



ENGAGE

Post Corona India will emerge as the premier tourist destination -

**Tourism Minister
Shri Prahlad Singh Patel**



World's worst lockdown manifests hidden strengths in India's hospitality sector

By Biman Mukherji

A New Global Macroeconomic Experiment is Underway

By Aradhana Khowala



“HOSPITALITY NEEDS MORE HELP

By Ajay K. Bakaya

We are a safe and a secure destination

Smt. Valsa Nair Singh



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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK



The pandemic has altered the landscape of the travel and hospitality industry across the globe forever. In India too, the sector has undergone a sharp paradigm shift as the contours of travel and hospitality have been transformed drastically to adapt to the new normal.

With health and safety being key priorities, customers are gravitating towards trusted brands with stringent hygiene standards laid out clearly. As part of its 2020 mission, HAI had made a firm commitment to helm change in a year that demanded strong leadership, not only for the sector's survival but also to design its revival. We firmly believe that 2021 will see the sector rebound, picking up momentum slowly but steadily on the back of resurgence in consumer confidence. If past trends are to be held as a yardstick, where economic downturns have showcased cycles of sharp decline followed by a cycle of rapid economic upsurge, we anticipate that the phenomenon of 'revenge travel', driven by pent-up demand, will lead the path of recovery. However, this may not be adequate for a complete resuscitation for the services sector; and it is estimated that it will take the travel and hospitality industry another 18-24 months to return to its previous RevPAR levels.

Given the cruciality of the current situation, it is imperative that the hospitality industry must reset its guiding principles. Responsible hospitality will emerge as the cornerstone of the next generation of travel. As the apex body of the Indian hospitality industry, it is HAI's mission to project and amplify the industry's pivotal role as a contributor to the nation's overall sustainable economic and social development, and employment; raise the standards of hospitality; and build a positive image for this industry, both, within India and across the globe.

In order to give the industry the necessary fillip, it is now even more paramount that the hospitality industry in India is granted an industry status. This will pave way for transparency, reduction in costs and encourage re-investment in the sector – all while strengthening the industry's foundation as it unlocks its true potential to make significant contributions to the country's GDP, as well as continue creating employment opportunities. In the immediate future, we hope to secure the government's support on deferment of taxes and license fees, which will provide us with better opportunities to contribute and revive mainstream economy. The recent decision to grant industry status to the travel and hospitality industry in the state by the Maharashtra Government is a very positive step, and we sincerely hope that such progressive changes will come to life across the country in favour of the entire sector. HAI is and will continue to work tirelessly with all stakeholders to create a robust industry landscape, while assisting the hospitality sector embrace the next phase of travel and tourism, every step of the way.

I offer my sincere and warm congratulations to all HAI members on the launch of our first industry magazine. The newly added regional chapters of Punjab, Karnataka, Telangana, and West Bengal not only mark HAI's steady growth but will also be a significant step forward to ensure that the industry is represented unequivocally at all levels and continues to extend its legacy and expertise to all states.

All my best wishes for a prosperous and a safe 2021!

Puneet Chhatwal
President, Hotel Association of India
MD & CEO, The Indian Hotels Company Limited



FROM THE DESK OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL



"The Annus Horribilis"--if we can put the last year mildly, is thankfully over. HAI greets the new year with hope, expectation and optimism and launches its magazine, a new symbol of its resolve to ENGAGE with other trade bodies, with our members, with the wider hospitality family, with the government and in fact with all stakeholders that make tourism happen.

We have a dream that this symbol, HAI ENGAGE will be a beacon of solidarity of the industry. We hope it will be a unified and forceful voice helping to get the industry the recognition it deserves in its role in making India a strong economic entity. We aspire that HAI ENGAGE will be a medium of connecting with the community at large, sharing our travails, our struggles as well as our achievements, and bring out examples of grit and determination, of innovations and ideas that is the hallmark of progress of the industry. We will showcase little known stories of industry's commitment to the nation's goal of Atmanirbhar and unfailing commitment to its social responsibilities.

We want HAI ENGAGE to be at the forefront of the future--educating, informing, communicating and engaging with everyone in true sense of the word. We expect the government both state and central, to use this powerful medium to engage with the industry to, communicate the steps taken to alleviate the sectoral concerns. For example, the current and first issue talks about the innovative steps taken by Maharashtra and the positive approach of states like Punjab, Telangana, Karnataka - to name a few.

The last year was a grueling one. Many SMEs must have gone under. Millions must have become unemployed or lost their source of income. The full picture will emerge only over a period of time. However, the year has also witnessed several accounts of exemplary resolve, the 'never say die' spirit. HAI has been alive to all Industry problems and has played a role in pleading and continuous advocacy with the government directly or indirectly for redressal. The Association has worked towards creating public opinion and awareness- in short ENGAGING and continues to do so.

Now HAI ENGAGE will be the Industry's most credible mouthpiece, its voice as the Association strives for the betterment of Indian Hospitality.

M P Bezbaruah
I.A.S (retd.)
Secretary General
Hotel Association of India



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Policy Milestones to Put Hospitality Back on Path of Recovery

We are a safe and a secure destination

While the covid pandemic has dealt a severe blow to the tourism industry, a young team of officials decided to put their heads together to see how best they could they make use of the state's infrastructure to plan ahead for a revival of not only the tourism sector, but also the local communities associated with it, Smt. Valsa Nair Singh, Principal Secretary, Tourism & Culture, Maharashtra Government told HAI ENGAGE.



"It has been a challenging year for all of us, like a trial by fire. But we took this as an opportunity. We had an internal meeting and we decided that this is what we will do in the next 6 months. Sindhudurg district was declared a tourism district. In February-March we took some revolutionary steps to make this happen in Sindhudurg. I have always considered myself as a tourism person.

If I look at Maharashtra, we first approved the hotel lease for Shiroda. What I wanted to convey is that there is a young team at the helm who is in a hurry to do things. Instead of crying about how covid has spoiled the hotel and tourism, we thought let us really plan on how best to use our tourism infrastructure. The tourism sector has the capacity of growing at the rate of 8.5% per annum and increasing the gross products of the state to approximately 55 billion dollars. Moreover, 60 lakh new jobs can be generated in this sector by the year 2030.

We decided on agro-tourism policy, which was not just limited to farming, but also other activities like wine-making, fisheries etc. We planned a lot of activities around that such as strawberry picking. We tied them to schools and colleges. The number of people who have been coming to us for registrations has been beyond our expectations.

Another policy was a beach shack policy. There is one in Goa but the policy in Maharashtra was haphazard. It could not be launched in 2020 but it will certainly come up this year. Another thing we have decided upon is caravan tourism, which can be with self-driven vehicles or other vehicles.

We have drafted the policy which should be going to the cabinet soon. We incentivize caravan tourism and also tie up with certain resorts. We would allow parking bays near certain places such as dams and reservoirs.

The fourth thing we have launched is adventure tourism policy. We have come up with certain dos and don'ts. We also looked at some of the things like opening up Wankhede stadium to tours. We have also started Bollywood tours. As part of ease of doing business, we have brought down the licenses that restaurants require from 70 to 10. Obviously, it was a painstaking process. We set an exercise to assess how many permissions are really needed to be given. Finally, we have come down to just 10 and all now can be done online. In the next phase what we are trying to do is to make everything into a single application.

Banquet licenses for hotels have been made into an annual process now. Electricity rate, electricity charges, water charges, property tax, development tax, increased carpet area ratio and non-agricultural tax shall be charged at the industrial rates with effect from 1 April, 2021, from the hotel entrepreneurs registered with the tourism ministry of the central government.

We have put MTDC properties together with private industry. There are good vibes about wanting to invest. The Government has promised infrastructure facilities such as power and water. I am quite excited by the thought about tourism for community development. Why don't we tie up and make the whole community feel part of tourism. It is not just for revenue but for development of the whole region. We are a safe and a secure destination. We are also working on a lot of strategies for marketing.

We are in the process of raising the limit on the number of guests at hotel functions from 50. It may be raised for the time being only for outdoor venues and there might be a different limit for indoor facilities. The hotel industry has asked us to raise the limit to 200.

"The (covid) numbers in Delhi are rising. It could have some trickle effect on Maharashtra. So only for very necessary cases, travel is being allowed. We will review this as soon as numbers come down it will happen."



Global Tourism Will Require A Historical Transformation To Beat Pandemic: UNWTO

Among the world's top employers, the global tourism industry will have to undergo a historical transformation towards a collaborative approach to rebound from the pandemic, World Tourism Secretary General Zurab Pololikashvili told EURACTIV.

While many countries have offered stimulus packages to aid the sector's recovery, he says, "we need ways to rehabilitate tourism so that it can keep up with a post-Covid 19 world."

To realize the vision of a truly global collaborative effort, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has convened a Global Tourism Crisis Committee to plot the path to a sustainable recovery.

"We are also connecting private sector entrepreneurs and innovators with public sector

institutions and organizations to find health, economic and destination recovery solutions," says Mr Pololikashvili.

The UNWTO will be providing a combination of financial and government support to change-making entrepreneurs in the most economically devastated tourism sectors, he added. The focus of these efforts will be in two specific areas - a shift towards promoting local and regional tourism with emphasis on utmost safety to rebuild tourist confidence. This in turn will be accompanied by a shift towards regeneration and sustainability.

"We have seen in past crisis how a domestic focus plays a key role in the wider economic recovery. This is an opportunity for distributing the many economic benefits tourism can bring to rural communities, communities that have often been left behind," says Mr Pololikashvili.

In his first exclusive interview with HAI ENGAGE, Tourism Minister Shri Prahlad Singh Patel talks about sustainability, promotion of domestic tourism and revival of the hotel industry.

“Post Corona India will emerge as the premier tourist destination”



Q. The Tourism and Hotel Industry has been the worst affected due to the pandemic, but now we are seeing some good signs of economic recovery. What are the measures which the government is taking to restore tourism and hospitality industry back to its Pre-COVID levels?

We had talks with the Hotel Industry and all the stakeholders a number of times during this period. We have tried to bail out those who had taken loans and suffered huge losses due to the pandemic. We would need to make a fresh assessment in the future.

The question is of survival and the government has undertaken several steps for that. We have discussed this with the Finance Ministry and Aviation Ministry. It is true that the hotel industry's revival will only happen once the footfalls are there.

Since the international tourism has been affected, we have tried to promote domestic tourism. We have to take some calls as the Metros are still under pressure because of the pandemic. All the conventions, conferences, events, functions are not taking place in the large hotels in Metros and have gone into virtual mode. It is quite natural that there would be losses but it should not be taken as universal.

Q. What type of policy support measures is the government thinking about?

The Finance Ministry has provided relief measures. Banks have extended a moratorium period on loans so there is no panic. Banks are not treating it as a risk industry.

The challenges in front of the Tourism Ministry were that we had 1400 hotel registrations earlier. The question in front of the Tourism Ministry was that the exact data and figures were not available and in order to address the problems of the industry this was essential. The government launched National Integrated Database of Hospitality Industry (NIDHI) portal and around 33000 registrations took place in a record time of four months.

Post Corona India has the alternative solution of Medical Tourism and Wellness Tourism like Yoga, Ayush, Ayurveda that are natural methods to promote wellness is available in our country which other countries are lacking.

Wellness Tourism board meeting was held with AIIMS Director, Medanta Group Chief among others and it was decided that the Wellness Centres should be tied up with the Hotel industry and a joint venture between the two is the need of the hour. Presently the wellness centres do not have the facility of stay and accommodation.

Q. How is the government working towards sustainability of the tourism and hospitality sector?

We have decided to promote the Tourist Highway concept through a global media campaign. If there are 100 highways, all the stay facilities on them--home stays, guest houses, small and large motels and hotels--their details will be available on the website.

Therefore, on one highway, all types of stay details will be mentioned if the tourist map is made available on the mobile. The Ministry held a dialogue with Google for the global media campaign and we have stated that we would include these facilities if Google gives us the Tourist Map.

Q. All this is for the promotion of International tourism but the International flights are restricted and not operational/banned.

Dekho Apna Desh as stated by the Honorable PM - Narendra Modi, the promotion of Domestic Tourism is already in progress. Except Metros tourists have started visiting other destinations. The Metros are still lagging behind due to Corona and it is our aim to develop new destinations and attract tourists.

The Tourism Ministry has given Relief from the period 25 December 2020 till 15 August 2021 and decided to promote the heritage and monuments besides the UNESCO sites. The tourists, film industry can shoot photography through drone of these monuments free of charge. The UNESCO sites have been exempted as they are already famous and popular. The art, culture, national promotion by the film industry can be done.

*The permission is being granted in 20 days, which was earlier one year or more.

*The fees has been curtailed from 1 lakh to 50,000/- for the film industry. This step has been taken because the film industry has also suffered huge loss during this period.

There are 3650 ASI sites in India out of which the UNESCO sites can be taken out. (UNESCO - There are a total of 38 world heritage sites out of which 30 are cultural, 7 are natural and 1 is mixed in India till now). ASI is also doing relisting in January and this number may increase to 10,000 or more.

Q. How will you do the promotion of infrastructure, as there is an increase in occupancy and demand for small hotels?

There is already Home Stay scheme to boost and develop tourism as an industry to attract tourists. New Destinations and Hilly terrain hotels will be promoted – construction of rooms for home stay, hygiene facility, washroom facility, procuring crockery and other infrastructure development support will be done.

At present we are on 34th position, and we have reached there from the 64th position. Post Corona India will be the most sought after and popular destination. The tourists are interested and the perception of our country has changed.

India will be the most sought after destination post-Covid: Tourism Minister

With India emerging relatively unscathed by covid compared to even developed nations, Tourism Minister Prahlad Singh Patel is optimistic that the country's hotel and tourism sector would recover from heavy losses and emerge as a premier destination in coming months.

Towards that end, he said the government had launched programs for collaboration with the hospitality industry.

"We have decided to promote the Tourist Highway concept through a global media campaign. If there are 100 highways, all the stay facilities on them -- home stays, guest houses, small and large motels and hotels -- their details will be available on the website," he said, adding that the tourism ministry would promote all of them.

He added that the ministry has held a dialogue with Google for the global media campaign.

Tourists will get an alert on their phones of all conveniences and other facilities on the way to any particular destination. Simultaneously, the Tourism Minister said the government is planning to promote iconic destinations and woo domestic tourists through a Dekho Apna Desh campaign (Explore your own country) at a time more people are looking for more options within the country. He said the government has identified 19 such iconic tourist destinations for their development in a holistic manner.

He added that in the post Corona era India will also become a significant destination for medical and wellness tourism for which the government will seek collaborations with the hotel industry.

"Presently, the wellness centres do not have sufficient stay and accommodation facilities. There is tremendous scope and possibility of getting a good response if the affiliation or provision for stay is created," he added.

With a rush towards home stay seen in wake of the pandemic, the government was further planning to promote more such facilities.

"Post Corona India will be the most sought after and popular destination. The tourists are interested and the perception of our country has changed," the minister asserted.

“World’s worst lockdown manifests hidden strengths in India’s hospitality sector”

By Biman Mukherji

Nine months after the world's strictest lockdown brought unprecedented chaos to the Indian hospitality industry, the empty rooms and desolate halls are once again coming alive slowly with the warmth and cheer of guest arrivals.

There has been a steady uptick in demand for leisure travel, a trend that has only got reinforced during the winter holiday season.

“People have started travelling again, seeking a change, after being cooped-up in their homes for several months and to beat the work-from-home fatigue,” says Mandeep S. Lamba, President (South Asia), at HVS Anarock.

“We anticipate leisure travel, especially to motorable destinations, to show a steady increase going forward. The outbound luxury traveler will also be on the look-out for exclusive vacations within the country in the foreseeable future as uncertainties relating to international travel will continue to loom large till a viable vaccine is widely available across the world,” he added.

Lamba forecast that the sector will get back to pre-covid levels in occupancy by 2022 and average daily rate the average rental revenue earned for an occupied room per day by 2023.

However there’s an absolute need to focus on demand, which unfortunately was totally sucked by COVID. Rapid structural shifts have already been highlighted in some of the published statistics. India is fortunate to have a large domestic base tapping which with governmental support is the need of the hour. We are continuing to learn to survive and get going says Mr. K B. Kachru, Vice President, Hotel Association of India and Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group.

People are dying to get out of their homes

While corporate travel has remained extremely limited, the trend of staycations or workcations is seeing the strongest growth trend in wake of the pandemic.

Priya Paul, Chairperson of the Apeejay Surendra Park Hotels which operate The Park Hotels chain, says that the trend has resulted in a slow and steady revival even in their city hotels and not just resorts, resulting in occupancy of between 65%-70% recently.

“Of course, people are coming for some corporate travel, but they are also coming for vacations, whether it is staycations or workcations, and small wedding functions,” she said.

The pent up demand for travel is resulting in a lot of leisure travel into city hotels and not just to a beach or a mountain. People are coming to the cities to visit their friends and families and are checking into hotels, Paul added.

“We had heard that the covid cases will be much higher in October-November in many cities, but that has been controlled quite well, and therefore that has resulted in more confidence to travel,” Paul added.

“People are looking forward to making their forward travel bookings including for weddings and banquet functions. So, I see a strong comeback in occupancy,” she said, though

adding that average room rates will take much longer to come back. “The first quarter of 2021 is the earliest that I see some strengthening of rates.”

Paul estimates that the room rates in city hotels are off by about 40% compared to the pre-covid period, but resort properties rates are almost equivalent to levels seen about a year ago.

Stringent health and hygiene protocols now a must

Puneet Chhatwal,
President, Hotel Association
of India and MD & CEO,
Indian Hotels Company Limited.

Though not evenly-distributed yet, the steady revival in demand has meant almost reinventing the hotel business in many ways, not the least of which being enforcing strict hygiene and safety protocols.

While it is time to reopen the tourism economy, there is equal need to showcase that the customer is absolutely safe, says Puneet Chhatwal, President, Hotel Association of India and Managing Director & CEO, Indian Hotels Company Limited.

Towards that end, Chhatwal said the country has to upgrade its basic infrastructure together with initiatives to build up new destinations. “Past crisis has shown the tourism’s capacity to bounce back strongly. With collaboration, we can unlock India’s bright tourism potential,” he added.

The hotel industry has not only been following all the government guidelines for rooms and restaurants, but have enforced their own rigorous safety protocols, said Rohit Khosla, Executive Vice-President Operations, North & West India at the Indian Hotels Company Limited.

He said that they have adopted stringent standards of hygiene, sanitation, personal protection equipment and physical distancing as four pillars of safety.

“People have become skeptical going into air conditioned restaurants. So we have change of air as guests are looking for that,” Khosla said. “We have covid-marshals who are even monitoring the guests,” Khosla adds.

The company has also launched a program called I-Zest so that everything is digital from the moment a guest comes in and there is no touch.

Other leading hotel chains are following equally strict protocols to ensure not only safety of guests, but also their own employees who are at constant risk.

“At least two of the domestic chains-India-based chains that I have been exposed to have had practices that are at par with and even superior to international chains,” says Vijay Thacker, Managing Director at Horwath HTL – India, adding that even hygiene delivery is done in a firm and respectful manner.

“The problem is not the hotel standards, the problem is the guest who refuses to comply with safety measures and then quickly reports to social media when the hotel pulls the guest up,” he added.

“The problem is also wider because masses of people do not comply with hygiene and safety standards in public spaces like restaurants, bars, malls, etc, where inbound visitors will go once they come to India,” says Mr. Thacker.



Embracing a new culture for international travelers



Industry leaders called for promoting a culture of safety and hygiene so that it gets instilled across the entire tourism complex and are not limited to hotel premises.

“People will travel when there is satisfaction. It has to be done from end-to-end from where you left home,” says Deep Kalra, Founder and Executive Chairman at MakeMyTrip, adding that people have to look forward to the experience again.

“It is true that roads have improved and connectivity has improved, but how do we make sure that the choke points are not there,” he added.

With the number of covid cases coming down, the government is looking at ways and means of reopening tourism in the country, said Meenakshi Sharma, Director General at the Ministry of Tourism, adding that her ministry has started discussions with the Ministry of Home and the Ministry of External Affairs on the subject.

“However it all depends on how the numbers play up. There are certain realities we have to accept, most importantly on health and hygiene,” she added.

Neither are international travelers likely to come back to India in a hurry amid the current global environment. The Indian government recently extended the suspension of international flights till January 31 following a fresh upsurge in corona virus infections.

“While one is certainly hopeful about a pickup in business travel, but it may not be coming back in a very meaningful way soon,” said Achin Khanna, Managing Partner (strategic advisory) at Hotelivate, which is a consultancy for the hotel industry.

He highlighted that a lot of the international business travel to India is driven by American and European business travelers who may not resume quickly, given the upsurge in infections again.

Khanna estimates that overall occupancies are now back at 75%-80% since a broad recovery took hold since last August.

However, the bread-and-butter corporate segment which comprises a wide variety of business travel will be at 50%-60% of traditional corporate demand for markets like Mumbai and Delhi and 30%-40% for markets like Pune and Hyderabad, he said.

Normally, the corporate segment accounts for 50%-60% of the hotel industry’s business.

“But once the business picks up, we think it will keep increasing. Demand for conferences and meetings are unlikely to permanently shift to online platforms,” he said.



Bright spots in a dreary landscape



In the meanwhile, the loss in corporate segment is to some extent being offset as leisure tourism has rebounded and spread to even destinations like Srinagar and Gulmarg in Kashmir, which were not faring too well even before the pandemic.

HVS Anarock’s Lamba concurred and said “that the single largest gainer in the post-covid era will be the home stay and vacation rental sector, which is seeing exponential growth.”

At the same time, the paradigm shift in business underway is posing challenges in repaying debts and managing operating costs for many hotels.

“Not all hotels are going to survive this tough time and some may shut down permanently, especially in the unbranded segment,” says Lamba, adding that government measures such as rescheduling loan repayments or offering to pay provident funds for a section of employees will bring “negligible relief.”

He said that the bright spot in the current crisis is that it “has forced the hospitality sector to come up with innovative and ingenious ways to utilize their assets to stay afloat,” right from food delivery to management.

For example, the use of technology for the hospitality sector was largely limited to the first point of customer contacts in terms of bookings done online, but this has now expanded to virtually every sphere with things like keyless check-ins and digital menus now turning into necessities rather than being seen as luxuries.

Priya Paul says that their group started food deliveries from day 2 of the lockdown and has now expanded that business to experiences like sending Chefs and bartenders at people’s homes.

“That business has been very interesting because that has enabled us to do smaller functions,” she said. The group has also started doing live sessions with DJs on virtual platforms to maintain their forte in bars and nightlife.

“We have posted live sessions for people to get the ambience of the whole place. The idea is that when you are running a 24 X 7 business and when you shut down, how do you remain connected to your customers, and how do you communicate in a new way,” she said.

“We are engaging at another level,” Paul added. “I think going forward into 2021, things are looking better with a vaccine imminent and out and that is very encouraging for everybody who is traveling.”

One thing is for sure by the time it happens the hospitality industry would have donned a completely new avatar.

A New Global Macroeconomic Experiment is Underway

Aradhana Khowala is a global expert on the travel, tourism and hospitality industry and is currently a Board Member of World Tourism Forum in Lucerne Switzerland. As CEO of Aptamind, she advises governments and businesses on using tourism as a force for good.

Khowala has been a leading voice on sustainable tourism, of the future, women in leadership and participated in global policy discussions in United Nation bodies, the World Economic Forum (WEF) as well as the G 20 apart from all major tourism summits.

In a wide-ranging interview with HAI ENGAGE, she spoke about how the hospitality industry is settling into a new "Trust Economy" even as the world is adapting to a duality where there is simultaneously lockdown protests and applause for health workers. Regardless of new use of technology, people will want to go out again, which means that the travel business will be significantly more than what we saw last year.



“What are some emerging trends in hospitality that we are seeing globally which will change the market dynamics in the Indian hospitality industry?”

COVID will undoubtedly have a profound impact on society, business, and consumers. But there are so many dimensions of uncertainty that a new global macroeconomic experiment is underway as no one can really be sure how this will pan out.

However, there are definitely emerging trends which are here to stay like work from home which is now normalised globally. Related to this trend the utility of office space will change and there will be a realization that long-lease workspace business model is breaking down. We have now a trend of “Trust Economy” with new hygienic procedures and protocols for travel, entertainment venues, meeting spaces, we have new trends in human services enhanced by technology. This had already started in hospitality and will now extend to other services, we have the new trend of contact-free economy, contactless payment, self-serve check-in, remote service, virtual services, and finally we have the continued growth in wellness as a major consumer focus.

Some of these trends will also reach an inflection point and cause serious friction because we are realising that the world is riskier

than we thought. As we battle unprecedented unemployment, massive government debt surpassing even post-WW2 levels, we are also potentially looking at increased government intervention especially in Europe which may be a prelude to increased government oversight in businesses.

And, most importantly we are looking at brewing social tensions because the society looks set to be even more divided Post-COVID. In the US 70% of jobs affected were those who earn under \$25K/yr. And COVID has widened the generation gap with its pace of change. We have the boomers suddenly struggling with skills which are not as relevant and we have the millennials who feel like boomers messed up the world for them. We now have tension between lockdown protests and applause for health workers, between globalism vs isolationism because one of the things we saw is there is no real cooperation among leading countries, we even saw tension at our homes with traditional gender role reversal, families were spending a lot of time together, yet there was rise in domestic violence. Duality is the key here.

What are the leading indicators and your view on the long term impact on travel?

We all know that travel has suffered. The impact of COVID has been greater than the three worst downturns of the last century combined. But here is what I find interesting. Overall, it has meant a reduction of expenditure of US\$700bn in two quarters or about US\$1 trillion over the year. If you look at where this has gone it has been spent on what we have spent a lot more of our time these last 8-9 months which is home. We have bought more technology new PCs, headphones, printers, cyber security; we have spent more on pets and home improvements like painting, fixing the garden and buying the secondary home in the jungle or countryside! In 2021 people will want to travel more and they will find money from the things they spent on this year. Because fact is there is only so much tech we can consume, we don't need an additional coat of paint on the house, the garden doesn't need more refurbishment and the pets don't need another fur coat. People will want to go out and see the world again and maybe we won't see \$1trillion back into it, but it will be significantly more than 2020.

Do you believe that the power of video conferencing can in the long term be replaced in person meetings?

Not really because let's be really honest we all have had it HAD it with Zoom and Webex and the endless “Can you hear me?” “Can you see my screen now?”

“Can everyone go on mute please” meetings.” I genuinely think businesses don't see video calls as an option. Even in 2000/2001 video was to replace the flights but that didn't happen. And the recent numbers shared by STR on how they are tracking a demand uptick in booking for events as an example for World Mobile Congress in 2021 in Barcelona which is a mega MICE market and it is showing a real peak in demand as people are still booking for attending these so I am very optimistic.

“Speaking of changing consumer behaviour, what is your view on the new consumers emerging out of this crisis and what is important to them? Should the hospitality industry really focus on them?”

I think the key to the next 10-20 years will be the coming of age of millennials. Why because even though the oldest millennials are 38, their average age is only 28.5. In the next 10 years the average income of a millennial will double and this will lead to a \$30-80 trillion of consumption shift from Baby Boomers to this generation. This is the greatest transfer

of wealth ever in history. And what millennials want from travel is significantly different and we will miss the biggest opportunity in our lifetime if we continue to do things like we have always done before. They want EVs not ICE engines; they want to shop online and not go to malls; they want to rent and throw and not own as much; and they want to travel to not just see but to make meaning. This also means that our communication strategy has to evolve - you need those who resonate their world because your next bigger spender and customer will be a millennial.

And what we see is carbon neutrality, climate change, community, cultural sensitivity, authenticity, diversity and inclusion, in other words everything social impact is really important to them. Pre-pandemic there was a growing body of studies that showed an increased demand from travelers on this as a key-criteria but now it is a generational issue, your next customer is going to demand it and that is non-negotiable.

What would be your advice for hotels and the hospitality industry in India for the post COVID world?

Just that we all ought to remember that travel always returns and after every setback travel and tourism has rebounded higher and faster and we have a 200-year history to prove it. If you look at the trajectory of growth for everything that impacts global travel be it per capita GDP or average life expectancy or growth driven by rising wealth or growing middle class, increased personalization and more pervasive presence of technology NONE of it has slowed by world wars, pandemics, depression, industrialization and it is hard to see that these will be derailed going forward. And if you look at the trajectory of growth after 9/11, after SARS or MERS - it has been unabated. Travel always bounces back quickly once perception of safety returns. So, this too shall pass!



HAI Establishes State Chapters To Pave Sector's Revival

A key pillar of India's tourism, the recovery of India's hospitality industry is widely expected to be pivotal to the sector's revival in the face of devastation wrought by the pandemic. To provide a fillip, the **Hotel Association of India (HAI)**, the apex body of hotels across India, has recently established state-level chapters in **Karnataka, Telangana and Punjab**.

HAI realized that much of the tourism's revival will depend upon what happens at the state level. Therefore, HAI has decided to establish state chapters in all regions for close collaboration with the state governments. Most of the vexatious issues faced by the industry—such as utility tariffs, property tax and license fee -- fall under the jurisdiction of state governments.

The chapters in Karnataka, Telangana and Punjab have set the ball rolling on such issues.

Karnataka became the first state where HAI established a chapter to aid the sector's recovery. Tourism accounts for 14.8% of Karnataka's GDP and supports 16 million jobs. The state, which ranks the third in tourism, has suffered enormous damage to its revenues due to the pandemic, but has recognized the need for a robust policy.

"Currently, the hotel industry's earnings are close to zero, and with high fixed operating costs ...the industry is extremely precariously poised," said Somnath Mukherjee, Member of Karnataka State Committee, Hotel Association of India and Area Director, Karnataka & General Manager, Taj West End Bengaluru.

"In fact, it is now estimated that about 40% of all hotels in India are on the brink of permanent closure. Almost 70% of the direct jobs in the hotel sector are at risk as are several jobs in the hotel-related support sectors. The very survival of the sector is under serious threat and requires urgent policy level interventions".

Echoing the need for a sectoral stimulus, HAI's **Punjab** chapter as well has appealed to Chief Minister Capt. Amarinder Singh to grant industry status to the hospitality sector.

The state has put in place a robust tourism policy that enabled the arrival of 47 million domestic tourists and over one million foreign tourists in 2019, but has the potential to do much better. "Punjab also has all the elements which make a destination attractive to the traveler. (But) currently, the hotel industry is going through revenue slump in the state," said Gautam Kapoor, Member of Punjab State Committee, Hotel Association of India & Owner, Radisson Hotel, Jalandhar.

"Many people have already lost their jobs in the sector due to the ongoing pandemic. These numbers are now slowly coming down since the removal of restriction on the hospitality sector. However, the very survival of the sector is under serious threat and this intervention will impact the recovery of the sector to a considerably large extent," he said.

Following the launch of its state chapters in Karnataka and Punjab, HAI launched its Telangana State Chapter to provide a unified voice for recovery. The Telangana Chapter has not only appealed for the grant of industry status, but also establish a State Tourism Development Board.

Travel and tourism noticeably absent from Budget 2021-22

Union Budget 2021-22, like the Finance Minister said, is part of the many mini budgets that were presented through the last one year. Broadly speaking, the government has tried to infuse fresh lease of life into the economy, however for the tourism and hospitality sectors, this is a missed opportunity.

While the six pillars of the Budget presented a diversified approach to fundamentals, focus on the travel and tourism sector is missing, yet again. Our industry is a crucial contributor to India's GDP and a significant employment generator, key tourism related announcements – an imperative to our survival - were clearly missed. We had certain expectations viz. industry status, rationalization in tax rate, GST relief, relief for liquidity problems, interest payment restructuring et al, which have been submitted to the ministry on multiple occasions. We expected that there would be some relief for the severely affected small and medium tourism enterprises.

The Union Budget has not provided any helping hand that was expected. We believe there is a long road to travel before the sector ultimately bounces back to its past glory. The pandemic has left a lasting impact on the segment and, the support of the government in recovery is extremely critical. While we welcome the focus on infrastructure that will help in providing thrust to domestic tourism, but no incentive has been provided for people to travel. We expected some tax-deductible relief measures as a policy for Indians to travel within India.

As an industry body HAI will continue to urge the government to provide short term relief and long- term policy support. We are only hopeful that, even though missing from the budget statement, as the previous year, this year too will see government intervention in the form of policy measures to address the specific bottlenecks to growth of the sector and help the industry unlock its potential and continue its contribution to the country's future economic growth.

The industry needs government support without which we fear the impact will be irreversible with unemployment and its impact on millions of livelihoods, potential NPAs owing to lack of financial support and lastly a lasting impact on the country's GDP in the long run.

"The hospitality sector has faced strong headwinds throughout the year in the state and needs immediate policy intervention in order to tide over the disastrous impact of pandemic," said Ian Dubier, Member of Telangana State Committee, Hotel Association of India & Area Director, Hyderabad and General Manager, Taj Krishna, Hyderabad.

Notably, Telangana's tourism sector ranks eighth in the country. However, the sector's challenges due to pandemic have been compounded by the hotel trade license fee being hiked multiple times. Similarly, the Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (HMWSSB) imposes a high cess of 35% on its billing for hotels despite hotels following guidelines of the Pollution Control Board on sewage treatment. Hotels are also charged exorbitant fees for liquor licenses.

Therefore, HAI's Telangana chapter has urged the state government for a comprehensive policy to enable job creation and realize the sector's true potential.



Mr. Ian Dubier, Member of HAI's Telangana State Committee and Area Director, Hyderabad & General Manager Taj Krishna with Shri K.T.Rama Rao, Minister of Industries, IT & Communication, MAUD, Telangana



Mr. Gautam Kapoor, Member of Punjab State Committee, HAI Jalandhar handing over representation to Hon'ble CM Capt. Amarinder Singh



Mr. Somnath Mukherjee, Member of Karnataka State Committee, HAI & Area Director, Karnataka & GM, Taj West End Bengaluru handing over letter to Karnataka CM. Shri B.S. Yediyurappa



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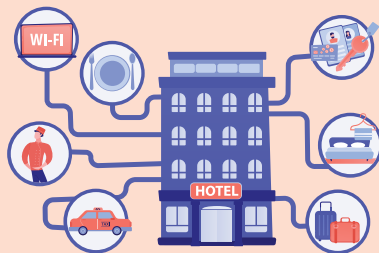
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Hospitality Needs More Help

By Ajay K. Bakaya



There are many things the current Union Govt. deserves credit for. Past and present. A certified countrywide GST tax policy; e-visas, MSME benefits; efforts to usher in building and real estate reforms; SEIS scheme overhaul, tourism skills promotion scheme; etc. etc. Bravo. The Government's responses and actions to Covid were timely and definitive.

Thank you.

However, the Hospitality industry, one of the largest forex earners and largest employers of the country, needs a substantial and rapid amount of relief from the business impact of Covid, which has been debilitating and traumatic. The biggest need for hotel owners is to get deferment on principal payments of financing by 12-24 months, which is an extremely doable task.

Sterling efforts by HAI, FHRAI, FAITH and others have produced murmurs of understanding, however, we are yet to see action. Yes, the government has had their hands full. However, the industry's contribution to the GDP is a significant 6.8 percent and employment provided runs into crores, with over 8 percent of the country's workforce. The hospitality industry professionals are ready to toil 24 x 7 in every nook and corner of our beloved country. In order to survive, the industry has had to furlough, lay off or cut timings for staff and therefore, lacs of people are fighting for bare survival. This necessitates speedy action from the government.

Vaccines are in sight, and the vaccination drives are being planned in several countries including India. More will follow. India should see a rollout of some momentum in the industry by July 2021. International traffic to India in 2021 will largely comprise Indian origin travelers visiting home. We may see a trickle of foreign travelers by October 2021 too. Wedding and banquet numbers will continue to suffer from state edicts limiting numbers. It is a dire necessity towards a healthier future. It will hurt revenues though. Hopefully, numbers will spring back to pre Covid levels by winter 2021. It is difficult to predict the long term impact of Covid on function numbers. My view is that these will bounce back with the control on Covid. At the same time, large conventions are unlikely to be scheduled in 2021.

The drop in demand means rates will be impacted and will remain soft. Again, any real recovery will begin from October 2021. On the bright side, leisure destinations have already shown increasing demand and profitability. Those within short and easy driving reach will attract more visitors. This trend will be growing stronger for at least another 2-3 years.

At the close of 2020, December month results across a broad spectrum of hotels show an overall occupancy of around 40%. And slow but steady growth MOM from October onwards. I feel 70% of 2019 revenues in 2021 is a healthy target benchmark. We've all learnt to control key costs. This number will produce decent operating profits.

“Happy Maharashtra, others to follow?”

The state has announced industry status for the hotel industry, effective April 2021. The most significant impact is lower electricity cost for Hotels. It is our second largest cost slab after payroll.

We're hopeful other tourism friendly states will follow suit. Hoping, praying and wishing 2021 is the year of recovery.

Ajay K. Bakaya is Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels. Views expressed in the article are personal and do not represent those of Sarovar or Hotel Association of India.



"Hard times don't create heroes. It is during the hard times that the hero within us is revealed," American leader Bob Riley once famously said. In midst of unprecedented hardship, India's hotel industry has emerged as a living testimony to the truth of the statement.

When the nationwide lockdown was imposed in late March last year, the hotel industry was left staring at one of the worst business crisis. Yet the industry realized there was a need greater than theirs-the common man's survival.

Across the board, hotel chains not only opened up their facilities to accommodate healthcare workers and incoming overseas passengers on Vande Bharat flights who needed to undergo mandatory quarantine, but they joined hands to distribute food among the poor.

It would be too great an exercise to capture all the relief measures undertaken by different hotels to provide relief, but we provide below a sampling of the Herculean effort. **There are many such stories – some known and others unknown, which we hope to bring out in future editions.**

The Lalit Group initiated support to the Delhi government to donate as much as 1000 kgs of wheat flour, 300 kgs of refined wheat flour (Maida) and over 700 kgs of vegetables from its own garden. As the lockdown extended, the group's 11 other hotels joined the relief efforts by providing food rations and daily meals to various local authorities.

The Keshav Suri Foundation (KSF) also reached out to support the extremely marginalized and probably the worst-affected transgender community through different NGOs such as Kinnar Maa Trust, Shiv Shakti Foundation in Mumbai, Payana in Bangalore, Saksham Trust in Chandigarh, Kinnar Maa Trust Aarohan, Basera Ek Samajik Sanstha, Pahal Foundation and Mitr Trust. Through these NGOs, the group provided over 10,000 kg of rations.

KSF and the Lalit group also supported one of the world's largest food drives, organized by Chef Vikas Khanna across Delhi and the National Capital Region.

One of the pioneers of luxury boutique hotels in India, the **Park Hotels group** lost no time to reach out to neighborhood communities where their various hotels are located to help out all those caught in a dire situation due to the lockdown, especially senior citizens.

Bringing smiles: Winning over Corona



Generous contributions of the hospitality industry during the pandemic times:

- Relief programs, pharmaceutical needs
- Sustenance and financial support
- State-of-the-Art ventilator's, PPE kits and masks
- Dry rations
- Fresh & healthy pre-packed meals



It touched the lives of as many as 10,000 people through multiple relief programs including the **Neighbourhood Services** initiative in Bangalore, Chennai, Goa and Hyderabad. People could call their hotels directly through the day for any emergencies or any pharmaceutical needs, which were provided to anybody within a five kilometre radius at no additional charge.

But their services did not stop there. The **Park Bangalore** not only had a free food hour for the poor every day, but also provided food bags to frontline covid workers including ambulance drivers and policemen besides daily wage workers. Left stranded by the lockdown, the hotel staff provided daily food packets to a settlement of garbage workers near Hebbel.

In Kolkata, the hotel group would cook extra meals each day and distribute to school children and the poor on the streets. They brought as much joy and happiness by distributing food packets to the elderly people and orphanages in Chennai. Besides, they also gave toys, clothes and groceries to alleviate their hardship.

In the city of Mumbai, the group partnered with an NGO AumiGrandera and Yash Charitable Trust to distribute essential kits including rice, sugar, lentils, cooking oil, bars of soap and biscuit packets.

Living up to the spirit of service of founder Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, the **Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL)** & Taj Public Service Welfare Trust distributed over three million meals to healthcare providers and migrant workers who were affected by the spread of covid. It provided relief measures in Mumbai, New Delhi, Bangalore, Coimbatore and Agra. In addition to this, it also supported State- of- the- Art ventilators/ PPEs which was the need of the hour.

IHCL further extended its support to Covid Warriors by opening its hotel doors and offering them a place to stay in more than 55,000 rooms.

Through its program, IHCL along with Taj Public Service Welfare Trust, partnered with BMC in Mumbai to provide meals to 7 key government hospitals / COVID centers. The company offered similar services in Bengaluru, New Delhi, Agra and Coimbatore.

IHCL through Taj Public Service Welfare Trust also supported the distressed hospitality workers through its initiative 'Taj for Family'. This provided sustenance to more than 6000 hospitality workers.

The **Sarovar Hotels** group pitched in with not only food distribution, but also made in-house masks using fresh linen and distributed those among daily wagers, NGOs and others in need with the help of local authorities.

The group also launched initiative #Thinkingofyouandcaringforyou through which it distributed food and grocery items to the needy with the help of local authorities. Their employees distributed fresh and healthy pre-packed meals to nearby daily wage workers.

They also provided groceries and cooked food to daily wage workers as well as the police.



“During a recent trip to Goa, I discovered that this tourist hotspot is reinventing itself for the luxury market in the post-covid context”

By Riaan Jacob George

Riaan George is a luxury content creator and journalist based in Mumbai and Colombo. He has been covering luxury hospitality for 15 years and is passionate about travel, cars, watches and planes. He is a regular contributor to magazines like Conde Nast Traveller, Travel + Leisure, Elle, Vogue and many more.

Insiders from the Indian travel space will tell you that this year's biggest tourism success through the pandemic has been the tiny state of Goa. And this is, by no means, discounting the tremendous losses that the state has had to incur due to the drop in tourist traffic. That said, Goa made a highly debated decision to throw open its borders to tourists in the early stages of the pandemic, which was met with great success. As a result, in the second half of 2020, Goa saw hordes of domestic tourists flocking back to its hotels, villas and restaurants. Hotels indicated high occupancy rates and it was hard to get a table at some of the popular restaurants.

According to a report by OTA ixigo, bookings for Goa jumped by 74 per cent in October 2020, from the previous month, inquiries are up by 66 per cent, even higher than pre-Covid levels. Year on year, the bookings have grown by 31 per cent in October 2020.

Be that as it may, I recently spent a long weekend with friends in Goa, taking a flight after almost 9 months and it was a delightfully refreshing experience. Over my long weekend in north Goa, I had a chance to indulge in some really fun activities, which did not include the crowded beaches and tourist hotspots. I booked myself into heritage walks, discovered cafes, chatted with locals and went to some awesome restaurants. Driving around north Goa, it seemed to me like there was no imminent threat of a pandemic at all - people flocking to bars, riding bikes, colourfully dressed tourists and a whole lot of buzz. That said, the overall 'Goa' experience seems to have changed a bit. For starters, hotels are going all out to bring back tourists through deals and packages, offering more exclusivity. The villa industry in Goa has also seen a huge surge because of people wanting to book entire spaces for themselves. The Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) has seen a huge demand in its new concept of homestays, Ama Stays & Trails, which sees the hotel group taking over and restoring heritage villas, offering their signature service in a more exclusive, non-hotel setting. Similarly, sprawling resorts like the ITC Grand Goa, has seen a huge demand due to its overall spaced-out layout, a multitude of facilities, which do not require guests to step out of the



property, and even some exclusive suites with attached plunge pools. I stayed at Mojigao, a concept hospitality venture by the owners of Artjuna, where private wooden cabins are tucked away in a thick jungle, making for a most exquisite eco-tourism experience. Needless to say, sustainable tourism and eco-tourism are making a huge splash in Goa right now and off-beat places like this add to the list. I also spent a few days at one of the suites in ITC Grand Goa, in the south. Admittedly, the south of Goa has a more tranquil, less touristy vibe, so if its complete silence you are after, away from the madding crowds, with a bevy of food & beverage options from the ITC's impressive repertoire, this is a great option. Comparative analyses between the north and south of Goa have become rather contentious issues among tourists but I like to think that each one offers a different kind of experience, to a different kind of tourist.

Heritage walks - I spent a morning discovering Fontanhas, a beautiful Portuguese neighbourhood tucked away in the heart of Panjim, with Make It Happen makeithappen.co.in, a homegrown company that specialises in heritage walks. Here, I strolled around understanding the architectural marvels of Fontanhas and even stopping at an old bakery, Confeitaria 31 De Janeiro to try out some local delicacies. I walked past old churches and family mansions, while my guide lavished us with tales from the colonial days of yore. One morning, I even did a sunrise trek through the jungles of Assagaon with Khoj-ao (khojao.com), where you walk through the wilderness, past deserted colonial mansions to check out some of the flora and fauna of Goa. An expert will show you the local species of birds, plants and trees as you watch the sunrise. Both these, I booked through Airbnb Experiences.

Sundowners - I decided to catch one of those gorgeous Goan sunsets in a chic setting, by heading to Anjuna. We spent one evening sipping on bubbly and enjoying some Mediterranean-style tapas at Antares, the stylish eatery-cum-bar by restaurateur Ashish Dev Kapur and celebrity chef Sarah Todd. Thanks to its location, perched atop a cliff, Antares is a great place to spend a lazy evening watching the sunset and moving onto dinner. Right next door is the quirky Titlie restaurant and bar, where you can enjoy sundowners and dinner with a cool soundtrack mix to a-company. Similarly, if its beach glamour that you are looking for, I'd surely recommend one sunset at the W Goa's brilliant Rockpool, perched high atop a cliff. At W Goa, not only will you enjoy some of the finest cocktails in the region but also be privy to some of the best DJs in the country who perform here regularly.



Coffee trail - As a coffee addict myself, I am always looking to suss out a destination's coffee scene. Given the increasingly discerning profile of tourists here, there is a cool coffee scene emerging here. I would definitely recommend the G-Shot Coffee Roastery and Cafe with its fuss-free garden setting and exhaustive coffee menu or even Mojigao for its famous cortados and fresh organic breakfast options. I also made a stop by the wayside at the vegan-focused Bean Me Up, in a cosy zen-inspired setting.

Culinary scene - It is quite hard to sum up Goa's food scene, dynamic and bustling, in just a few lines but for the sake of this feature, I shall attempt to do so. I lunched with local chef Rohan Shah, whose seafood speciality restaurant Goa Spice offers home recipes and the best quality seafood, with a focus on Goan Saraswat cuisine. Head here if you are looking for a truly unique gastronomic experience, without any touristy frills. I'd surely recommend the beautiful backyard garden at Jamun, Assagaon, for a coastal food experience in a stylish setting. I tried out the Jamun seafood thali, which featured the most famous curries from coastal regions across India Goa, Kerala, Maharashtra, West Bengal served with jamun-coloured puris. And the cocktails are worth recommending! Don't miss a dinner in the courtyard of Mahé, which, as its name suggests revisits Kerala cuisine and presents it in a fine dining avatar, thanks to the dynamic vision of its owner Parth Timbadia and Chef Sandeep Sreedharan. And finally, a meal at the unpretentious Vinayak restaurant, famed for its local seafood specialities is just what you need for a comfort meal, in a very local setting. I tried the Bombay ducks and mackerels in local Goan spices, which were extremely memorable.



Local pick

If you're looking to stock up on some local booze, look up the homegrown Hapusa gin, by the same people who made Stranger & Sons gin. This infused gin is packed with Himalayan juniper and all the botanicals are locally sourced. Most bars and restaurants around Goa serve cocktails with Hapusa gin if you ask for it. Recommended!



Images courtesy Ama Stays & Trails
<https://fromsmash.com/ama-Stays-and-Trails-Goa-Villa>

Policy milestones to put hospitality back on path of recovery

Telangana:

The state government of Telangana has proposed to establish an online system for various activities relating to tourism for improving the Ease of Doing Business. The online system shall allow users to submit and track their application systems as well as obtain the final certification for various activities.

So far, there is no such mechanism to register tourism trade enterprises, and the facility will allow speedy processing of various licenses, clearances and certificates required for setting up of hotels, travel and tour operators business and conducting tourism events. Telangana's Commissioner for Tourism has also proposed creating a framework for public-private partnership to promote the sector.

As part of an effort to promote tourism, the government also plans to introduce single window clearances as well as data collection to improve quality of services.

Maharashtra:

The Maharashtra government has formally accorded "industry status" to the hospitality sector. The status was accorded to the sector as far back as 1999, but had unfortunately remained only on paper with no meaningful benefits.

Effective from April 2021, the hospitality industry will be levied tariffs and duties on electricity, water, property development and non-agricultural taxes at industrial rates. The operating cost of hotels and other tourism-related activities will drastically come down in the state due to lower electricity and other land-related rates.

Delhi:

A committee set up by the Delhi government has suggested a number of measures for simplifying the liquor pricing mechanism and checking malpractices like evasion of duty in the trade.

The committee was given the task of suggesting measures to augment state excise duty revenues as well as create more jobs at restaurants by boosting the business, following a drastic drop in spending in wake of the pandemic.

The committee has suggested that the number of dry days in a year be reduced to three (October 2 (Gandhi Jayanti), August 15 (Independence Day) and January 26 (Republic Day)).

It has further suggested that the Delhi government to issue licenses to departmental stores to sell soft liquor such as beer and wine. It has also suggested that the legal age for drinking be reduced to 21 years from 25 years in the National Capital Region (NCR).

Andhra Pradesh:

The state government of Andhra Pradesh has decided to launch an aggressive tourism policy to follow up on various measures that won it the plaudit of the most improved major state in tourism in an India Today study.

The state says the new measures will include attractive incentives, rationalized terms and conditions for land lease and infrastructure development. It will also run a digital marketing campaign, offer virtual tours, augmented reality and virtual reality for better experiences.

It proposes to develop more 5 and 7 star resorts at prominent destinations, develop 11-theme-based tourism projects including rural tourism and wellness tourism.

There will be a 100 % waiver of Land Use conversion charges, fixed cost power reimbursement to new tourism units for a period of five years and 100% reimbursement of stamp duty and net SGST as well.

HAI LEADS POLICY DEVELOPEMENT

Faced with an existential crisis following the severe impact of the ongoing pandemic, the Hotel Association of India (HAI) has urged the government to immediately open online applications for hotels to claim benefits offered under the Service Exports from India Scheme (SEIS) for financial year 2019-20.

"We are grateful to the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) for providing benefits to hotels under the Service Exports from India Scheme (SEIS) of the Foreign Trade Policy (FTP). The process for applying for the reward is online and normally commences in the month of May each year. For the fiscal of 2019-20 therefore, the hotels were looking forward to applying for the benefits in May 2020. However, it has not yet been operationalized," said Madan Prasad Bezbaruah, Secretary-General, Hotel Association of India (HAI).

"While these are unprecedented times and some delay is acceptable, it has now been stretched for six months. In order for the hotel industry to survive through the global health crisis, these benefits need to reach the hoteliers while there is still time," he said.

"We appeal to the Government of India to make the online application process available to hotels. These benefits are offered to hoteliers as a fixed percentage of their annual net foreign exchange earnings. The incentive enables hotels to subsidize input costs of imports and facilitates Indian hospitality to match global standards of hotels that a foreign tourist is accustomed to," said Mr. Bezbaruah.

"Given the hardship that hotels are going through since March, this delay may prove to be a crippling injury to an industry that is struggling with a force majeure scenario. The request to allow the hotels to avail the SEIS benefits that have already accrued to them for the year 2019-20 is fair and legitimate and should be acceded to. It is not a concession," he highlighted.



Patron-in-Chief
Hotel Association of India
Mr. P.R.S. Oberoi
Executive Chairman
EIH Limited



Mr. Puneet Chhatwal
President
Hotel Association of India &
Managing Director & C.E.O
The Indian Hotels Company
Limited



Mr. Vikram Oberoi
Immediate Past President
Hotel Association of India &
Managing Director & Chief
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Mr. K.B Kachru
Vice President
Hotel Association of India &
Chairman Emeritus &
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Mr. Sanjay Sethi
Member
Hotel Association of India &
Managing Director & Chief
Executive Officer
Chalet Hotels Ltd.



Mr. R. Shankar
Member
Hotel Association of India &
Head, Corporate Affairs, EIH Ltd.



Mr. Samir M.C
Member
Managing Director
Fortune Park Hotels Ltd.



Mr. M.P. Bezbaruah
Secretary General
Hotel Association of India

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