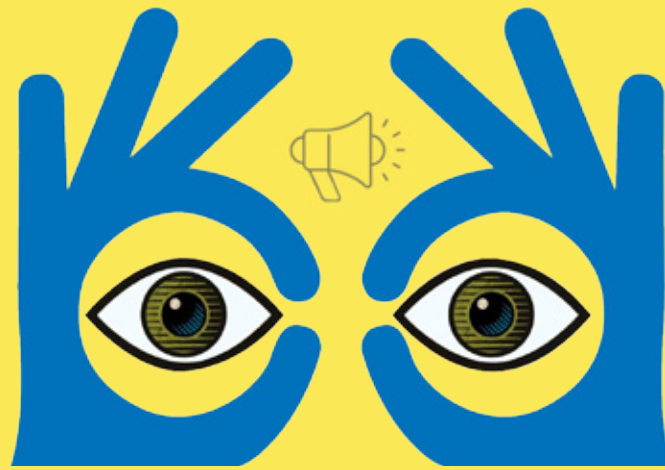




ENGAGE

September-October 2024 | Volume 4 | Issue 5



INDIA

An Opportunity For Hotel Brands To Position & Expand Their Presence Rapidly



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RATAN:
An Obituary

Sustainability
Conclave:
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From the President's Desk



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

The times, they are indeed changing. In today's fast-paced, tech-driven world, branding has never been more crucial for businesses, especially in the hospitality industry. As we navigate through dynamic shifts in both consumer behaviour and demographics, how a hotel or resort positions itself can make all the difference in capturing the right market and ensuring long-term success.

We live in an era where financial influencers, many of whom are in their 20s, are offering advice that was once the domain of elder generations. You've probably come across social media content, where a young influencer says something like, "If I had bought a 1,000 stock of Wipro in 1975, I'd be a billionaire today." While this youthful enthusiasm is inspiring, it underscores a key point: branding is no longer a one-size-fits-all approach. It's about understanding and catering to diverse audiences with different needs and expectations.

This brings me to the senior population—a growing and influential demographic. According to the United Nations' World Population Ageing 2019 report, the number of people aged 65 and above is expected to rise to 1.5 billion by 2050, with 225 million of them residing in India alone. In 2024, seniors comprise 11% of the Indian population, and this will grow to 20.8% by 2050. This shift presents a unique opportunity for the hospitality industry, and hotels are already beginning to adapt. The industry is focusing on amenities that ensure comfort and accessibility for seniors—think wheelchair-friendly showers, lower beds, wider doorways, and even ramps for easy mobility. By doing so, hotels cannot only provide a better experience for seniors but also capture a slice of the growing \$0.5 -1 billion senior recreation market.

Branding for the future means recognising these shifting demographics and adapting to them. It means catering to the raw energy and hustle of the younger generations while also respecting the needs of older guests who have a growing propensity for travel. As retirees become free from professional obligations, they represent a valuable customer base, one that can be fiercely loyal if treated well.

At its core, the future of hospitality lies in balancing innovation with tradition—offering cutting-edge amenities while ensuring comfort and accessibility. The brands that succeed will be those that understand the importance of making every guest feel valued, no matter their age or background. As we look ahead, branding in hospitality will be about much more than just a logo or a slogan—it will be about building trust, fostering loyalty, and embracing the changing tides of global demographics. **HAI**

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Branding in hospitality is unlike product branding; it is multi-dimensional, dynamic, and constantly evolving.



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Padma Vibhushan
RATAN N TATA
 Chairman Emeritus,
 Tata Sons
 28.12.1937 - 09.10.24

HAI mourns the passing of India’s jewel, Ratan Naval Tata

The Hotel Association of India joins the nation in mourning the loss of visionary leader Ratan Naval Tata. Known for his humility and quiet influence, Tata shaped the ethos of the nation with his unwavering commitment to excellence, integrity, social responsibility, and empathy. His legacy has profoundly impacted every sector he touched, including hospitality, where his visionary leadership continues to inspire generations.

Tata’s leadership extended beyond business. Under his stewardship, Tata Group diversified into new industries while maintaining its deep-rooted values of philanthropy and social good. His approach to business wasn’t just about profits—it was about making a positive impact on people and society. His dedication to social causes, whether through the Tata Trusts or the various philanthropic endeavors of the group, made him a beloved figure globally.

In 2008, the Government of India recognised his contributions by awarding him the Padma Vibhushan, the nation’s second-highest civilian award. Ratan Tata’s passing leaves a void that will be difficult to fill, but his legacy will continue to guide future generations. HAI pays deep respect and homage to this great son of India and prays for eternal peace for his soul.

“I find myself at a loss for words to pay tribute to Mr. Ratan Tata, a true legend. It’s rare to meet someone so humble and selfless. His ability to remain understated is a lesson that will always stay with me. I had the privilege of meeting him a few times, and each encounter showed his warmth and encouragement, especially toward the younger generation. His legacy will undoubtedly continue to inspire entrepreneurs and generations for years to come.

For me and countless others, Mr. Tata represented empathy, generosity, and humility. I fondly recall seeking his thoughts on the future of Indian hospitality at an industry event. Instead of focusing solely on business strategies, he emphasized the importance of our industry’s role in uplifting communities and improving the lives of the people we work with. That conversation has stayed with me ever since. As we say goodbye to Mr. Tata, I bow my head to his extraordinary vision and the core value he stood for—humanity.”

KB Kachru
 President, HAI
 Chairman - South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group

“Mr. Ratan Tata, Chairman Emeritus, Tata group was a tall leader and a true visionary. His immeasurable contributions have shaped IHCL, the Tata group and the nation. Under his stewardship, Taj forayed to international shores, took bold strides in pioneering new destinations and innovative concepts. We will always be indebted for his leadership.

I am blessed to have had the privilege of personal interactions with Mr. Tata, his value based leadership has left a deep imprint on me. His life exemplified his commitment to the Tata group values and his legacy will forever continue to inspire and guide us.”

Puneet Chhatwal
 Immediate Past President, HAI
 Managing Director and CEO, IHCL

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HAI Member Hotels sign MoUs to mentor Hospitality Institutes

The Hotel Association of India (HAI), has been collaborating with the Government on Sectoral policy matters for more than two decades. One of the most recent initiatives in this direction by HAI Members has been in supporting the institutes of hotel management under the national council, ministry of tourism, government of India. Eight hotel groups will be mentoring the institutes and have inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to that effect. This collaboration with the hotel groups was announced at the celebratory Event marking the World Tourism Day 2024 at a grand function organised by the ministry. Honorable Vice President of India, Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar presided over the event held at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi.

Seven of the hotel groups involved are HAI members, including industry giants like

The Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL), Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels, The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group, ITC Group of Hotels, Lemontree Hotels, The Radisson Hotel Group and Marriott International. The eighth hotel group that signed the MoU is the IHG Hotels & Resorts. K.B. Kachru, President HAI and Chairman – South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, remarked, “This collaboration is in the best interest of the industry and the nation, focusing on skilling and employability for the country’s youth.” Rohit Khosla, Vice President of HAI and Executive VP (Operations) at IHCL, added, “We are proud to be part of this initiative, which aligns with IHCL’s core values.” The initiative aims to bridge the gap between academic training and industry requirements, enhancing career prospects for hospitality students while improving the guest experience.

Tourism Ministry launches Handbook to support States/UTs

Ministry of Tourism, Government of India launched a handbook for States/UTs to grant and implement Industry Status for the Tourism and Hospitality sector on 27th September, 2024.

To improve ease of doing business and attract private sector investments in tourism, while many States and UTs have categorised tourism as an industry or have granted industry status through an official notification, translation into tourism units availing such benefits has not occurred at a large scale.

To support efforts of States/UTs in granting and implementing ‘industry status’ for the tourism and hospitality sector, the Ministry of Tourism has launched a handbook which aims to serve as a guide to States/UTs. This handbook will provide States and UTs a step-by-step guide on granting industry status to tourism, and thereby benefiting from greater investments and job creation through tourism and hospitality.

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India's hospitality sector attracts \$93 mn investment in H1 2024



According to JLL's Hotel Investment Trends - India H1 2024 report, hotel investment volumes are projected to reach \$413 million for the year, a 22% increase from 2023. In the first half of 2024, hotel investments reached \$93 million, with listed companies accounting for 44% of total transaction volumes.

The upscale segment dominated the market, contributing 44% of total transactions, followed by mid-scale at 31%, luxury at 23%, and the economy segment accounting for the remainder. Owner-operators led 30% of total transactions, with HNIs, family offices, and private hotel owners contributing 26%.



Sterling makes its debut in Bokaro, Jharkhand

Sterling, India's leading leisure hospitality brand has made its debut in Jharkhand with its hotel, Sterling City Centre Bokaro. Located within the SAIL city in the heart of Bokaro, the property connects seamlessly with the major business sectors in Bokaro & other industrial areas in Jharkhand like Ranchi, Dhanbad and Sindri.

Sterling is the first pan-India hospitality brand in Bokaro and brings its signature warmth and award-winning hospitality to the steel city.

Chalet recognised among India's best workplaces for Women 2024

Chalet Hotels Limited announced its recognition as one of India's Best Workplaces for Women 2024 (mid-size). This prestigious honour highlights Chalet Hotels' commitment to creating a high-trust, high-performance culture, with inclusivity, fairness, and employee well-being at the core of its organisational values.

The recognition was conducted by great place to works, which assesses organizations based on their efforts to foster a workplace environment that promotes equality and empowers women. This year, the top 100 organisations were selected in both large and mid-size categories, commending those who have made a significant impact by building a culture of inclusivity and fairness.

Mr. Sanjay Sethi, MD & CEO of Chalet Hotels Limited, said, "At Chalet Hotels, we firmly believe in creating an environment where all individuals, especially women, can thrive and reach their full potential. This recognition as one of India's Best Workplaces for Women is a testament to our ongoing efforts to foster a culture of diversity, fairness, and empowerment. We are committed to continuing this journey, ensuring that inclusivity remains at the heart of everything we do."

Last year, in June 2023, Chalet had launched The Westin Hyderabad Hitec City, which is led by an all-women team. This pioneering initiative stands as a beacon of empowerment and reflects the vision for a more inclusive and forward-thinking hospitality industry."



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HAI Launches ODISHA Chapter



Odisha has been identified as a priority state for tourism development, as highlighted in the Union Budget 2024-25, making it a fitting location for HAI's first State Chapter launch. The Chapter aims to collaborate closely with the state tourism department and local stakeholders to promote sustainable tourism and hospitality. Efforts will also focus on expanding HAI's presence in the state.

Tourism primarily operates at the state level, making it crucial to have a platform dedicated to the growth and development of hotels, which are vital to tourism infrastructure. At this level, HAI has emphasised one key policy intervention:

states should extend to hotels the same benefits provided to the manufacturing and agriculture sectors, such as reduced utility rates and lower property taxes. Given the high operational costs of hotels, such industry benefits would reduce expenses, increase competitiveness, and make investments in the sector more attractive.

Odisha's robust tourism policy already offers several subsidies, including capital investment, employment, electrical duty, environmental protection infrastructure, and SGST subsidies. The Chapter will work to ensure that these benefits are fully accessible to hotels. With improved connectivity, enhanced infrastructure, and a focus on both domestic and international markets, Odisha holds tremendous potential for tourism growth.



The Odisha Chapter was launched in Bhubaneswar, and attended by key Executive Committee members including Mr. K.B. Kachru, President HAI & Chairman – South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, Mr. Rohit Khosla, Vice President HAI & Executive Vice President (Ops.), The Indian Hotels Company Limited, Dr. J.K. Mohanty, Member & Hon. Secretary of the HAI and Managing Director of Swosti Group, Mr. Vikram Oberoi, Corporate Member, HAI & Managing Director & CEO, EIH Limited, Mr. Ajay Bakaya, Fellow Member,



The Hotel Association of India (HAI), the apex body for hotels across India, launched its Odisha Chapter on 13 September 2024, under the leadership of Honorary Secretary Dr. J.K. Mohanty, Managing Director of Swosti Group. HAI has been actively advocating for the tourism and hospitality sector to receive the recognition it deserves for its capacity to generate jobs, contribute to the economy, and promote inclusive growth.





& Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels Pvt. Ltd. & Mr. R. Shankar, Member HAI & President - Corporate & Legal Affairs EIH Ltd. Mr. M.P. Bezbaruah, Secretary General and Mrs. Charulata Sukhija Deputy Secretary General were also a part of the HAI delegation for the launch which was attended by prominent hoteliers of Odisha.

The HAI team met with senior government officials, including Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida, to explore collaboration opportunities to boost tourism. While Odisha has a strong tourism policy, its share of domestic and foreign tourists remains low as compared to its potential. The Deputy Chief Minister welcomed HAI's initiative and expressed optimism about building a strong partnership to elevate Odisha's status in tourism. Other officials of the Odisha State Government present at the meeting included Shri Balwant Singh IAS, Secretary Tourism, Shri Samarth Verma IAS, Director Tourism & Dr. Lalatendu Sahoo, GM OTDC.



Speaking at the launch, Mr. Kachru said, "We are happy to introduce the Odisha Chapter, which marks a significant milestone for the Association and the hospitality sector. This chapter will help us promote the state's tourism with the support of HAI hotel members."

Mr. Khosla stated, "Odisha is rapidly gaining popularity among travellers, drawn by its culture, heritage, and natural beauty. The positive aspect is that 4-5 star hotels are increasingly interested in the state and are ready to expand. We are optimistic that the HAI Odisha chapter will assist in the state's growth and foster collaboration with stakeholders."

Mr. M.P. Bezbaruah, Secretary General, HAI, said, "We are thrilled to introduce the HAI Odisha Chapter, a key initiative by the Association that will help us collaborate with the government to implement innovative policies and initiatives to promote tourism."

Dr. Mohanty added, "As part of HAI, our goal will be to collaborate with the government bodies, local stakeholders, communities, and industry partners to realise the full potential of the sector." **HAI**



BRANDING FOR GROWTH:

Cutting The Clutter



Branding in hospitality goes far beyond aesthetics; it involves every touchpoint, from the quality of service to the atmosphere, from how guests are welcomed to how they feel throughout their stay. A consistent, well-executed brand strategy reassures customers about what to expect at every interaction—whether booking online or checking in at the front desk. Crucially, it also addresses concerns around hygiene, safety, and convenience, elements that are increasingly important to today’s travellers. This consistency builds trust, which is vital in an industry where personal experiences and word-of-mouth reviews can make or break a business. Brands must avoid a synthetic, one-size-fits-all approach, as authenticity is key to fostering loyalty. Branding eventually helps hotels to rise above the clutter in a competitive market and strengthen their terms of engagement. We gather expert insights on branding strategies in hospitality.

Team HAI Engage





Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur



Maharajas Express

India presents a significant opportunity for hotel brands to rapidly expand, driven by its growing economy, rising middle class, and increasing domestic and international travel. With government initiatives like Incredible India and infrastructure development fuelling the hospitality sector, both luxury and budget hotel brands have a chance to thrive. However, in such a competitive market, success hinges not just on expansion but also on building strong and trustworthy brands.

Branding in hospitality is more than a logo or a tagline—it's about creating a unique identity that resonates with customers and builds trust. In a diverse country like India, where

personal experiences and word-of-mouth reviews influence decision-making, a strong brand assures guests of consistency, quality, and reliability. Whether it's through luxury properties or budget accommodations, hotel brands must cultivate trust by delivering on promises of service, safety, and convenience. This trust becomes the foundation of long-term loyalty and repeat business.

As India's digital landscape continues to grow, hotel brands can leverage technology to enhance guest experiences, but branding remains the key differentiator. It is the trust that a brand inspires—through seamless service, attention to detail, and personalised experiences—that sets hotels apart in a crowded marketplace. For hotel brands, especially in a market as dynamic as India, a well-executed branding strategy is essential for

not just standing out, but for building lasting relationships with customers.

Since online reviews and social media have amplified the voice of the consumer, hospitality brands must actively shape their reputation. Every guest interaction, from the tone of an email to the ambiance of the lobby, must reflect the core values of the brand. When done right, branding becomes a powerful tool to attract repeat guests, command higher rates, and create emotional connections that transform visitors into brand advocates.

In a heated market, creating strong brands is key to success. A report by McKinsey "How the world's best hotels deliver exceptional customer experience" points out, "Distinctive, superior service is more important now than

ever. The luxury segment is projected to grow at 6% per year through 2025—faster than any other chain-scale hotel class—and competition for customers is intensifying, as luxury hotels proliferate and alternative options (such as stylish rental villas equipped with chefs and staff) enter the marketplace. Non-luxury properties have also closed the gap on some of the physical details that indicate luxury, such as sumptuous mattress tops and rainfall shower heads."

With consumers spoiled for choice, especially in global travel and leisure, properties need to communicate not just what they offer but why they matter. Ultimately, branding is the key to not only staying relevant but also thriving in it.

Marriott International, with its portfolio of 17 brands, caters to diverse travellers, from luxury



“India is a melting pot of culture, and for international hotel brands, finding a localised strategy that augurs well for long-term growth should be approached by considering region-wise traveller demographics and psychographics”

RANJU ALEX

Area Vice President, South Asia at Marriott International

and premium to select and long-stays.

Ranju Alex, Area Vice President, South Asia, Marriott International says, “Our focus is on delivering exceptional hospitality for every type of traveller. With 153 properties, Marriott offers options for every budget and preference, from luxury brands like The Ritz-Carlton and JW Marriott to premium and select service brands like Westin, Courtyard by Marriott and Fairfield.”

She points out a particular challenge for foreign brands—localisation. “India is a melting pot of culture and for international hotel brands, finding a localised strategy that augurs

well for long-term growth should be approached by considering region-wise traveller demographics and psychographics,” she says.

The introduction of their 17th brand, Moxy, in South Asia brings a playful and energetic experience targeted at younger explorers. After launching in Bengaluru, Moxy recently opened in Mumbai Andheri West. Marriott is also expanding into Tier 2/3 cities, with a focus on making hospitality more accessible. By tailoring offerings to local preferences and enhancing food and beverage options, Marriott aims to build loyalty in these emerging markets. Their Marriott Bonvoy loyalty program connects guests to personalised experiences while providing flexible redemption options for stays and dining.

Marriott’s approach to branding emphasise local culture and aesthetics. For instance, in urban centres like Mumbai, the focus is on



Outside of Greater China, Marriott International expects to debut its AC Hotels

sleek, modern designs, while in Rajasthan, heritage and cultural authenticity is brought into their services. The company’s commitment to sustainability is also noteworthy, with a target to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. As Marriott continues to innovate, its diverse portfolio, focus on personalised guest experiences, and commitment to sustainability make it well-positioned to meet the evolving needs of Indian travellers.

Sakshi Sehdev Dogra, Head of Sales & Marketing Eurasia, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, says their branding strategy revolves around several key elements to enhance guest satisfaction and brand loyalty. They prioritise localisation, tailoring the hotel services, amenities and experiences to match each market’s unique cultural and regional specifics. This approach ensures that guests feel at home, no matter where they stay. Their marketing efforts are robust, with significant



Wyndham Hotels & Resorts



“Our ‘Count on Me’ initiative highlights our commitment to rigorous safety standards, featured prominently in our marketing campaigns to build trust with guests”

SAKSHI SEHDEV DOGRA,

Head of Sales & Marketing Eurasia, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts



Jaisalmer, Camel Rides

investments in loyalty programs, online booking platforms, and industry-event collaborations. These initiatives help them connect with a wide audience and deliver a seamless guest experience.

They have a major focus on health and safety. “Our ‘Count on Me’ initiative highlights our commitment to rigorous safety standards, featured prominently in our marketing campaigns to build trust with guests. Additionally, we are committed to sustainability, integrating eco-friendly practices into the operations to support environmental responsibility and meet the expectations of environmentally-conscious travellers,” she says. Cultural and regional differences within India play a key role in shaping hotel branding strategies. Hotels often tailor their offerings to align with local tastes, preferences, and traditions. For instance, in states with a strong cultural identity like Rajasthan, brands incorporate traditional

decor, cuisine, and hospitality practices to enhance guest experiences. In urban areas, the branding focus is on modern amenities and business-oriented services. Additionally, religious and seasonal tourism trends influence marketing efforts, with hotels offering region-specific packages and promotions.

“This localised approach allows hotels to better connect with diverse customers in India,” she adds.

Digital marketing and social media are essential for building and maintaining a hotel’s brand identity. They help hotels engage directly with guests, showcase services, and share unique experiences in real time. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook allow hotels to create visual storytelling, promoting their ambience, facilities, and guest satisfaction. Online reviews, influencer collaborations, and targeted ads further enhance visibility and credibility. By

staying active on social media and leveraging digital tools, hotels can attract a wider audience, establish trust and remain competitive in a fast-evolving market. Wyndham Hotels & Resorts has adapted its brand strategies to cater to the unique preferences of Indian consumers through several approaches:

●Focus on Domestic Travel

India has a strong domestic travel market, and Wyndham tailors its marketing to cater to local travellers who seek short weekend getaways, pilgrimages, and family vacations.

●Expansion of Midscale and Economy Segments

With a growing middle class, there’s a strong demand for affordable yet comfortable accommodations. Wyndham’s midscale brands, such as Ramada, Howard Johnson, Days Inn find a receptive market. Promoting value-for-money offerings without compromising on quality and service appeals to price-sensitive consumers.

●Technology & Digital Presence

Indian consumers are increasingly tech-savvy, with a preference for online booking and mobile apps. Wyndham enhances its digital platforms by offering localised mobile apps, e-payment options, and discounts and loyalty programs tailored for online customers.

●Targeting Religious and Spiritual Tourism

India has a strong market for religious tourism (e.g., visits to holy cities like Varanasi or pilgrimage sites). Wyndham creates packages specifically designed for this audience, offering proximity to religious sites, transportation arrangements and amenities that cater to the needs of pilgrims.

●Sustainability Initiatives

With increasing sustainability awareness among travellers, Wyndham’s efforts towards eco-friendly practices (such as energy-efficient hotels, water conservation, and plastic reduction) resonates well with travellers who

value environmental responsibility.

She adds, “Sustainability has become a key factor in the branding of hotels in India as more travellers seek eco-friendly options. Hotels that emphasise green initiatives not only reduce their environmental impact but also build trust with guests. To effectively communicate their sustainability efforts, hotels can highlight eco-friendly practices such as energy-efficient lighting, water conservation, and waste reduction programs through their websites, social media, and guest interactions. Certifications like LEED or Green Key add credibility. Additionally, offering guests the option to participate in these initiatives, like opting for towel reuse or contributing to carbon offset programs, creates a deeper connection and attracts



“A strong digital presence allows hotels to own their story, enhance guest engagement, leverage influencers, ensuring that the brand is perceived as intended”

J.B. SINGH

President & CEO, InterGlobe Hotels



He points out some key elements for a hotel's success:

- Successful brands adapt to local preferences while maintaining international standards.
- It's important to prioritise the well-being and success of all stakeholders, recognising the importance of people in the hospitality business.
- Transparency, effective communication, and active listening are crucial for empowerment and accountability.
- Staying attuned to industry trends and the evolving global landscape is essential for remaining relevant and purposeful.
- Consistency in quality and service.
- Commitment to Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) practices.

environmentally conscious travellers looking for responsible accommodation choices.”

J.B. Singh, President & CEO, InterGlobe Hotels says, “Our branding strategy centres around providing consistent quality and modern comfort at affordable prices, primarily through the Ibis brand. We prioritise delivering experiences without compromising affordability.”

The Ibis brand's strong reputation for consistency in the quality of facilities as well as services resonates with travellers seeking a reliable and enjoyable experience. “Our focus on digital integration, clear communication, and efficient service ensures guests relax and enjoy their stay. By remaining dedicated to these principles, we aim to position InterGlobe Hotels as the preferred choice for value-conscious travellers seeking a comfortable and reliable hospitality experience.”

“The focus should be on delivering

excellence at the lowest cost, while not compromising quality and by optimising efficiency. Understanding the trends of the Indian market can be helpful in crafting plans that align with the unique demands of customers. Additionally, upskilling and training people are crucial. Talent crunch and high level of attrition needs to be systematically addressed by hotel brands keeping in mind their growth,” he says.

Global brands might have increased their footprint in the Indian market; however, this sometimes comes at the cost of inconsistent standards, and brands must tackle this, he warns. Global hospitality brands must keep reinventing to remain relevant and ensure a stronger brand recall in the domestic market, he points out.

“Digital marketing and social media are essential for hotels to reach wider audiences and build brand awareness. Online reviews and engagement have become the new word-of-mouth. By actively participating in the digital space, hotels foster transparency

and approachability, endearing themselves to the digitally savvy travellers. Ultimately, a strong digital presence allows hotels to own their story, enhance guest engagement, leverage influencers, ensuring that the brand is perceived as intended,” he adds.

To resonate with Indian consumers, they integrate family values and authentic hospitality. This includes diverse culinary offerings that cater to regional tastes, and partnerships with local brands like Sleepy Owl and Chai Point. Cultural sensitivity is crucial, and they support local artists through music events and showcase curated



“Our strategy is built on three core pillars: making the hotel feel like home, ensuring each moment counts and delivering hospitality from the heart”

SHRUTI GIRDHAR
Marketing Communication Manager
at Hyatt Regency Chandigarh

Indian literature in the hotel libraries. “InterGlobe Hotels leads in green building initiatives and aims to reduce the environmental footprint. Sustainability is now a core value, resonating with eco-conscious guests. Beyond energy-efficient lighting and water conservation, we empower guests to participate through programs like linen reuse and refillable water stations,” he points out.

Shruti Girdhar, Marketing Communication Manager, Hyatt Regency Chandigarh, brings over seven years of experience in brand strategy and integrated marketing. She says, their branding strategy is deeply inspired from Hyatt's core principle of care—not only for guests & staff but for everyone involved. “We care for people so they can be their best. The ‘care culture’ is deeply rooted in all Hyatts across the globe.”



Hyatt Regency, Delhi

“At Hyatt Regency Chandigarh, we position ourselves as a #HomeAwayFromHome. Our goal is to create an environment where guests feel a genuine sense of belonging, ensuring their stay is memorable and enriched with heartfelt experiences. Our strategy is built on three core pillars: making the hotel feel like home, ensuring each moment counts, and delivering hospitality from the heart. These pillars drive every touchpoint of our operations, whether it’s through personalised services or fostering authentic connections. Hyatt Regency Hotels inspire an open outlook, encourage the embracing of new experiences, and celebrate diverse cultures. By staying grounded in these values, we foster deep loyalty among our guests and employees,” she says.

“A strong digital footprint is indispensable. From engaging websites to active social media, hotels must be visible where potential guests are searching and engaging. Localisation is crucial as well, and brands that incorporate Indian culture into their services and offerings while maintaining global standards resonate with domestic travellers and international visitors alike. Sustainability and wellness also play pivotal roles in branding, with travellers seeking brands that align with their values. Memorable storytelling, rooted in the brand’s identity, helps hotels stand out in a crowded market. By integrating personalisation,



digital strength, cultural relevance, and storytelling, hotels can carve out a distinctive position in India’s dynamic hospitality landscape,” she says.

She points out that global brands in India face the challenge of navigating the country’s vast cultural and regional diversity. With multiple languages, customs, and preferences, a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective. Successful brands must localise their services to appeal to diverse regional markets while maintaining brand consistency.

In addition, complying with India’s complex regulatory environment requires meticulous attention to local laws and business practices. Price sensitivity is another key factor, as Indian consumers are increasingly discerning about value for money. Global brands must strike a balance between offering premium services and competitive pricing. The competition from well-established local brands adds further pressure, as these brands are often more attuned to local preferences.

“Overcoming these challenges is not just about localisation—it’s about understanding the nuances of the Indian market and



adjusting branding strategies accordingly. Global brands must adopt a strategic, agile approach to succeed in this vibrant, yet complex market,” she says.

What resonates in one region might not in another, so understanding these differences is key to creating relevant and effective brand messages. For instance, hotels in north India may emphasise grandeur, opulence, and traditional hospitality, which aligns with local consumer expectations. In contrast, southern regions might prioritise wellness experiences, reflecting a cultural focus on holistic well-being.



Marketing messages and activities must reflect the unique values and aspirations of each region, while festivals and events present opportunities for brands to create special experiences that celebrate local culture, she says. Like, in Chandigarh, they welcome guests with Bhangra and dhol, giving them a chance to dance their way in. Embedding these cultural nuances into their brand strategies, hotels can create a sense of belonging and familiarity that strengthens guest loyalty across India’s diverse landscape.

She adds, “Sustainability is no longer a trend—it’s a core value in modern hotel branding. “At Hyatt Regency Chandigarh, sustainability is integrated into our operations as part of our commitment to responsible urban development. Our dedicated Green Team implements energy-efficient practices, such as recycling water for gardening and using solar-powered heating systems. From composting wet waste to eliminating single-use plastics, we actively engage guests by promoting our sustainability efforts. These initiatives strengthen our brand and attract eco-conscious travellers who appreciate hotels that align with their values.”



Radisson Hotels

“Our growth in the country is a testament to the trust and support of our stakeholders, including valued partners, employees and millions of guests who choose us for creating memorable moments”

NIKHIL SHARMA

Managing Director and Area Senior Vice President (ASVP) for South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group

Nikhil Sharma, Managing Director and Area Senior Vice President (ASVP) for South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, says, “At the Radisson Hotel Group, our 26-year journey in India reflects the country’s rich diversity of languages, travel preferences and cuisines. Our brand focuses on creating curated and personalised experiences for both inbound and domestic travellers through our portfolio of nine distinct brands, ranging from luxury lifestyle to mid-market. We ensure that every guest finds tailored offerings that meet their unique needs. With the support of our valued partners and the efforts of a highly efficient work force, we have achieved the right balance of delivering international standards while being sensitive to local traditions.”

He points out that their branding strategy acknowledges growth opportunities in Tier 2/3/4 markets, enabling them to effectively communicate their international hospitality standards to a broader audience.

“Sustainability is integral to our strategy, as we commit to enhancing energy efficiency and reducing our carbon footprint through initiatives like the Pathway to Net Positive Hospitality. Our hotels in Nagpur, Ahmedabad and Indore lead in sustainable operations, featuring LEED certifications and eco-friendly infrastructure like EV charging stations. By sharing our sustainability efforts through digital and in-person channels, we engage with eco-conscious travellers. With 190+ hotels in operation and development located across 110+ locations in India, our growth in the country is a testament to the trust and support of our stakeholders, including valued partners, employees and millions of guests who choose us for creating memorable moments,” he says.

By tapping into the country’s rich cultural tapestry and aligning with the preferences of domestic and international travellers, hotel brands can unlock long-term success and be part of India’s hospitality transformation. **HAI**



EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



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



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



Mr. Rohit Khosla
Vice President
Hotel Association of India
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Mr. Vikram Oberoi
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Mr. Anil Chadha
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Hotels, ITC Limited



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Managing Director & CEO
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Managing Partner
Radisson Blu Marina Hotel
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Ms. Sonali Chauhan
Member
Hotel Association of India
General Manager
IHCL SeleQtions



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

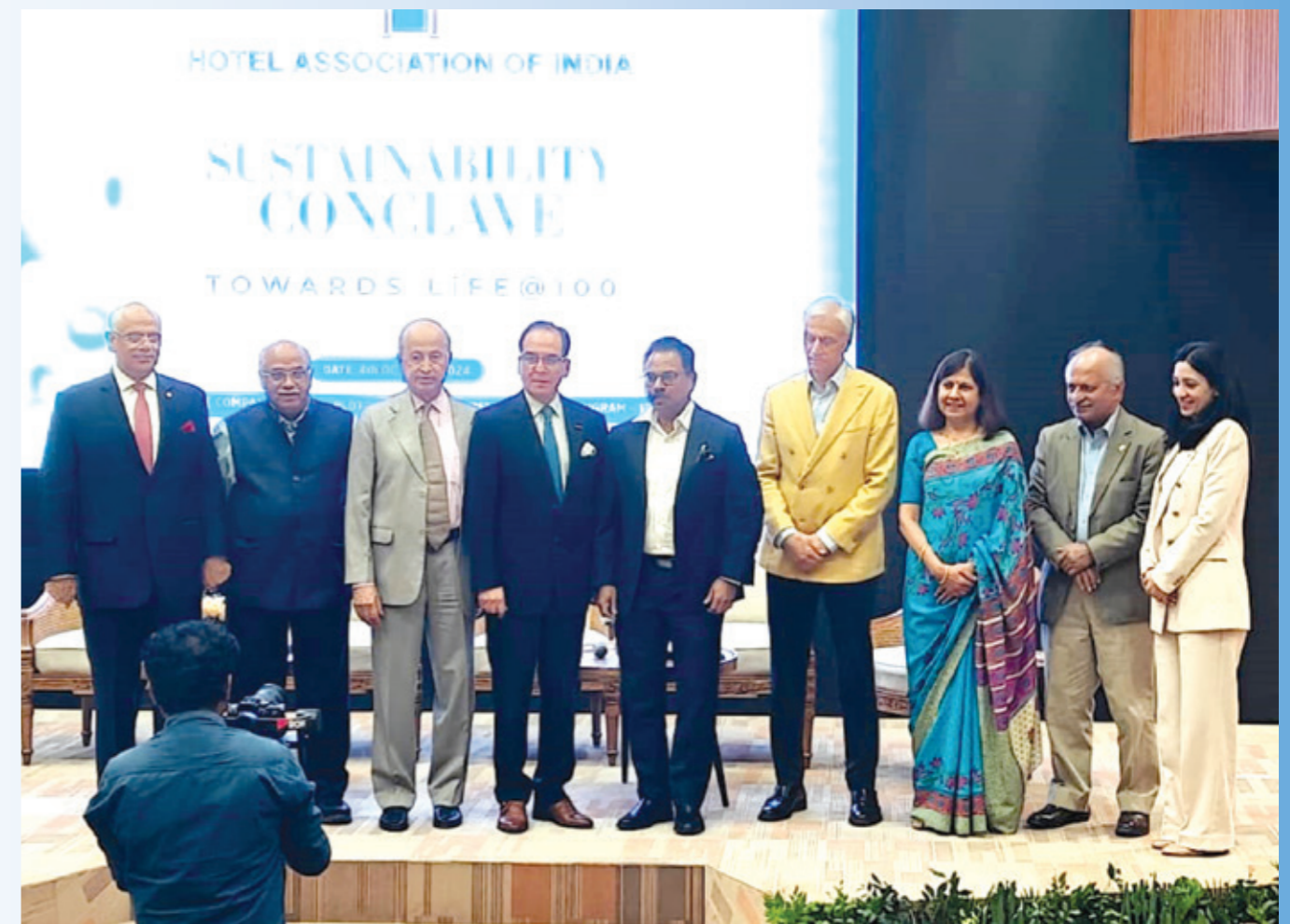
SUSTAINABILITY CONCLAVE

TOWARDS LIFE@100

The Sustainability Conclave: Towards LiFE @100, hosted by the Hotel Association of India (HAI) in partnership with Jaquar, brought together key industry leaders, government

officials, and sustainability experts to drive conversations on aligning the hospitality industry with sustainable practices. With a focus on India's commitment to environmental conservation and sustainable tourism, the Conclave aimed to chart a path for the industry to achieve net-zero targets and embrace sustainability at its core.

In his welcome address, M.P. Bezbaruah, HAI Secretary General, set the stage, followed by HAI President and Chairman of Radisson Hotel Group, K.B. Kachru, who highlighted the association's dedication to aligning business goals with sustainability. Kachru pointed out the impressive sustainability track record of Indian hotels, with 99.5% implementing energy efficiency initiatives and 87% working to reduce water use. However, he stressed that participation alone is not enough, saying, "We need clear targets and tangible outcomes; this is the need of the hour."



Sustainability as the Future of Indian Hospitality

In his keynote address, **SUMAN BILLA**, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, underscored the need for Indian hotels to set clear sustainability goals, drawing inspiration from Kerala's Responsible Tourism initiative. He called for the adoption of prescriptive sustainability standards and urged the government to provide tax incentives to encourage hotels to meet these targets. Billa emphasised the global trend towards eco-conscious tourism, highlighting Scandinavian countries' carbon-neutral goals and citing examples like Singapore's Resource Efficiency Grant and Costa Rica's Certification for Sustainable Tourism.

MUGDHA SINHA
Director General, Ministry of Tourism,



further reinforced the importance of LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment), introduced by Prime Minister Modi at COP26. She highlighted how this mission aims to reduce the carbon footprint of the tourism sector and emphasised the role of responsible travel practices in ensuring the longevity of the planet. “Sustainable tourism is not just about business; it’s about ensuring we leave behind a planet for future generations to explore and enjoy.”

AMANDEEP GARG

Additional Secretary, Ministry of Environment, spoke about the global appreciation of Mission LiFE, citing participation from millions of individuals in various environmentally-conscious events. He

called for greater collaboration between the government, industry, and local communities to make LiFE a mainstream practice in Indian tourism. “We must take this forward as a mass movement towards an environmentally conscious lifestyle,” Garg said.

HAI’s Commitment and Best Practices in Sustainability

HAI took a significant step by pledging to sustain efforts in preserving the environment for future generations. Key leaders, including K.B. Kachru, (HAI President and Chairman of Radisson Hotel Group), Rohit Khosla (Vice President HAI & Executive VP of Operations, IHCL),

Ajay K. Bakaya (Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels Pvt. Ltd.), Sonali Chauhan (Member HAI and General Manager, IHCL), M.P. Bezbaruah, Secretary General HAI and Charulata Sukhija, Deputy Secretary General HAI, and all HAI Members at the Conclave participated in the HAI Pledge Taking, affirming their commitment to fostering sustainability within the hospitality industry.

Panel discussions focused on energy efficiency, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction, and renewable energy showcased how the hospitality industry can play a pivotal role in driving sustainability. Speakers from ITC Hotels, Oberoi Group, Chalet Hotels, shared insights on best practices, ranging from smart sustainable hotel designs.



RAVI SINGH

Secretary General and CEO of World Wide Fund for Nature - India, emphasised the importance of long-term environmental protection and sustainable development.

H.C. VINAYAKA

Vice President - Technical, EHS & Sustainability, ITC Ltd - Hotels Division highlighted the concept of “responsible luxury,” demonstrating how luxury and sustainability can coexist.

SUMIT RAWAT

Vice President Engineering, The Oberoi Group, deliberated on creating smart sustainable hotels using principles of engineering & sustainability.

JANHAVI PARAB

Deputy General Manager - ESG & Sustainability, Chalet Hotels Limited, highlighted energy-efficient operations, and responsible resource management.

RAJESH MEHRA

Promoter and Director Jaquar group presented a very insightful presentation by highlighted the importance of 100% sustainable sanitary ware production and waste management. He

stated that as a brand deeply invested in sustainability, Jaquar continuously works to reduce environmental impact and conserve resources.

CB RAMKUMAR

Vice Chair, Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), in his remarks emphasised on the resource efficiency, circular economy and minimising water consumption. Speakers from IHCL, Lemon Tree, Marriott International and The Park Hotels shared their insights.

GAURAV POKHARIYAL

Executive Vice President – Human Resources, IHCL mentioned on attaining its goal to train 1,00,000 youth by 2030 in the hospitality industry.

ARADHANA LAL

Senior Vice President - Sustainability & ESG, Lemon Tree Hotels Ltd. focussed on providing employment to specially abled in the sector.

DEEPALI BHATIA

Area Director of Sales, Marriott International, spoke about the importance of customer relationship and how one should engage with its customers.

RAJESH RADHAKRISHNAN

Area General Manager of The Park Chennai, emphasised the importance of addressing over-tourism by developing new destinations to enhance the tourism and hospitality sector.

Sustainability Trends and Global Insights

The Conclave also explored global sustainability trends, with experts noting the need for the Indian hospitality sector to catch up with international standards. Inge Huijbrechts, Chief Sustainability & Security Officer at Radisson Hotel Group, spoke on the importance of setting clear

net-zero goals, while Liz Ortiguera from the World Travel & Tourism Council pointed out that climate change is a pressing concern in Asia, urging the Indian government and industry leaders to act swiftly. "It's no longer about 'why' we need sustainability; it's about 'how' we implement it," she stressed.

Global best practices such as Singapore's Resource Efficiency Grant and Costa Rica's sustainable tourism certification were presented as models for India to follow. The discussions also highlighted how Europe enforces sustainability with punitive measures, something India should consider to accelerate its progress.



Special LiFE Actions and the Role of Tourists and Businesses

One of the key outcomes of the Conclave was the focus on LiFE actions for both tourists and tourism businesses. Special actions for tourists included:

- Saving energy and water
- Saying no to single-use plastics
- Reducing waste
- Empowering local businesses and communities
- Respecting local culture and heritage
- Consuming local foods
- Conserving natural heritage

For tourism businesses, actions included signing up for the Tourism for LiFE





(TFL) certification, with Bronze, Silver, and Gold levels, aimed at encouraging hotels and destinations to adopt and promote sustainable practices.

The Way Forward: A Greener Future for Hospitality

The Conclave ended on a high note with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between HAI and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). This partnership will help Indian hotels adopt global standards in sustainable travel and tourism, positioning them to meet the growing demands for eco-conscious travel.

As Rohit Khosla concluded the Conclave, he reiterated the importance of collaboration and urgency in achieving sustainability targets: "The hospitality industry must act now to balance growth with sustainability. Our actions today will shape the future of tourism in India and the world."

The HAI Sustainability Conclave not only reinforced the industry's commitment to sustainable practices, but also served as a call to action for all stakeholders to work together towards a future where tourism, environmental conservation, and economic growth coexist in harmony. **HAI**

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HARYANA: The desi trail

With its diverse landscapes, comforting food and famously hospitable people, Haryana is in focus this season as a must-do destination.

BY RIAAN JACOB GEORGE



DLF Hub

● Destination

Though Haryana is close to the Delhi-NCR region, it is often overlooked in the tourist scheme of things, and frequently overshadowed by its northern neighbour, Punjab. However, we would say that Haryana is a hidden gem with respect to tourism offerings and travellers who choose to explore this state will find much to discover in terms of food, heritage, natural landscapes, and culture. From lush green national parks to ancient battlefields and historic spots, Haryana boasts many different interest points for tourists.

There are often similarities drawn between Haryana and Texas, USA, given the nature of their agricultural economies as well as their landscapes. Both regions are instantly recognisable by their flat plains and vast fields, that are rich in agricultural produce. From a cultural

“From a cultural standpoint, Haryana’s people have played an important role in the Indian military, quite like Texas. Today, Haryana prides itself on its rapid modernisation within its agricultural segment and this is reflected throughout the state”



Cyber City, Gurugram



Noor Mahal Karnal, Haryana



Museo camera



Sai Ka Angan Temple



Sheetla Mata Mandir



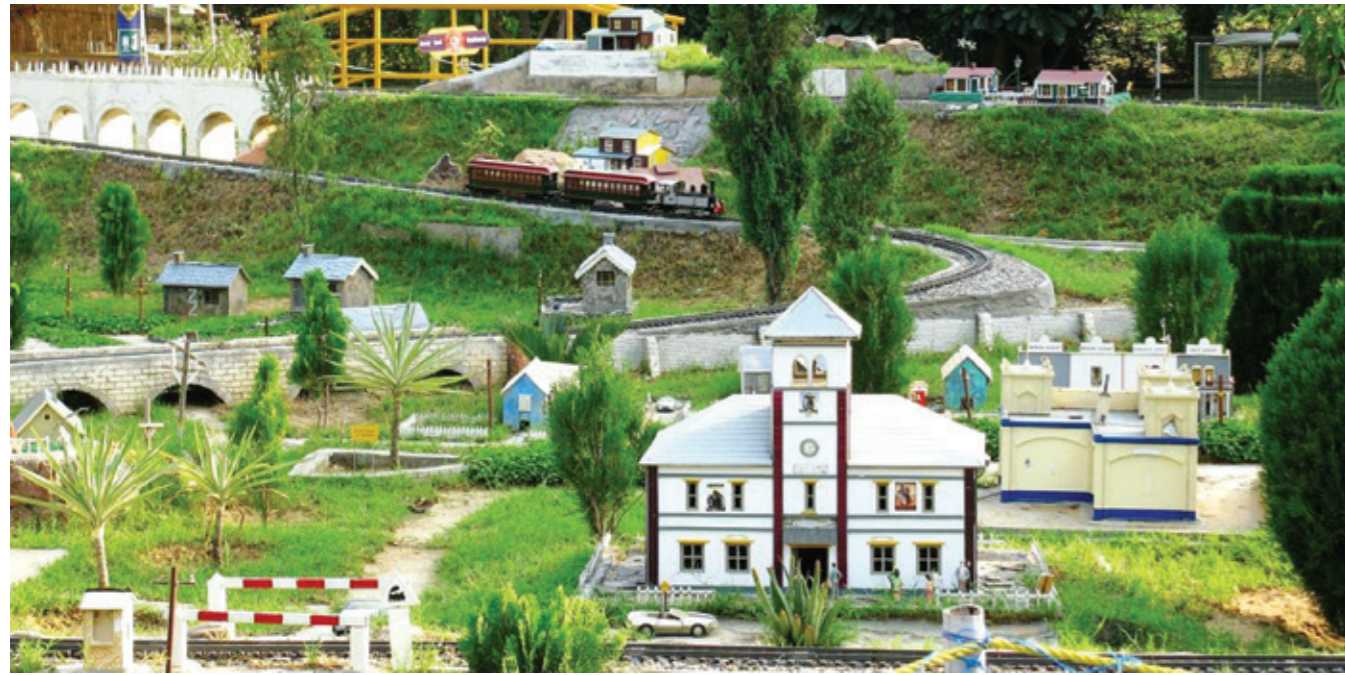
Galleria Market

standpoint, Haryana’s people have played an important role in the Indian military, quite like Texas. Today, Haryana prides itself on its rapid modernisation within its agricultural segment and this is reflecting throughout the state and amazing road infrastructure.

If you are doing a tourist trail through Haryana, here’s what you can explore

You can start your exploration in the ultra-modern metropolis of Gurugram that breaks all Indian stereotypes for international travellers. This is now one of India’s leading corporate and business hubs, with a bevy of high-tech business park complexes and is home to a major international and

● Destination



NeverEnuf Garden Railway

cosmopolitan community. The hotels in Gurugram are world-class while the F&B scene is truly worth checking out, largely in clusters like CyberHub and 32nd Avenue. Sohna is known for its wellness retreats, while Kingdom of Dreams is a beautiful entertainment hub. At the entrance of Gurugram, the Ambience mall houses the world's leading brands for some retail therapy.

Next, drive on the fabulous roads across to Chandigarh, which is the shared capital of both Haryana and Punjab. Architecture buffs will find much to delight in as the city is known for its beautiful urban design, conceived by architect Le Corbusier. While the city's beautiful streets and layouts are worth checking out, it also boasts some quaint spots like Sukhna Lake, Rock Garden and Rose Garden. Chandigarh also has many luxurious malls with a thriving food & beverage scene. When the weather is cool, do enroll in some architecture and photography walks through the city.

While on the way to Chandigarh, be sure to stop at the charming town of Ambala, which houses the famous Sikh pilgrimage spot of Panjokhra Sahib Gurudwara. The local food culture of Ambala is worth checking out too. Straight out of our history books, the town of Panipat has played an important role in India's history known for its three famous battles, which were fought in 1526, 1556 and 1761. While there is no battlefield that remains today, you can still visit the Panipat Museum, which explains the city's military

“The hotels in Gurugram are world-class while the F&B scene is truly worth checking out, largely in clusters like CyberHub and 32nd Avenue. Sohna is known for its wellness retreats, while Kingdom of Dreams is a beautiful entertainment hub”



Rock Garden



Panipat Museum

history in great detail. Another town, known for its legendary battle is Kurukshetra, a sacred site for Hindus as it is here that they believe the epic battle of the Mahabharata took place and the Bhagavad Gita was delivered here by Lord Krishna. This town hosts an annual religious and cultural festival called the Gita Jayanti, which draws travellers from across the country. Don't

forget to make a stop at the beautiful Brahma Sarovar, a water tank that is considered sacred by Hindus. As you might already be aware, the town of Rohtak is a student's town or the education hub of the state. If you do have time to pass through Rohtak, visit the Dini Museum, as well as some of the archeological sites present on the outskirts of the city. For a relaxing evening, especially in winter months, be sure to head to the picturesque Tilyar Lake, where you can picnic by the bank, enjoy some local snacks and even hire a boat for an hour to soak up the ambience.

Nature Trails

Nature lovers will find delight in exploring Sultanpur National Park. This vast green forest is a short drive away from Gurugram and boasts an immense diversity of flora and fauna. While exploring the park on a safari, you can spot blackbuck and deer. The



Aravali Trail Experience



Surajkund Crafts Mela, Haryana

A Cultural Experience

If you can time your trip to the annual Surajkund Mela, you can enjoy this fortnight-long extravaganza that is a beautiful showcase of local artisans. Here you can discover handicrafts handles and cultural performances from across Haryana and from the corners of India too. This is an extremely popular festival that attracts thousands of enthusiastic travellers and culture vultures from all over the world. In 2025, the Surajkund Mela will bring together the state of Rajasthan in collaboration with South Africa, a wonderful cross-cultural manifestation that travellers cannot miss.



Surajkund Crafts Mela, Haryana

park also houses a plethora of endemic bird species, which draws birdwatchers from across the country here. If you spend some time here, you can find several migratory birds like pelicans, flamingos and flocks of Siberian cranes, who come to this part of the country during winter months. It is a great idea to go there with some photographer friends who can capture the nature, while you soak up the experience. Continue your nature exploration in Morni Hills, which feature verdant walking trails, picture-perfect waterfalls and beautiful spots to picnic. The area around Morni Hills houses many small boutique hotels and homestays, where you can enjoy an authentic Haryanvi hospitality experience.



Bajre ki Khichdi

An Undiscovered Gastronomic Destination

The food scene of Haryana is relatively undiscovered and not spoken about enough by travel content creators, thereby making all the more appealing to us. The state's dairy products are truly of superior quality owing to its varieties of buffaloes and cows. A lot of Haryanvi cuisine is prepared using ghee, butter and milk. Some of the rural Haryanvi dishes that are worth mentioning are Singri ki sabzi, rajma and bajra khichri. Bread plays an important part in the average meal of a Haryanvi family and no matter where you go in the state, you are assured of very good quality rotis. A case in point is the besan masala roti, which goes well with local vegetables or the Haryanvi hara dhaniya choliya, with coriander chutney. Another local favourite, though enjoyed in other states too is the kadhi pakora. Sweet treats like mithe chawal and Malpua are rich and have strong cultural links. **HAI**



Branding Indian Hospitality

Branding in hospitality is unlike product branding; it is multi-dimensional, dynamic, and constantly evolving.

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



Covid-19 changed, perhaps forever, many of the ways of doing tourism business. As the hospitality industry was slowly getting back on its feet after the pandemic, some of the new trends became apparent. One such trend was consumer preference for branded hotels. The reason was obvious. Mortal fear still guided consumers to look for some assurances of health, safety and hygiene. The branded hotels provided that safety more than others. A new phrase was coined at that time—trust is the new currency. A survey by Hotelivate at that time showed that all star category hotels witnessed appreciation in occupancy and average rate of RevPar. Five star and five star deluxe were getting higher RevPar than others.

As recovery became stronger, the fear slowly receded, the pent-up demand showed up. The mismatch between demand and supply meant that consumers had less options and hotels also less need to capitalise on the strength of their brand.

“At one time, there was a period of financial constraint, where promotion wasn’t considered a strategic priority. The Ministry of Tourism had to advocate for the value of investing in branding and promotion”

Branding has many dimensions. Twenty-five years back the globally acclaimed branding—Incredible India—was launched. It was innovative, covered digital and social media and expanded to constant visibility in foreign lands through painted buses and trams. It was indeed an incredible example of bringing the mind-boggling diversity of a sub-continent of 1.2 billion people under one brand.

Every initiative has its moment, and Incredible India was an idea whose time had arrived. Before this, there was a period of financial constraint, where promotion wasn’t considered a strategic priority. The Ministry of Tourism had to advocate for the value of investing in branding and promotion. It’s lesser known that the hospitality industry, largely through HAI members and with support from the Ministry of Tourism, launched a branding initiative called Experience India, funded by a percentage of their foreign exchange earnings.

For various reasons, time has come for a reinvented Incredible India branding and also for hospitality branding to align with it. Foreign Tourists Arrival to India has been sluggish. There are many reasons for that; some related to geopolitics. It is a time for India’s positioning, consistent with the expectations of the millennial travellers. When Incredible India was designed, the situation was similar. Tourism was preparing to meet the new, unmistakable trend of the millennium called the “experience economy.” It used the “!” symbol “to convey the mind-boggling depth and intensity of the **Indian Experience**. After the pandemic, the trend has veered



“After the pandemic, the trend has veered towards experience-based travel. People are looking for transformative experiences based on nature and culture, community interaction and cuisine”

towards experience-based travel. People are looking for transformative experiences based on nature and culture, community interaction and cuisine. Every aspect of India—its variety of geography, ethnicity, culture, and unspoilt nature—offers immense possibilities of meeting such expectations of unique experiences. These images need to be rekindled.

There is a need for new thinking on hospitality branding as well. Indian hospitality is globally recognised as outstanding, but that image is generally based on excellence of individual brands. Whether that image should or could be expanded to the entire industry is something worth considering.

There are many reasons for renewed attention to branding. First, to remove the continued negative image that the hospitality sector is elitist. It is a domestic perception, but it affects government policy approach and attitude. Second, again the negative image of high prices. Amitabh Kant, in his highly acclaimed book “Branding India” mentions the International Herald Tribune lead story “In Gold Rush India, hotel rooms are scarce and expensive” The problem of demand and supply mismatch is genuine but often the problem is not shown in the proper perspective. I remember a public discussion in which this allegation was responded to by the doyen of hospitality PRS Oberoi—you cannot compare

cheese with chalk, he said. While demand and cost need to be handled, the differentiating element of excellence of service can be highlighted. In other words, the hospitality branding should be based on the defining difference in creating a total experience.

Hospitality industry will also need to position itself on some other key emerging issues. One is sustainability—issues like climate change, green tourism, circular economy, LiFE and so on. Indian hospitality has done pioneering work in adopting and implementing many of these global initiatives, often leading by innovative action. HAI has taken the initiative in promoting certification by global standards. There is much scope for collating the disparate examples of excellence to create a brand image for the industry.

Similarly, technology dominates the industry today and will play an even larger role in the future. Industry positioning on technology will focus on two key aspects: boosting productivity and profit, and enhancing the overall customer experience. A recent report by Amadeus on hotel marketing strategies highlights how digitalisation can personalise the five stages of a traveller’s journey: the Inspirational Stage, Planning Stage, Booking Stage, On-Site Experience Stage, and Post-Trip Stage. Brand positioning will need to evolve, not only in terms of content but also in reach and design, to stay ahead of these trends.

Research shows that Generation Z, expected to hold a third of global spending power by 2035, will shape future demand. The question remains: How will the industry adapt its brand to meet the needs of this tech-savvy generation?

As a service industry, where the concept of the experience economy is creating a “market of one,” and where rapidly changing technology demands continuous training for service providers, the industry’s role in skilling and caring for its workforce becomes crucial. Many HAI members have already taken steps to bridge the gap between required and available skills through innovative mentoring programs. This focus on workforce development could help build a strong brand image for the hospitality industry.

Branding in hospitality is unlike product branding; it is multi-dimensional, dynamic, and constantly evolving with the times. As author Jonah Sachs aptly said, “A brand is a story unfolding across all customer touchpoints.” **HAI**



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