



ENGAGE

May-June 2025 | Volume 5 | Issue 3



POWERING HOSPITALITY THROUGH INFRASTRUCTURE



SHAPING TOMORROW'S DESTINATION TODAY

Suman Billa, Additional Secretary
& DG, Tourism, Govt. of India

PUDUCHERRY: A TOUCH OF FRANCE IN INDIA





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From the President's Desk



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

As we go to print, our thoughts are with the victims and families affected by the recent incident in Ahmedabad. This tragic incident is a stark reminder of how safety and preparedness must remain central to the hospitality and travel ecosystem, no matter how fast the sector evolves. It is a moment of collective grief—and reflection.

Even as the industry mourns, we remain mindful of the larger transformation underway in Indian tourism. As the world's most populous nation with an extraordinary mix of cultural, ecological, spiritual, and heritage assets, India is poised to emerge as a globally competitive, year-round destination. The government's \$3 trillion tourism economy vision for 2047 is an ambitious, tangible goal rooted in policy, partnerships, and people.

The sector already contributes nearly 6.6% to India's GDP and supports over 46.5 million jobs, according to a WTTC report. Government schemes like Swadesh Darshan 2.0 and PRASHAD now go beyond infrastructure to focus on holistic development—experiential circuits, electric mobility, smart signage, and universal accessibility.

However, tourism is not just an economic driver; it is a tool for national development—building infrastructure, empowering local communities, fostering entrepreneurship, and enhancing India's global soft power. The incident has only reinforced the need for infrastructure preparedness. Infrastructure gaps, regulatory hurdles, digitisation backlogs, and a 55–60% talent shortfall in the Hospitality sector must be addressed urgently. Uniform infrastructure status—long demanded by the sector—can significantly improve ease of doing business. Sustainability, too, must become non-negotiable. Clean energy, climate resilience, biodiversity protection, and waste management must be built into every project if we are to lead responsibly.

In this issue, we bring together voices that reflect this duality—of opportunity and responsibility, optimism and caution. The tragedy in Ahmedabad reminds us that while growth is essential, so is accountability. The time for tourism is now. How we build it today will shape how the world experiences India tomorrow. **HAI**

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With a \$3 trillion tourism economy in sight, India must rethink infrastructure, embrace digitisation, and act in mission mode to unlock its full travel potential.



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HAI mourns lives lost in Ahmedabad air tragedy



The Hotel Association of India is deeply saddened by the tragic plane crash in Ahmedabad—an incident that has shaken the entire nation. Our thoughts and heartfelt prayers are with the families of those who have lost their lives, and with everyone affected by this devastating tragedy.

We salute the emergency services, first responders, local authorities, community members, and all the forces involved for their relentless efforts in managing what has been an extremely chaotic and distressing situation.

Aviation is a vital part of India's tourism and hospitality ecosystem, and such a tragedy sends ripples across the entire industry. As the national body representing hotels, we extend our full support to the airline, the authorities, and the medical teams working tirelessly in the aftermath.

Our member hotels remain committed to offering care, comfort, and support to all travelers—both domestic and international—during this difficult period. We are ensuring that anyone in need finds safety, warmth, and compassion within our establishments.

In moments like these, we come together as an industry and as a nation. We mourn the loss and remain united in resilience, shared humanity, and hope.

HAI stands with J&K Tourism

Jammu & Kashmir, long revered for its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty, continues to enchant domestic and international travellers, conference delegates, and film crews alike. K.B. Kachru, President of the Hotel Association of India and Chairman—South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, acknowledged that the recent unfortunate incident in Pahalgam has understandably impacted tourism. “However, we expect normalcy to return soon. Given the region's resilience, tourism will bounce back quickly,” he said.

The Hotel Association of India believes that



J&K's tourism revival must be rooted in renewal and shared responsibility. Member hotels across the region remain committed to guest safety and will collaborate closely with both government and private stakeholders to restore trust. “J&K is the crown jewel of Indian tourism, and we will continue to support every effort to uphold its promise,” Kachru added.

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Green commitment

On World Environment Day, 5 June 2025, HAI Hotel Members across India reaffirmed their dedication to environmental sustainability through a series of impactful initiatives. Member hotels of the Hotel Association of India (HAI) participated enthusiastically in this nationwide celebration, aligning with this year’s UN theme, “Ending Global Plastic Pollution.” Hosted by the Republic of Korea, the day called for urgent global action and reinforced the need for an international treaty to curb plastic waste.

For the 27th consecutive year, HAI member hotels commemorated this day by becoming hubs of engagement and environmental awareness. From guests and employees to vendors, school-children, NGOs, and local communities, a diverse group of participants came together on and off hotel premises to spread awareness about the fragile state of the environment and the shared

responsibility of protecting it for future generations.

The celebrations saw a wide range of activities designed to drive behavioural change and champion sustainable hospitality practices. These included plantation drives, creative slogan-making sessions, educational displays highlighting the harmful impact of plastic pollution, and a dedicated plastic-free awareness campaign. In a notable stride toward clean energy adoption and climate action, the day also witnessed the inauguration of a solar farm, signalling a deepening commitment to green infrastructure.

From large hotel chains to independent properties, the industry echoed a united message: pro-environment initiatives are central to operations, with a strong emphasis on waste reduction and efficiency. Reinforcing this sentiment, the India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) joined the Prime Minister’s “Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam” initiative. Lead-

ing the celebrations at The Ashok in New Delhi, ITDC Managing Director Mugdha Sinha described the act of planting a tree in a mother’s name as a symbolic tribute to Mother Earth, reaffirming ITDC’s pledge to a circular, plastic-free economy.

At The Oberoi Rajvilas, the day was marked with elegance, creativity, and a powerful sense of purpose. In harmony with the global theme, the hotel showcased installations crafted from repurposed plastic and introduced interactive QR code displays that engaged guests in meaningful storytelling. The celebration went beyond symbolism—it was a well-executed call to action that fused conscience with creativity, transforming awareness into inspiration. True to the Oberoi ethos, the initiative reflected a graceful and memorable commitment to sustainability.

Across the country, World Environment Day 2025 was observed through meaningful participation and a growing movement toward responsible hospitality.

HAI champions hand hygiene

The Association Members across the country celebrated the 11th HAI Hand Hygiene Day! on May 5th 2025. The initiative is aimed to reinforce the critical importance of hand hygiene in the workplace while fostering a culture of health, safety, and infection prevention. By raising awareness around proper handwashing practices, HAI continues to support public health and safety across the and local communities.



New members join HAI

The Hotel Association of India (HAI) is pleased to welcome its newest member hotels:

Sarovar Portico	Badrinath
Sarovar Premiere	Amritsar
Welcomhotel By ITC Hotels	Bengaluru
Namah Resort	Jim Corbett
The Heritage Village Resort & Spa	Manesar, Gurgaon
Welcomhotel	Chennai

Their addition strengthens HAI’s growing network of quality hospitality establishments across India.

Hospitality firms queue up for IPOs

Several travel and hospitality companies are gearing up to go public, encouraged by strong demand-supply dynamics, a surge in domestic tourism, and robust macroeconomic fundamentals. Among them, Oyo, Pride Hotels Group, and LaRiSa Hotels & Resorts are planning initial public offerings. Lemon Tree Hotels

has announced plans to list its subsidiary, Fleur Hotels, within two years. The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts successfully concluded its IPO earlier in May. Meanwhile, Prestige Hospitality and Travel Food Services have also begun IPO proceedings, signalling growing investor confidence in the sector.



Industry unites for Kashmir



The tourism industry is stepping in to help revive travel in Jammu & Kashmir. The Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality (FAITH), the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), and key members of the Hotel Association of India (HAI) will visit Srinagar, Gulmarg, and Pahalgam in the coming weeks to reinforce the message that the region remains safe for tourists. As a show of solidarity, IATO is organising a four-day trip with a 22-member delegation to Srinagar and Pahalgam to support and uplift the J&K tourism sector.

Building the foundation for India's tourism boom

While Tier I cities and a few iconic spots have seen considerable development and investment in infrastructure, it is India's Tier II/III cities that hold the key to unlocking a new wave of tourism growth.

By Dr Jyotsna Suri

Chairperson & Managing Director, The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group

India's rich tapestry of culture, history and natural beauty gives it a distinctive advantage on the global tourism map. From ancient heritage sites and vibrant festivals to breathtaking landscapes and pristine beaches, the country is brimming with experiences that can attract travellers throughout the year. Encouragingly, there is growing recognition of this potential and with the right focus on infrastructure, India is well on its way to becoming a truly year-round global destination.

While Tier I cities and a few iconic spots have seen considerable development and investment in infrastructure, it is India's Tier II/III cities that hold the key to unlocking a new wave of tourism growth. These places have hidden heritage sites, beautiful natural spots and unique local cultures that many domestic and global travellers are now looking for. The last decade has seen tremendous progress in India's infrastructure, be it modern airports, the

Travellers both from India and overseas now look for destinations that are not only easy to reach but also digitally connected



expansion of road networks or the introduction of high-speed trains like Vande Bharat that are connecting different parts of the country faster than ever before. These advancements have laid a strong foundation for tourism to flourish. Building on this momentum, there is a tremendous opportunity to enhance the overall visitor experience, especially in emerging destinations. With further improvements in flight connectivity, seamless road and rail

The private sector needs support from helpful government policies, tax breaks, funding support, simpler regulatory framework and help in marketing



access, quality accommodation, sanitation, safety measures and multilingual signage, these lesser-explored places can become key attractions on the global tourism map.

It is encouraging to see that the discussion around tourism infrastructure is no longer just about buildings and roads. Today, elements like reliable internet, easy online access to information and smooth digital payments are just as important. Travellers, both from India and overseas, now look for destinations that are not only easy to reach but also digitally connected. Government programmes such as PRASHAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive) and Swadesh Darshan are positive steps in this direction. Initiatives like Wed in India and Meet in India are also helping position the country as a top destination for weddings, events and conferences, further boosting regional tourism and infrastructure development. The private sector also has an important role to play in improving tourism, whether it is small hotels, eco-friendly resorts, home stays, unique local experiences or better transport options. However the private sector needs support from helpful government policies, tax breaks, funding support, simpler regulatory framework and help in marketing.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) remain a powerful model for accelerating this progress. The collaboration between public resources and private execution has already shown results in sectors like airports and ropeways and can be expanded further into areas like heritage restoration, hospitality training, and last-mile connectivity.

As we envision India's future as a year-round global tourist destination, it is clear that infrastructure must evolve into a broader idea, one that builds not just places but experiences. A collective, future-forward approach where governments enable, businesses innovate, and communities participate can transform India into the world's most preferred destination. **HAI**

POWERING HOSPITALITY THROUGH INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure is the backbone of India's Hospitality sector. As roads, runways, and digital highways expand, so does the nation's ability to welcome, host, and delight travellers from every corner of the world. With the right support, India's tourism sector could transform into a \$3 trillion powerhouse by 2047.

Team HAI Engage



The Indian hospitality and tourism sector is a vibrant expression of the country's cultural richness and a vital pillar of economic growth. Contributing around 8% to the GDP and generating nearly 10% of employment, the sector is poised to reach a \$3 trillion contribution to GDP by 2047 (out of this hospitality will comprise \$1 trillion), creating 46.5 million jobs, according to the WTTC report. But for this growth to be sustainable and inclusive, it must be anchored in a strong and enabling infrastructure. From airways to highways and railways, from digital connectivity



GOVERNMENT PUSH

Several government schemes are actively driving tourism infrastructure. These are:

- **PRASHAD** (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive)

Focuses on developing infrastructure around major religious and pilgrimage sites to promote spiritual tourism.

- **Swadesh Darshan scheme**

Aims to develop theme-based tourist circuits (e.g., Buddhist, Coastal, Desert, Eco, Heritage) across states to promote integrated tourism development.

- **Dekho Apna Desh**

Encourages domestic tourism by urging citizens to visit at least 15 destinations within India, promoting local economies and cultural appreciation.

- **UDAN** (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik)

Enhances regional air connectivity by making air travel affordable, especially to underserved and unserved airports, boosting access to remote tourist destinations.

- **SAATHI** (System for Assessment, Awareness & Training for Hospitality Industry)

A COVID-era initiative to ensure compliance with safety and hygiene protocols by the hospitality industry, improving tourist confidence.

- **NIDHI** (National Integrated Database of Hospitality Industry)

A platform to register accommodation units, enabling better planning, regulation, and support for the hospitality sector.

Additionally, FDI in tourism is allowed up to 100% through the automatic route, and hotels around UNESCO sites are being incentivised with tax holidays.





to last-mile logistics and the development of Smart Cities, infrastructure is the critical enabler of tourism and hospitality expansion, especially in a post-Covid world where travel preferences have evolved significantly.

With a heady cocktail of history and modern living, a chameleonic panorama that changes from one Indian State to the other, vast expanses that leave deep imprints on the retina, varied and rich culture and cuisine, there are a million unexplored nooks and corners in India that offer huge opportunities. Tourism is seen from distinctive perspectives, including niche products like the adventure circuit, medical tourism, wellness, sports, MICE, eco-tourism, film, rural, religious tourism, cruises, art and craft expos, culinary and cultural bonanzas.

And yet, about 10 million inbound travellers come into India while over 20 million



outbound travellers go out of India every year. Also, while Buddhism originated in India and seven of the eight main Buddhist pilgrimage sites are here, our country gets less than one per cent of Buddhist pilgrims in the world. The potential is immense with the upcoming planned infrastructure visualised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. A lot is being done that will propel India into a major tourist hub of the world.

The steps taken over the past few years are

“Tourism is seen from distinctive perspectives, including niche products like the adventure circuit, medical tourism, wellness, sports, MICE, eco-tourism, film, rural, religious tourism, cruises, art and craft expos, culinary and cultural bonanzas”

now visible in the Holy city of Amritsar, in the form of the Heritage Street, Qila Ahluwalia, Qila Gobindgarh, Jallianwala Bagh, Durgiana Temple plaza walk, and Rambagh Deorhi, among others. These projects were implemented by the Centre and the state government in collaboration with the Amritsar Municipal Corporation. With the city catering to thousands of tourists daily, these developments have provided a substantial boost to tourism.

Another notable example is Varanasi, where enhanced connectivity during Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's eight-year tenure has begun yielding impressive results. Tourist footfall crossed 8.94 crore in 2023 and surpassed 11 crore in 2024. According to a Times of India report from May 2025, V. Vidyavathi, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, has given officials a two-month deadline to implement visible changes aimed at enhancing Varanasi's appeal as a unique tourism destination.

In Bihar, Tourism Minister Raju Kumar Singh chaired a departmental review meeting at the Tourism Directorate in March, setting clear priorities to accelerate tourism development. He instructed officials to ensure timely completion of projects sanctioned under the Chief Minister's Pragati Yatra and called for speeding up the tender process for constructing three five-star hotels in Patna.



In a bid to boost tourism, Karnataka is set to introduce seaplane services to key tourist destinations. The state government plans to enhance accessibility to popular spots such as Hampi, Krishna Raja Sagar (KRS), and the Almatti backwaters through this initiative. Meanwhile, the Kerala government is expanding its carrying capacity studies to additional locations as part of its push for eco-friendly and sustainable tourism that safeguards the state's natural beauty. There are many such plans at various destinations in various other states too.

The Prime Minister's Viksit Bharat vision, along with initiatives like PRASHAD, Swadesh Darshan, SAATHI, Dekho Apna Desh, NIDHI, and state government plans, underscore the strong link between tourism and infrastructure development.

Connectivity as catalyst

Dr Sanjay Sethi, MD & CEO of Chalet Hotels, observes, "Infrastructure development is



“Infrastructure development is often the silent catalyst behind tourism growth”

DR SANJAY SETHI
MD & CEO
CHALET HOTELS

often the silent catalyst behind tourism growth. The second airport in Goa is a prime example—unlocking access, enhancing connectivity, and boosting visitors confidence. Today's travellers value ease of travel as much as the destination itself.”

Indeed, projects like the Navi Mumbai International Airport and Mumbai's new coastal road are set to transform inbound tourism. Similarly, the expansion of regional air connectivity under the UDAN scheme has already operationalised 631 routes connecting 91 underserved and remote airports.

The Ministry of Civil Aviation has targeted 120 new destinations and 4 crore passengers under UDAN over the next decade. Such developments have a direct multiplier effect on the hotel sector, which in turn boosts local employment and

“The Ministry of Civil Aviation has targeted 120 new destinations and 4 crore passengers under UDAN over the next decade. Such developments have a multiplier effect on the hotel sector, which in turn boosts local employment and regional development”

regional development. The development of any nation is intrinsically linked to the strength of its road and transit networks—and India is making bold strides in this direction. One of the most ambitious initiatives driving this transformation is the Bharatmala Pariyojana, an umbrella programme for the highways sector aimed at enhancing the efficiency of freight and passenger movement.



By bridging critical infrastructure gaps, Bharatmala envisions a network of Economic Corridors, Inter and Feeder Routes, National Corridor Efficiency upgrades, as well as roads enhancing border, coastal, and international connectivity. With greenfield expressways and strategic roadways planned across the country, the project is not only designed to reduce travel time and fuel costs but also to open up newer destinations, enabling smoother access to emerging tourist hotspots and boosting the hospitality industry in their wake. By creating parallel cities and enhancing connectivity, areas open for tourism to explore new opportunities.



“The intensive infrastructure developments in the Northeast are of two types—in general for all sectors, and in particular, for tourism and hospitality”

MP BEZBARUAH
HAI
SECRETARY GENERAL



From 'Paradise unexplored' to tourism powerhouse

Take the case of the Northeast—a verdant region comprising seven culturally rich states, each with its own distinctive art, cuisine, and traditions. Long considered remote and under-connected, the region is now witnessing a remarkable transformation. **M.P. Bezbaruah**, former Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, member of the North Eastern Council and Secretary General, HAI, notes, “The intensive infrastructure developments in the Northeast are of two types—in general for all sectors, and in particular, for tourism and hospitality.”

Key initiatives include the construction of 14 new railway lines spanning 1,180 km, over 5,000 km of highways, 12 airports, 64 new air routes under the UDAN scheme, and Rs 1,000 crore worth of inland waterways. These efforts are unlocking the tourism potential of

destinations that once took days to reach and are now accessible within hours.

However, despite this major connectivity push, hospitality infrastructure in the Northeast remains limited, with only 70 classified hotels across the entire region. The Hotel Association of India's (HAI) state chapter for the Northeast is working to bridge this gap by partnering with local governments and investors.

Bezbaruah also emphasises the need for hospitality infrastructure to be granted full infrastructure status. “It will unlock capital access and improve ease of doing business, especially for regions like the Northeast where investor confidence is crucial,” he adds.

Odisha: Investment and innovation

Dr. J.K. Mohanty, CMD, Swosti Group and Chairman Eastern Region, Hotel & Restaurant Association of Odisha, believes



“Under the new state government, tourism has been accorded priority status, with over Rs 8,155 crore of investments secured at the Make in Odisha Conclave 2025”

DR J.K. MOHANTY
CMD, SWOSTI GROUP AND
CHAIRMAN EASTERN REGION,
HOTEL & RESTAURANT
ASSOCIATION OF ODISHA





“Infrastructure development and destination readiness are not just enablers but catalysts. Initiatives like PM Gati Shakti and Swadesh Darshan are laying the groundwork for a more seamless and inclusive travel experience”

ZUBIN SAXENA
SVP & REGIONAL
HEAD (SOUTH ASIA), HILTON



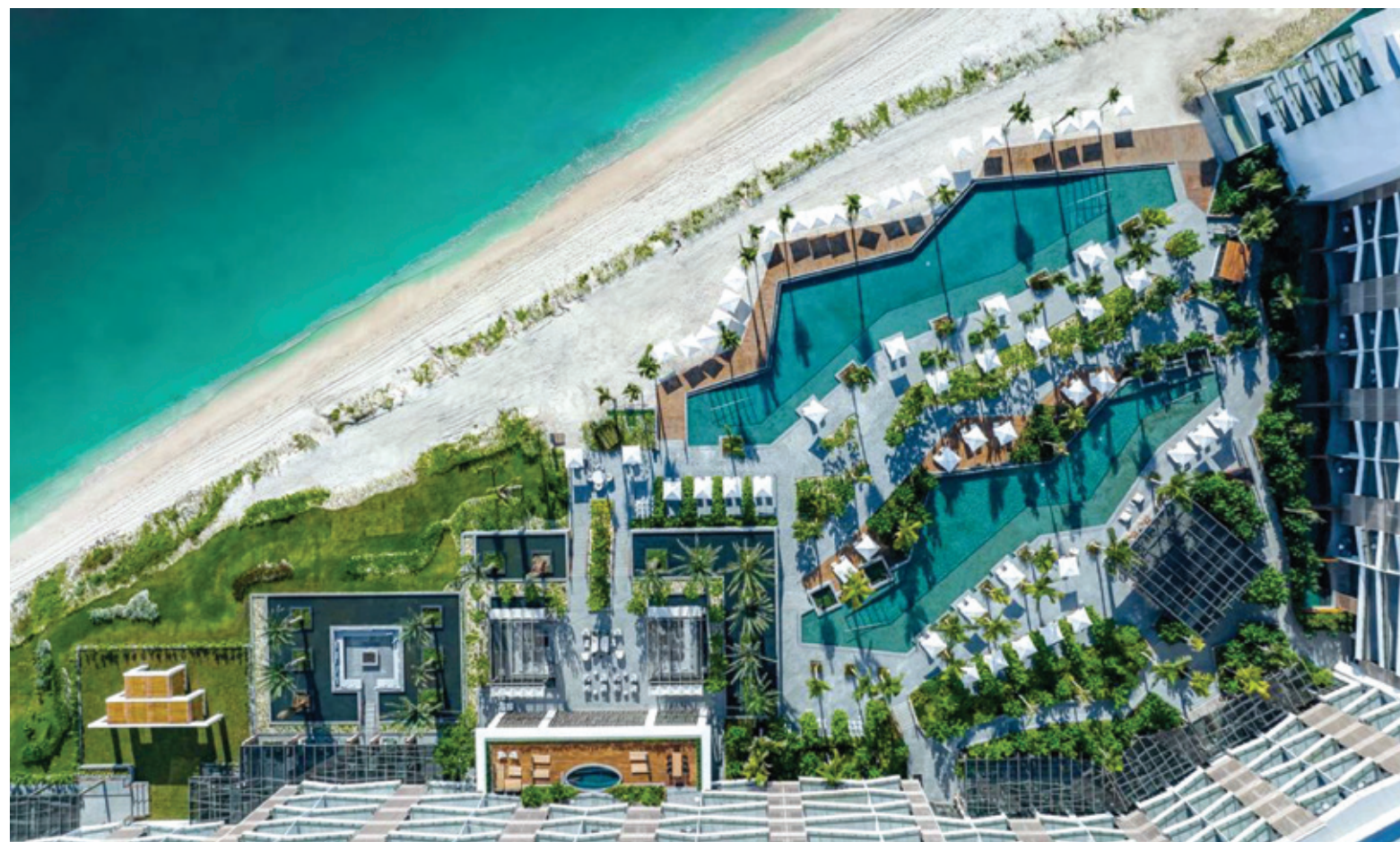
tourism is a key driver of Odisha's future growth. "Under the new state government, tourism has been accorded priority status, with over Rs 8,155 crore of investments secured at the Make in Odisha Conclave 2025," he states.

Chilika Lake is being developed as a special tourism zone with eco-friendly practices. Swosti Group is contributing by developing luxury resorts and MICE facilities that not only cater to high-end tourism but also generate employment and foreign exchange.

Mohanty too emphasises, "It is time that hospitality is given full infrastructure status. It is not just a sector of luxury and leisure—it is a backbone of jobs and GDP."

Digital infrastructure: the invisible highway

In the post-pandemic world, digital infrastructure has become as important as



physical roads. **Zubin Saxena**, SVP & Regional Head (South Asia), Hilton, notes, "Infrastructure development and destination readiness are not just enablers but catalysts. Initiatives like PM Gati Shakti and Swadesh Darshan are laying the groundwork for a more seamless and inclusive travel experience." Hilton, like many other global hotel chains, is expanding into Tier-II cities, aligning with the trend of remote and lesser-known destinations becoming popular. Digitisation, internet penetration, and AI-based services are enhancing the customer experience while ensuring health and safety protocols.

Tourism post-Covid

The pandemic had decimated the sector, but the hotel industry was among the first to bounce back. According to RateGain, by October 2020, hotel reservations had recovered by 73%, with Tier-II destinations like Dehradun and Goa leading the bookings.



This shift underscores a broader trend: people are seeking quick getaways, immersive experiences, and destinations that are accessible by road or short flights. The rise of bleisure (business + leisure), staycations, and eco-tourism is also reshaping how infrastructure needs to evolve.

Infrastructure status

Tourism is one of the few sectors that can provide immediate and broad-based employment. The industry's capacity to innovate, adopt and adapt is immense, as was evident in the post-pandemic recovery. Moreover, it's a high investment sector that boosts local employment. So a uniform infrastructure status to the industry is essential.

Industry leaders are unanimous in their call for granting full infrastructure status to the hospitality sector. Such recognition would unlock access to long-term financing, enable single-window clearances, and ensure more streamlined regulatory

support. The sentiment is widely echoed by industry bodies such as the Hotel Association of India (HAI) and the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI). "If the hotel sector is booming, the economy is booming," says Sethi. "Post-Covid, people flocked to hotels—we were the first to bounce back. That resilience deserves to be matched with structural support."

As we look at the amrit kaal period of high growth, it's essential to continue the growth momentum by focusing on ease of doing business, digitisation, skill development, infrastructure enhancement, and sustainable practices.

From high-speed rail to last-mile delivery, from internet access in remote villages to air routes to the Northeast, the infrastructure push will decide whether India's hospitality sector can meet its vast potential. The good news? The building blocks are already in place. The challenge is to scale them up, stitch them together, and turn Incredible India into an irresistible one. **HAI**

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Shaping tomorrow's destination today

India is ready to transform tourism into a driver of growth, inclusion, and global leadership, writes **Suman Billa**, Additional Secretary & Director General, Tourism, Government of India.

India stands on the cusp of a tourism transformation. With its diverse landscapes, rich heritage, and vibrant culture, our country is uniquely positioned to emerge as a year-round, globally competitive tourism destination. The Ministry of Tourism is spearheading this transformation through a series of forward-looking initiatives designed to create world-class experiences, attract private investments, and ensure sustainable and inclusive development.

Destination development

The ministry is moving decisively to chart a new course for Indian tourism—one that goes beyond legacy circuits and

embraces the full diversity of the nation. The emphasis is now on developing new and lesser-known destinations, offering fresh experiences to both domestic and international travellers. These efforts are grounded in a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model that brings together the strengths of government vision and private sector efficiency.

Recent budgetary announcements reflect this strategic direction, with robust policy support for performance-linked incentives, inclusion of hospitality units in the Harmonised Master List (HML), and investment in holistic destination development. The objective is not merely to build infrastructure but to reimagine tourism through governance reforms, destination-specific development

models, and enhanced investor confidence.

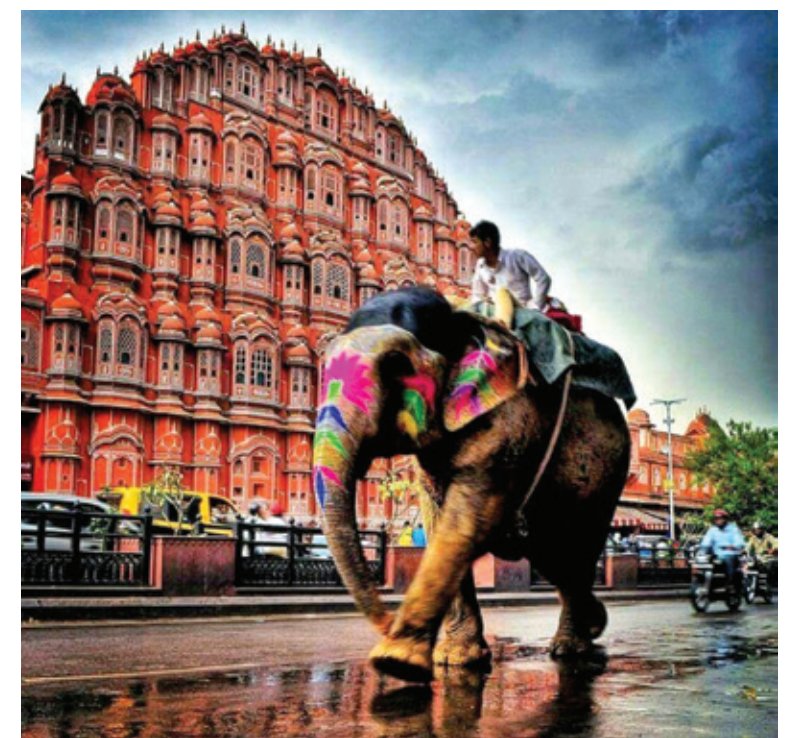
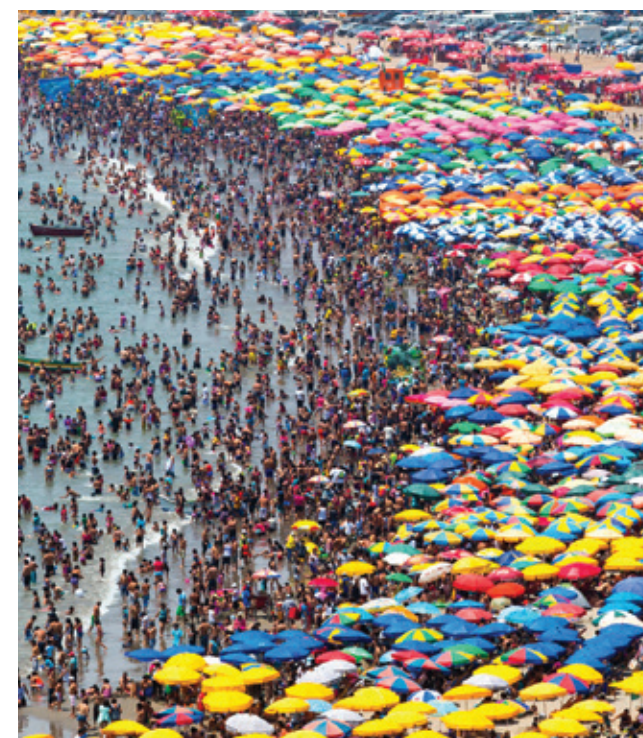
Infrastructure and accessibility

In 2024-25, the ministry sanctioned 55 projects worth over ₹2,200 crore under the Swadesh Darshan and PRASHAD schemes. These projects are designed not only to enhance physical infrastructure but to uplift entire ecosystems surrounding tourist sites.

Complementing these are 40 additional projects under the Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI) supported by long-term, interest-free loans of ₹ 3,295 crore, selected through a challenge-based mechanism that encourages innovation and performance. These SASCI projects are expected to usher in private investments of close to ₹ 10,000 crore.

Connectivity is another cornerstone of

“
Tourism is not just an economic activity—it is a powerful tool for national development. It can bring prosperity to rural areas, catalyse infrastructure development, celebrate our cultural identity, and enhance India's global image
”



this strategy. Initiatives such as expanded Vande Bharat Express routes, improved national highways, and the regional air connectivity scheme UDAN are enhancing accessibility to both prominent and offbeat destinations. Better mobility options help unlock the potential of remote regions, making travel more seamless and increasing the overall attractiveness of destinations.

At the micro level, infrastructure investments include electric carts, cycling paths, pedestrian trails, accessible walkways, experiential circuits, smart signage, parking facilities, and universal accessibility features. These seemingly modest interventions significantly elevate visitor satisfaction, especially for families, seniors, and travellers with special needs.

PPP route

A thriving tourism sector cannot be built on public investment alone. The ministry is actively cultivating a fertile environment for private investment, recognising that the private sector is key to expanding and diversifying India's tourism offerings. Whether through the development of wellness resorts, eco-lodges, experiential hubs, or large-scale convention centres, public-private partnerships are central to our vision.

The inclusion of hospitality units in the master list at select 50 destinations is a bold policy shift aimed at unlocking institutional credit and attracting high-quality private investment. Simultaneously, through programs like Swadesh Darshan and SASCI, states are being encouraged to collaborate with private operators in the development, operation, and management of tourism assets, ensuring their long-term sustainability and service excellence.

Sustainability and climate resilience

Tourism infrastructure today must be resilient, future-ready, and environmentally sustainable. Swadesh

Darshan 2.0 integrates sustainability benchmarks into every project—from the use of eco-friendly materials and energy-efficient systems to enhancing green cover and supporting biodiversity.

At several sites, clean mobility solutions such as electric vehicles are being introduced. These efforts not only improve the tourist experience but also support India's broader climate goals by gradually reducing the sector's carbon footprint. In a warming world, tourism must be a solution, not a stressor—and India is committed to leading by example.

Inclusive growth

Perhaps the most powerful impact of tourism lies in its ability to transform local economies. Vibrant destinations are not built by infrastructure alone—they thrive on the energy and enterprise of local communities. Our approach is rooted in the belief that tourism must be inclusive, people-centric, and locally beneficial.



To this end, we are rolling out targeted skilling programs like Paryatan Mitra and Paryatan Didi, training young people and women to become guides, facilitators, and hospitality professionals. Simultaneously, we are promoting community-run homestays, integrating traditional crafts into tourism circuits, and supporting haats and souvenir outlets that allow tourists to engage with authentic local cultures.

By turning villages into tourism-ready ecosystems, we are creating livelihoods, encouraging entrepreneurship, and fostering pride in local heritage. This is not just infrastructure development—it is nation-building through tourism.

Collective action

India's strong domestic travel base and growing appeal to global travellers provide the ideal foundation for long-term growth. But realising the sector's full potential demands coordinated

action. The Ministry of Tourism is committed to enabling this by supporting states, incentivising private sector participation, and pursuing policy reforms that remove bottlenecks and stimulate investment.

Tourism is not just an economic activity—it is a powerful tool for national development. It can bring prosperity to rural areas, catalyse infrastructure development, celebrate our cultural identity, and enhance India's global image.

The road ahead is ambitious, but the path is clear. With Centre-State collaboration, industry participation, and community engagement, India is laying the foundation for a tourism renaissance—one that blends growth with responsibility, scale with sensitivity, and ambition with inclusion. By shaping tomorrow's destinations today, we're not just enabling better travel—we're building a stronger, more vibrant, and united India. **HAI**

Unlocking INDIA'S hidden corners

How last-mile connectivity is turning India's remotest regions—beaches, mountains, and forests—into the country's next big tourism story.

By Team HAI Engage

Once overlooked and underdeveloped, India's far-flung towns and scenic outposts are fast emerging as tourism's new frontier. Behind this transformation lies an essential force: last-mile connectivity. From winding forest roads to improved healthcare in coastal hamlets, it's the delivery of infrastructure that is redefining how India travels, and how the world sees India.

India's hospitality sector is undergoing a quiet revolution, powered not just by luxury resorts or airline routes but by the humble village road, the rural clinic, the mobile signal tower, and the small-town railway halt. Even far-flung destinations



can thus see a surge in both tourist interest and investor confidence. According to JLL's 2024 report, nearly 50% of hotel transactions now happen in smaller cities—an undeniable indicator of the changing winds.

Much of this growth is anchored in the government's infrastructure push. Programs like the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) and the Regional Connectivity Scheme (UDAN) are not only helping tourists reach new places, but are also enabling a steady trickle of progress to reach the very edges of India's map—be it a beach in the Konkan belt, a homestay in the Northeast, or a trekking base in the Western Ghats.

These newly connected places are not just pretty—they are alive with story, culture, and opportunity. Travellers, especially the post-pandemic generation, are seeking slower, deeper, more authentic encounters. Tier II/III destinations, with their low costs, cultural richness, and warm hospitality, fit the bill perfectly. With local traditions intact and crowds still manageable, they



are fast becoming magnets for both spiritual and experiential tourism.

Equally significant is the ripple effect on local communities. As better roads bring more visitors, trained hospitality workers—many of them returning from metros—are setting up businesses in their hometowns. Government-backed skilling programmes like those from the



Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council (THSC) are helping to build a capable local workforce, ensuring that jobs stay local, and the smiles are homegrown.

Importantly, tourism growth cannot thrive on roads alone. The development of clean public toilets, convenience stores, wellness clinics, local transport, and digital payment systems is essential to making a remote destination travel-friendly. The blend of physical infrastructure and service readiness is what turns a scenic spot into a viable destination.

There's also a broader economic logic at play. Smaller cities offer lower costs, less saturation, and an ideal mix for "Bleisure" travel—a growing trend where tourists blend work and vacation. With remote work possibilities rising and wellness becoming central to travel, hill towns, coastal villages, and forest retreats are uniquely placed to benefit.

The synergy between last-mile connectivity and tourism infrastructure is creating a virtuous cycle. Better access fuels tourism, tourism brings in footfall and demand, and that demand justifies more investment in connectivity and services. What begins as a road often ends in a ripple, empowering a village, enabling a family business, and enriching the Indian tourism narrative. **HAI**



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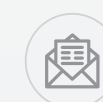
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A touch of France in India

The quaint and charming town of Puducherry is a delight for travellers seeking culture and immersive experiences.

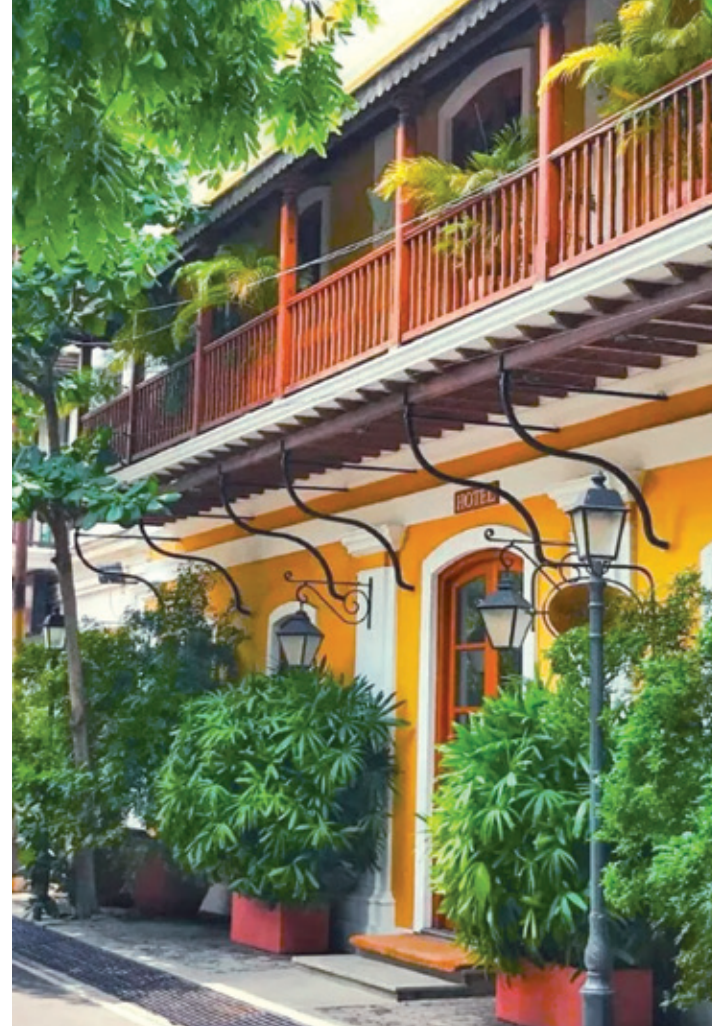
BY RIAAN JACOB GEORGE



Puducherry is unique in terms of cultural offerings. This former outpost of France on the Coromandel Coast of southeast India is traditionally rooted in its Tamil identity yet retains many aspects of its French heritage. The smell of temple flowers and the salty Bay of Bengal, mingling with the wafting aromas of a boulangerie churning out fresh croissants, where road names are written in French and Tamil, and where cobblestone streets in the old French quarter takes you back many centuries to a bygone era. Puducherry, over the past few years has evolved into a beautiful living community of artists, chefs, bakers, designers, bohemians, surfers, and even architects. And the tourists are delighted because it captures their imagination. For historical context, Puducherry became

● Destination

famous at the turn of the 18th century when France proclaimed it as the largest colony in India. It went on to serve as the capital of French India till 1954, retaining its bastion for a few years more after the rest of India was emerging from British rule. Despite its integration of the Union of India, Puducherry continues to showcase a unique identity with its French-style urban planning, architecture and cultural dichotomy. It is here where you will find traditional Tamil families living in stately French maisons, cafes and boulangeries dotting the streets and Hindu temples along side baroque churches. Today, Pondy beautifully blends its traditional side with its French art de vivre, chic bistros, boutique hotels, design stores and patisseries. What we love about Puducherry is its motley mix of visitors and residents, like yoga enthusiasts, design lovers, culture vultures, foodies, backpackers, honeymooners from Chennai or Bengaluru's corporates.



Pondicherry's colonial architecture



A quaint seaside French promenade on Indian ECR, Pondicherry

Govt. Initiatives

Puducherry tourism policy aims to promote domestic tourism and economic opportunities. The policy emphasises the development of "satellite sites" to distribute tourism, beyond the main tourist attractions, and aims to generate employment.

In 2022 Puducherry witnessed the arrivals of 17.6 lakh domestic tourists and 900 foreign tourists while in 2023, Puducherry saw 31,214 foreign tourists, a significant increase from 2022.

- As per Union Budget 2023-24, 10-years' Tourism Plan would be developed for promoting tourism in



the Union Territory of Puducherry for creating employment opportunities to 5,000 youths in the next five years.

- In state budget 2024-25, the government allocated Rs 130 crore to environmental conservation and climate resilience projects, such as the prevention of beach erosion.
- As per Union Budget 2023-24, under Smart City Project, linking of

various urban storm water drains and improvement works for Rs 99.50 lakh has been commissioned.

- The government is committed to improve Puducherry's socio-economic aspects to improve investment opportunities.
- In December 2022, the Tourism Minister inaugurated four projects in Puducherry under the Swadesh Darshan scheme.

VISIT WHITE TOWN

The tourist highlight of Puducherry is Ville Blanche or White Town, the French Quarter. This is a perfectly geometrical maze of rues and boulevards, with French names, lined with multi-coloured villas in a distinct style, with white trimmings and elegant facades and fenced gardens. Architecture buffs will enjoy going on heritage walks to understand the French sensibilities of these structures that date back to the 18th and 19th centuries, perfectly blended with Tamil design movies. Stroll along La Promenade, or Rue Dumas or Rue Suffren, or visit establishments such as Café des Arts or La Maison Rose that serve up authentic French croissants and coffee. A beautiful blend of Franco-Tamil coexistence. It is no wonder that a lot of iconic Bollywood and Tamil movies use this quarter as a backdrop for their films.





Matrimandir - Golden Temple in Auroville



Paradise Beach

A SPIRITUAL SOJOURN IN AUROVILLE

Founded in 1968, Auroville is a cultural and spiritual highlight for those visiting Puducherry. It was conceived by The Mother (the spiritual icon Mira Alfassa) to represent an international township of sorts that shunned traditional religion and did not belong to any particular nationality. Even today, Auroville is home to 2,500 residents from 50 countries who run art galleries, cafés, yoga centres, and even organic farms. At the core of Auroville is the fascinating Matrimandir, which is a futuristic golden globe enveloped by verdant gardens. Those seeking inner peace will find it inside the meditation chamber, which reflects natural light through its single crystal. Be sure to spend time around the township as there are many interesting sustainable initiatives and establishments to visit and discover communal living.

Tucked away in the French quarters, you will see hordes of people flocking to Sri Aurobindo Ashram, established by Sri Aurobindo and his collaborator, The Mother. Visitors come here from afar to focus on meditation by the marble tombs of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Spend some time around the ashram to discover the multiple activities that it is involved in such as schools, charitable trusts and even a printing press.



Sri Aurobindo Ashram

Auroville is home to 2,500 residents from 50 countries who run art galleries, cafés, yoga centres, and even organic farms. At the core of Auroville is the fascinating Matrimandir, a futuristic golden globe enveloped by verdant gardens

A TROPICAL PARADISE

Puducherry has recently gained immense popularity for its beach-related activities beyond its most popular waterfront stretch the promenade. Paradise Beach is popular with tourists who flock there by boat from Chunnambar Boat house, a picturesque ride through mangroves and palm-fringed coastlines, while Serenity Beach is indeed serene and attracts hordes of early morning surfers. With surfers come a host of cafes, surf shops and more to add the vibe.



Chunnambar Boat House



Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus church

RELIGIOUS HARMONY

Take some leisurely time to explore the town's religious diversity and its establishments. The town is brimming with churches, temples and mosques that effortlessly coexist with each other. The Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus has imported stained glass windows from France and is beautifully illuminated at Christmas. The Immaculate Conception Cathedral with its unmistakable French blue and white facade is stunning. Hindus will find spiritual resonance in the Manakula Vinayagar Temple, which stands out for its ornate temple carvings as well as its much-loved temple elephant, Lakshmi, who taps visitors on the head with her trunk, to grant her blessings.

MUSEUMS, BOTANICAL GARDENS & ANCIENT HISTORY

Do not forget to make a pitstop at the Puducherry Museum, which houses a host of artefacts and archaeological gems from the Roman trading port of Arikamedu, dating back to the 2nd century BC. A visit to this museum shows the history of sea trade that has existed in this part of the world for thousands of years. French botanist George Samuel Perrotet's beautiful Botanical Gardens now feature 1,500 different varieties of plants in a French formal style, boasting elegantly laid out flower beds, water bodies and fountains, along with a sound and light show every evening.

Getaway to Tranquebar

If you want to discover a fascinating place beyond Puducherry, drive south a couple of hours to Tranquebar, a relatively forgotten Danish colonial town with its Scandinavian touches. The Dansborg Fort still stands by the beach, while the town houses quite a few buildings that showcase Danish architecture and Christian missionary influences. Tranquebar is a perfect extension to your Puducherry trip and a great way to discover South India's multi-layered history.



Botanical Garden and Aquarium

Pondy beautifully blends its traditional side with its French art de vivre, chic bistros, boutique hotels, design stores and patisseries



Casablanca



Kalki



Goubert Market

ARTISANAL TREASURES

Strolling through the quaint boutiques of White Town or Auroville, you will discover a bunch of lovely finds like organic beauty products, sustainable cotton clothing, Indo-French fusion furniture, books, artworks, gourmet products and even handmade paper. Casablanca and Kalki are stores we love. We also recommend a quick visit to the Goubert Market for spices, fresh produce, local street food and flowers along with incense and essential oils. **HAI**



It is now time for tourism

With a \$3 trillion tourism economy in sight, India must rethink infrastructure, embrace digitisation, and act in mission mode to unlock its full travel potential.

By **MP BEZBARUAH**

Secretary General, Hotel Association of India



While introducing the epoch-making economic reforms for the Indian economy, the then Finance Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, had famously quoted Victor Hugo—

“No force on earth can stop an idea whose time has come.” In a sense tourism in India can also feel that its time has come now, primarily because of two significant changes in attitudes. First, the advocacy and endorsement for tourism has come from the top—the Prime Minister. Second, the role of tourism in employment creation and in promoting inclusive growth is now more widely acknowledged than before. In fact, the PM has repeatedly emphasised the role as a pillar of economic development.

Along with this growing recognition of the potential of tourism, come huge expectations about its contribution to India's rising economic power and ambition of becoming the third largest economy in the world. After this year's budget presentation, the PM in an unprecedented move, interacted with the industry about the future and made a very significant remark that it is now time to roll out the roadmap. In that roadmap the most important factor is infrastructure development, or the enabling factors that help to make the journey.

The approach to infrastructure development will also have to change qualitatively to be in tune with the mega ambition of creating \$3 trillion tourism economy by 2047. One such change is to move to a comprehensive, total infrastructure development approach. In this year's budget speech, there is a hint of such a government policy direction when the Finance Minister spoke of destination development as a complete package. Similarly, the Goa Roadmap, which was part of India's G20 Summit, is a landmark

directional approach to restructuring and reviving tourism after the disaster of Covid-19. No doubt it is focused on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but one of its five priority goals for action is digitisation, and another is destination management, which in fact is infrastructure development. It makes a very significant suggestion for action – “rethinking of strategies towards a holistic approach.” Such a picture of looking at tourism as a comprehensive whole and not as isolated parts has been missing for far too long.

The concept of infrastructure will need to be expanded to accommodate the new trends and influences. Infrastructure developments are of two types—specific for tourism and hospitality, and general for the country which also facilitate tourism. Traditionally infrastructure is seen more as physical—like accommodation, transport and communication, roads, rail, air, river, and perhaps the development of destinations. Any infrastructure development policy that overlooks the transformative impact of digitisation and the critical role of skill development risks falling short of achieving truly comprehensive growth.

The long-term ambition for tourism cannot be quantified only in numbers. The future infrastructure development will have to be built around, and adapted to, global trends that are shaping tourism—demand for transformational experiences, technology empowering consumers, concept of circular and green economy, the impact of Bleisure travel, the overpowering influence of AI, just to mention a few.

Drawing the roadmap for infrastructure is possible only if we have a clarity about the destination. That objective has been variously articulated, like achieving by 2047 the goal of \$3 trillion tourism economy, or the contribution of above 10% to GDP,



Ease of doing business should be a continuously and evolving, dynamic policy attuned to the emerging needs

or 100 million foreign tourist arrivals, or a place in the top ten tourism destinations of the world. Of course, planning infrastructure for 2047 should also include the requirements of the booming domestic tourism 2.5 billion now and estimated to grow to a staggering 15 billion by 2047.

BRIDGE THE GAPS

Infrastructure can be the Achilles heel to spoil the journey. In key areas there is glaring mismatch at present which can widen and make the goals unachievable unless comprehensive planning and investments take place. Accommodation is a case in point. No reliable statistics of demand and supply is available nor is there such a projection for the future needs. DG tourism has stated that there are about 1.8 lakh branded hotel rooms against a requirement of 4 lakh rooms and another unbranded 1.5 million rooms against a requirement of 2.8 million. The investment required is huge, but the hospitality industry is capable of and willing to invest if an enabling atmosphere is created. Pragmatic incentives for hotels like “infrastructure status” which should not cause any financial burden to the government, can go a long way.

In the same way, “doing business” should be a continuously and evolving, dynamic policy attuned to the emerging needs. The World Travel and Tourism Council India Initiative (WTTICII), in a report, has shown that hospitality investments encounter 49 pre-construction licenses/approvals and 22 post construction, with consequential time delays. The same report also points out wide divergences in policy and practices on important issues like land policy, “industry status,” laws and frameworks, between the states and also between the states and the centre. For example, the floor space index (FSI)

Pragmatic incentives for hotels like “infrastructure status” which should not cause any financial burden to the government, can go a long way

varies in states from 0.33 to 6.00. The government policy of “convergence” among stakeholders, it is hoped, will reduce such imbalances.

On the macro level, a FICCI/McKinsey report on the roadmap for “India’s Century” recommends, among other things, to “reduce logistics costs from 14 to 8% of the GDP, ... infrastructure project cost overrun from 20% to less than 5%”.

In the civil aviation sector, which is crucial to tourism growth, the picture is mixed—of promising growth and massive future challenges to handle. By 2050 airports and airlines are expected to handle 23.9 billion passengers which will be 243% of the world population. Matching issues like capacity creation, modernisation of airports, ground handling, safety in the skies, and innovations in aircraft designs, will engage the attention. In India, the third largest civil aviation market in the world, during the last decade domestic passenger traffic grew at a compound rate of 9.7% and international at 4.5%. The FM in the last budget has given a boost to the UDAN scheme, which will play a crucial role in expanding destinations to far corners of the country. The scheme, which has connected 88 airports and operationalised 619 routes, will be expanded to connect 120 new destinations and carry 4 crore passengers in the next ten years.

Nowhere else the concept of “convergence” will be of more importance than in the road infrastructure. Gati Shakti is boosting the economy. Its projects should be closely aligned with the tourism plans for destination development and last-minute connectivity. Otherwise, destination development will lag behind tourist arrivals, creating over-tourism problems in the existing ones, and sustainability will fall by the wayside. It will be ideal if the Gati Shakti schemes could also have a component of wayside facilities and modern road signages.

As the PM said, the roadmap has to be rolled out. That can be done by stating the vision for 2047 and taking up implementation in a mission mode as per government policy. It should identify the infrastructure required to achieve the goals, indicate the present status, elaborate on the ways to fill the gap, including government policy initiatives, identify the agencies responsible for each task and create an empowered agency to coordinate and monitor and take course correction when and where necessary. **HAI**

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