his keynote address, Chief Minister Shri Vishnu Deo Sai highlighted the State's unexplored natural beauty, vibrant culture, diverse tourism experiences, and expanding investment opportunities.

During the event, HAI Secretary General M. P. Bezbaruah and Deputy Secretary General Charulata Sukhija held a constructive meeting with the Chairman of the Chhattisgarh Tourism Board and the Secretary Tourism to deepen industry-government collaboration.

Chhattisgarh is demonstrating a strong growth trajectory, with investment proposals surpassing ₹6,321 crore in industry and ₹505 crore in tourism. This reaffirms the State's potential not only as an emerging industrial hub but also as a compelling tourism destination. The government's focus on diversifying the economy, strengthening infrastructure, and leveraging its natural and cultural assets positions Chhattisgarh as a promising frontier for travellers and investors alike.



ANNOUNCING THE NEXT EDITION OF HAI'S SIGNATURE EVENT

HAI announced the 7th edition of its signature Event. The HAI Hoteliers' Conclave is scheduled for **4th of May 2026 at Taj Palace in New Delhi.**

The theme for the Event is **Re-engineering Hospitality**. The objective of the Conclave is to provide an industry platform for policy makers and decision makers of hospitality sector to converge in an endeavour to examine how the sector has transformed in the recent years on account of changes among others in consumer behaviour, technological advancements, practices in sustainability and to discuss how the sector should evolve in the extremely uncertain, volatile and complex future.





FUTURE-READY HOSPITALITY SECTOR

Indian travellers are seeking more meaningful experiences, gravitating toward smaller, less crowded destinations that offer authenticity, natural beauty and cultural depth

By K.B. Kachru, *President, HAI.*

The Indian hospitality industry ends 2025 with a sense of pride as well as optimism for what lies ahead in 2026. We continue to navigate a dynamic phase of growth and reinvention, shaped by policy shifts, evolving traveller expectations, and an external environment marked by global economic uncertainty, geopolitical tensions, and domestic challenges. Yet, despite these headwinds, one truth stands out: hospitality remains one of India's most resilient sectors—deeply connected to our cultural fabric and central to the nation's economic aspirations.



In addition to policy advocacy at the Centre, we at HAI, have focused on developing State chapters. We went to Maharashtra, Goa, J&K and the North-east after having launched the Odisha Chapter in Bhubaneswar in 2024, reaffirming our commitment to supporting tourism development in states. We are in conversation with Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and will soon connect with the governments of Punjab and Delhi to support the government's vision for tourism and how to promote the industry through policy, capacity building and partnerships. Our members, including IHCL, the Swosti Group, Oberoi Hotels, Sarovar Hotels and the Radisson Hotel Group, are expanding their footprint in the country, both in the metros as well as in the smaller cities and towns and are committed to investing in future. Hotels are key tourism infrastructure; without the expansion of hotel rooms, tourism cannot play the envisaged role in the nation's Vision 2047 of a Viksit Bharat. HAI has been working closely with other industry bodies and government agencies to ensure sustainable, inclusive growth that

strengthens both tourism and local economies and will continue to collaborate with stakeholders.

As a service sector, we cannot be future ready without talent development acquisition and retention. We launched the first-ever Industry Mentoring Programme for the hotel sector. Our hospitality is rooted in the age-old tradition of Atithi Devo Bhava.

2025 showcased the sector's tremendous potential. The Maha Kumbh Mela offered the world a glimpse of India's spiritual heritage. Demand for hotels and premium stays surged 20-30% during the event, generating sustained momentum and underscoring the rise of spiritual and experiential tourism. We met the UP tourism minister to support the government's vision for UP Tourism and how to promote the industry through policy, capacity building and partnerships.



Equally significant was the Union Budget 2025-26, which recognised Tourism and Hospitality as key drivers of job creation and allocated Rs 20,000 crore to improve infrastructure and connectivity, along with the announcement of developing tourism in challenge mode with 50 new destinations. Convergence, collaboration, public private partnerships and active involvement of states as been identified as key pillars. These measures lay the groundwork for a more competitive and globally attractive tourism ecosystem.

RESILIENCE IS CRUCIAL

The tragedy in Pahalgam serves as a painful reminder of the fragility of tourism-dependent regions. Over the last few years, J&K was witnessing a remarkable revival, with hoteliers expanding capacity and travellers returning in large numbers. The incident forced us to pause, reassess and strengthen safety frameworks. At HAI, we remain committed to rebuilding trust, reinforcing security and supporting the region's long-term recovery. Resilience has

always defined our sector, it will guide us forward again.

TIER 2/3 GAINING TRACTION

As we look at travel trends shaping the year ahead, one theme stands out—the rise of community-driven travel. Indian travellers are seeking more meaningful experiences, gravitating towards smaller, less crowded



destinations that offer authenticity, natural beauty and cultural depth. Tier 2/3 markets are emerging as strong engines of growth, supported by improved connectivity and rising aspirations. This shift is reflected in the industry performance data: branded hotel signings are up sharply, with nearly 50% of new inventory in Tier3/4 markets as of June 2025. RevPAR has grown 10% sequentially, ADRs remain firm, and investor confidence continues to strengthen.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Sustainability remains a core priority. Whether it is the exchange of best practices, collaborating for events to create awareness, launch a handbook and recommend incentivising of sustainable practices in the union budget, HAI will continue to promote sustainability, and HAI members have pledged to make all efforts to make their hotels net zero by 2050, well ahead of the government target of making India net zero by 2070. This aligns with the growing global expectation that tourism must not merely grow, but grow responsibly.

Our collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism also continues as discussions

Our collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism continues as discussions advance on the new National Tourism Policy. With proposals from states underway, the focus on sustainable tourism and improved visitor experience is timely and necessary

advance on the new National Tourism Policy. With proposals from states underway, the focus on sustainable tourism and improved visitor experience is timely and necessary. The recent GST reduction for mid-market hotel stays is expected to unlock fresh demand. However, the non-availability of ITC has created a challenge for hotels in the budget sector and we will relentlessly pursue the cause of restoring ITC, of de-linking hotel restaurant GST rates from room rates and of linking room rate thresholds to inflation as a mechanism of regular review.

As we move into the New Year, our path forward is clear. By embracing new traveller expectations, strengthening regional ecosystems, investing in skills and sustainability, and working hand-in-hand with policymakers, both with the state government level and the government of India, we can redefine India's hospitality landscape.

The road ahead holds both challenges and promise. But with unity of purpose, we are well-positioned to build a stronger, safer, and more globally competitive hospitality sector for the country. **HAI**



THE HOSPITALITY REBOOT INDIA'S YEAR OF REINVENTION

A stronger consumer, better connectivity, and a shift toward branded, experience-led travel are powering the sector's new growth cycle.

Team HAI Engage

India's hospitality sector entered 2025 with renewed momentum, buoyed by resilient domestic demand, a more confident consumer, and a widespread shift toward organised, experience-led travel. As pandemic-era uncertainties faded, operators across segments focused on strengthening capabilities, improving service quality, and deepening their presence in fast-growing regional markets.

The result has been a year marked by steady recovery, purposeful innovation, and a clearer alignment between what travellers seek and what hotels are preparing to deliver. Insights from industry leaders reveal a sector that is evolving rapidly—driven by experiential travel, improved connectivity, sustainability, and the rising aspirations of India's expanding middle class.





“
Growth expected
from integrated
tourism zones, cruise
and coastal tourism,
and enhanced
domestic and
international
connectivity
”

J. K. MOHANTY
CMD, Swosti Group

J. K. MOHANTY, CMD, Swosti Group, says 2025 has been a year of steady recovery, innovation and transformation for Indian hospitality. Growth was powered by the resurgence of domestic tourism, improved air and rail connectivity, the revival of MICE and destination weddings, and a rising preference for experiential, sustainable and wellness-led travel. Guests now expect personalised services, authentic local experiences and responsible hospitality — expectations that are reshaping operational models across the industry.

MICE Tourism is recognised as a key driver for economic growth and job creation in India



Revenue Projection
(49.4) billion USD (2024)
expected to reach (103.7)
billion USD (2030).



Growth Rate
~13% CAGR.



Key Drivers
Massive infrastructure
development (roads, high-
speed rail, airports) and
new, diverse MICE-ready
cities.



Infrastructure Expansion Supporting Growth



Connectivity
Over 150 operational airports and
150,000+ km of new roads.



Capacity
Over 2.48 million hotel rooms.

Source: Ministry of Tourism



“Tier-2/3 cities have emerged as important growth markets, supported by government initiatives in spiritual circuits, eco-tourism and heritage development. In Odisha, improved infrastructure and proactive policies have boosted destinations such as Puri, Bhubaneswar and the coastal and tribal belts, attracting investment in boutique resorts, wellness retreats and eco-lodges,” he says.

Looking ahead to 2026, Mohanty expects growth from integrated tourism zones, cruise and coastal tourism, and enhanced domestic and international connectivity. Swosti’s upcoming 5-star Gopalpur Palm Resort embodies this vision of sustainable, world-class tourism infrastructure in Odisha.

DEEKSHA SURI,
Executive Director, The LaLiT Suri
Hospitality Group, says 2025 was a year
of measured consolidation backed by
purposeful innovation. Demand
stabilised across segments, prompting
hotels to prioritise quality of revenue
over sheer volume. At the same time,
wellness, culinary experimentation and
digital guest engagement continued to
evolve. Leisure travel led demand,
weddings and social celebrations
remained robust, and MICE recovered
steadily. Spiritual tourism surged,
supported by improved connectivity.
Travellers, she notes, increasingly seek
culturally rooted experiences delivered
with global standards of comfort.

Tier-2/3 cities continued to shine,
driven by rising regional hubs and
infrastructure upgrades. In 2026, she
expects growth to follow new
airports, transport corridors and
destinations rich in culture and
natural assets. Policy initiatives
around connectivity and heritage
development have provided
meaningful support, but she
emphasises the need for faster
single-window clearances and
reduced compliance burdens. The
future, she says, will blend smart
technology with responsible
operations, but human capital and
experiential depth must remain at
the core of hospitality.



“
Travellers now
increasingly look for
experiences rooted
in local culture,
delivered with the
efficiency and comfort
of global hospitality

”
DEEKSHA SURI
*Executive Director,
The LaLiT Suri
Hospitality Group*

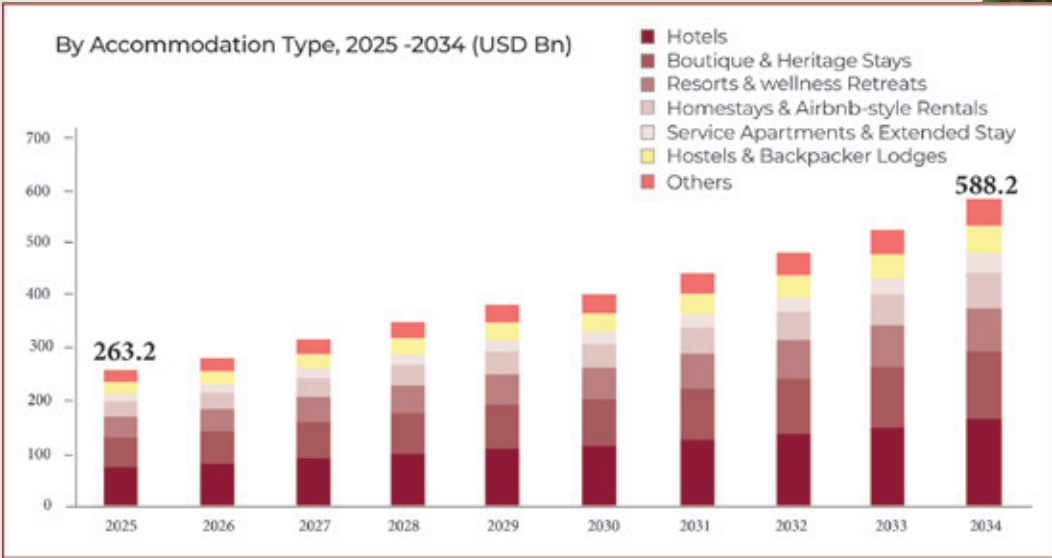


INDIA TOURISM & AVIATION SECTOR OVERVIEW (2024–2025)

Startup Ecosystem ~23,828 DPIIT-recognised startups in Travel and Tourism (as of Oct 31, 2024).	Infrastructure Expansion 120 new destinations (airports and helipads) planned under UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik).	Regional Focus Expansion primarily targeting Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Northeast India.	Passenger Forecast Goal to serve 40 million passengers over the next decade.

Source: IBEF

INDIA HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY MARKET



Source: <https://dimensionmarketresearch.com>



CGH Earth witnessed its strongest post-Covid performance in 2025. Inbound travel surpassed pre-pandemic levels, driven by a younger cohort seeking deeper, value-driven experiences rather than conventional sightseeing. Domestically, the rise of shorter, more frequent getaways kept occupancy steady throughout the year. Social media and content-led discovery emerged as major demand drivers, with digital communities and influencers shaping travel choices and amplifying brand visibility.

MICHAEL DOMINIC,
CEO & MD, CGH Earth Experience
Hotels, notes that travellers now look for authenticity and tangible impact. “Beyond sustainability claims, travellers now seek properties that

support local communities, reduce environmental footprints, and preserve cultural and ecological integrity. This shift aligns with CGH Earth’s long-standing ethos of responsible tourism.”

Experiential destinations rooted in nature and culture—coastal regions, hill escapes and rural hinterlands—showed the strongest growth, alongside boutique hotels and intimate experiential stays that offer personalisation and place-based storytelling.

He adds that 2026’s growth will be powered by experiential immersion, environmental stewardship and design for a younger, purpose-led audience, with technology enhancing guest journeys without diluting authenticity.



“
Beyond sustainability claims, travellers now seek properties that support local communities, reduce environmental footprints, and preserve cultural and ecological integrity

”
MICHAEL DOMINIC
CEO & MD, CGH Earth
Experience Hotels



“

Technology, from AI-driven personalisation to predictive operations, will redefine service standards. Sustainability will need to be embedded end to-end as a baseline. Experiential depth, cultural relevance, and human capital will remain central to differentiation

”

ZUBIN SAXENA

Senior Vice President, Regional Head,
South Asia - Hilton

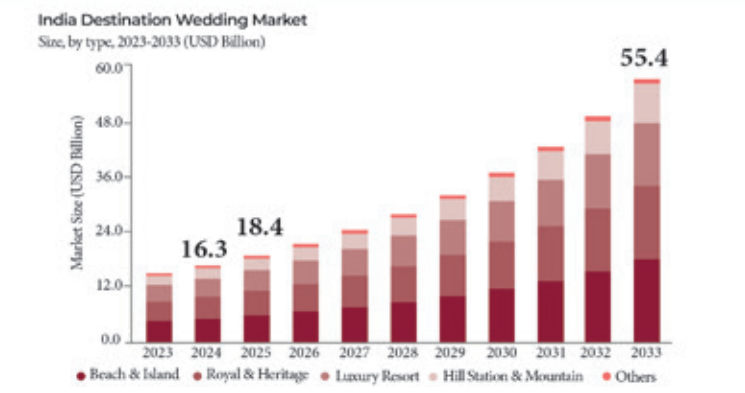
ZUBIN SAXENA,

Senior Vice President and Regional Head, South Asia, Hilton, says 2025 was a year of intelligent, focused growth. Operators strengthened their commercial engines, owners backed branded supply in underserved markets, and policy reforms such as GST rationalisation improved affordability and clarity for travellers. The result was a market that became deeper, more resilient and more accessible—evidence that India’s hospitality sector is now structurally stronger and future-ready.

Demand came from multiple engines: strong domestic leisure, a weddings market of 8-10 million celebrations annually, a rapidly expanding MICE segment, and a sharp rise in spiritual tourism supported by new highways, airports and regional rail networks. Travellers also grew more discerning, seeking design-forward midscale options, seamless digital experiences and sustainability-led stays.

India remains one of the most under-supplied branded hotel markets, boosting pricing and RevPAR. Hilton accelerated its presence across Tier-2/3 cities while expanding its luxury portfolio. For 2026, Saxena says technology, sustainability and human capital will shape the next phase of hospitality leadership.

INDIA DESTINATION WEDDING MARKET TRENDS



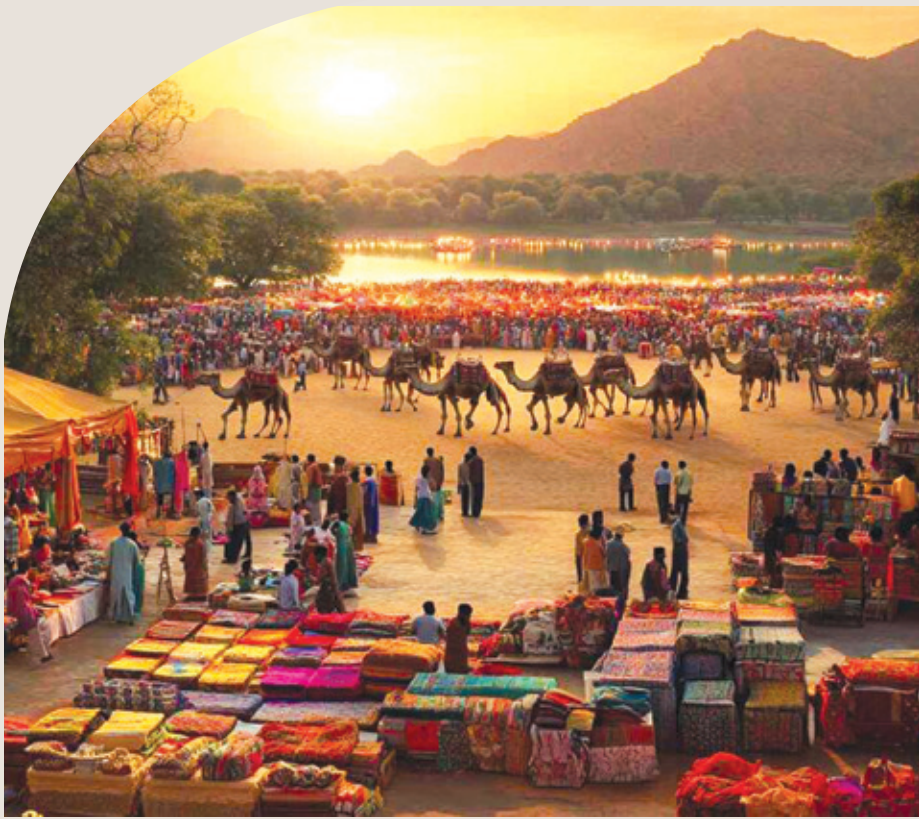
The India destination wedding market size was estimated at USD 16.3 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach USD 55.4 billion by 2033, growing at a CAGR of 14.8% from 2025 to 2033.

Source: <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/india-destination-wedding-market-report>



NIKHIL SHARMA,
MD & COO, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, says 2025 has been a defining year for India's hospitality sector, powered by economic confidence, stronger domestic travel and a clear shift toward organised, branded accommodation. Rising middle- and upper-middle-class travellers—taking more frequent, higher-quality trips—have been key demand drivers. Spiritual circuits, cultural destinations, self-drive holidays and festive travel helped smooth out traditional seasonality.

Guest expectations evolved sharply, with travellers seeking reliability, efficiency and seamless service, alongside personalised touches and digital convenience. This blend of tech-enabled ease and human warmth is becoming the new benchmark. Radisson's growth in 2025 has been fuelled by Tier-2/3 cities and supported by its multi-brand architecture, enabling faster conversions and wider accessibility.



KEY ASPECTS OF CULINARY TOURISM IN INDIA



Driver for Travel
56% of international travelers to India are motivated by culinary experiences.



Economic Impact
The segment holds an estimated revenue potential of ₹1,83,771 crore (US\$ 21 billion).

Key Offerings: Popular activities include food trails, cooking classes, restaurant visits, and food festivals.

Source: FICCI-Skift report (March 2025)



OPPORTUNITIES & DIVERSE ATTRACTIONS



Motivation for Travel
Cultural and heritage factors motivate 59% of international travelers visiting India.



Revenue Potential
This specific segment has an estimated revenue potential of US\$21.9 billion as of 2025.

Source: FICCI-Skift report (March 2025)



“
The next wave of growth will come from a balanced mix of urban, spiritual, and experience-led destinations
”

NIKHIL SHARMA
MD & COO, South Asia,
Radisson Hotel Group



For 2026, Sharma expects growth across urban, spiritual and experiential destinations, driven by better connectivity, consumer confidence and sustained infrastructure investments.

Taken together, these perspectives show an industry on the cusp of a new growth cycle—one defined not just by higher demand, but by smarter infrastructure, sharper market segmentation, and a deeper commitment to sustainability and human-centred hospitality. In the New Year, the sector's forward trajectory will depend on its ability to balance technology with warmth, scale with authenticity, and expansion with environmental responsibility. If this balance is achieved, Indian hospitality is poised to strengthen its position as one of the world's most dynamic and future-ready travel markets. **HAI**



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STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES

BY SUJIT BANERJEE

FORMER UNION SECRETARY, TOURISM
SECRETARY GENERAL, WORLD TRAVEL
& TOURISM COUNCIL, INDIA INITIATIVE

India's hospitality sector posted record-high occupancy of 68% and strong ADR/RevPAR growth in 2025, according to Hotelivate, driven by resilient domestic demand and a sharp post-Covid recovery. Top-tier cities such as Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru led performance, while oversupply in Tier 2 and 3 cities remained a concern. Stabilised hotels outperformed newer ones, benefiting from higher occupancy and ADR. This strength was supported by a robust domestic market: over 85% of India's tourism spend came from domestic travellers, with total outlay crossing \$200 billion and more than 3 billion trips made during the year.

Demand was broad-based. Leisure travel, spiritual circuits (Ayodhya, Varanasi, Char Dham) and weddings drove volume, while corporate travel and MICE rebounded in major metros. Foreign tourist arrivals also surged—India recorded more than 5.6 million FTAs by August 2025, tracking close to or above 2019 levels. Events like the ICC

Cricket World Cup and the previous year's G20 presidency provided strong tailwinds, especially from diaspora and short-haul international markets.

This momentum translated into investment confidence. India led the Asia-Pacific region in hotel development, with 693 projects (88,884 rooms) in the pipeline by Q1 2025. New capital targeted emerging resort corridors, heritage towns and villa clusters near urban centres. Asset-light models, PPPs and state-level reform champions such as Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh supported the expansion, with digitised single-window clearances improving ease of doing business. While many states have granted 'industry status' to tourism and hospitality, several promised incentives remain stuck in interdepartmental processes. Without stronger coordination, this gap between policy and execution risks weakening investor sentiment.

Policy played an important enabling role. The GST Council's reduction to 5% for

Policy played an important enabling role. The GST Council's reduction to 5% for rooms priced up to Rs 7,500 brought nearly 90% of hotel inventory within easier reach for value-conscious travellers

rooms priced up to Rs 7,500 brought nearly 90% of hotel inventory within easier reach for value-conscious travellers. However, the absence of input tax credit (ITC) under this slab has raised industry concerns. A September 2025 appeal by HAI and WTTCII to the Revenue Secretary argued that denial of ITC discourages quality upgrades and margin stability—especially when peer markets levy only 6–10% GST-equivalent rates on hotels.

Looking ahead, three imperatives stand out. First, human capital: with WTTC projecting an 11-million shortfall in hospitality workers by 2035, the sector must invest in youth, women, leadership and digital skills. Second, responsible capital: hotels need to embed ESG principles into development and operations to attract global investors. Third, experiential depth: India must evolve beyond commoditised "rooms and F&B" toward design-driven, locally rooted, tech-enabled experiences.

If 2025 demonstrated India's resilience, 2026 must be about readiness—for scale, for sustainability and for global leadership. **HAI**





“

Leisure travel remained the dominant demand driver

”

Indian travellers place strong emphasis on culturally sensitive services, including family-oriented itineraries and diverse dining needs, making personalisation a key competitive differentiator for destinations and hotels.
NOOR AHMAD HAMID, CEO, PATA

What were the strongest demand drivers in 2025, and how did guest expectations evolve?

In 2025, India's hospitality sector was supported by strong domestic mobility and the steady return of international travel. India's scale, diversity and growing middle class make it one of the most influential source markets in the region. Leisure travel remained the dominant demand driver, with spiritual tourism, wellness-focused journeys and culturally immersive trips showing notable momentum.

Guest expectations evolved in two clear directions. First, travellers increasingly sought authentic and meaningful experiences—local culture, heritage, food and nature—reflecting a broader shift

toward responsible and purpose-led travel. Second, expectations for digital convenience rose sharply, from frictionless booking and payments to personalised recommendations. Indian travellers also place strong emphasis on culturally sensitive services, including family-oriented itineraries and diverse dining needs, making personalisation a key competitive differentiator for destinations and hotels.

Which regions or hotel formats emerged as the most promising investment zones in 2025?

While I do not comment on individual assets, India's investment landscape in 2025 reflected global shifts toward differentiation, sustainability and community connection. Across the Asia-



Pacific region, including India, we see growing investor interest in boutique sustainable hotels, adaptive-reuse heritage properties and community-based accommodations. These formats align with traveller demand for authenticity and allow destinations to distribute economic benefits more widely.

India's emerging and secondary destinations also gained visibility as improved connectivity and infrastructure opened new opportunities in culture, nature, wellness and adventure tourism. In parallel, India's increasing engagement in sub-regional cooperation—particularly through Nepal and neighbouring markets—has created new possibilities for cross-border tourism circuits and MICE development, which will continue to attract strategic investment.

Where do you foresee the next wave of growth in 2026?

Growth will be driven by three core priorities: value, digital transformation and sustainability. Destinations will increasingly focus on high-yield segments such as wellness, experiential luxury, small-group premium travel and purpose-led journeys. Digital readiness—AI-enabled personalisation, secure digital payments and seamless customer journeys—will be essential for competitiveness.

Equally important is strengthening sustainability and community benefit. Managing carrying capacity, promoting responsible traveller behaviour and supporting local entrepreneurship will help ensure long-term resilience. With its strong domestic base, dynamic private sector and growing role in regional collaboration, India is well-positioned to shape a more balanced and future-ready tourism landscape in 2026 and beyond. **HAI**



ADVENTURE TOURISM POPULAR TREKS IN INDIA

India's trekking routes are as diverse as its people, each offering something unique, whether it's a dramatic icy canyon, a peaceful wildflower valley, or a close encounter with towering Himalayan peaks. These treks have become favourites among adventurers for good reason: they promise moments of quiet awe, bursts of adrenaline, and memories that stay with you long after the trail ends.

By Riaan Jacob George

India is a dream destination for those who love the outdoors. With Himalayan snowfields, lush forests, flower-covered valleys, and desert mountains, the country offers treks that suit every kind of explorer. Some paths test your endurance, some soothe your mind, and others simply leave you in awe. Here's a warm, storytelling-style look at some of India's most iconic and well-loved treks and routes that continue to inspire adventurers year after year.



CHADAR TREK, LADAKH

Few treks feel as otherworldly as the Chadar Trek. Each winter, the Zaskar River freezes into a thick sheet of ice, turning the landscape into a silent corridor of glass and stone. Walking on the frozen river, hearing the low groans of shifting ice, and being surrounded by towering canyon walls is an experience that stays with you long after the journey ends. It's challenging, cold, and raw, but for many, that's exactly what makes it unforgettable.



KEDARKANTHA TREK, UTTARAKHAND

Kedarkantha is a favourite among trekkers because it blends adventure with warmth and simplicity. The trail takes you through pine forests, snowy meadows, and peaceful campsites where the stars feel impossibly close. The moment you reach the summit at sunrise is pure magic. The entire Himalayan range glows softly as if waking up with you. It's a trek that is suitable for beginners but still rewards seasoned trekkers with unforgettable views.



VALLEY OF FLOWERS, UTTARAKHAND

The Valley of Flowers feels like nature at its most playful. During the monsoon, the valley bursts into a riot of colours. Pink, blue, yellow and purple flowers stretch as far as you can see. The mountains stand quietly in the background while clouds drift low across the meadows. It's the kind of place that makes you slow down, breathe deeply, and just take in the beauty around you. Many people also visit Hemkund Sahib nearby, adding a peaceful, spiritual touch to the journey.



ROOPKUND TREK, UTTARAKHAND

Roopkund blends high-altitude adventure with a touch of legend. The route winds through forests and rolling pastures before opening into vast snowfields that lead to the mysterious lake where ancient human skeletons were discovered. The combination of dramatic landscapes, rich folklore, and the thrill of climbing higher each day makes Roopkund one of India's most intriguing treks. It's the kind of journey that sparks curiosity as much as awe.



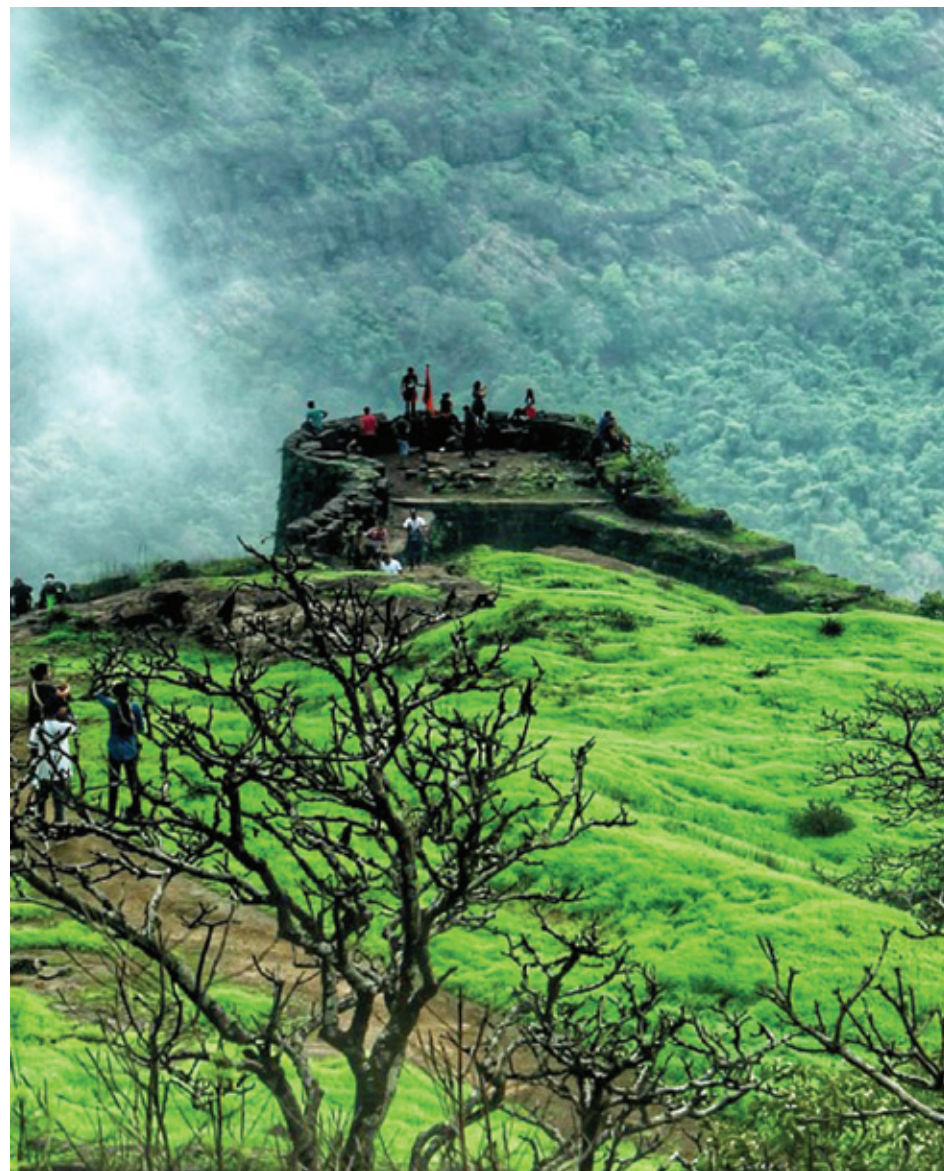
HAMPTA PASS, HIMACHAL PRADESH

Hampta Pass is a story of contrasts. One moment you're walking through the green, lively valleys of Kullu, and the next, the scenery shifts into the barren, rugged terrain of Lahaul. The pass itself offers a dramatic crossover between these two worlds, making every step feel exciting and new. Many trekkers end the journey with a visit to Chandratatal Lake, a sparkling Himalayan lake that adds a quiet, beautiful finish to the adventure.

GOECHALA, SIKKIM

Goechala is a trek for those who love the mountains in their purest form. The journey begins in dense forests rich with rhododendrons and gradually climbs into high-altitude terrain where the views seem endless. The highlight is the close-up view of Kanchenjunga from Dzongri and then from Goechala. It feels like the mountain is right in front of you. It's a challenging trek, but the sense of scale and the raw beauty of Sikkim make every step worthwhile.





RAJMACHI, MAHARASHTRA

Rajmachi is the perfect escape for city dwellers, especially during the monsoon. The trail is gentle and scenic, taking you past waterfalls, mist-covered hills, and patches of bright green forest. At the top, the ancient forts of Rajmachi stand quietly, offering sweeping views of the valley below. It's an easy, enjoyable trek that doesn't require much planning... just a sense of adventure and a love for the rain.

TARSAR MARSAR, KASHMIR

Tarsar Marsar is often called one of the most beautiful treks in India, and it's easy to see why. The trail wraps around rolling meadows, clear streams, and forests before opening up to the twin lakes of Tarsar and Marsar. Each lake reflects the surrounding mountains so perfectly that the surface looks like polished glass. Camping by the lakes, under Kashmir's soft evening light, is an experience that feels peaceful. **HAI**



From whisper to roar The Northeast's moment beckons

Once a quiet frontier, the Northeast now carries the weight of expectations as infrastructure improves, perceptions shift, and India waits to see if the region can fulfil its long-promised tourism destiny.

By M.P. Bezbaruah

Secretary General, Hotel Association of India

■ *"Northeast: India's next global sustainable tourism powerhouse"*
– Tourism Minister.

■ *"Integrated tourism blueprint outlined to boost Northeast connectivity and growth"*
– Minister DONER.

■ *"Centre okays Rs 3,000 crore tourism projects for NE"*

■ *"Northeast India: A hidden gem for tourism potential"*—HVS Anarock

As the year comes to an end and tourism looks to the future, Northeast Tourism steals the limelight with many expectations. That brings to mind a story about India's economic reforms. Before the reforms were launched, the internationally acclaimed magazine, *The Economist*, had written a cover story on India's untapped potential with a cover page cartoon of a caged tiger. After the reforms were introduced, the immediate outcome was slow and imperceptible. The magazine ran another story with a cover page cartoon of the open cage, but the tiger refused to come out. Similarly, the potential of the NE is well known. For years, the Ministry of Tourism had called it the "Paradise Unexplored." The Government of India is giving priority to the Northeast. Will the region now fulfil the promise?

First, a look at the potential. In the

17th century, a poet accompanying the invading Mughal army to the region had described the place thus: "This land is like no other land". This uniqueness sets NE apart and provides the new-age tourists with what they are looking for: sustainable experiences, and a variety of nature, culture, heritage, adventure and wildlife, ethnicity, and cuisine. From the snowcapped mountains of Sikkim to the rugged hills of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura and Mizoram, the rolling meadows of Meghalaya, and the verdant plains of Assam, there is surprise at every step in the Northeast. With its more than 200 tribes with vibrant culture and tradition, dotted with rich and varied flora and fauna, 30 game sanctuaries and national parks, 50% forest area, 400-500 varieties of Orchids, 900 species of birds, three-fourths of all bird varieties in India, the Northeast has it all.

Yet the performance has been poor. As the Ministry of Tourism report shows

**A brand identity for
Northeast Tourism is sorely
missing and the DONER
Ministry should logically
take the lead in working
that out**

in 2024, Northeast India accounted for only 0.43% of Domestic Tourist Visits and 1.17% of foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs). There are many worrying factors. While FTA growth has been good, domestic tourist arrival has dipped. The average also hides vast differences between states. As the HVS Anarock report on the Northeast tourism shows, even for hotel accommodation, Assam and Sikkim account for over 56% of the Northeast India's branded hotel inventory.

As the New Year dawns, many positives now bring hope that the NE will fulfil the expectations. First, of course, is the perception about the NE. It has changed from a place of disturbance, afflicted by insurgency to one of peace and development. This change is the most important impetus for promoting tourism. And the Government of India is pushing the advantage vigorously, in financial assistance for tourism and in creating infrastructure for connectivity that facilitates tourism growth. More states in the NE—Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh are now in the railways map of India. It is reported that under the UDAN scheme, eight new airports have been constructed, and 72 new air routes have been operationalised over the past decade. The HVS Anarock report states that air traffic grew at a CAGR of 10.6% between 2015–2024, with record air traffic of 11.2 million passengers in 2024, which, if sustained,



will nearly double to 20.5 million by 2030, boosting tourism and hospitality.

The same report brings the encouraging news that the outside world is recognising the hidden potential of the region. Branded hotel capacity in the region is set to nearly double by 2030, with over 3,000 new rooms in the pipeline. The New York Times listing of Assam as one of the top 52 must-see places in the world and the UNESCO recognition of the Maidams, burial places of the Ahom kings who ruled uninterrupted for 600 years, have also created enthusiasm. The Government of India has been hosting the International Tourism Mart in the NE and that provides an opportunity to market the region. Many worthwhile initiatives like the Hornbill Festival of Nagaland and the Cherry Blossom Festival of Meghalaya have shown the possibilities, but they need to be sustained and integrated into a broad picture of total NE tourism.

The states play the most crucial role in the promotion of tourism, and several NE states have expressed that intent by formulating tourism policies in the last few years. However, transforming intent to action is the primary challenge before NE. As the Prime Minister had exhorted the industry, it is time for NE to "roll out the roadmap". While at the last mart in Sikkim, all the states were enthusiastic about increasing tourist visits, the latest statistics do not bear that out. Compared to 2023, 2024 saw a worrying decline in domestic tourism for Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, while FTAs increased only marginally, from 0.221m to 0.244m.

It is heartening to see the DONER Minister talking of "an integrated tourism blueprint" for the NE. A brand identity for Northeast Tourism is sorely missing and the DONER Ministry should logically take the lead in working that out. In fact, a cohesive Northeast approach to tourism development should be at the top of the agenda. The Ministry of Tourism has encouraged development of regional tourism circuits, and it is necessary to see, in collaboration with the tourism industry, that the circuits

Northeast provides what the new tourists are looking for—a new and varied sustainable experience

do not remain isolated state circuits. In the national context the total number of tourists is low, and the number of visitors to the region, both domestic and foreign, varies widely between states. A comprehensive NE tourism development and a brand identity, and truly integrated NE tourism circuits will go a long way in harnessing the potential of the states so far left behind.

Similarly, though the news about the possible increase in branded hotel rooms is encouraging, the numbers still fall short of the requirement. The industry has shown that it is willing to and can invest in the NE. Such

The perception about the NE has changed from a place of disturbance, afflicted by insurgency to one of peace and development. This change is the most important impetus for tourism

investments will have many spin-off effects in creating employment opportunities and encouraging and stimulating similar economic activities. The DONER Ministry can perhaps take the lead in facilitating such economic activity in two ways. First, remove the roadblocks to such activities, adopt harmonised ease of doing business norms, suitable land policy, and so on. Second, provide incentives to the industry to grow, like treating tourism as an industry, or providing the benefits of infrastructure status to the hospitality industry. The states should realise that the multiplier effect of such incentives in creating employment and income will give manifold returns.

Northeast provides what the new tourists are looking for—a new and varied sustainable experience. On that strength the future tourism vision should be built, to make tourism a catalyst for inclusive growth. To ensure that it does not lead to unsustainable tourism or the pitfalls of over-tourism, more destinations need to be developed. The integrated tourism strategy that the DONER Minister is referring to should also include skill development, plans for community engagement, appropriate marketing and connectivity. That is a long agenda. Northeast has the potential. There is good intent. It is now time for action and to take the first steps to make Northeast the tourism powerhouse.

As it is said, even a thousand-mile journey must start with the first step. **HAI**

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