



# ENGAGE

September - October 2021 | Volume 1 | Issue 5

## Domestic Tourism: **Endless Possibilities**

**Unraveling  
Madhya  
Pradesh**



**Holiday  
Moves  
to the Villa**

**Exclusive:**  
Interview with  
CEO of NITI Aayog  
Amitabh Kant



**Reimagine  
Hospitality  
with  
Priya Paul**







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## From the President's Desk

**T**he rebound of tourism, post the second wave has given the hospitality sector a great sense of reassurance. While, the Covid-19 setback of over 18 months can't be overcome soon, the current buoyancy, supported by the festive season should help the industry to return to 70-75 per cent of pre-Covid revenues. Moreover, with the occupancy rate increasing, average rate per room is bound to go up. On the other hand, though MICE and business travel will take some time to fully recover, people's desire to travel is certain to get the industry back on its feet again. This confidence also stems from the rise in the number of vaccinated population in the country. According to recent government data, more than 70 per cent of India's population has been vaccinated with at least one dose.

Meanwhile, Covid-19 has been a one-in-a-century opportunity to look at readjustments and imbibe lessons learnt through the pandemic; we have to factor in new kinds of risks to the business which we had not done before.

I feel it is imperative to take proactive steps to optimize resources and empower employees while opting for innovative ways of working with enabling digital technologies. To thrive in the long run in a volatile environment, we need to step back, look at the bigger picture and keep adaptability on top of mind. While there are bound to be "certain" challenges and "still-uncertain" circumstances; by keeping the focus on sustainable growth, the customer at the centre, and personalization at the fore, each brand has the opportunity to start afresh.

Domestic tourism will remain the leading form of tourism, representing an important tool for economic growth and development. This is also asserted by the growing influence of trusted brands tapping into smaller markets to capture the trend. With branding gaining momentum, it will be up to brands to support and ensure growth in the shortest possible time while maintaining the highest degree of service standards. Till overseas travel opens up, we have a potential of 25 million travellers for India.

India is a travellers' kaleidoscope with its geographical diversity and rich cultural heritage. Indians are rediscovering their country and this trend is here to stay. Travellers are now exploring beyond the tried and tested destinations. They are looking for unique experiences like, heritage homes, havelis, farm stays and villas. Travel from being a lifestyle choice has emerged as a huge business opportunity - the pie has only become bigger. India has tremendous potential to develop and build capacities in tourism that are sustainable; In rural tourism, in the Indian Islands and in lesser known and lesser traversed destinations, as the customers look for options that are safe and conform to the new normal of hygiene, sanitation and social distancing.

The beauty of India is that it is a destination with limitless possibilities, and the hospitality business can leverage this potential. I believe that by being sharper in vision, more engaged with guests, developing innovative approaches, up-skilling ground teams, and focusing on people first, we will recover much faster. **HAI**



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

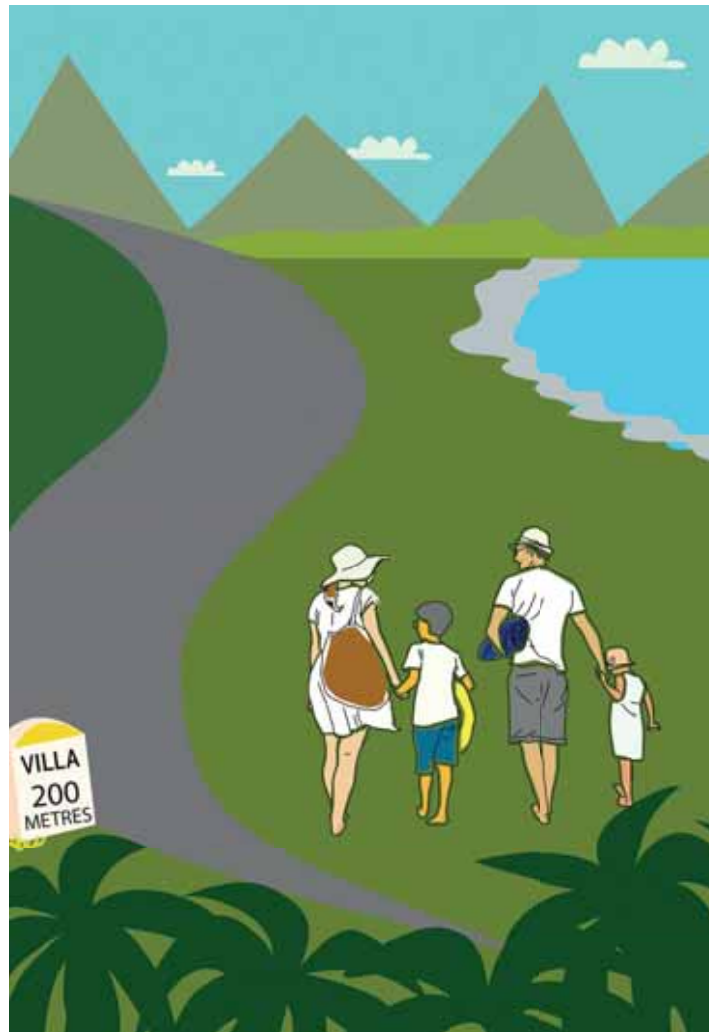


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For thousands of visitors, Indian Hospitality is the first interaction with the country's fine culture and vibrant heritage. The extraordinary mélange of flavours, food trails and culinary delights, architectural details steeped in history, or the grand landscapes—all carry the Incredible India story forward.



## LeaderSpeak



"We have used the COVID break to reimagine our businesses across all brands"

Priya Paul, Chairperson, Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels Limited, talks on how they have built a differentiated hospitality brand and are weathering the COVID storm.

## Interview

"This is an opportune time for India to unleash the potential of Wellness Tourism"

Amitabh Kant, CEO of NITI Aayog, and author of Branding India: An Incredible Story has been the key driver of the hugely successful Incredible India campaign. In an exclusive to HAI Engage, he talks on the way forward.



## Destination

### MADHYA PRADESH Unravelling The Heart of India

Discover the state for out-of-the-ordinary experiences. Catch the ancient vibes at ruins of old forts or get dazzled by contemporary, buzzy cities that resonate with modern appeal. It's also the land of Chanderi and Maheshwari silks. There is so much to see and experience,



## The Last Word

### Let's Leave No One Behind

Since domestic tourism will have to be the foundation of the new turnaround, we need to also make it sustainable, and be mindful of lifting all—the local communities, local environments and local cultures.



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# ENGAGE



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## HAI talks with Parliamentary Standing Committee



**T**he Hotel Association of India (HAI), on invitation, appeared before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism & Culture, headed by Mr TG Venkatesh, MP, Rajya Sabha, in two separate meetings, on August 16 and September 9, respectively. The panel heard the Association's views regarding "distress in Tourism and Hospitality sectors due to the Covid-19 pandemic."

The HAI delegation, in the August 16 meeting, was led by its President, Mr Puneet Chhatwal, MD & CEO, The Indian Hotels Company Limited. Other members of the delegation included Mr KB Kachru, Vice-President,

HAI and Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, Mr MP Bezbaruah (Retd IAS) & Secretary General, HAI, Dr (Ms) Jyotsna Suri, HAI Corporate Member and Chairperson & MD, Bharat Hotels Limited, Mr Ajay Bakaya, MD, Sarovar Hotels Pvt Ltd and Mrs Charulata Sukhija, Deputy Secretary General, HAI. In the September 9 meeting, HAI was represented by Dr Suri and Mr Bakaya.

The committee heard the Association's views on the adequacy or otherwise of the financial assistance provided by the banks, as per directions of the Government of India, to the Hospitality sector, and the relief measures extended by the GOI under the Emergency

Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS). The second meeting was focused around understanding the roadblocks to the effective and successful implementation of the ECLGS scheme.

The Tourism & Hospitality sector is a key pillar of the national economy, and has a critical role to play in the post-pandemic economic revival. HAI deeply appreciates the opportunity to share suggestions with the august committee, and the committee's efforts in finding solutions for the Covid-ravaged hospitality sector.

In its various representations to the Finance Ministry and RBI, HAI has been highlighting the need to customise ECLGS and tailor it to the specific needs of the Hospitality sector. **HAI**

L-R MP Bezbaruah, KB Kachru, Puneet Chhatwal, Jyotsna Suri, Ajay Bakaya and Charulata Sukhija



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### MAHARAJA CHHATRASAL

CONVENTION CENTRE - KHAJURAHO

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# Passage to India



For thousands of visitors, Indian Hospitality is the first interaction with the country's fine culture and vibrant heritage. The extraordinary mélange of flavours, food trails and culinary delights, architectural details steeped in history, or the grand scenescapes—all carry the Incredible India story forward

By Charulata Sukhija



Courtesy: Tripadvisor.com

Each country's traditions and culture are closely linked to the national identity. India is endowed with a rich cultural heritage, that exists in its monuments, architectural details, literary works, arts and artifacts, folklore, language, knowledge systems, culinary varieties, and so on.

Each diverse region has its own unique heritage, making it like a necklace of shimmering diamonds, each more stunning and exquisite than the other.

Tourism and heritage are closely linked as people often travel to experience cultures different from their own. Nostalgia makes for a great reference point. Given India's wealth of history and culture, it is not surprising that cultural tourism is a prime motivator for domestic and international tourists.

Immersive experiences have always been a source of constant delight for tourists. Those engaged in the promotion of tourism, therefore, showcase the country's rich heritage. Detailing matters, and that's why, whether it is the "maharaja" of the national carrier or ITC's "namaste" - the respectful folding of hands to honour the guest - the symbolism is deeply representative of a culture that is as warm and inviting as it is grand.

Some of the well-designed benchmarked hotels are the best ways to experience the nation's heritage, arts and culture, exemplified in every facet of their operations, design language and service that exemplifies Atithi Devo Bhava, the Sanskrit term meaning "the guest is equivalent to God". Guests are traditionally welcomed with arti, tikka and a garland, a unique ritual typically used to worship deities. Such greetings are often accompanied by the beating of traditional drums or



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<b>HING POWDER</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delicious flavour</li> <li>• Strong aroma</li> </ul>	<b>NARIYAL PAANI</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% tender coconut water</li> <li>• Rich in potassium, calcium &amp; electrolytes</li> </ul>



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Courtesy: Tripadvisor.com

**At lovingly restored heritage hotels, you step into a magical world, where lavish scenes combine with bespoke experiences and pretty details that echo high octane-glamour, fit for royalty**

dhols, nagadas and trumpets and the delicate showering of the guests with flower petals and rose water. Rangoli - beautiful patterns created on floor with finely ground coloured rice powder - traditional lamps, clay pots and lit diyas at hotel lobbies, that are symbols of the customary welcome, reflect the inherent cultural values of the Indian society. Even the drink served to guests on arrival - tender coconut, ginger tea, aam ka panna, jaljeera, chhachh or buttermilk - are a showcase of the distinctive tastes and flavours of India.

At lovingly restored heritage hotels, you step into a magical world where lavish scenes combine with bespoke experiences and pretty details that echo high octane-glamour, fit for royalty. While some palaces, forts, havelis and heritage buildings being operated as hotels give tourists a feel of past grandeur, there are many others that have been built on the lines of imperial lavish homes. The Lalitha Mahal Palace, Mysore, Rambagh Palace Jaipur, Lake View Palace and Laxmi Vilas Palace in Udaipur, the Neemrana Fort hotel, Samode Palace, Mandawa Castle are some popular hotels in the first category. In the second category, there are many iconic hotels. The Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, Mumbai, the Vilas properties of the Oberoi group, ITC hotels like The Grand Bharat, Grand Chola, The Lalit Great Eastern in Kolkata, The Ashok, or The Imperial in Delhi, the Brunton

Boatyard in Kochi are some examples of hotels designed in the heritage styles of India.

Many hotel interiors borrow traditional, local idioms in styling, from furniture and furnishings to the decorative elements and staff uniforms, so as to give guests a thematic visual of local and traditional lifestyles and art forms. The lobby of ITC Maurya hotel in Delhi is an excellent example of how heritage and modernity is deftly interwoven on a grand, luxe scale.

Indian Hospitality also promotes Indian textiles, handicrafts and different art forms. The Khazana stores located in the Taj group properties help in reviving the vast creativity of Indian craftsmen, traditional arts, jewellery and textiles. Local artists are often invited by hotels for musical and dance performances giving an opportunity to in-house guests to enjoy local artistry. Often hotel guests have the opportunity of signing for specially curated heritage walks and tours, or to view arts and exhibitions, plays and other cultural events organised by the Hotel.

The culinary route is another very vital way Indian Hospitality carries the Discover India theme forward. Many visitors get their first taste of authentic culinary experiences and service styles at signature restaurants like ITC's Bukhara, Dum Pukht, Dakshin, Royal Vega, Kebabs and Kurries, Avaratana, and so on.

As wellness centres or through spas, hotels have introduced the world to our ancient practices of Yoga, Ayurveda and Naturopathy. The Ananda in the Himalayas, Somatheerum Resort in Kovalam, to name a few, have carved out a distinctive niche in this field.

With so much to offer, needless to say Indian Hospitality has got its due spotlight on the world stage, and many Hotels have bagged prestigious international honours. Being profound, strong and sensual at the same time, It is a proud ambassador of India's distinctive culture and traditions. **HAI**



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*“We have used the COVID break to reimagine our businesses across all brands”*



**Priya Paul**, Chairperson, Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels Limited, talks on how they have built a differentiated hospitality brand and are weathering the COVID storm.



The Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels Group has made a mark by innovative solutions, cutting-edge services and fresh design thinking. What can we look forward to in the coming months?

Tourism is slowly recovering. We are socializing, small meetings are back, and our guests are looking at ways to connect and come to our hotels. We at Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels Limited (ASPHL) are very excited to bring all the fun and new concepts that we have been working on, to engage with our customers in a new, refreshing way.

We have used the pandemic time to reimagine our businesses across all our brands. Even during the lockdowns, we were very active on digital activations and experiences, and our various initiatives and activities have reflected in a healthy growth of the business. The H1 21 was better than our competitors despite all the disruptions. THE Park Hotels are market leaders with a powerful food and

beverage brand ecosystem. Our entertainment options, with our trademark Anything But Ordinary experiences, have brought our customers back.

We look forward to four openings by the end of 2021. I am delighted that we will also now be in Indore with the first THE Park Hotel opening in the city by November. A contemporary boutique hotel in design and style, THE Park Indore with 99 rooms, will bring to the city THE Park's renowned nightlife and food & beverage offerings.

We also bring our legendary Someplace Else, the Mecca of Music from THE Park Kolkata to Mumbai this year. This will be a fabulous new addition to Mumbai's nightlife. We have just relaunched our newly refurbished iconic alfresco bar and restaurant, Aqua at THE Park New Delhi.

Flurys, our 94-year-old iconic patisserie café, is being aggressively growing. We now have 47 outlets, and will be adding another 10 by the end of the year.

Our priority continues to be the safety

of our guests and team, and we are ensuring that we create experiences, keeping those in mind with S.H.I.E.L.D., our all-encompassing safety and hygiene programme.

**What role will the Group play in boosting Domestic Tourism?**

COVID has brought back the focus on great destinations that we have within our country. More than 3000+ domestic flights have taken off already and we see an increase in travel by trains vis-a-vis 2020 – these are all signs of growth in domestic tourism. Travellers are looking for safe and hygienic places.

ASPHL has always had very strong positioning in domestic market built over 50 years. We understand the Indian customer and their needs. Our guests trust us and come to us for more than just a hotel room. They know that our hotels are vibrant and happening places. They come to us with full confidence with a heightened sense of safety and hygiene as well as also for great food and Anything But Ordinary experiences we offer. We have a very high repeat clientele

**“We ensured even during the lockdowns that our Anything But Ordinary experiences were alive digitally”**

of 30%. We will continue to strengthen our presence in more cities, bringing new experiences to the fore, and generating employment in these cities.

**THE Park Hotels has always stood out with splendid Hotel experiences, artwork designs and so on. What's the new brand positioning after Covid?**

For THE Park Hotels, our brand positioning of Anything But Ordinary continues to remain the same. We ensured even during the lockdowns that our Anything But Ordinary experiences were alive digitally, and we will continue to focus on them through our seven brand pillars. These are: Urbane India; Curating Culture; Food Reimagined; 360° Design; Stay Swell; Life: Leisure; and, Ready, Set, Business

Our Zone by The Park Hotels, an upscale social catalyst brand for the



**“Customer needs have changed in the last one year. The pandemic brought much swifter adoption of technologies, motivated by a combination of safety requirements and consumer behaviour”**

design-conscious, price-conscious travellers will continue to be Social, Nimble, and At Ease. With relaxed, un-boxy spaces, a happening bar, and restaurants, Zone by The Park gives our guests the space to make new connections, refresh and recharge themselves.

All our brands continue to be aided by our S.H.I.E.L.D programme that brings the best of luxury, design, hygiene, safety and service excellence under one roof.

**What details on upcoming properties would you like to share? Were any projects impacted due to Covid?**

Currently we have 18 hotels: THE Park Hotels, THE Park Collection, Zone by The Park Hotels and Zone Connect. We used the pandemic as an opportunity to scale up our portfolio of brands. We launched a new brand, Zone Connect under Zone by The Park and have signed new hotels under our various brands.

THE Park Collection will soon open in Ladakh and Heritage palace ‘Ran Baas’ in Patiala with 28 keys; Under Zone by The Park, we will be in Amritsar with 199 keys, and Zone Palace Phalodi with 25 keys; For Zone Connect, we will be in Port Blair with 24 keys, Goa with 49 keys, Coimbatore with 55 keys, and in Darjeeling with 65 keys. Under THE Park Hotels, the development work of a 200-room property in Pune also has re-commenced.

THE Park Indore got delayed due to COVID, but will now open in November this year.

**What new experiences is the Group planning to roll out?**

Customer needs have changed in the last one year. The pandemic brought much swifter adoption of technologies, motivated by a combination of safety requirements and consumer behaviour. We are restructuring our mobile strategy to aggregate and digitize in one single interface processes related to pre, during, and after-stay experiences. Our new digital strategy is more mobile-centric, brand-agnostic, and focused on hyper-

personalization.

We have digitalized all guest activity touchpoints starting from reservations, contactless check-in/out and any kind of service requests. Guests can order by using QR-Codes, they can view and verify invoices, order room service without using any hardcopies and pay digitally.

Technology has become an intrinsic part of any experiential. We had online digital activations last year. Some of these were, THE Park Aqua Sunset, where we took the glamorous vibe of Aqua for listeners to experience online through specially curated playlists by music producers and DJs across India; Quarantine Chronicles, a guest video testimonial campaign; roped in our Chefs, Spa managers & in-house fitness experts to engage with our audience cutting across geographies through Stay (S)well campaign, and many such more. We are now moving these offline too.

**What are your suggestions for the bounce-back the industry badly needs?**

Hospitality has been one of the most devastated industries. We understand the compulsions of imposing restrictions and unitedly stand with the government to fight the pandemic. However, the impact on occupancies and room revenues has affected the viability of many hotels. As restrictions continue to be imposed, it is only fair that hotels be provided relief in payments of their fixed operational costs. A complete or partial waiver of statutory payments, like property tax/lease rentals/licence fee/excise fee payable by hotels to various government authorities will provide relief during the pandemic, and help the industry. Paying for utilities like electricity on actual consumption basis rather than on a minimum load would also be helpful. Some states like Maharashtra and Karnataka have made welcome moves in this area.

From a policy perspective, Industry status to hotels across all States, allowing them to avail the benefits available to the manufacturing sector, like lower property tax, lower licence fees, lower tariffs on utilities like electricity and



water, is long due. It is time to look towards domestic tourism with a stronger focus, to incentivize domestic travel, generate employment and create tourism destinations that are prepared to handle increased number of visitors.

Making the currently announced ECLG Scheme available to a larger section of hotels will prevent many hotels from shutting down on account of a liquidity crunch.

The Ministry of Tourism has been promoting ‘Dekho Apna Desh’ campaign which is excellent and which we must build on. But the eventual opening of international tourism is also critical.

**What sustainable solutions did the Group evolve to deal with the Covid setback? How much is sustainability and environment part of the overall Group strategy now?**

Sustainability and environment have been our core areas for strategic action. ASPHL has initiated natural resource conservation strategies, energy-saving and recycling initiatives across its hotels. These include rainwater harvesting, re-cycling waste, re-using materials such as wood, water conservation, solar energy, eco-design and conserving power and energy.

Pioneering in the field of energy conservation, THE Park Hyderabad is India’s first LEED GOLD certified green hotel. Our hotels undertake awareness

generation and sensitization programs for staff and employees on water conservation, saving electricity and usage of paper products as opposed to plastics. We have replaced a large part of plastics long back, have terrace gardens in our hotels and are growing micro-greens and herbs that are used in the hotel kitchens.

We are exploring initiatives we can take to reduce emissions and our carbon footprint.

**What are your views on the role of women in taking ASPHL to the next level of success?**

We have women in very senior roles. We don’t differentiate between men and women. The focus has always been on caliber and competence. We have women professionals leading their respective verticals and driving success to the organization as well as for themselves. I believe in creating an enabling environment where more women realise their potential.

**What have been the innovations implemented, in guest service, front office, F&B services? How is technology transforming guest experiences now?**

We took the time to reimagine, reinvent and reset when the pandemic hit the nation. We introduced digitalized interaction touchpoints: contactless check-in and check-out process,

**“From a policy perspective, Industry status to hotels across all States, allowing them to avail the benefits available to the manufacturing sector, like lower property tax, lower tariffs on utilities like electricity and water, is long due”**

QR-based menus – both in the restaurant spaces and in-room dining, digital payments; rolled out workation, daycation, staycation, isolation packages that received an impressive response.

There are rejuvenated menus across hotels with a strong emphasis on the concept of farm-to-fork and immunity building ingredients.

We have installed glass dividers on the reception for extra safety of travellers and associates, increased the frequency of sanitizing with hospital-grade disinfectants in high-touch guest areas and using, electrostatic sprayers to disinfect guestrooms, gyms, and other public areas.

**Given that MICE will be affected for some time, is the Group working on some alternate plans?**

Guests are now looking towards smaller

events, and weddings continue to be the mainstay. However, the volume of wedding expenditure is still more or less the same because guests are now looking at intimate and exclusive weddings and wedding staycations. This has given us the chance to offer more experiential luxury that fulfils, delights and takes utmost care of safety and hygiene. Guests have made lifestyle changes, are looking forward to the concept of Farm to Fork, and conscious consumption. There are specific requests to have vaccinated staff while they hold their events with us.

MICE events have taken a middle path, by means of hybrid events that combine physical and virtual events. Since packed banquets are a distant reality, hybrid events are at the forefront now.

**What will be your message to Hospitality to keep the outlook positive and remain resilient?**

This crisis has been unpredictable and unprecedented. But it has brought the whole industry together to tackle a variety of issues. For me, it has been most gratifying to see how our teams and partners have worked hard, been resilient and faced challenges together. I would encourage everyone to continue in the same way as I have complete confidence that we will all emerge successful. **HAI**



# *My Holiday* IS IN THE *Villa*

Post-Covid, travel is driven by people's dreams of a free life, and itineraries on the bucket list. Socially distanced Villa vacations are an excellent opportunity for travellers who want to slowly ease back into the outside world. Being exclusive in nature, owing to the relatively smaller scale of operations, villa-cations are fast catching up, offering stirring experiences that let visitors explore nature, community and culture intimately.

BY NITI SINGH

NESTLED IN THE GREENS:  
amā Stays & Trails Tea  
Estate Bungalows, Munnar





As vaccination drives increase, and the next Covid wave is still at bay, many people are eyeing venues where they can enjoy safe vacations, in their chosen social bubbles, in the company of friends and family. For those who don't want to dive immediately back into the bustle of a busy Hotel, there are many superior quiet getaways, or exclusive villas within Hotel properties, near the beach, on the hills, at temple towns, heritage locations, Tier 2 cities, and so on, that offer renewed hope and fresh restarts to people in general, and to the Hospitality industry too.

A villa holiday is usually not like a hotel stay that may offer multi entertainment options, spas, gyms, infinity pools, dining and bar venues, and so on, but the relative exclusivity, serenity and calm at villa properties is a major attraction for those looking for out-of-the-ordinary experiences.

With many standalone villa properties offering value packages for long stays, these are fast emerging as the favoured choice among people looking for work-cum-vacation breaks. "Work from Mountains" says the landing page of the 150-year-old restored Abbotsford estate in Nainital, and this sounds like a most appropriate call when Work from Home or Work from Anywhere has become the standard corporate work culture. With wi-fi connection in each room, misty window views and pine-scented air, the home away from home looks like the perfect backdrop for the creative muse to ignite fresh thinking.

Customers may pick from luxurious beach villas, terraced Himalayan properties, riverside homes, to eco lodges in the heart of the jungles, or tree houses, suiting every whim, fancy and budget. Travel websites MakeMyTrip and TripAdvisor have added villa sections to their listings. Honestly, the most difficult part of the vacation is deciding where you want to go, as in each nook and corner of the country, from Karjat to Kodaikanal, there's a Villa to suit one's pocket and style.

Many of these properties are located at an easy drive down distance from major towns and cities, and social bubble weekend breaks are emerging as the



**A WARM EMBRACE:**  
(above and below)  
Villas of the Lalit Hotels



“Villa stays is a beautiful concept, embracing privacy and luxury, and the pricing is very competitive, in view of the value proposition offered to guests”

**RAKESH MITRA,**  
Group General Manager Sales &  
Revenue, The Lalit Hotels





One difference after Covid is that Indians have discovered tourism in their own backyard. People who might have visited France or Italy are now showing interest in independent properties on home turf

**JANHAVI PRASADA,**  
Owner of Abbotsford Estate in Nainital

reigning trend. Delhi-based lawyer couple Harsh and Shweta Pathak, for instance, are looking forward to their upcoming weekend break in Lansdowne with a group of friends, a long-awaited break from their monotony at home.

Owners Rupam and Oli Borah, of La Belle Vie in Naukuchiatal, that like others, has a stretchable pricing policy, with rates going up in busy festival time, say the USP of villa holidays is that they offer a fuller experience, and guests enjoy the feeling of owning a home away from home. At most bungalow villas, like La Belle Vie or at Sara's Chalets in Mukteshwar, for instance, guests may make full use of the in-house kitchen, and rustle up a favourite recipe while the attendant staff can do the accompanying tasks.

Among the luxurious five-star Hotel chains, the award winning IHCL Group was an early adopter of the trend, even before Covid struck in 2019. Taking a holistic views of traveller preferences to embrace the slow life, reclusive stays and authentic experiences, amã Stays & Trails, has rapidly expanded its portfolio, and is now offering over 50 homestays and villas at destinations such as Munnar, Chikmagalur, Alappuzha, Coorg, Darjeeling, Kodaikanal, Alibaug, Lonavala, and Wayanad, among others. Each villa takes a different route in colour and design. It's difficult to resist an offer from the Taj Group of Hotels, called "The Bungalow is Yours", with the promise of an exclusive opportunity to absorb local culture and life, along with greater peace and quiet compared to a mixed-appeal hotel that may otherwise dazzle with buzzy amenities. "amã Stays offer an intimate vision of slow life in luxury homes. It is India's first branded homestay portfolio that offers guests an opportunity to immerse themselves into a slice of the local culture and life, whilst enjoying time with family and friends in exclusive, private villas. Every bungalow is pet-friendly, making it a perfect getaway with loved ones, including the four-legged family members. The proximity of the homestays to a 'hub' hotel allows guests access to the closest IHCL hotel, for any additional facilities or services, thereby allowing guests to enjoy the best of both worlds," says the IHCL spokesperson. "Each villa and heritage bungalow, like in the charming by-lanes of Goa, in Munnar or in Khadakvasla, showcases local



(Clockwise from above) Abbotsford Estate; amã Stays & Trails, Madh Island; La Belle Vie Naukuchiatal, Bhimtal; Abbotsford Estate



amã Stays offer an intimate vision of slow life in luxury homes. It is India's first branded homestay portfolio that offers guests an opportunity to immerse themselves into a slice of the local culture and life, whilst enjoying time with family and friends in exclusive, private villas

**IHCL SPOKESPERSON**







**Aashna Khurana, Creative Director, Karma Lakelands, an estate close to Gurgaon, says that the interest in their Villas is at its peak right now. They have had visitors inquiring for diverse needs like weddings, bachelorette parties or to just feel close to nature, in company of farm animals at their estate, like cows and rabbits**

heritage, culture and regional cuisine," he adds. Immersive experiences, quiet, the opportunity to heal and gain a new understanding of life, are the main inspirations behind the villa-cation trend.

Rakesh Mitra, Group General Manager, Sales & Revenue, The Lalit Hotels, says that there has been a change in customer preferences towards destinations which are easily accessible by road and for hospitality venues closer to nature. "The trend is in favour of drive-cations, workcations and staycations that are customised as per individual requirements," he says. Their villas and cottages, at Goa, Bekal and Srinagar are an integral part of their marketing and branding activities. They come equipped with well-stocked kitchens, dedicated chef and butler services, with enhanced privacy for guests. "Villa stays is a beautiful concept embracing privacy and luxury, and the pricing is very competitive in view of the value proposition offered to the guests," he says.



Since 2020, there has been a significant uptick in the number of bookings for villas, homestays, vacation rentals and hostels. This trend will continue to dominate consumer behaviour even after the pandemic is well behind us

**VIPUL PRAKASH,**  
MakeMyTrip Chief  
Operating Officer

With the pandemic forcing people to consider non-conventional holidays, Nasdaq-listed travel portal MakeMyTrip plans to add 15,000 alternative properties over the next 18 months. "Demand for premium and luxury hotels offering high safety standards is high. The severity of the second wave of Covid-19 made safety protocols a top priority for travellers," says MakeMyTrip Chief Operating Officer Vipul Prakash, adding that they are seeing pent-up demand for alternative stays. "In pre-Covid days, a family with a young child or a group of friends out on a bachelorette vacation preferred booking a villa. Now, families, couples, groups of friends and co-workers are looking for luxurious isolation together. There is a definite spike in the number of professionals and entrepreneurs opting for workcations in the hills or at the beaches of Goa. Since 2020, there has been a significant uptick in the number of bookings for villas, homestays, vacation rentals and hostels. This trend will continue to dominate consumer behaviour even after the pandemic is well behind us," says Prakash.

A growing number of small, intimate hotels, restored palaces, boutique resorts, well-appointed homestays, plantation retreats and jungle lodges have personified conscious luxury where the motivation is for travel that educates and enriches, encourages a digital detox but allows connectivity when one needs it. Travellers who will risk a post Covid-19 journey will look out for exotic locations, away from teeming crowds. This is the reason why Aashna Khurana, Creative Director, Karma Lakelands, an estate close to Gurgaon, feels that the interest in their Villas is at its peak right now. In fact, this "scattered hotel" concept as she calls, has been so popular that they recently added a Presidential Villa with four bedrooms and premium facilities, a private swimming pool and butler service. They have had visitors inquiring for diverse needs like weddings, bachelorette parties or to just feel close to nature, in company of farm animals at

(above & below)  
Villa & A wedding  
at a Karma  
Lakeland villa







their estate, like cows and rabbits.

Nestled among the Aravalli hills, close to Gurgaon, near Garat Pur Bas Village, is the 20-year-old Tikli Bottom, a three-bedroom stylish haveli that is often used for fashion shoots and film locales. What it counts as its major attractions are out-of-the-ordinary experiences, where you may opt for a night under the stars, on a charpoy. "This kind of tourism, that's more rural where you can see buffaloes hanging close by, appealed to a niche segment till recently, but is now gaining popularity," says owner Annie Howard.

Janhavi Prasada, owner of Abbotsford Estate and chief organiser of the Kumaon Literature Festival, says villa tourism is all about getting into the details, and she personally oversees each detail when guests are over. "One difference after Covid is that Indians have discovered tourism in their own backyard. The same people who would have visited France or Italy, are now showing interest in independent properties on home turf," says Janhavi. She says the personal experiences that are curated at her villa properties, like the walking trails with the owners, personalised menus or the discovery of little-known crafts pockets are what makes such properties stand out.

Interest in villa-cations shows that discerning travellers want to go beyond the hotel walls and connect with and understand local cultures, history, people and their traditions. Such inclusive experiences create magical and lasting connections that go far beyond the latest Instagram feed. For many rural communities, tourism is their lifeline. Activities that bring visitors to farms and helps them have DIY experiences, helps local farmers grow their business, provides visitors a close interaction with local cultures, while also promoting sustainable tourism.

"Travelling with extended family and friends to a

**PEACEFUL AND DISTINCTIVE: CGH Earth Resorts in Kumarakom (above), in Machus Cottage (below), and (facing page) at Thekkady**



safe zone has increased," says Michael Dominic, CEO of CGH Earth that operates "travel experiences" across a collection of 16 boutique hotels, resorts and ayurvedic centres. Offers on longer stay packages include free nights, discounts on F&B, free laundry, wi-fi connectivity, and so on. "What we have seen is the emergence of a market within each state where we are located (mostly in the south). We have had to rework our rates for the new market, but as months pass by from a lockdown phase, we have seen an increase in demand, and have increased our rates." He says villa properties are inviting interest simply because they are private in nature and guests get the feel of being surrounded in a safe bubble. Interior design details that are borrowed from local folk idioms, from regions where the properties are located, create a unique point of interest. For instance, Dominic says, among the CGH Earth properties, the Spice Village has been inspired by the tribal dwellings of the Manan tribe, Coconut Lagoon has old wooden tharavad homes, celebrating the skill of the Kerala Thachushastra and wooden carpentry, Marari Beach villas are inspired by the fishing villages of Marari Kulam, Mantra Koodam in Kumbakonam has cottages and independent illams inspired by the agraharams in the area.

Such innovative sparks will hopefully guide through a successful revival in the coming months for Hospitality. According to global real estate service firm JLL, across India, in April 2021, occupancy levels dropped by about 17 per cent and room rates declined by about nine per cent when compared to March 2021. To ride through the storm, many hotels and restaurant chains are recharging the new environment with

🌿 **Villa properties are inviting interest simply because they are private in nature and guests get the feel of being surrounded in a safe bubble** 🌿

**MICHAEL DOMINIC**  
CEO of Kerala-based CGH Earth Group.



custom-made experiences.

In a report "The travel industry turned upside down" by Skift Research and McKinsey & Company, the authors note that "travel companies should seek to understand their customers as micro-segments, not monoliths. Travel is, after all, deeply personal." This means that tourism has to be tailored for the modern travellers who might be looking at more than just beaches and forests. As per recent trends, travellers have made changes in their itineraries from familiar to unexplored destinations and it is time the service providers wake up to the cultural bounty of the country and enrich their itineraries by including immersive experiences that give visitors a sense of local connection, artistic indulgence and soul-replenishment. "What we have seen during Covid times is an increase in travel with pets. We have had parrots too!" says Dominic. What can be more quiet, reclusive and filled with 'susegad'? **HAI**



# “This is an opportune time for India to unleash the potential of Wellness Tourism”

**Amitabh Kant, CEO of NITI Aayog, and author of *Branding India: An Incredible Story* has been the key driver of the hugely successful Incredible India campaign. In an exclusive to *HAI Engage*, he talks on the way forward. Excerpts follow:**

**What's your perspective on domestic tourism and how will it evolve in the next 12-18 months?**

With uncertainty in the global travel and tourism sector, India has significant potential with world heritage sites, bio-geographical zones and biotic provinces, to increase the number of domestic travellers. The government is providing loans to MSMEs in the tourism sector. In his 2020 Independence Day speech, Hon'ble PM urged people to visit 15 domestic tourist destinations in India by 2022. IRCTC is running a series of Swadesh Darshan trains. Theme-based tourism promotes the growth and development of domestic tourism in the country. In July this year, the ministry drafted a proposal titled “National Strategy and Roadmap for Medical and Wellness Tourism”. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has introduced a new scheme called the “All India Tourist Vehicles Authorisation and Permit Rules, 2021”, in which a tourist vehicle operator can register online for All India Tourist

Authorisation/Permit. This permit will be issued within 30 days of submitting the application. The Ministry of Tourism developed an initiative called SAATHI (System for Assessment, Awareness & Training for Hospitality Industry) by partnering with the Quality Council of India (QCI) in October 2020. The initiative will effectively implement guidelines/SOPs issued with reference to COVID-19 for safe operations of hotels, restaurants, B&Bs and other units.

**What can the Hospitality sector expect as far as Policy is concerned?**

A number of measures have been taken by the government to revive the Hospitality sector:

1. The GST (goods and services tax) rate

**“The recently-announced provision of free visas to five lakh tourists visiting India will give the sector a huge boost”**



on hotel rooms with tariffs of up to Rs 7,500 per night has been cut to 12 per cent from the existing 18 per cent. In addition, the tax on room tariff of above Rs 7,500 has been slashed to 18 per cent from the existing 28 per cent.

2. The National Integrated Database of Hospitality Industry (NIDHI) was launched in 2020 for registration of various accommodation units in the country. Prior to this, the Ministry of Tourism had only 1400 hotel registrations but now over 40,000 hotels have registered on the NIDHI portal. The portal provides a number of benefits like Star Classification for

hospitality units, project approvals for accommodation units, listing of hotels on IRCTC hotel booking portal and information about capacity building workshops and conferences.

3. The Ministry of Tourism has partnered with the Quality Council of India (QCI) and launched the System for Assessment, Awareness and Training for Hospitality Industry (SAATHI) to assist the hospitality industry in their preparedness to continue operations safely. Self-certifications regarding adherence to SAATHI framework, capacity building and third-party assessments are the three main

elements of this initiative. The SAATHI dashboard provides information on the number of self-certified hospitality units across the country.

4. The Government of India constituted the National Tourism Task Force in 2020 comprising Tourism Ministers of all State Governments/UTs and line ministries.

5. Recently, the following measures were announced by the Finance Minister for revival of the Tourism sector:

- Provision of working capital or personal loans to people in the tourism sector to discharge liabilities or restart

**“Opening of Wellness Centres in urban as well as rural areas will give fillip to wellness tourism in the country and propagate the theme of AatmaNirbhar Bharat”**

businesses affected due to Covid-19. Loans will be provided with 100% guarantee with a limit of ₹10 lakh for travel and tourism stakeholders and ₹1 lakh for registered tourist guides.

- Provision of free visas to 5 lakh tourists visiting India.



**"Incredible India", and "Atithi Devo Bhava" have been outstanding campaigns. Post Covid, what kind of positioning is being planned?**

Since ancient times, India has been known for its Indigenous health systems like Ayurveda, yoga & naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH), which have been effective in curing various chronic diseases. Significant lifestyle changes have been observed across the world since the occurrence of the pandemic, with a shift to traditional health systems. This is an opportune time for India to unleash the potential of Wellness Tourism in the country. "Wellness Tourism" would be the unique selling proposition of India in the future.

**Technology will play a key role in contactless handling of tourism. What are the plans to ensure modernization of tourist spots, and to ensure Covid protocols are strictly followed?**

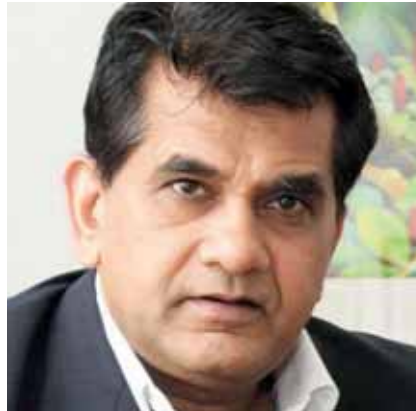
In the post Covid world, Augmented Reality & Virtual Reality would play a significant role in promotion and marketing of popular tourist destinations in India. The nascent AR/VR market in India has witnessed an increase in the number of startups in recent years and offers a plethora of opportunities for first generation entrepreneurs in the country.

The Incredible India Mobile App is an innovative project of the Ministry of Tourism developed in 2018 to enable travellers access information about recognized tourism service providers, approved inbound tour operators, adventure tour operators, domestic tour operators, tourist transport operators, travel agents, regional level guides, classified hotels available in respective cities/tourist centres, and so on. The application will also be upgraded from time to time.

Contactless ticketing is being promoted at popular tourist destinations in India. Adequate social distancing norms are being followed at tourist sites to prevent overcrowding.

**How to attract global tourists back? How can we make India a thriving hub for MICE tourism?**

Factors like Cleanliness and Sanitation are of utmost concern for any traveller. However, in this aspect, India is looked down upon by many foreign travellers



**"India can use the Safe Travel Stamp to rebuild the confidence of tourists. The stamp, launched by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), allows travellers to recognize governments and companies around the world that have adopted global standardized protocols for health and hygiene"**

and in order to shun this image, India can use a Safe Travel Stamp to rebuild the confidence of tourists. The specially designed stamp, launched by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), allows travellers to recognize governments and companies around the world which have adopted global standardized protocols for health and hygiene. A significant number of countries are currently using the Safe Travel Stamp to attract tourists.

Under the Market Development Assistance (MDA) scheme of the Ministry of Tourism, financial assistance is provided for the promotion of MICE tourism in the country. Currently, 15 % of Foreign Tourist Arrivals visit India for Meeting or Conferences.

Medical Value Travel holds tremendous potential for India, which ranks 10th out of 46 major medical tourism destinations in the world. In terms of medical expenses, India is more competitive than Singapore, Thailand and Brazil. Medical treatment is significantly cheaper in India as compared to the US and other developed countries.

**How do you envision the Hospitality sector to rebound?**

COVID has forced countries to adopt travel restrictions. While many businesses are encouraging employees to work from home, an increased emphasis on leisure or creating package deals to appeal to these demographics will boost the sector. A variety of tourism trends that are based on more general changes in consumer behaviour, like the need for healthy, sustainable, personalized services, the rising demand for digitalization and the use of technology, will aid the hospitality sector to quickly rise up. Staycations offer an excellent alternative to travellers who want to avoid long distance journeys.

**What kind of synergies can be proposed between Hospitality, travel and tour operators, and other stakeholders? What are your recommendations for a stronger and stable PPP system?**

There is a need for creating a single platform for effective coordination between different stakeholders in the hospitality sector (Hoteliers, Travel and Tour operators, Tourist guides). Promotion of destinations would create opportunities and encourage private players to develop and maintain tourism infrastructure in PPP mode. 27 MoUs have been signed under the 'Adopt a Heritage' Scheme.

**What opportunities can the Hospitality sector look up to now?**

The outlay for Annual Budget 2021-22 of the Ministry of Tourism is Rs 2026.77 crore. Recent announcements like increasing the size of the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) from Rs 3 lakh crore to Rs. 4.5 lakh crore, liquidity support by the Reserve Bank of India and tax exemptions given by some state governments, are some of the measures that will help the sector move towards recovery. The aesthetically designed Vista Dome LHB coach on tourist routes will also give a better travel experience to passengers. Use of innovative practices, Information Technology and Artificial Intelligence, in everyday operations will be key to show resilience and unlock tourism's immense potential, while also helping our country with the post-pandemic economic revival. Opening of Wellness Centres in urban as well as rural areas would give fillip to wellness tourism in the country and propagate the theme of AatmaNirbhar Bharat. **HAI**

## ONLY SOME LEGACIES HAVE STOOD THE TEST OF TIME

At the heart of the 200 year old legacy of The Glenlivet is some exemplary craftsmanship interspersed with undying passion, making it the world's most appreciated single malt

- George Smith, the renowned founder of The Glenlivet.
- The single malt has had some of the most famous men as its admirers. Here's Charles Dickens praising the single malt in his own words.
- George Smith famously carried a pair of hair-trigger pistols, presented to him by the Laird of Aberlour, which he used to ward off threats from several illicit smugglers.
- A shot of The Packhorse Bridge that's located over the river Livet near The Glenlivet distillery. This was later introduced as the new icon in The Glenlivet's logo.

*Transcribed from the original letter to George Smith, 1872*

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**THE GLENLIVET**



## Industry Developments

### Rs. 60,000-crore loan guarantee scheme for COVID-hit sectors yet to take off

A Rs.60,000-crore loan guarantee scheme for helping sectors hit the hardest by COVID-19 is yet to get off the ground, 52 days after it figured at the top of an economic relief package to cope with the second wave's shocks.

### APHA urges state government to provide hotels relief from taxes

Andhra Pradesh Hotels Association requested the state government to provide relief from various taxes like Trade license fees, property taxes, drainage and water taxes and electricity charges. The Association's recently elected president Balakrishna Reddy appealed to the state government to provide support for at least two years for the hotels so that they can recover from two-year losses due to the COVID pandemic. He further requested an award industrial status for Hotels. The APHA president added that the hotel industry is among the top three sectors worst hit with the COVID pandemic. The sector gives employment to the uneducated, School dropouts and youth with less education. "If this sector collapses, lakhs of people will become unemployed. So, we request the central as well as state government to give handholding to the hotel sector", he said.

### Hyatt set to expand India footprint by 70% in 2 yrs

Hyatt Hotels Corporation plans to expand its footprint in India by over 70 per cent by 2023 as it seeks to make the most of the resurgence seen in the hospitality sector after a lacklustre 18 months, said the company's senior executive. Notwithstanding the pandemic and the impact, it has had on hotel operations, large hospitality chains in India, including Indian Hotels, ITC Hotels, East India

Hotels, Marriott International, among others, have been signing up new hotels and adding to the number of keys, particularly in the leisure category that has seen a bounce-back of late on account of 'revenge travel'. "India is the fourth highest represented country in our global development pipeline. There is a lot of interest in this market," says Peter Fulton, group president for EAME/Southwest Asia.

### MSME status for Hotels sought

Andhra Pradesh Hotels Association (APHA) has urged the state government to grant Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) status to hotels and extend support to them in the form of incentives. The hotel association executive body members held a conference and discussed the problems being faced by the industry in the state.



### Lakshadweep eco-tourism development plan gets thumbs-up from hoteliers

KOCHI: Amid protests by various political parties against the reforms introduced by administrator Praful Khoda Patel, the Lakshadweep administration has some good news. Its plan to transform the archipelago into a global tourism destination got a big boost with leading hospitality groups responding overwhelmingly to the Investors' Conference in New Delhi. Though green activists have raised concerns that the plan to

follow the Maldivian model of development would adversely affect the islands' fragile eco-system, the administration vows to maintain eco-balance. The plan is to develop water villas and beach villas on the Kadmat, Suheli and Minicoy islands.

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS



### Venice set to charge tourists for entry

Venice plans to charge visitors for access and set entrance quotas from the summer of 2022, according to newspaper Stampa. The Italian city, one of the world's top tourist destinations, will also require prospective visitors to reserve access in advance, according to the newspaper. Turnstiles will be installed at the main access points of the city's historical centre. Measures to control the inflow of tourists had been debated for years before the pandemic all but halted arrivals in 2020. This year, with travel slowly resuming, the restrictions are back on the agenda, as global tourism hotspots try to restrain mass arrivals and improve the quality of the experience for both visitors and residents.



### Saudi Ministry of Tourism set to discuss Saudi's investment potential at 2021 International Hospitality Investment Forum

The Ministry of Tourism of Saudi Arabia will participate in the International Hospitality Investment Forum (IHIF) which will be hosted at the InterContinental Berlin, Germany, from 1st to 3rd of September. The forum, which will welcome over 170 industry leading speakers and participants from 80 countries, seeks to provide a platform where discussions, debates, and lessons regarding the recovery and future of the hospitality industry can take place. The Ministry of Tourism's attendance at the forum will showcase the Kingdom's growing tourism industry to prospective investors, giving them a broader understanding of the developments that have been made as well as investment opportunities.

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Photo: Ankit Dandhare

# MADHYA PRADESH

## *Unravelling The Heart of India*

Discover the state for out-of-the-ordinary experiences. Catch the ancient vibes at ruins of old forts or get dazzled by contemporary, buzzy cities that resonate with modern appeal. It's also the land of Chanderi and Maheshwari silks. There is so much to see and experience, so much energy and enterprise to admire, and, above all, so much aspiration to feel affinity for. One visit is not enough.

BY PRAMATI ANAND

**M**ADHYA PRADESH, the heart of India, is a heady cocktail of history and modern living, a chameleonic panorama that changes from region to region with vast expanses that leave deep imprints on the retina. For food varieties, it's a culinary gift that keeps on giving, and for shopping, the Chanderi and Maheshwari silks are much sought-after. There are endless reasons to explore the state. It's the land of legends and fabled rulers, like Chandragupta Maurya and Ashoka The Great.

The capital Bhopal is a thriving urban haven, that is in equal parts modern and ancient, while the largest and among the

cleanest cities is Indore. Madhya Pradesh is the second-largest Indian state by area. Jabalpur, Gwalior, Ujjain, Satna are teeming cities that have made their mark.

A journey into this heartland will not only take you back in time through the various architectural marvels like the temples of Khajuraho and the fort city of Mandu, but also lead you closer to your spiritual centre, as you move around the stupas of Sanchi. Allow the natural beauty of Bedaghat and the Tiger Reserves at Kanha satiate the adventurous spirit in you. It is not without reason that the MP State Tourism has kept its tagline: MP Ajab hai! Sabse Gajab hai! (MP is the most incredible place!)





Photo: Jatin Jangid

**Baz Bahadur's army was no match for Adham Khan and he fled to Chittorgarh. Meanwhile, the Rani, not wanting to be captured, poisoned herself**

## MANDU, THE LARGEST FORT CITY IN THE WORLD

The best time of the year to visit the largest fort city in the world is the monsoon. Located in the Malwa region, now in Dhar district, this historical site comes alive in the rains, as lush greens envelop the surroundings, and you fall under the spell of forgotten times.

Mandu is famous for its royal love story, of Baz Bahadur and Rupmati's, who were forced to separate due to an enemy attack.

Miyan Bayezid Baz Bahadur Khan

ruled from 1555 to 1562 and was the last king of Malwa. The story revolves around his meeting with Rupmati, a shepherd's daughter while on a hunt in the forests.

Mesmerized by her beauty and mellifluous voice, he proposed that she should come to live at Mandu. She requested a place not far from the Narmada River, and so he built the Rupmati Pavilion and Rewa Kund for her.

Unfortunately, in 1561, the Mughal emperor sent Adham Khan to conquer

Mandu (some sources say that it was actually to conquer Rani Rupmati), but Baz Bahadur's army was no match for Adham Khan and he fled to Chittorgarh. Meanwhile, the Rani, not wanting to be captured, poisoned herself.

These stories echo from the tombs, as you move up from the Baz Bahadur Palace to Rani Rupmati's pavilion and Rewa Kund. It is from here that she used to look at the Narmada and her lover.

## ORCHHA, THE BUNDELKHAND EMPIRE

Around 13 km from Jhansi, the humdrum of the city soon transforms into the murmur of a lifetime gone by. From the Betwa River, a spectacular view of Orchha emerges. On one side are the Chaturbhuj Temples, their giant stairs leading to the river. On the other, a turquoise stream of Betwa river gushes down the rocks, as it runs across the temples from behind the cliffs.

Jahangir Mahal is one of the most sought-after sites to visit in Orchha. It is said that Raja Bir Singh Ju Deo built the fort to welcome Jahangir to Orchha.

Walking around the Mahal is like taking a trip down memory lane. Rising to three storeys, the palace's entry is marked by large stone elephants, symbolic of welcoming Indian Royalty. The delicately carved windows and pillars of red and yellow sandstone give the palace its unique edge.

The rooftop offers views that will make Bundelkhand come alive from the textbooks of the forgotten past. The palace overlooks vast green forests that merge with the Betwa.



Photo: Abhijeet Parmar-Orchha

## GWALIOR FORT, A UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Termed as "a pearl among the fortresses of Hind" by Mughal emperor Babur, the Gwalior Fort is a gem that can be visited again and again. The UNESCO World Heritage Site is situated on top of a hill. It is one of the most impenetrable forts in the country.

The intricate craftsmanship of turquoise tiling with hints of glistening yellow imbues it with mesmerizing energy. The Gwalior Fort covers an area of 2.4 km while enclosing some of the greatest marvels of medieval history—the Man Singh Palace, Teli ka Mandir, Gurjari Mahal, Saas Bahu Temple, and Chaturbhuj Temple.

Gwalior is also the birthplace of music maestro Tansen. The Tansen Music Festival or The Tansen Samaroh is celebrated here every year, around December 26-30, at Tansen's tomb in Gwalior.

A trip to Gwalior is incomplete without witnessing the soul-stirring performances that'll forever remain etched in your heart.

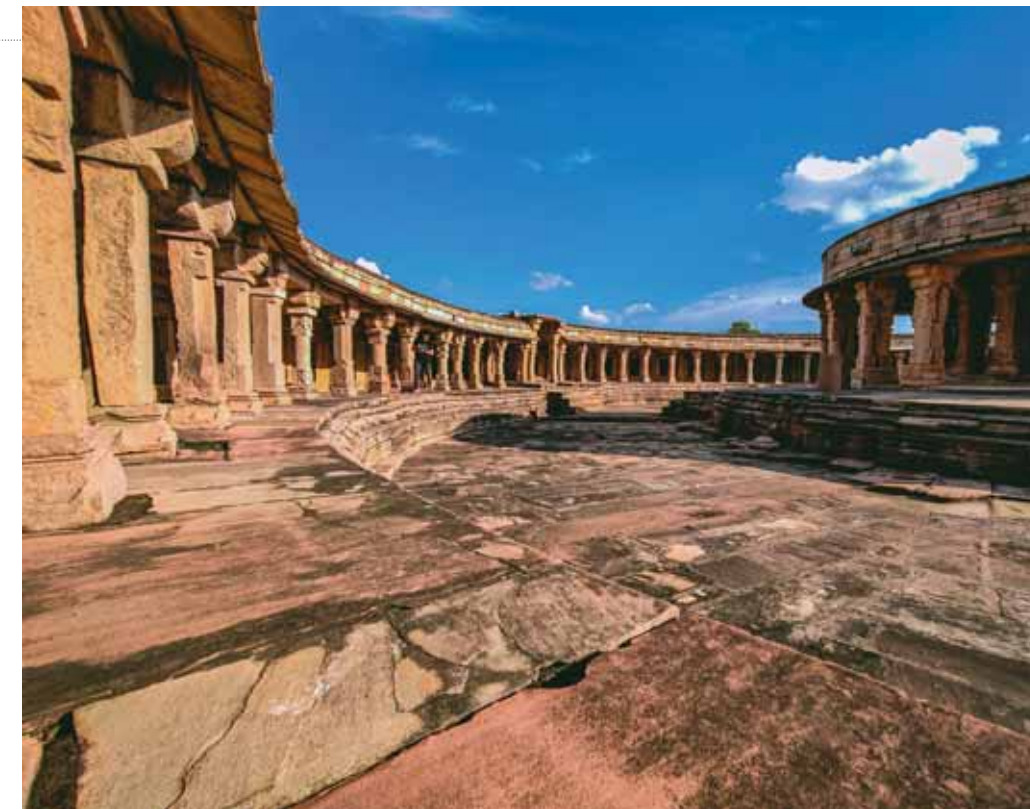


Photo: Yash Kiran



Photo: Rishikesh Hedaoo

## BHEDAGHAT, THE GRAND CANYON OF INDIA

Imagine riding a boat on a moonlit night, the silver moon reflecting onto the marble rocks all around and melting into the water. Bhedaghat, in Jabalpur district, is often referred to as the Grand Canyon of India. It is a unique marvel of nature where the Narmada flows through a gorge created by high marble rocks and falls off the cliff with utmost force, creating the spectacular Dhuandhar Falls, called as such for their smoky

appearance.

The incredible beauty of marble rocks and their various morphological glittering forms on either side of the Narmada River are sure to leave you spellbound. Several dinosaur fossils have also been found in the Narmada valley, in the Bhedaghat-Lametghat area of Jabalpur. The site is currently a part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site's Tentative Lists.



## SANCHI STUPA, ONE OF THE FIRST MONASTIC STUPAS

Emperor Ashoka ordered the construction of the Stupas at Sanchi to preserve and popularize Buddhist philosophy. Sanchi is not only home to the Gupta temples, one of the earliest examples of temple architecture, but also the Mahastupa which was given the status of World Heritage Site in 1989.

A journey to Sanchi has become synonymous with a journey to MP. Perched on top of a hill overlooking the plains and about 40 km from Bhopal, Sanchi has a group of Buddhist monuments -- monolithic pillars, palaces, temples, and monasteries, all in different states of conservation, most of which date back to the 2nd and 1st century BC. The serenity of the place will touch you, and you will feel at home even amidst the spellbinding architecture. The Lion Capital of the Ashokan Pillar is kept at The Sanchi Archeological Museum.



Photo: Ameena Tasneem

**A journey to Sanchi has become synonymous with that of MP. Perched on top of a hill, Sanchi has a group of Buddhist monuments, most of which date back to the 2nd and 1st century BC**

Photo: Ashutosh Dvivedi



**The Khajuraho temples, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, are among the most important specimens of Indian art. The Chandela rulers built the temples over 100 years, each king commissioning a temple**

## KHAJURAHO TEMPLES OF LOVE

The Khajuraho temples, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, are among the most important specimens of Indian art. The Chandela rulers built the temples over a span of 100 years, each king commissioning a temple.

The fascinating thing about the temples is that they belong both to the Hindus and the Jains. They are known for their exquisite craftsmanship that consists of splendid demonstrations of fine sculptures out of which the famous erotic sculptures of Khajuraho account for only 10 per cent. The Khajuraho sculptures bear testimony to the fact that we came from a much more evolved time.

A week-long classical dance festival, the Khajuraho Dance Festival, is held annually in February which also is a great time to visit the temple.

## KANHA NATIONAL PARK JUNGLE BOOK DESTINATION

Rudyard Kipling was inspired to write "Jungle Book" after being here. The lush sal and bamboo forests are best visited in November, but for tiger tracking, a good time to go to the Kanha National Park is April-May, when the vegetation is sparse and wildlife gathers around for water.

A sighting of the beautiful Swamp Deer (Barasingha) will make you catch your breath. The Park's biggest achievement is the preservation of this rare species!



Photo: Han Jurgen Mager

## PANCHMARHI A QUIET RETREAT

Panchmarhi, at an elevation of 1067m, is another calming getaway for nature enthusiasts. It is known for its Pandav Caves and breathtaking waterfalls!

Madhya Pradesh is rich and varied in many ways. There are plentiful options for travellers, and some great Hospitality locations to stay at. MP Tourism has been working hard to provide the best accommodation options at all places of importance to suit every budget. The Kanha Safari Resort, Kanha, Betwa Retreat, Orchha, Baghira Jungle Resort, Mocha Glen View are among some delightful venues. With such varied fare, travel will never lose its appeal. **HAI**

# LET'S LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Since domestic tourism will have to be the foundation of the new turnaround, we need to also make it sustainable, and be mindful of lifting all—the local communities, local environments and local cultures.

**By MP BEZBARUAH**

Secretary General, Hotel Association of India



**T**he world has just celebrated World Tourism Day on the theme of "Tourism for Inclusive Growth". The topic is relevant. Tourism's capacity to generate income and employment in areas bypassed by manufacturing or normal industries is well known. But tourism being the end result of so many activities, many of which are not visible, the total impact is often not seen or properly accounted for. Still, the backdrop to all the celebrations is quite grim. Tourism decreased by 95% and the loss to the global GDP was \$4 trillion, pushing it to the level of what it was 30 years back. Worldwide, an additional 32 million, mostly women, youth and low paid workers, have been pushed into extreme poverty. According to a recent assessment made by the Ministry of Tourism through the National Council of Applied Economic Research, 2.15 crore people engaged in tourism lost their jobs.

But as UNWTO rightly points out, "it is an opportunity to look beyond tourism statistics and acknowledge that behind every number, there is a person". Unseen miseries caused by the collapse of tourism due to COVID-19 is a very human story. The faceless face is what HAI has emphasized in all its pleas to the government, requesting for urgent, focused attention to tourism's recovery to save jobs and lives. It is in consonance with

the motto of the Sustainable Development Goals--- "leave no one behind".

Therefore, the global call for inclusive growth through tourism is significant. It rests on two major objectives. First, to help the sector recover quickly, and second, when recovery takes place, to use tourism as a part of the national development strategy for inclusive growth. However, the recovery outlook still remains modest. Most experts believe that international tourism will return to the level of 2019 by 2023 only. In India as elsewhere, therefore, domestic tourism will have to be the foundation of tourism's revival.

Though not much recognized, domestic tourism has been the mainstay of India's tourism. The number of domestic tourist visits is a staggering 2,322 million; the ratio of international to domestic tourist visits is 1:232. This figure includes a wide variety of destinations and types of visitors.

If domestic tourism has be a tool for inclusive growth, it will have to be more diversified and better planned than at present. The distribution of tourists, domestic and international, is rather skewed so far. The top ten states/UTs get 87.2 per cent of foreign tourists and 87 per cent of domestic visits. The other 26 states/UTs receive on an average 0.5 per cent of arrivals. The "Dekho Apna Desh" campaign has done great service for the promotion of domestic tourism, but its reach and expanse must lift the others left behind. No doubt, the states have to play the pivotal role in making this change.

Domestic tourism can be broadly divided into three categories: 1. Very local, people visiting local fairs, festivals, temples nearby; 2. Regional, mostly limited to visits to tourist attractions within the state, or at best nearby states; 3. Visits to tourism places of national and international importance. In addition, we have to consider occasional religious congregations that attract a large number of visitors. It will be ideal if a benchmark survey of tourism resources of the country is carried out separately, identifying places of local interest, places of purely domestic interest and places of national



Courtesy:Facebook





Courtesy:Facebook

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and international importance. The resource should include all different forms of tourism, like rural tourism, eco-tourism, adventure tourism, heritage and culture tourism, and so on. If the survey is carried out district-wise, building up such an inventory will not be difficult. The information will help in planning destinations for promotion of domestic tourism—identifying the nature of infrastructure development, finance required, agency to manage for each category, and so on. It will help in prioritizing the implementation process. And most significantly, local organizations and communities can be given a role in the development of tourism.

Very rightly, the government had taken up schemes for circuits to be selected and developed. This approach requires to be strengthened with attention to a few factors. First, the places in the circuit tend to get all the attention to the exclusion of others. In an ideal planning, each major circuit can have many linked or feeder sub-circuits which will increase the options available to tourists. Similarly, the circuits often tend to be foreign tourist-centric. There should not be much difference in the nature of development of destinations between domestic and foreign tourists. There is a general feeling that quite often while planning a circuit, the nitty-gritty is not discussed with the key people who are to service them and make them economically viable—the tour operators and the travel agents.

There is merit in trying to find simple solutions in promoting tourism. India has to develop many more destinations. The new generation of tourists are money-rich and time-poor looking for unique experiences. The UNWTO has repeatedly pointed out that post-COVID, sustainability will no longer be an option, it will be a necessity. Tourists are looking for nature and open-space experiences. And that is how India can leverage its vast unexplored regions in a way that tourists can come and enjoy a varied experience. What we need to do is to, a) provide safety and security; (b) good connectivity to the place and within the circuit; (c) IT-friendly environment; (d) clean and hygienic accommodation; (e) and, imaginative destination development to create a good experience. As domestic tourism will be predominantly

dependent on road transport, two requirements often neglected, — imaginative wayside amenities and proper road signages—should be top of the agenda.

The concept of inclusive growth demands that the community is an inseparable part of this experience—planning the tourism attractions, providing services and getting economic benefits. Above all, community participation should be for encouraging responsible tourism, which of course extends to the tourists as well. Local cuisine is a major attraction for tourists, and authentic local culinary delights should be a part of any destination planning. Similarly, culture is one of the most important aspects of Indian tourism. A survey had shown that 90-95 per cent of income of artists and craftsman in prominent touristy states like Kerala and Rajasthan came from tourism. Since culture is an important draw for tourists, the destination management teams should ensure that the experience is authentic.

UNWTO had also estimated that for almost 30 per cent of tourists, shopping is a major motive for travel. India is a shopper's paradise and many tourists enjoy their shopping experiences. However, there are also innumerable instances of causing hassles in shopping, cheating in quality of products and prices, and such experiences create a poor impression. Most Indian destinations do not have authentic, branded souvenir shops that most foreign countries have. Each destination should have a system of certification for arts and crafts, like the English Heritage marks, or our own silk marks.

Just before the pandemic so rudely shook tourism, the Ministry of Tourism had drafted a Policy with the overarching theme of "Sustainable and Responsible Tourism", aiming to reach 33 million foreign arrivals and 3 billion domestic visits, building 100 smart destinations, 20 iconic destinations and setting up professional destination management organizations. As we see the first rays of hope, the vision has to be put in place firmly and resolutely in the shape of a policy. We can do it and transform from despair to resurgence. I never tire of quoting the classical poet Virgil: "They can/Because They think they can." **HAI**



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