



# ENGAGE

Nov-Dec 2023 | Volume 3 | Issue 6

## STEPPING BACK IN TIME

As travellers crave more than just a place to lay their heads, India's heritage hotels—grand palaces and old havelis—emerge as custodians of a cultural narrative





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CREATIVE VISUALIZATION  
SERVING SUGGESTION



## From the President's Desk



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

India boasts a history that spans over several millennia, with influences from various civilizations and cultures. India's glorious past with its plethora of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, ancient temples, palaces, and historical monuments, beckons travellers to explore its rich cultural heritage.

India has always been famous for its rich heritage and ancient culture making it a potent blend which attracts millions of tourists each year to its heritage tourist attractions. Heritage tourism allows visitors to witness the majestic ruins of the past, explore the grandeur of the Taj Mahal, or marvel at the architectural brilliance of Hampi's Vijayanagara Empire, besides many other such sites. The awe-inspiring temples of Khajuraho, the intricately carved Ajanta and Ellora Caves, and the breathtaking forts of Rajasthan stand as living testaments to the country's architectural prowess. India, often referred to as the cradle of spirituality, is a treasure trove of religious and spiritual sites. Pilgrimage destinations like Ayodhya, Varanasi, Tirupati, Bodh Gaya and others draw seekers from around the globe. The vibrant tapestry of Indian culture is woven with threads of dance, music, festivals, and traditional arts. The country's living heritage, thus, is equally fascinating and offers travellers a unique glimpse into the heart of India's identity.

### SHOWCASING INDIA'S HERITAGE TOURISM

Heritage tourism is an important aspect of the Tourism Policy. The Draft Tourism Policy of 2022 mentions one of the strategic objectives of the policy "to preserve and enhance the cultural and natural resources of the country". The Prime Minister has also stated: "We want to show the world our country's heritage, to make India a hub of heritage tourism."

Indian hospitality has always endeavoured to showcase the rich cultural heritage of India. It goes beyond providing accommodation and services; it embodies the warmth and diversity reflected in traditional welcomes, regional cuisines, arts and crafts as well as wellness offerings. Heritage tourism creates jobs, provides new business opportunities, helps protect natural resources, and improves the quality of life for local communities. It's a substantial business opportunity for the hospitality industry. The government's focus on tourism and the increased infrastructure development can help the hospitality industry to expand significantly.

Step into this journey back in time as this Edition is dedicated to the allure of Heritage Hotels, where history and luxury intertwine, creating unforgettable experiences for each guest.

Wishing all a very Happy New Year, where we all scale even greater heights!





# CONTENTS

VOLUME 3

ISSUE 6

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2023



## Cover Story

10

### Timeless Grandeur

In a world where travellers crave more than just a place to lay their heads, India's grand palaces and old havelis emerge as custodians of a cultural narrative. With a fusion of contemporary comforts and timeless charm, these restored properties beckon the modern wanderer, offering an immersive experience that goes beyond accommodation, delving into the very soul of our diverse heritage.

Cover photo: Neemrana Fort

## Leader Speak

8

### Magnet Cities

Heritage tourism aids in the positioning and branding of a destination, acting as a magnet for FTAs and domestic tourists, says **Abinash Manghani**, CEO, WelcomHeritage Hotels, in an interview.



## Close Look

24

### Exciting Opportunities in the Hospitality Sector!

Get ready for a fantastic journey into the world of travel and tourism in India!



## Guest Column

26

"We have different stories to tell about the past"



**AMAN NATH** is an Indian writer, hotelier, and architectural restorer. He is the co-founder of the Neemrana Hotels chain, that's credited for pioneering the heritage hotels movement in India. He writes on Heritage Hotels.

## Health

30

### Embracing Millets

The International Year of Millets 2023 witnessed a culinary celebration at renowned hotels like **Lemon Tree, Four Points by Sheraton Navi Mumbai, and Wyndham's Ramada.**



## Destination

32

### The Karnataka Highlights

Abounding with UNESCO World Heritage sites, national parks, cultural trails and wonderful road trip infrastructure, we trace an itinerary through Karnataka.

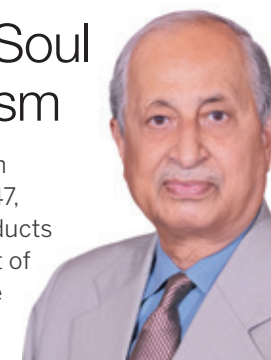


## The Last Word

39

### Heritage: The Soul of India's Tourism

As India plans to have 100 mn foreign tourist arrivals by 2047, the pressure on heritage products will be immense. The concept of "carrying capacity" should be carefully implemented in all fragile destinations.



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## 6th HAI Hoteliers' Conclave on 12 Feb

The Hotel Association of India (HAI) is organizing the sixth edition of its flagship event HAI Hoteliers' Conclave on 12 February in New Delhi. The event will conclude with a farewell dinner hosted by the Association president, Mr Puneet Chhatwal, MD & CEO of the Indian Hotels Company Limited at Taj Palace, New Delhi. Industry leaders, CEOs of hotels, policymakers, international industry experts, and media personnel will be attending the conclave. Curated on

the theme "Hospitality-the engine for GDP growth & Employment", the objective is to provide an industry platform for policy-makers and decision-makers of the hospitality sector to converge in an endeavor to study the huge opportunity that the sector offers to realize India's Vision 2047.

The conclave will provide partner companies and solution providers an opportunity to network closely with the Indian hotel industry's leaders and stalwarts.

## Ram temple to kickstart job growth

The hospitality, travel, and tourism industry has created up to 20,000 additional jobs solely to cater to the anticipated inflow of lakhs of tourists in Ayodhya during and after the inauguration of the Ram temple on January 22.

According to several officials in the hospitality sector, thousands of jobs in areas such as hospitality managers, restaurant and hotel staff, logistics managers, drivers etc are likely to open up towards the end of this year or the first half of 2025, not just in Ayodhya but also in neighbouring cities like Lucknow, Kanpur, Gorakhpur and so on.



## IHCL's 200th hotel: Gorbandh Palace

Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director and CEO of IHCL, as well as the President of HAI, expressed his joy at the opening of Gorbandh Palace in Jaisalmer, a significant achievement as it marks IHCL's 200th operational hotel. This establishment completes the vital tourist circuit of Jaipur-Jodhpur-Jaisalmer. Chhatwal expressed gratitude for the collaboration with Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar, marking the third hotel in a partnership spanning over 50 years. Situated in the heart of Jaisalmer, the expansive Gorbandh Palace, Jaisalmer-IHCL SeleQtions, with 83 keys, is



a majestic retreat surrounded by lush gardens. The hotel draws inspiration from Jaisalmer's rich history, paying homage to its cultural heritage. Boasting over 80,000 square

feet of outdoor lawns and an intricately designed banquet hall spanning over 3,000 square feet, the venue is perfect for glamorous soirées and corporate retreats. Additionally, the spa provides holistic rejuvenation inspired by India's ancient healing tradition. Maharaj Kumar Sahib

Dr Lakshyaraj Singh Ji Mewar of Udaipur said, "IHCL, the true custodian of Indian hospitality, has a long and fruitful association with my family. We are delighted to build on the partnership and continue this journey with Gorbandh Palace - IHCL SeleQtions. I am confident that this opening will enhance the tourism potential of Jaisalmer."



## Hotelier India Awards

The 14th edition of the Hotelier India Awards was a jubilant celebration of talent, achievements, influence, and style. The focal point of the evening was the JW Marriott New Delhi Aerocity, where the grand finale of the 14th Annual Hotelier India Awards 2023 unfolded.

Industry leaders, seasoned hospitality professionals, and emerging hoteliers gathered in Delhi to partake in the most significant awards ceremony within the hospitality sector. This event recognized and honored the industry's finest talents, extending its appreciation not only to young hoteliers and



General Managers but also to Housekeepers and Chief Engineers. The occasion served as a unifying platform, bringing together the entire industry to acknowledge and celebrate the hard work and dedication of its contributors.

## Puri addresses Hospitality luminaries



Hardeep Singh Puri, Union Minister for Housing & Urban Affairs and Petroleum & Natural Gas, recently spoke about the immense potential of the hotel industry, projecting it to become a staggering \$1 trillion by 2047. Addressing luminaries in the hospitality industry at the 7th BW Hotelier Indian Hospitality Summit & Awards 2023, he emphasized the need to unlock the untapped domestic potential to achieve even greater heights, considering the mentioned figures as conservative in the broader context of aspirations.

Referring to a report by the Hotel Association of India (HAI), Puri highlighted the industry's current and anticipated contributions to India's GDP. In 2022, the direct contribution already amounted to a substantial \$40 billion. Projections indicated a further increase to an impressive \$68 billion by 2027, ultimately aiming for the ambitious \$1 trillion milestone by 2047.

Shifting focus to the civil aviation sector, the minister unveiled another remarkable achievement, noting the doubling of the number of airports from 74 to 148, with their carrying capacity surpassing pre-Covid levels. Transportation, a crucial component in the hospitality sector, also received scrutiny. Puri expressed satisfaction with India's notable progress in urban transportation infrastructure, proudly sharing that the country is on track to have the world's second-largest urban transport metro system, closely following China, with approximately one crore people commuting daily in metros across India.

## Culinary arts training

The International Institute of Culinary Arts (IICA) in New Delhi has forged a partnership with JCRE Skilling Solutions based in Manipur to offer top-notch culinary training to aspiring youth from the north-eastern region. As a pioneering skilling partner funded by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) for the north-east, JCRE Skilling Solutions has dedicated over a decade to imparting skills to the youth in this region. Their efforts have resulted in the training and skill development of approximately 50,000 individuals in various service-oriented skills.

## Odisha tourism

The tourism sector in Odisha anticipates significant potential in the Shree Mandir Parikrama Prakalp (heritage corridor project) in Puri, aiming to draw visitors from both within the state and internationally. Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik is set to inaugurate this ambitious Rs 800-crore project.



## Park Hyatt Los Cabos

The Park Hyatt brand is opening its second hotel in the Caribbean-Mexico region later this year: the new Park Hyatt Los Cabos at Cabo del Sol resort. The new property is expected to open by the end of 2024, according to Hyatt Hotels. The beachfront resort will be a mix of rooms and suites, some with private plunge pools, along with a collection of luxury villas.



# Chatterati



## CYCLING FOR HEALTH

At times, minor episodes become game-changers. For instance, a knee injury paved the way for Ajay Bakaya, Managing Director of Sarovar Hotels & Resorts, to embrace long-distance cycling. This seasoned hotelier, overseeing the management of 80 hotels across 50 destinations in India and Africa over two decades, found himself drawn to life on two wheels after a knee injury disrupted his regular running routine in 2015.

Long-distance cycling, he shares, has imparted valuable lessons in patience, positive energy, and self-control. Among his most cherished cycling adventures are the Tour of Nilgiris (TfN) and a cycling trip from Dehradun to Mussoorie.

The journey into cycling began when Bakaya crossed paths with Manas Arvind, an experienced cyclist credited with introducing competitive cycling to Gurugram. Arvind suggested cycling as a preferable alternative to running, emphasizing its joint-friendly nature and lower risk of injuries.

Bakaya's initial cycling escapade with Arvind took them through the streets of Gurugram and the Galleria market. Embracing the cycling community, Bakaya further connected with Adil Nargowala, an HR executive and long-distance runner. Challenging himself to a 100km ride alongside Nargowala, starting from Gurugram and winding past iconic landmarks like the airport and India Gate, Bakaya describes the experience as exhilarating, despite the expected post-ride soreness.

## FITNESS COMMITMENT

Chairman Emeritus and Principal Advisor, South Asia, Radisson Hotel, K B Kachru's book, 'Humility And Agility: The Life Of A Hotelier' mentions his fitness commitment. An excerpt: "I wish to continue working while I am still healthy and fit enough to do so. To keep healthy I prefer not to rush through any chore and I like to prepare well in advance for everything possible. I exercise discretion in my eating habits and believe in taking small helpings; I even weigh myself twice a day and in the last forty years, I have weighed largely the same. I also make sure I take a minimum of 10,000 steps a day. My late father-in-law used to say, 'You go crazy if you retire when you are still healthy enough to work'."



Caricature by Anthony Lawrence



## PUNEET CHHATWAL'S RARE DOWNTIME

Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director & Chief Executive of the Indian Hotels Company Limited, blends extroverted warmth from his Punjabi heritage, and European formality. During his infrequent moments of relaxation, Chhatwal indulges in diverse music, tennis, spa visits, and cooking. He regards Bath as the premier spa city in Europe and often dons his chef's jacket to prepare meals for 20-30 people, mostly comprising old friends and family.

Among his priorities is optimizing the group's business, determining strategic spending areas, and making decisions on whether to build or buy. While building is a meticulous and time-consuming process, buying presents its own challenges. Chhatwal emphasizes the importance of developing a clearly defined brandscape in the customer-centric hospitality business, where perceptions play a crucial role.

## LESSER KNOWN FACTS ABOUT JYOTSNA SURI

Jyotsna Suri, Chairperson & Managing Director of Bharat Hotels Limited, is among the tallest leaders in the Hospitality industry. Having worked across various departments such as housekeeping, food and beverage, front office, marketing, sales, and more, she brings a wealth of experience to her role. An ardent art admirer and heritage enthusiast, Dr Suri played a pivotal role in restoring the historical significance of The Lalit Great Eastern Kolkata, a 180-year-old heritage property.

Passionate about environmental protection, Dr. Suri is a strong advocate for sustainable practices. Her contributions range from harnessing solar energy to an impressive initiative of planting over 5 lakh plants across different parts of the country. Drawing inspiration from her parents, husband, and Mahatma Gandhi, she encourages women to "believe in yourself and do the best you can." Dr. Suri emphasizes the importance of resilience in the face of challenges, a principle applicable to every profession or business.



## First greenest village of India

Khonoma stands proudly as the First Greenest Village in Asia, drawing visitors with its abundance of natural resources, captivating history, and vibrant culture in Nagaland. Located just an hour's drive from the state capital of Kohima, Khonoma Village sits quietly amidst lush green hills and terraced rice fields with ochre hues. This village is a sought-after destination, attracting visitors from far and wide.

Khonoma Village is known for cultivating approximately 60 varieties of rice and nearly 40 types of organic crops each year, showcasing its agricultural diversity. The unique ecosystem of Khonoma supports a diverse array of flora and fauna, encompassing various plant species, wild fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, and natural dyes. The village is a haven for bird enthusiasts, with close to 200 bird species calling it home.



# Magnet Cities

Heritage tourism aids in the positioning and branding of a destination, acting as a magnet for FTAs and domestic tourists, says **ABINASH MANGHANI**, CEO, Welcom Heritage Hotels, in an interview.



## What are the benefits of heritage travel to tourists?

Heritage tourism serves as a poster child of a nation or city's tourism identity and aids in its positioning and branding as a prime destination to see marvels of the past, with a strong historical narrative. For instance, the Taj Mahal in Agra, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Statue of Liberty in New York, The Great Wall of China, have stories attached to them and people are attracted to these places.

For domestic tourists, these places are more accessible, and with the development of tourism infrastructure like airports, highways, hotels, shopping, and good eating places, such places become magnets for tourist arrivals. The spillover effect aids employment of the region.

## When did the trend of Heritage Hotel properties catch on in India?

With the abolition of the privy purses in 1971 by the government, many of the erstwhile maharajas and nobles converted their residences, palaces, forts and havelis into hotels.

Rajasthan took the lead and today boasts of the finest heritage hotels in Jaipur, Jodhpur and Udaipur, supported by tourism infrastructure, hotels across price bands, easy accessibility, and so on.

There are similar heritage hotels in other states as well. Many of these places need to develop a robust tourism eco-system to make them into economic powerhouses.



WH Cheetahgarh Resort & Spa, in Bera Jawai, Rajasthan



WH Shivavilas Palace, Sandur



WH Bal Samand Lake Palace, Jodhpur



WH Gurkha Houseboats, Srinagar

## How can heritage properties be designed to capture the interest of the younger generation?

"We don't inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children," says an old proverb. While it is true that heritage tourism is frequented by a mature demographic, younger tourists today are looking for "experiential" vacations and heritage sites serve as excellent places for discovery of the nation's true identity. In today's savvy "social media sharing" economy, millennials and Gen Z travellers share their experiences in real time. This is one of the reasons that such places are popular for weddings and aid MICE tourism. If we are able to infuse adventure activities and other experiences, they will further pique the interest of younger travellers.

## In what ways do heritage properties contribute to the educational experience of young tourists?

To quote GK Chesterton: "They say travel broadens the mind, but you must have a mind." Since heritage tourism revolves around "cultural and architectural" legacies on the one hand and

## Social media has ensured that heritage destinations and properties get a new lease of life, and this is expected to be a generational trend

encompasses a destination's natural assets such as flora & fauna, and wildlife, travel to these destinations supplements formal education of young tourists. They are able to see these fabled cities, architectural marvels or natural wonders, and experience and appreciate different cultures and cuisines too.

## How can local communities be involved in making heritage properties more appealing to younger audiences?

"It takes a village to raise a child," they say. And it takes local communities to weave a wholesome experience for travellers, to introduce the local cuisine, culture, arts and crafts, language and social norms, thus creating positive and diverse

impressions which may be collected and shared.

As mentioned earlier, social media has ensured that heritage destinations and properties get a new lease of life, and this is expected to be a generational trend.

## Any outstanding examples of heritage properties in India or abroad that you would like to mention?

The Taj Mahal in India has ensured that Agra is a global tourism destination. Similarly Jaipur, Jodhpur and Udaipur with their forts and palaces are a must-visit. More recently, Benares and now Ayodhya will spur a major growth in international and domestic tourism. British India hill stations like Shimla, Ooty and Darjeeling across the country are prime examples of destination cities.

Architectural landmarks like the Gateway of India in Mumbai and India Gate in New Delhi were built to mark historical events. The Qutab Minar in Delhi marks the epitome of the Delhi Sultanate prior to the Mughals. Summarising, it can be said that heritage tourism provides the base for any nation's leisure tourism efforts. **HAI**



# Timeless Grandeur

In a world where travellers crave more than just a place to lay their heads, India's grand palaces and old havelis emerge as custodians of a cultural narrative. With a fusion of contemporary comforts and timeless charm, these restored properties beckon the modern wanderer, offering an immersive experience that goes beyond accommodation, delving into the very soul of our diverse heritage.

## Team HAI Engage

India's grand palaces stand as alluring gateways to our cultural legacy, beckoning the new wave of travellers with an irresistible blend of history, luxury, and authenticity. The allure lies not only in the regal ambiance and meticulously preserved artifacts but also in the immersive experiences they offer. Modern travellers, fuelled by a desire for unique and meaningful encounters, find themselves captivated by the grand, old, restored properties. These seamlessly blend contemporary comforts with the timeless charm of our cultural heritage, creating an atmosphere where every corridor, every room, and every culinary offering tells a story. As travellers seek more than just accommodation,



Taj Falaknuma Palace, Hyderabad



palaces emerge as custodians of a cultural narrative, drawing enthusiasts to the very heart of our rich and diverse legacy.

At Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL), the iconic brand Taj, has held a pioneering position in the industry for over a century. Taj has maintained an unwavering commitment to rekindle interest in India's glorious past by restoring some of the country's most celebrated heritage properties that date back to pre-Independence. Says **Rohit Khosla, Executive Vice President, Operations, IHCL**: "With our extraordinary portfolio of palaces, we are honoured to be the world's largest operator of authentic palace-hotels. Our fabled palaces are present across destinations in India, and bear history dating back as far as 1700 AD."

IHCL's collection of palaces includes the Rambagh Palace and Jai Mahal Palace, Jaipur; Taj Lake Palace and Taj Fateh Prakash Palace, Udaipur; Umaid Bhawan Palace, Jodhpur; Taj Falaknuma Palace, Hyderabad; Taj Usha Kiran Palace, Gwalior; and Taj Nadesar, Varanasi. Rambagh Palace and the Taj Lake Palace have been in the IHCL portfolio for over 50 years.

Each of these palaces are deeply rooted in their rich tapestry of history, heritage, culture, and folklore. The visitor journey is heralded by distinctive ceremonial welcomes. From luxurious rose petal showers to horse-drawn carriages and the sound of traditional drums and bugles, these set the tone of every stay. "The architectural grandeur of these palatial structures elevates each stroll into a magical journey immersing visitors in the rich tapestry of the bygone eras. From the airy corridors by the fabled Lily Pond at the Taj Lake Palace and the bougainvillea-kissed promenades at the Umaid Bhawan Palace to the



**The process of restoration has been elevated to an art form through IHCL's extensive experience in the management of palaces. These living legacies, serving as enduring icons of history, were originally crafted centuries ago, with an abundance of love, passion, and masterful workmanship**

**ROHIT KHOSLA,**  
Executive Vice President, Operations, IHCL



Taj Falaknuma Palace, Hyderabad



Umaid Bhawan Palace, Jodhpur



Rambagh Palace



Taj Fateh Prakash Palace, Udaipur

grand archways of Rambagh Palace, every walk echoes tales from the past," he says.

Signature suites have been restored to harmonise with the discerning tastes of modern travellers. From the stunning Sarva Ritu at the Taj Lake Palace that carries Maharana Bhupal Singh's initials to the Maharani Suite at the Umaid Bhawan Palace the personal chamber of the erstwhile Maharani of Jodhpur every suite in the royal palaces exudes a unique charm.

Even the dining transcends the realm of a mere culinary indulgence. For example, the Suvarna Mahal at Rambagh Palace, one of India's most luxuriously appointed restaurants, was once a royal banquet with exquisite fresco paintings and opulent décor; the Amrit Sagar bar at Taj Lake Palace still has the erstwhile Maharana's



throne from where he would address his esteemed guests. “These culinary havens are not just sketches from history; they present dishes meticulously derived from recipes that echo the opulent era of the Nawabs, Maharajas and the royal kitchens, thereby offering a gastronomic voyage back in time,” he says.

He adds: “The process of restoration has been elevated to an art form at IHCL. These living legacies, serving as enduring icons of history, were originally crafted centuries ago with an abundance of love, passion, and masterful workmanship. The meticulous task of preserving the workmanship, upholding the aesthetic integrity, and ensuring the perpetuation of elaborate detailing demands a profound reservoir of experience and expertise.” The Taj was ranked the best in the “World’s Finest Luxury Grand Palaces” category at the esteemed 101 Executive Summit held recently in Germany.

Meanwhile, in the culturally rich Shekhawati region of Rajasthan, known for its splendid fresco art and heritage, stands the **Vivaana Culture Hotel**. This 150-year-old architectural gem, transformed into a boutique property, is a testament to the region’s artistic and historical lineage. Spread across two havelis, Vivaana, with its 33 elegantly appointed rooms, echoes the grandeur of the past. Businessman **Atul Khanna** decided to follow his passion of restoring old havelis, which led to the setting up of the Vivaana Culture Hotel in Ajitgarh Churi, Rajasthan.

The restoration journey of Vivaana was arduous. It required the collaboration of skilled artisans, architects, and historians who shared a vision to preserve the building’s original character while making it suitable for modern hospitality. This involved conserving the ancient frescoes,



Vivaana Culture Hotel Mandawa, Rajasthan



**Staying at Vivaana is not just about luxury; it’s about immersing oneself in the culture and heritage of the Shekhawati region. We organize guided heritage walks, cultural performances, and traditional Rajasthani experiences, offering guests a deep dive into the local culture**

**ATUL KHANNA,**  
Founder, Vivaana Culture Hotel



Vivaana Culture Hotel Mandawa, Rajasthan

intricate carvings, and the traditional Rajasthani architecture. Each room in the hotel is distinct, featuring restored frescoes that depict mythological and historical narratives. The courtyards, with traditional jaalis and chhatris, add to the structure’s timeless charm. “Staying at Vivaana is not just about luxury; it’s about immersing oneself in the culture and heritage of the Shekhawati region. We organize heritage walks, cultural performances, and traditional Rajasthani experiences, offering guests a deep dive into the local culture. The vision extends beyond Vivaana to the broader Shekhawati Revival Project. This initiative focuses on preserving and promoting the region’s cultural heritage. The Shekhawati Revival Project has been recognized by the government, finding a place in the recently-launched India Art Architecture Design Biennale and showcases the Shekhawati heritage,” says Khanna. “The hotel is an active participant in the cultural dialogue



Vivaana Culture Hotel Mandawa, Rajasthan



of the area, promoting local festivals, music, and dance forms of Rajasthan,” he adds.

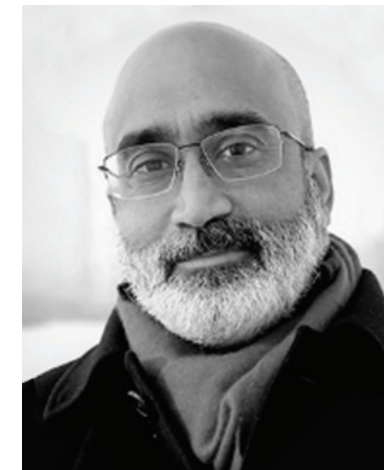
Careful of making minimal carbon impact, the hotel uses solar energy, rainwater harvesting, and engages in community programs, including skill development and supporting the local Anganwadi. During the annual Shekhawati Festival, Vivaana becomes a cultural hub where tourists and art enthusiasts from across the globe converge to celebrate the region’s art and crafts. Additionally, the hotel has initiated educational programs for the youth, aiming to kindle an appreciation for their heritage from a young age. Workshops on fresco restoration, traditional building

techniques, and the history of Shekhawati art are regular features at Vivaana’s cultural calendar.

In Kolkata, The Oberoi Grand, or The Grand Dame of Chowringhee, is regarded as the centre point of the city. Once a boarding house catering to international soldiers enroute to fight the World War, The Grand Hotel in 1938, under the able eye of Mohan Singh Oberoi, became home to the rich and famous. Says **Mayan Dhawan, General Manager, The Oberoi Grand, Kolkata**: “The peace and tranquility of the hotel are immediately apparent as you enter its heavy, wrought iron gates. White Corinthian splendour, green palms and cool green marble

flooring signal the turn-of-the-century elegance that characterizes the hotel. From the refined colour scheme of sienna, powder blue, ivory and beige, accented with rich woods, to the exquisitely detailed furniture, every inch breathes comfort and old-world luxury.”

It was the residence of a certain Colonel Grand in the mid 1800s. The hotel’s neo-classical façade and grand pillared entrance mark a successful fusion of classical European and traditional Indian styles. Since early days, The Grand became synonymous with modernity while retaining its old-world charm. Every modern engineering marvel and innovation was brought into the hotel to make the guest experience the old glory with modern luxuries.



**Travellers are increasingly seeking authentic and enriching experiences. The surge in interest in heritage hospitality has sparked a renaissance in the way people connect with the past, creating a deep appreciation for cultural legacies around the world**

**ROHIT KOHLI,**  
Joint Managing Director, Creative Travels

The hotel has traversed seven generations and has seen Kolkata in its heyday as the capital of British India, two world wars, the passing of an empire, famine, floods, fire and riots, and still stands within the heart of the city pristine, serene and beautiful.

**Rohit Kohli, Joint Managing Director, Creative Travels**, says: “In recent times, there has been a profound shift in the preferences of travellers seeking authentic experiences. The surge in interest towards heritage hospitality has sparked a renaissance in the way people connect with the past, creating a deep appreciation for cultural legacies around the world. One of the quintessential expressions of India’s heritage hospitality is its opulent heritage hotels. These majestic establishments are former palaces, forts, havelis, or mansions meticulously restored to offer an immersive experience into the past. The



**The Oberoi Grand Kolkata or the Grand Dame of Chowringhee is regarded as the center point of the city. Once a boarding house catering to international soldiers en route to fight the World War, The Grand Hotel in 1938, under the able eye of Mohan Singh Oberoi, became home to the rich and famous**

**MAYAN DHAWAN,**  
General Manager, The Oberoi Grand, Kolkata



The Oberoi Grand - Corridor



The Oberoi Grand lobby



The Oberoi Grand - Facade





Glimpses of Udaipur

properties are often run by local families, who provide an intimate experience, allowing guests to interact closely with the hosts, partake in traditional customs and experience authentic regional cuisines."

One of the most important functions of heritage hospitality is to foster a better understanding and respect for cultural heritage. Travellers are looking for meaningful experiences that allow them to absorb the soul of a destination, not merely a place to stay. Heritage hospitality not only preserves cultural heritage by converting historical places into hotels, but also creates sustainable economies. In drawing a new wave of mature travellers to the heart of India's storied past, heritage Hotels serves as cultural ambassadors, he adds.



Elephants, Trissur Pooram



Vijay Vilas Heritage Resort Mandvi, Kutch

Steering the heritage legacy of India, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) was formed on 27 January 1984. It is a volunteer membership organization set up to protect unprotected monuments and sites not under the purview of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the state departments of archaeology. It provides financial, technical and intellectual assistance for the preservation of cultural and natural resources, heritage, and creative and innovative activities.

**Chuden Tshering Misra, Member Secretary, INTACH**, says: "INTACH has more than 200 Chapters across the country, with members from all walks of life. The Chapters play a catalytic role in engaging public interest

and influencing government policy, to protect heritage from negligence and vandalism. They have awakened public interest on heritage matters through workshops, heritage walks, trainings, publications, cultural events, and community development programs. They have assisted in spreading awareness



**To date, approximately 75,000 heritage properties in more than 500 towns have been listed by INTACH**

**CHUDEN TSHERING MISRA,  
Member  
Secretary, INTACH**



Heritage-Tourism Map of Kargil

in their neighborhoods about the need to protect the local cultural and natural history, especially in schools and colleges.

She adds: "The built heritage of our country is a priceless non-renewable resource. Besides approximately 3,683 monuments protected by the ASI and around 4,103 state protected monuments, the majority of our heritage buildings remain largely unidentified, neglected, and threatened by urban pressure. INTACH, since its inception in 1984, has recognized the need for identifying and documenting the cultural heritage throughout our country with heritage listing as one of its main activities. Till date, approximately 75,000 heritage properties in more than 500 towns have been listed by INTACH."



A view of Government Public Library (from the courtyard), Prayagraj, UP



A view of Virtual Experiential Museum, Varanasi



INTACH has taken up projects to develop heritage tourism with the purpose of sustainable conservation and enhancement of visitor experience at the sites. It works with other national agencies to prepare comprehensive master plans for heritage/historic sites, to identify and develop heritage villages for rural tourism, conserve and re-utilize historical assets to make them accessible to the public, and so on.

**Randhir Vikram Singh, President, Indian Heritage Hotels Association (IHHA)**, says: "India is the first country that comes to mind, when we talk about culture, heritage and history. Rich in diversity and culture, the folklore and tales of Indian rulers and royal structures date back centuries. The Heritage Tourism movement was started to make Heritage Buildings viable, and that led to the creation of the Indian Heritage Hotels Association (IHHA) in 1990."

He adds: "Whether you are looking for royal grandeur or simply want a chance to experience historical romance, heritage hotels in India will take you through an unforgettable journey. In January 1991, the Government of India recognized heritage hotels as a distinct category and divided them into three subcategories Heritage, Heritage Classic and Heritage Grand. There are several criteria that aim to categorize these hotels, like the number and sizes of the rooms, the cuisine, any sporting facilities, the management, and special features, if any. These structures must have been constructed before 1935 and must have unique architecture, ambience, and historical significance."

He points out: "The tourism and hospitality sectors are significant sources of employment, income, and foreign cash. Additionally, they support creative endeavors, fairs,



Podar Haveli, Nawalgarh, Shekhawati Region, Rajasthan



**Old assets require expensive conservation and restoration, a low-room base that affects feasibility, high maintenance, such as outdated plumbing and fixtures, there are challenges of staff training, and a lack of infrastructure, such as drainage, power, communication and connectivity**

**RANDHIR VIKRAM SINGH,**  
President,  
**Indian Heritage Hotels Association**



Hotel Shekhawati Haveli



Murmuria Haveli, Mandawa, Rajasthan

festivals, traditional crafts, and cultural preservation. This makes it easier to disseminate the tourism industry's total benefits. No other industry employs as many people directly or indirectly daily. The tourism industry is acknowledged as a key growth player of the nation's economy. However, old assets require expensive conservation and restoration, a low-room base that affects viability, high maintenance, such as outdated plumbing and fixtures, and may have challenges related to drainage, power, communication and connectivity, and so on."

Heritage no longer only refers to the grand residences of former royalty; there has been an increase in bungalows and havelis that offer glimpses of the past, possibly personal histories of repute, resulting in a wide range of homes for vacationers to explore, he says, adding, "One of the most important aspects is to maintain the integrity and upkeep of the place. There have to be prior architectural checks assuring



**At Thengal Manor, you may literally flip down the pages of history as the majestic mansion was built in 1929, and the first daily newspaper in the Assamese language, 'Dainik Batori' was launched from here**

**BIKASH DAS,**  
Resident Director  
**Heritage Northeast Pvt Ltd**



Thengal Manor Hospitality





Thengal Manor, Jorhat



Kaziranga Golf Resort



Ujjayanta palace museum, Agartala

the longevity of the hotels and it also becomes the duty of the employees and guests to appreciate and respect the heritage.”

The north-eastern part of India is called the land of blue hills, green valleys and red rivers. Heritage North East Pvt Ltd provides boutique heritage hospitality, and a chance to savour the colonial lifestyle and a tea holiday. Heritage North East is a part of the B&A Group of Companies, having wide interests in tea plantations, tea broking, and heritage tourism. They manage the Thengal Manor in Jorhat, the Banyan Grove in the heart of the Gatoonga Tea Estate, and the Kaziranga Golf Resort.

**Bikash Das, Resident Director Heritage Northeast Pvt Ltd**, says: “At Thengal

Manor, you may literally flip down the pages of history as the majestic mansion was built in 1929, and the first daily newspaper in the Assamese language, ‘Dainik Batori’ was launched from here. Feel the ambience of the colonial days as you relax in period furniture and décor. At the Banyan Grove, you may peek into the life of the Tea Estate Manager as he begins his day at 5.30 am, and see the colourful women pluckers as they chatter and sing while plucking the freshest two leaves-and-a-bud from the bushes. The Kaziranga Golf Resort is 75 km from the Kaziranga National Park, a World Heritage Site declared by UNESCO. The course is conveniently set with colonial-style cottages and the unique ‘Burra Sahib’s Bungalow’ that is now the Club House.”

Whether in the bustling markets of Delhi or the serene backwaters of Kerala or the genteel flavour of the North East, heritage hotels are cultural hubs, allowing guests to absorb the essence of the region while revelling in the luxury of a bygone era. In India’s heritage hotels, each stay is a chapter in the unfolding story of the country’s diverse and vibrant past. **HAI**

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STATUE OF UNITY

- Providing more inclusivity to hospitality & tourism stakeholders
- Providing visibility to Indian hospitality & tourism entities
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- Ensuring electronic delivery of various services and benefits
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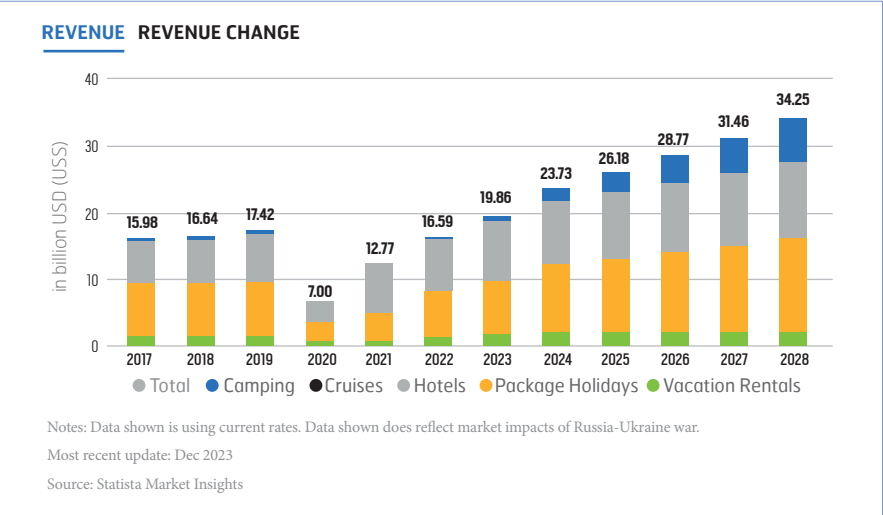


# EXCITING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR!

Get ready for a fantastic journey into the world of travel and tourism in India!

According to statistica.com, the Indian Travel & Tourism market is set to reach a whopping \$23.72 billion in 2024. The heart of this market lies in Package Holidays, with an expected volume of \$10.48 billion in 2024. People are preferring staycations, eco-friendly trips, laid-back explorations, and weekend getaways, showing a strong desire for quality time with family and friends. The hospitality sector is booming with optimism in 2024, bringing a surge in hotel bookings and a bunch of exciting opportunities.

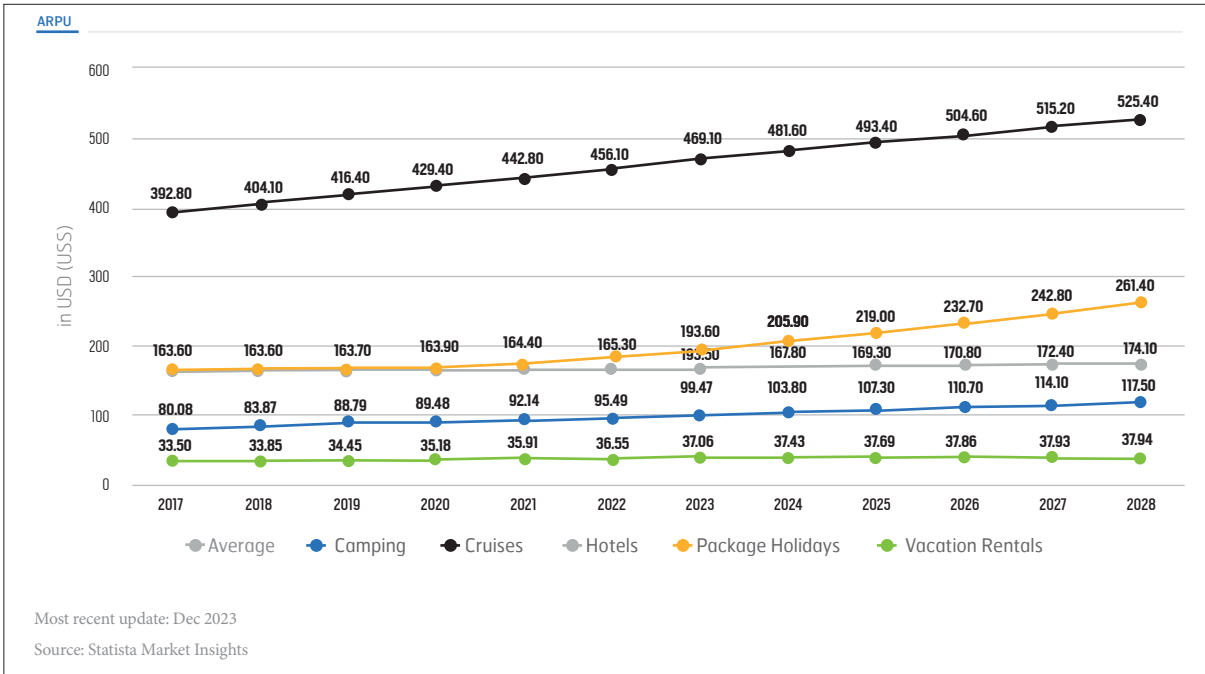
## Projected Revenue in Travel & Tourism market



Two big contributors to this growth are domestic travel and religious tourism. But, before we get too carried away, let's check out some factors that could affect the sector. The economy, both local and global, plays a big role. When the economy

is doing well, people are more likely to travel for leisure, and that means hotels will be busier. On the flip side, challenges like high GST rates and changes in regulations, such as visa policies and taxes, can affect how much people want to travel.

## Market trends in Travel & Tourism



As per the BENORI Report brought out by the Hotel Association of India (HAI) namely - **Vision 2047: Indian Hospitality Industry - Challenges and Road Ahead**, the rise in travel and tourism is expected to significantly contribute to the expansion of the Indian hospitality industry by 2047.

## Drivers and Impacts of Increasing Travel and Tourism

### DRIVERS

- Infrastructural development of hospitality to be prioritised with a fixed target and a clear timeline.
- Effective collaboration at different levels such as central and state level, private and public sectors.
- Building multi-activity ecosystems for different segments such as MICE, F&B, and tourism circuits followed by the development of iconic tourist sites.
- Facilitate ease of travel-visa reforms and travel-friendly immigration facilities at airports, last mile connectivity.
- Set up 200 Centres of Excellence across states through Swadesh Darshan and Prasad schemes each with 0.1 million foreign tourists and 20 million domestic tourists.
- Establish 5 Mega Tourism Zones each with almost 10 million foreign tourists and 200 million domestic tourism visits (DTVs).

### IMPACTS

#### SHORT-TERM (2022-2027)

- Domestic tourist visits were 677 million in 2021.
- Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) in India are projected to increase from 1.52 million in 2021 to 15 million by 2024.
- India has positioned itself as a major tourism destination as it chaired the G20 in 2023.

#### MID-TERM (2027-2037)

- Domestic tourist visits are expected to increase from 677 million in 2021 to ~1.5 billion by 2030.
- FTAs are expected to touch 25 million by 2030.
- The rising tourist footfall for both leisure and business travel will further create more opportunities in the hospitality industry.

#### LONG-TERM (2037-2047)

- Domestic tourist visits are further expected to jump to 15 billion by 2047.
- FTAs are further projected to grow attracting 100 million tourists by 2047.
- India is estimated to grow at 7-9% CAGR in the coming decade and committed to deliver plans aligned with the commitments to ensure positioning of India as one of the leaders in the tourism sector by 2047.

Local factors matter too! Things like how easy it is to get to a place, its proximity to tourist spots, and ongoing infrastructure projects can make a destination more appealing. The rise in religious tourism, especially with the inauguration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, along with investments from leading and top hotel brands, will further contribute to the evolving dynamics of the hospitality sector. Hotel operators need to understand these local factors to set the right prices, run effective

marketing campaigns, and plan their business strategies. But wait, there's more on the global stage! Major events worldwide can wield the hotel industry, influencing travel trends, consumer behavior, and the overall demand for places to stay. Looking ahead, the Indian hotel industry is expected to see double-digit revenue growth in FY24, according to ICRA.

Thanks to ongoing domestic travel, demand from MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and

Exhibitions) and business trips, and an increase in foreign tourists, the future looks bright. Despite challenges, factors like better infrastructure, more flight options, a favorable population demographic, the anticipation of growth in MICE events, and likely support from the government in terms of policies favorable to the hospitality sector are setting the stage for a strong and promising future for the Indian hospitality industry. Get ready for some incredible experiences! **HAI**





# “We have different stories to tell about the past”

Aman Nath

AMAN NATH is an Indian writer, hotelier, and architectural restorer. He is the co-founder of the Neemrana Hotels chain, that’s credited for pioneering the heritage hotels movement in India. Since 1991, with the first Hotel launch, the Group now has a string of heritage properties, lovingly restored, with the original character of the place intact. Excerpts from an interview:

## What is the origin of the Neemrana properties?

Neemrana was conceived with the objective of preserving India’s rich heritage by restoring and rejuvenating its non-listed historical architecture. This includes the vibrant culture that surrounds the properties. As a historian, my passion was ignited by the realization that numerous historical treasures across India were being neglected, left to decay as ruins. Post-independence, only a handful of these ruins gained central and state government attention for restoration, leaving countless others, significant to regional history in complete neglect.

In 1984, the first hospitality project commenced with the restoration of the Neemrana Fort Palace—a vast ruin. This transformed into a symbol of architectural restoration-for-reuse, illustrating the potential to revive India’s bygone era. Neemrana’s continuous focus has been on converting historical

**The use of appropriate materials was paramount to ensure authenticity and longevity, aligning with the building’s age and style**

wonders into heritage hotels, providing a genuine depiction of India’s culture, heritage, and values to discerning travelers. Rejecting superficial luxury, we call ourselves ‘non-hotel’ hotels as none of our properties were originally meant to be hotels. They are all monuments of historical significance with different stories to tell about the past. And, they have been restored by us to be better than their past magnificence and glory!

In essence, Neemrana’s origin is a testament to the belief that life is not about experiencing luxury but about authentic travel experiences, which extract “more” from “less”. India’s philosophical evolution teaches us an enduring elegance of simplicity, and Neemrana embodies this wisdom, inviting guests to appreciate the past lifestyles with expectations of simplicity.

## When you started this, it was a niche field. Which experts did you consult for the restoration?

In the absence of experts, common sense is always a great guide. Old buildings are very solidly built and Neemrana stands on a rock. Traditional skills of the building still existed in the 80s, and we have had two generations of masons/carpenters who have learnt on the job and taught it to the younger lot who come. The aesthetic also needed interventions because we needed windows, air-conditioning, and plumbing. As these were not listed buildings, liberty could be taken and the rule was to enter all the modern conveniences without obviously showing them on the facade. We learnt on the job as our teams grew better and larger, we took on more and more projects in different parts of India. The best discovery was that India being the world’s only continuously alive civilization, had skills in Tamil Nadu, Goa, and Madhya Pradesh which were alive wherever we went.

## What kind of maintenance is required?

Maintaining the original features of historical buildings within our heritage ‘non-hotel’ hotels is a laborious and multifaceted process, guided by a commitment to preserving and showcasing India’s rich architectural legacy. Regular maintenance and repair form the cornerstone of our strategy, encompassing tasks like detecting cracks in the



Neemrana Twilight

stone walls, repairing roofs and safeguarding surfaces. The use of appropriate materials was paramount to ensure authenticity and longevity, aligning with the building’s age and style. But the intervention of modern materials like steel and glass, cement and other waterproofing materials was also done in a discerning manner. Through these practical and comprehensive measures, Neemrana Hotels ensures that our guests from around the world can authentically re-live Indian history while enjoying the distinctive charm of these restored architectural treasures.

## How do you make it appealing to contemporary taste?

At Neemrana Hotels, we recognize that contemporary tastes are evolving, and discerning guests seek more than the fake luxury offered by the standard hotel chains imitating each other in architecture and décor. Neemrana stands apart by seamlessly blending historical authenticity with unique contemporary experiences. Our commitment to providing a distinctive experience begins with the rooms across all Neemrana properties where vintage furniture coexists with a vibrant colour palette of paintings and artifacts by famous Indian artists and craft persons.

All Neemrana properties ensure modern-day comforts and amenities, coupled with lush greenery and gardens, appealing to a diverse range of tastes. Also, flagship properties like the 15th-century Neemrana Fort Palace boast a heated swimming pool, offering a contemporary touch against a backdrop of the bygone era. Similarly, intimate properties like the 20th century. Neemrana’s Three Waters in South Goa and the 17th century Neemrana’s Bungalow on the Beach in Tranquebar feature large swimming pools and vibrant interiors, providing a delightful contemporary escape. By offering an enriching blend of historical experiences and contemporary elements, we transcend the

ordinary, ensuring that Neemrana Hotels are not just destinations but immersive journeys through time and taste.

## How do you beat the competition emerging from spa and nature resorts?

Neemrana Hotels stands out as a sanctuary for travellers seeking solace in spa and nature-oriented properties through a distinctive approach. Neemrana’s journey began with a commitment to preserve India’s culture, heritage, and history, and this ethos extends seamlessly to wellness and nature experiences. The natural topography surrounding Neemrana properties sets them apart. Our spa treatments go back to the authentic Ayurveda and are hosted against old walls and spaces which are in themselves very therapeutic. From the 14th century Hill Fort-Kesroli to the 15th-century Neemrana Fort-Palace and the 19th-century Tijara Fort-Palace, all are nestled amid the breathtaking 2-billion-year-old Aravallis, offering mesmerizing views and lush greenery. Our properties open out to nature in a very spectacular way. The 19th-century Neemrana’s Ramgarh Bungalows in Kumaon provide serene hill views and clean surroundings, while the 17th-century Neemrana’s Bungalow on the Beach in Tranquebar boasts the thickest ozone layer, allowing guests to savor the best sunrise, sunsets and the calming sea waves.

Neemrana’s wellness experiences transcend the conventional approach. Rooted in ancient Indian therapies, the spa offerings focus on holistic healing for the mind, body, and soul. Our yoga and meditation tap into ancient Indian Ayurveda. The blend of authentic Indian practices and pristine natural surroundings ensures that Neemrana remains a top choice for those in search of solace and wellness amidst the tranquility of heritage properties. **HAI**

**As these were not listed buildings, liberty could be taken and the rule was to enter all the modern conveniences without obviously showing them on the facade**



Wallwood Garden, Coonoor





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## Davidoff Cigars unveils its "The Difference" campaign 2023 and brings back its former popular Classic No. 1 as new Limited Edition



From Left to Right: Akhil Mathur, Manvi Saluja, Vineet Malu and Bora Buladi

'Being different' is an integral part of Davidoff! The brand Davidoff always ensures that no matter where its customers come into touch with Davidoff, they will learn about The Difference".

Davidoff introduces a new communication campaign that re-promotes the popular White Band Collection lines Signature, Grand Cru, Aniversario and Millennium. First of a kind campaign took place in New Delhi India on 2nd Dec at The Aqua Park Hotel by N V Lifestyles, Official Business Partner for Davidoff Cigars India, Sri Lanka and Maldives. The event was attended by Bora Buladi, Vice President, Davidoff Cigars along with other cigar aficionados, Hotels and Distribution Partners all over India and Maldives and Team Members. The event celebrated and emphasized the unique differences via its White Band Collection lines, which represent the most iconic cigars in portfolio. The goal was to educate aficionados and partners and give them more reasons to choose a cigar bearing a White Band.

The White Band is The Difference because of the following reasons:

- Only 10% of seeds make it through Davidoff's strict quality control.
- From 225,000 seeds per plant, Davidoff sows only the strongest and most viable. Premium taste begins at birth.
- Every Davidoff cigar passes through 300 hands before it is enjoyed.
- Each White Band cigar is handcrafted. Each hand applies a personal skill to what will become a very personal experience.
- Davidoff's inventory is the largest in the world.
- 2,600 tons of tobacco ensure variety and consistent quality. Davidoff cigars will never be compromised by unexpected natural events.
- Davidoff weighs every single leaf before rolling.
- Davidoff makes sure that every blend has the exact same amount of

- ingredients. Caribbean passion and Swiss precision bring you consistent taste.

"It takes 10 years of experience to roll a Davidoff cigar. You can taste how Davidoff's creations are wrapped around years of experience. Perfect combustion, pleasant draw, sophisticated aromas. Time beautifully filled!" said Akhil Mathur, Chief Commercial Officer, N V Lifestyles.



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## EMBRACING MILLETS: *A culinary journey of health & heritage*

The International Year of Millets 2023 witnessed a culinary celebration at renowned hotels like **Lemon Tree, Four Points by Sheraton Navi Mumbai, and Wyndham's Ramada**, where millet-based dishes were introduced, creating a gastronomic fusion of health and heritage.



**M**illets, celebrated for their gluten-free nature and nutritional richness, are emerging as a dietary staple. With a low Glycemic Index, millets prevent blood sugar spikes and offer versatility, making them a perfect fit for every age group, especially those on gluten-free diets. The International Year of Millets 2023 witnessed hotels like **Lemon Tree, Four Points by Sheraton Navi Mumbai, and Wyndham's Ramada** introducing millet-based dishes. These hotels incorporated the ancient grains into the menus, promoting a sustainable and nutritious culinary experience.

Says Rajeev Janveja, Senior Vice President & Corporate Chef, Lemon Tree: "Millets are coarse grains that have been traditionally grown and consumed in the Indian subcontinent for over 5,000 years. They have high nutritional value and are rich in proteins, vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Lemon Tree Hotels has been at the forefront of celebrating International Year



of Millets 2023 by adding millet-based dishes to the daily buffet to enhance the reach of Indian millets to guests."

Similarly, in a bid to embrace the International Year of Millets, Four Points by Sheraton Navi Mumbai, Vashi took the culinary experience to a whole new level with a specially curated menu featuring millets. From rotis to cookies, breakfast to coffee, every meal at Four Points by Sheraton boasted the goodness of millets. The chefs at Four Points by Sheraton crafted four distinct types of millet rotis. A dedicated counter allowed guests to choose from a selection of four millets, ensuring a diverse and delectable dining experience. For those with a sweet tooth, Four Points by Sheraton introduced millet cookies. Guests had the option to enjoy a guilt-free treat while sipping on their favorite coffee or tea at Navi Mumbai Baking Co. Moreover, in a commitment to offering lactose-free alternatives, Four Points by Sheraton Navi Mumbai stepped beyond the conventional almond and rice milk options by introducing millet milk. This innovative addition allowed coffee enthusiasts to enjoy their favorite beverage with a unique twist, providing a creamy and nutritious alternative that aligned with the International Year of Millets celebration.

Wyndham's group of hotels, exemplified by the distinguished Ramada By Wyndham Gurgaon Central, also introduced millet-themed buffets. The culinary team, driven by a spirit of innovation, crafted a diverse array of dishes, showcasing the versatility of millets, starting from millet-themed breakfast options. The group remains steadfast in its commitment to being a frontrunner in promoting wellness, sustainability, and the profound culinary heritage of millets. **HAI**



# THE KARNATAKA HIGHLIGHTS

Abounding with UNESCO World Heritage sites, national parks, cultural trails and wonderful road trip infrastructure, we trace an itinerary through Karnataka.

BY RIAAN JACOB GEORGE

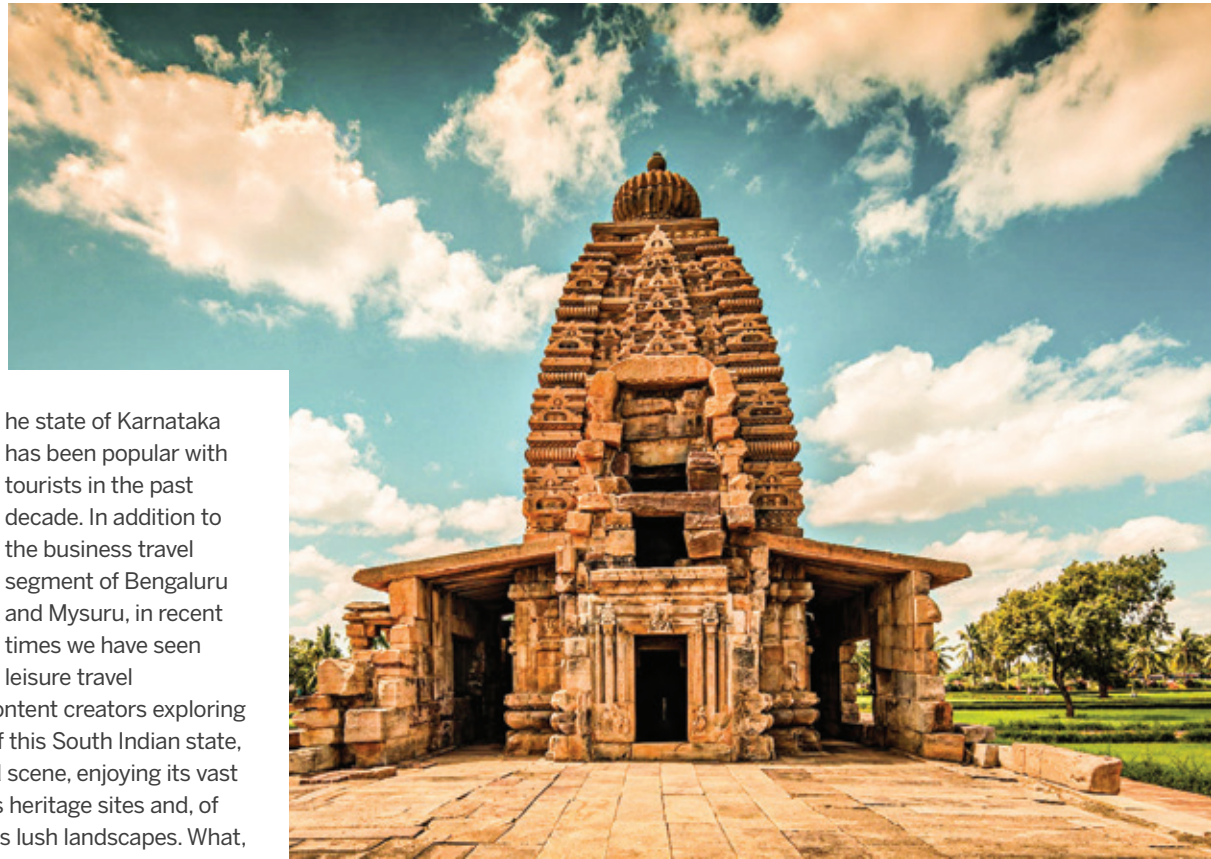




**T**

he state of Karnataka has been popular with tourists in the past decade. In addition to the business travel segment of Bengaluru and Mysuru, in recent times we have seen leisure travel

magazines, shows and content creators exploring the length and breadth of this South Indian state, savouring its unique food scene, enjoying its vast coastline, marveling at its heritage sites and, of course, driving through its lush landscapes. What, then, makes Karnataka such a big draw for tourists? For starters, the sheer diversity of tourism experiences. Moreover, this state is a treasure trove of experiences for heritage and history buffs, given the number of UNESCO World Heritage sites that this state showcases and has so beautifully maintained.



Hampi

**Hampi is a tourist attraction for both locals and tourists and features a labyrinth of temple ruins and massive rock structures that have been standing there for many centuries**



Lalith Mahal Mysore



Nagarhole National, Park Bandipur, National Park



Gokarna



Half Moon Beach



Mahabaleshwar Temple.

## The Coastal Stretch

What's so unique here is the fact that Karnataka boasts a gorgeous, lengthy coastline along the Arabian Sea, giving rise to many tourist spots, a great food scene and scenic routes. Given its proximity to Goa and Maharashtra, you will find unique cosmopolitan mix of influences. The Konkan Coast Heritage Circuit is a sort of vibrant tapestry. South of Goa, the coastal Karnataka stretch unveils the verdant embrace of the Western Ghats, Bandipur and Nagarhole National Parks, where you can enjoy thrilling safari adventures. Keep your eyes peeled for majestic tigers, playful langurs and herds of spotted deer as you navigate the dense forests on a jeep safari.

The seaside towns of Gokarna and Karwar are upcoming destinations in terms of popularity and we do see a lot of tourists heading there as they are relatively unexplored and undiscovered.

Relax on the pristine sands, enjoy some water sports on the beaches of Gokarna and even explore some ancient temples like the Mahabaleshwar Temple. While on the subject of water sports, Gokarna and Karwar's beaches have now got establishments that specialize in surfing, kite surfing and standup paddle boarding in the azure waters. As you would expect, given the influx of tourists in this part, there is a thriving food and shopping scene too in these areas.

For a touch of urban charm, head to Mysuru, where the opulent Mysuru Place stands as a testament to the region's royal heritage. Explore the bustling markets, delve into the vibrant Mysore silk-weaving tradition and indulge in the famous sweets of Mysuru.





## The UNESCO World Heritage Trail

This state is ideal for a heritage connoisseur as there are magnificent UNESCO World Heritage sites that dot the state all over.

Let's start with the most popular of all, Hampi. Also known as Pampa Kshetra, this ancient village now has the ruins of one of the India's medieval kingdoms. Hampi is a tourist attraction for both local and tourists and features a labyrinth of temple ruins and massive rock structures that have been standing there for many centuries.

We then move to Pattadakal, which is a UNESCO World heritage site that captures the essence of various art forms. Showcasing the pioneering architectural marvels of the Chalukya Dynasty, Pattadakal harmoniously blends artistic influences from the north and south of India. The breathtaking temples of this site stand as a testament to this unique fusion, portraying a magnificent amalgamation of cultural expressions. The Sahyadri mountain range, commonly referred to as the Western ghats stretches across 1,60,00 sq km of land, running parallel through, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Goa, Maharashtra and, of course, Karnataka. This expansive region encompasses multiple wildlife sanctuaries, national parks and forest reserves. This part of Karnataka hosts hundreds of species of flowering plants and animals.

Next on our trail is Hoysala. The Chennakeshava Temple in Belur and the Hoysaleswara Temple in Halebidu have together been granted the UNESCO World Heritage status. Constructed during the Hoysala dynasty, these temples boast a remarkable fusion of Nagara and Dravidian architectural styles. Celebrated for their intricate stone carved structures, distinctive motifs and lavish sculptures, these temples are considered to be truly iconic in South India. We then move to the monuments of Srirangapatna island town, which is located near the Kaveri River. Srirangapatna is considered to be



Kabini Wildlife Sanctuary. Nagarhole National Park



Bhootnath Temple Badami, Karnataka



Mahishasura at the entrance of Chamundeswari Temple

one of the most popular pilgrimage sites in Karnataka. Within its complex, you will find Karnataka's most expansive temple, the Ranganathaswamy Temple. Be sure to visit the other highlights of this town, like the fortress, bird sanctuary and mausoleum.

And finally, do not forget to visit the monuments and forts of the Deccan Sultanate, dating back to the medieval era. These UNESCO labelled sites are divided into four components, each holding significant historical importance within the Sultanate's narrative. There are forts and tombs constructed by the Deccan Sultanate rulers and these are located in Gulbarga, Bidar, Bijapur and Hyderabad, and represent a hybrid architectural style merging Islamic and Hindu influences.



Chamundeswari Temple Mysore

**Coorg boasts an entirely unique subculture and landscapes, quite different from the rest of the state**

## The Coorg Trail

One of Karnataka's tourist highlights is the region of Coorg, which boasts an entirely unique subculture and landscapes, quite different from the rest of the state. A four-hour drive from the state capital Bengaluru, Coorg boasts magnificent country roads cutting through some breathtaking landscapes, and gorgeous coffee plantations. The tourist experience in Coorg is quite different given its luxe home stays, hotels and Airbnb options. Coffee lovers will delight in the fact that this region is big on coffee. A visit to a coffee plantation is a must, where the process is demonstrated and you end this with a coffee tasting session. Coorg is also a great place to enjoy some outdoor activities like trekking, e-biking, rock climbing, birding, plantation walks and more. The food scene in Coorg is well known and if you do your research, look for home chefs who specialize in local Kodavu cuisine, cooked in people's homes.



Coorg, Karnataka







Nagarhole National Park



Nagarhole

### In the wilderness

Karnataka's diverse landscapes, flora and fauna have given rise to the most magnificent of national parks, which are best explored on road trips. For starters, the Nagarhole National Park, is part of the larger Nilgiri region. It is extremely popular among tourists for elephants, tigers, and sandalwood forests. Bandipur National Park is known for its tiger population and safaris through this park are absolutely magnificent as the roads are well paved and the views are glorious. Other tiger-specialised national parks like Mudumalai Tiger Reserve or Banerghatta National Park are popular for their populations of tigers, elephants and diverse species of birds. Birding is a huge draw in Karnataka, in addition to mammal-seeking safari goers.

### Cosmopolitan Bengaluru

While Bengaluru's modern side needs no introduction, it is the food and beverage scene of this city that has come into focus over the last couple of years. From neighbourhood coffee roasters to hyper-local breweries and even award-winning restaurants, Bengaluru has now established itself as one of the F&B hubs of the country. Dynamic chefs from across the country as well as local Bengaluru foodies have come together to create a thriving gourmet community.

### Art at Bengaluru Airport

Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport's spanking new Terminal 2 gives travellers an introduction of sorts to Karnataka's art and culture through its massive and beautifully curated art programme. The state-of-the-art terminal boasts dozens of commissioned artworks placed at different parts of the terminal, many of which are reflective of Karnataka's architecture, art and culture. QR codes next to each artwork can be scanned so that travellers can engage with the artwork and find out more about it. [HAI](#)



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# HERITAGE: The Soul of India's Tourism

As India plans to have 100 mn foreign tourist arrivals by 2047, the pressure on heritage products will be immense. The concept of "carrying capacity" should be carefully implemented in all fragile destinations.

**By MP BEZBARUAH**

Secretary General, Hotel Association of India



"The one land that all men desire to see and having seen once, by even a glimpse, would not give the glimpse for all the shows of all the rest of the globe combined": the National Tourism Policy of 2002 starts with this quote from Mark Twain, which extols the grandeur of Indian heritage and civilization. The broad policy is based on, among others, "India's unique civilization, heritage, and culture." In the SWOT analysis of India's tourism, the strength is explained in terms of the "built heritage of its ancient past", "diversity of languages, cuisine, traditions, customs, music, dance, religious practices, and festivals, its holistic healing traditions, art and craft".

In fact, not surprisingly heritage has been the soul of Indian tourism from the beginning. The very first Policy of 1982 recognized that the biggest element in attracting international tourists to India was the country's historical and archaeological monuments. This refrain runs through the National Committee on Tourism report of 1988 as also the Draft Tourism Policy of 2022 in which one of the strategic objectives of the policy is to "to preserve and enhance the cultural and natural resources of the country". The Gujarat Heritage Tourism Policy of 2020 quotes the Prime Minister: "We want to show the world our country's heritage, to make India a hub of heritage tourism."

The depth of heritage and cultural resources of India justify the pivotal attention given to heritage in the country's tourism planning. Apart from more than 5,500 monuments declared as "protected monuments"

by the Archaeological Survey of India, there are more than 5,000 such monuments looked after by the state governments. Most certainly there are thousands of other monuments not looked after by anyone. Yet the richness is not fully captured by these figures. While temples, architecture, and sculptures are more visible, India's rich natural diversity and all the intangible heritage mentioned in the 2002 policy make the heritage attractions incomparable.

However, culture, heritage and tourism have a two-way relationship. Heritage provides the essence of Indian tourism. Tourism thrives because of the excellence of heritage attractions. At the same time, there are many instances of collapsing architecture, and dying art and craft forms being revived because of the patronage of tourism. Often, interaction with tourists about the excellence of the heritage of the local communities revives their self-confidence and cultural pride. There are also numerous examples of ill-managed tourism properties creating socio-cultural problems for the host communities. At the beginning of the new millennium, UNWTO referred to a European Union survey which showed that about 20% of tourists travel solely to experience culture and heritage, whereas for 60% of them, tourism's adverse impact on culture is a major concern. Such concern is only likely to have increased over the years, particularly after the wake-up call of the Pandemic. This concern often described as a "culture clash" has existed in some form for centuries.

David Ogilvy, the renowned advertising professional had recounted in his books how the ancient Greeks prayed to the Almighty to spare them from the "scourge" of foreign tourists. The socio-cultural impact of tourism has been a matter of concern for tourism planners also

**Heritage management must involve the local communities at every stage, and must not treat them as outsiders**





### The very first Policy of 1982 recognized that the biggest element in attracting international tourists to India was the country's historical and archaeological monuments

for a long time. A meeting of world tourism leaders in Manila way back in 1997 discussed the problem and concluded that the development of heritage tourism will inevitably affect the culture of the host community and the extent will depend on the resilience of the community in balancing between the demands of the tourists and their own values and traditions.

Management of socio-cultural impact on heritage, both tangible and intangible, needs a very sensitive approach. Quite often the influx of large numbers of tourists in small destinations puts pressure on already stressed infrastructure. There are instances of irritation caused by the priority given to tourists for scarce civic facilities like water, sanitation, and power—generally referred to as “irridex effect” in tourism literature. Similarly, insensitivity to the ethos of local culture, often arising from ignorance as well as tourists behaving irresponsibly—“away from home syndrome”—can affect the preservation and sustainability of heritage products.

Heritage management, therefore, must involve the local communities at every stage and must not treat them as outsiders. The concept of Destination Management Organization mentioned in the Draft Tourism Policy with a pivotal role for the host community is a very pertinent one and needs to be made operational. Secondly, principles of responsible tourism, of educating the tourists as well as the hosts should be an integral part of heritage management. Third, as India plans to have 100 mn foreign tourist arrivals by 2047, the pressure on heritage products will be immense. The concept of “carrying capacity” should be carefully implemented in all fragile destinations. At the same time, diversification

### The Draft Tourism Policy of 2022 mentions one of the strategic objectives of the policy to “to preserve and enhance the cultural and natural resources of the country”

and spreading the destinations to new areas should be a part of the strategy. There are a considerable number of exquisite heritages still languishing for attention and they should be brought into the tourists' circuit with proper maintenance, marketing and infrastructure coordination.

One of the earliest conventions on heritage management in 1976 in Nairobi had emphasized the importance of seeing “heritage beyond single monuments or sites”, the importance of tackling heritage issues in comprehensive entirety, balancing between culture and economic gains and mobilized by social and community action.

Even physical maintenance of the heritage assets should keep a few fundamental issues in sight. First is the question of quality, encompassing the quality of experience of the visitors, the quality of life of the host community, and the quality of its physical environment. Great heritage in a shabby surrounding is a contradiction that Indian tourism must get rid of. Second, is the need for continuity of the heritage, both physical and intangible. The guiding principle in preservation and continuity is authenticity, both in physical restoration and in storytelling on the intangibles. Sadly, tourism is often seen as the enemy of authenticity and cultural identity.

Physical preservation of heritage suffers from several problems. First is the dichotomy between centrally preserved properties and those preserved by the state governments. It is essential to bring cohesion and collaboration, particularly if the expected increase in FTAs is to be dispersed to newer destinations. Second, many of the smaller heritage spots around the country were created and maintained by local experts. That expertise is becoming unavailable now and needs to be nurtured by training. Third is the major constraint of funds. Governments have tried various PPP initiatives for the upkeep and maintenance of monuments. These initiatives have to be seriously revisited and innovative funding mechanisms need to be devised. Indian heritage will be in great danger of decay and deterioration unless the problem of funding is sorted out.

Our vast, varied, and incomparable heritage is a great socio-economic asset and requires a comprehensive approach which cannot be provided by the ASI alone. The government should consider creating a platform or an agency that can monitor, make policy decisions and coordinate the efforts of different agencies for the preservation, development and enrichment of Indian heritage in all its manifestations. **HAI**



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