



# ENGAGE



**Our responsibility lies towards the local habitants**

Jose Dominic  
CGH Earth Group

**People will push back on non-essential travel:**

Zubin Saxena

*Northeast:*

**In Search of an Unexplored Paradise**

by Pramati Anand

**Tourism during and after Covid-19  
A World View**

M P Bezbaruah



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## From the President's Desk

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



A lot has transpired over the past two months. In a repeat of 2020, the nation went under phase-wise lockdowns weakening the economy once again. Lives and livelihoods were impacted – this time even more severely than before. The travel and hospitality sectors, which barely survived the crisis of 2020 and were beginning to slowly see small shoots of recovery only recently, were left staring at another devastating Covid-19 wave.

Like many others, our industry too, lost some of its most revered members during these trying times. The loss of stalwarts like Anil Bhandari, Ankur Bhatia and many others hits home – not just for me but for many of my contemporaries. We have indeed lost some of the brightest minds in the industry. I take this opportunity to pay our humble respect and tribute to all those who have succumbed to the pandemic.

Whilst loss is an inevitable part of life, the show must go on. And so, with resolve in our hearts and collective solidarity

as always, hotels across the country stepped forward like true warriors to play a role in supporting the community and nation in the battle against Covid-19.

Through it all, the Hotel Association of India has continued to tirelessly pursue Central and State Governments across the country to appeal for benefits for the industry, which could help it tide through the financial duress and stress it was under. The Association engaged with stakeholders across the spectrum including the Tourism Ministry, Finance Ministry, and Reserve Bank of India among others; making constant representation to help alleviate some of the pressure. We also collaborated with other industry bodies and stakeholders to put forth a united and consistent voice of the industry seeking plausible and effective long-term solutions for the revival and growth of the sector.

Our state chapters have played an instrumental role in the successes that we see today. One significant step towards a more progressive future for the industry was according 'Industry' status to the hospitality sector by the states of Maharashtra and Karnataka, which will allow it to avail benefits like lower electricity and water tariff, lower property tax, rationalization of license fees and a simplified approval process for hotel

projects and operations. The Association's efforts have also yielded results across other states, with the Governments of Punjab and Telangana having introduced some welcome changes in their state tourism policy while Odisha, Gujarat and Rajasthan have extended financial support to the sector.

Another major development for our industry is the extension of the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme. Similarly, the Association has strongly recommended to the Reserve Bank of India to provide liquidity support to the sector. The outcomes are encouraging and it further reiterates the success that the power of collaboration and cohesive working towards a common goal can bring about. It is our utmost belief that these wins will go a long way in bringing relief to the sector in the long-term.

The story doesn't end here – in fact, this is just the beginning of the journey towards a new era for the industry. There is a lot of work that needs to be done to bring about a real transformation. In addition to engaging with the Central Government, the Association has sought the intervention of the Prime Minister on several issues. I am sure that with the continued support of all members, we will be able to scale new heights and become a significant voice for the hospitality industry in India.



# CONTENTS



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## 08

### Responsible Hospitality

Sustainability is a business approach that creates long term stakeholder value by managing risk and embracing opportunities through optimization of the economic, environmental and social bottom lines, also known as the Triple Bottom Line:  
Aradhana Lal



## 10

### Lead Interview

Jose Dominic, is a visionary businessman who pioneered and presented a new luxury hospitality model without the extravagance of conventional luxury hotels. In a freewheeling conversation with HAI ENGAGE, Dominic talks about his experiment with responsible hospitality, the need to preserve local tradition, the impact of the pandemic and how CGH Earth Group is innovating to keep afloat.



## 16

### Lead Story

How the hospitality industry stood steadfast in their fight against the pandemic.



## 22

### Leaderspeak

Zubin Saxena, talks about measures taken by the Radisson Hotel Group to contain the spread of the pandemic amidst hopes of recovery.

In a conversation with HAI ENGAGE, Saxena outlines how Radisson has been at the forefront of fighting Covid-19 through innovative measures it has implemented to safeguard the safety of its employees while continuing to offer customer delight.



## 26

### Destination

Northeast: In Search Of An Unexplored Paradise  
One of the biggest opportunities that travel gives us is the chance to break down barriers; provided we give it the time to work its magic.



## 31

### The Last Word

Spurred by vast advances in aviation technology, for 40 years of the last century tourism had grown at a rate higher than the growth of the world economy, to become one of the biggest industries M P Bezbaruah writes about Tourism during and after Covid-19 – A World View



All of us at Hotel Association of India are deeply saddened by the tragic and untimely passing away of so many industry colleagues.

Champions in their sphere of work, each one contributed immensely to the growth of India tourism and hospitality. The fraternity mourns its precious members, lost forever to the deadly pandemic.

Our heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of the departed. Paying our respectful gratitude, we pray that the noble souls rest in eternal peace.

## POLICY DEVELOPMENT

### “HAI appeals to extend help for the hospitality sector: writes to PM”

Hotel Association of India (HAI) has appealed to Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for immediate intervention to provide relief to the hospitality industry which is on the verge of collapse, in five key areas--- one-time settlement of loans and extension of loan moratoriums till September 2021, waiver of all statutory liabilities at Centre, State and Municipal levels for the pandemic period, stimulus package-subsidising of salaries of hotel employees, according 'Infrastructure Status' and to bring Tourism & Hospitality to the concurrent list of the Constitution. HAI in its appeal highlighted that more than 40% of hotels have shut or are on the brink of closure and 70% of overall jobs are now in danger directly or indirectly.

Hospitality industry remains one of the most impacted sectors in the country and continues to struggle due to Covid restrictions and absence of financial reliefs from the government. In its representation to PM, HAI has strongly urged the Government to consider one-time re-structuring of loans and extension of loan moratoriums

till September 2021, pointing out that the increasing loan burden at a time of almost non-existent income may serve only to increase the NPAs of Banks and Moratorium will provide a breathing space to the already crippling industry.

Reiterating its earlier demand HAI has requested waiver of all statutory liabilities at Centre, State, and Municipal levels for the pandemic period especially during the lockdown period on ground of natural justice. Even with zero revenue and resources, many of the hospitality establishments continue to pay the staff on humanitarian grounds which is now unbearable for the industry. HAI therefore has requested PM to offer stimulus package-subsidising of salaries of hotel employees by 50% from April 2021-March 2022 as is being done by many countries as a part of their economic recovery programmes.

While lauding the Government's effort to promote Domestic tourism the industry body also stressed on the fact that expansion of domestic tourism will require creation of suitable accommodation to meet the incremental demand. The hospitality sector is a provider of key tourism infrastructure serving the basic need of accommodation of travelers of any kind. According 'Infrastructure Status' will enable the industry to access long term funds at subsidized rates as available to other infrastructure industries like ports, highways, airports, railways etc. HAI also added that Infrastructure status will encourage greater investments in tourism infrastructure around the country, create income, and have



a ripple effect on demand and will therefore help economic recovery of the country.

At present, the relief, incentives, and other promotional support to industries differ from state to state. For harmonious growth of the industry, there is a need for greater and closer coordination across the country. Featuring Tourism & Hospitality in the concurrent list of the Constitution will facilitate a stronger coordinating role for the Ministry of Tourism, HAI added. The Industry body also recommended to form a consultative mechanism like a Task Force of the government and industry representatives which will help in pragmatic policy formulation and bring the true spirit of Public-Private Partnership.

The potential shock to livelihood of millions working in the hospitality industry is enormous. The Indian hospitality sector has a critical role to play in the post pandemic economic revival and has been announced as the fourth pillar of the Indian economy. HAI urged for PM's bold intervention and directions for implementation of the suggestions to save the Industry jobs and the lives and livelihoods of the citizens employed in hotels and to enable the industry to get on its feet so that it can make its contribution to the national economy added HAI.

## States across India extend financial support to tourism sector

### Gujarat:

Gujarat government decided to waive off property tax and fix charge in electricity bills of hotels, resorts, restaurants and water parks for the period of 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022. The government has decided to levy electricity bill only on actual use of electricity.

### Odisha:

"We are working on a detailed support package to be offered to the industry which would include hotels, restaurants, tour operators, and self-employed people including photographers and guides," said Odisha Tourism Secretary Vishal Kumar Dev.

### Rajasthan:

Rajasthan has announced exempts, with immediate effect, 25 % amount of the initial license fees as the case may be, payable for the FY 2021-22 by the licensee for renewal or fresh grant of licence of Hotel Bar, Club Bar or Restaurant Bar.



### RBI to provide Rs. 15000 crore to hospitality and tourism sector

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to offer a separate liquidity window of Rs. 15000 crores to contact intensive

# IN THE NEWS

sectors. The measure is aimed to mitigate the impact of the second wave of the ongoing pandemic. With this, commercial banks can offer fresh lending support to sectors including hospitality, restaurants and tourism.

"In order to mitigate the adverse impact of the second wave of the pandemic on certain contact-intensive sectors, a separate liquidity window of Rs. 15,000 crores are being opened till March 31, 2022 with tenors of up to three years at the repo rate," said Shaktikanta Das, RBI governor.

Under this scheme, the maximum exposure limit for borrowers under the resolution framework scheme has been increased from Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 50,000 crores for MSMEs, small businesses and loans to individuals for business purposes. These sectors are among the most impacted businesses during state level restriction to curb the spread of Covid virus. To facilitate the necessary liquidity support, banks will be permitted to park surplus liquidity, equivalent to the size of the loan book created, under the reverse repo window at 3.75% or 40 basis points higher than the prevailing reverse repo rate.

The hospitality sector has welcomed this decision which will offer much needed cash flow in the hospitality business, which was struggling for survival. The ferocious surge in coronavirus cases has wreaked havoc for the overall economy and hospitality business. As the country continues to fight the biggest health crisis, government and RBI support will go a long way in sustaining jobs and livelihoods of employees in the sector.

Echoing similar views, Hotel Association of India Vice President KB Kachru said the liquidity window is a major relief to the hospitality sector which has been reeling under the devastating impact of the ongoing pandemic. "Hotels, recognized as one of the most stressed sectors, have been requesting for such a relief to be provided urgently," Kachru said.

It has given an additional lease of life to several hospitality establishments that are on the brink of closure. Ailing hotels will be able to save related jobs, lives, and livelihoods. Hotel loans are less likely to become NPAs, he added.

## 'Hospitality Solutions for the changing world'

## Prama Hikvision's Smart Hospitality Solutions Help to Ensure Seamless Security Experience for Guests and Staff

The prolonged pandemic scenario has prompted the hospitality sector to enhance the security to the next level. Prama Hikvision offers Smart Hospitality Security Solutions to ensure a seamless security experience for guests and staff.



### Integrated Security Solutions:

The Integrated Security Solutions include advanced systems in Video Surveillance, Access Control, Intrusion Alarm, and Perimeter Security. When these solutions are integrated with a Command and ControlCenter, they provide a better outcome in terms of proactive security management. Products: IP Video Security Cameras (CourVu and AcuSense), Video Walls, Access Control: Time and Attendance Systems, Facial Recognition Terminals, Intrusion Alarm (AX-Hub Kit), Perimeter Security Solution, X-ray Baggage Scanners, Smart Pole, Emergency Call Box, Door Frame Metal Detector, etc.

### Temperature Screening Solution:

Hikvision Temperature Screening Solution, with multiple product types and wide range of applications, is designed for the detection of skin- surface temperatures so as to achieve rapid and safe preliminary screening with high efficiency. AI technology ensures Thermographic Cameras only detect human skin-surface temperature to reduce false alarms of other heat sources. Products: Thermal Cameras, Hand Held Thermal Cameras, Facial Recognition Terminal with Temperature Screening , Metal Detector Door etc.

### Artificial Intelligence Applications:

Many successful deployment of Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications across the hospitality industry. AI enabled Facial Recognition Technology is driving innovations like VIP Guest Alerts and Personalised Greetings, etc. Products: Face Recognition Camera Technology

### Broadcasting Solutions:

For Special Events and Conferences

### People Counting Solutions:

Hikvision Duel Lens Cameras

### Hotel Lobby –Hallway-Corridor:

Hikvision Fish Eye Cameras

### Conference Hall:

Hikvision Fish Eye Cameras

### Restricted Entry:

Facilitating the entry of RSVP confirmed guests by instant face recognition, identifying the unconfirmed guests, and also keeping a tab on the uninvited guests. Products: High Speed Entrance Solutions with Face Recognition Terminals

### Perimeter Security:

Protecting the periphery of a hotel ground with the help of sophisticated Perimeter Protection Cameras, which come equipped with a Strobe Light and an audio output which get activated when an intruder comes within its range.

### The Wireless Bridge Solution:

An ideal solution in an escalator environment - which acts as a communication agent to relay the feeds of the camera inside the lift to the router placed at the top of the building - leading to enormous savings in Cabling Costs, Maintenance Costs and Replacement Costs.

### Alarm Systems:

Sophisticated Alarm Systems, which come in the form of mini call boxes and come equipped with a three-in-one mechanism - a call switch, a two-way communication, and a camera. Ideal for an emergency in cases of theft, fire or accidents. Product: Ax-Hub Kit and Smart Pole, Emergency Call Box, Panic Switch

### Under-Vehicle Surveillance Solution (UVSS):

An information management system that integrates an automatic collection of underlying vehicle image, display, and storage functions, and eliminates the need for the manual and imperfect stick-and-mirror exercise. Product: Hikvision UVSS Solution

### ANPR Solution:

Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) Camera Technology that uses intelligent systems to read and verify vehicle registration plates against a database, and marks the entry of any unregistered vehicles. Together with Barriers and Bollards, it works as an effective measure to ward off unwanted intruders. Product: Hikvision ANPR Camera

# RESPONSIBLE HOSPITALITY



## Lemon Tree aims to achieve plastic neutrality and zero waste in the coming years

Sustainability is a business approach that creates long term stakeholder value by managing risk and embracing opportunities through optimization of the economic, environmental and social bottom lines, also known as the Triple Bottom Line: Aradhana Lal

Today, sustainability is globally viewed through the lens of a company's environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) performance - the three pillars that measure how sustainable and positive are the impact of a company's operations on all stakeholders including society at large.

In fact the old view that a company's primary objective is to only reward shareholders is becoming obsolete – what the world is interested to know today is how responsibly a company behaves with all its stakeholders. “Increasingly even



investors and customers are now using ESG as a screening process for potential investments and for use of the brand/company, respectively”, said Aradhana Lal, Vice President (Brand, Communications and Sustainability Initiatives), Lemon Tree Hotels in a conversation with HAI ENGAGE.

“Over the last few years, Lemon Tree Hotels has strengthened its work in all these areas and observed a positive impact on its stakeholders. During this unprecedented pandemic year, it has become even more evident to us that to sustain our business over time, embedding ESG principles in our business model is a critical requirement. We have developed and implemented a number of good governance practices i.e. board oversight of key areas including risk, nomination and remuneration, CSR, audit, succession planning to name a few”, Lal says.

Lemon Tree has been moving towards renewable energy over the last few years including solar, wind and hydel power. Today renewable energy accounts for approximately 10% of total energy consumed; the hotel chain has set a goal to double it in the near future. By replacing traditional energy with renewable energy and by conserving energy, the group has also been able to reduce its carbon footprint and continues to constantly find ways to reduce GHG emissions.”

Another fundamental environmental practice at Lemon Tree is water conservation, recycling and reuse. Lal says, “the goal is to get to Zero



Discharge as soon as we can”. Lemon Tree has also recently re-defined its waste management policy and a pilot is underway. “We want to achieve plastic neutrality and zero waste in the coming years,” added Lal.

Social inclusion is also one of the mainstays at Lemon Tree. The company has trained its efforts on creating a socially inclusive work environment which seeks to employ people of different backgrounds, abilities and ethnicities and offer them work as a unified team with a common goal. Lal says, “we believe that people who are opportunity deprived due to physical, social or economic disabilities must be provided the same environment as others to realize their full potential. Such individuals should be presented with the opportunity to live their lives with dignity.”

During the pandemic, Lemon Tree undertook a slew of initiatives to ensure the health and safety of guests and employees including partnering with state governments to convert 21 hotels into quarantine centres for Indians returning from outside the country.

“We have partnered with leading hospitals, where we have offered our properties across India to provide early care to mild/asymptomatic Covid patients. We partnered with Diversey to roll out a hygiene and sanitization program called Rest Assured. We are also providing free packed meals to people in some cities and have till date provided over 100 meals”, Lal says.

# LEAD INTERVIEW

“Our responsibility lies towards the local habitants. Even if we must shut down, we won’t hesitate to do so for the safety of people”

**Jose Dominic**

Jose Dominic, the CEO of Kerala-based CGH Earth Group, and ‘Brand Guardian’ of CGH Earth Hotels, is a visionary businessman who pioneered and presented a new luxury hospitality model without the extravagance of conventional luxury hotels. In a freewheeling conversation with HAI ENGAGE, Dominic talks about his experiment with responsible hospitality, the need to preserve local tradition, the impact of the pandemic and how CGH is innovating to keep afloat. Edited excerpts below:



**Q** CGH Earth is known for its unique culture offering local experiences to the tourists. What kind of experiences can one expect at the Coconut Lagoon?

**A.** Being a late entrant in the tourism sector, Kerala has a different set of business model when compared with other states. The model focuses towards providing local experiences to the tourists. Their first priority is society and then the economy. This model was followed earlier in 1988 when we ventured into Lakshadweep. CGH Earth was earlier known as Casino Group of Hotels. We used the term ‘Earth’ as it featured the model and the core values we wanted to pursue. Today, the acronym CGH stands for Clean Green & Healthy. We cater to the foreign, domestic, hi-tech segment who are looking out for budget friendly options. They have been given the term independent travelers by us.

Independent Travelers are a different set of consumers for us, they travel to learn about new culture. This varied consumer behavior helped CGH group to link out and play. Initially, our model would have looked strange but today it fits into the global scenario of being environmentally sensitive and ultra-local.

**Q. Tell us about the experiences that connect travelers.**

**A.** Our CGH model has brought a radical shift from colonial hangover where hotel staff is marble custodians wearing white shirt, black pants. We believe it is not necessary to present luxury with colonial hangover. Luxury can be provided with liberation and here we have liberated from carpet cladded floors, marble tops and cabinets. Our experience inspired us



“Our local art is venerated by the Keralites. Tourism has to be the patron of this industry to encourage art, which gave employment or remuneration to the artists”

to give luxury to our customers within traditional ambience, where we could promote local food and architecture. We serve local food in the breakfast menu. Even our premises are organic, we don’t use pesticides and plastics. The toiletries we provide are also locally produced. Our aim is to reflect the essence of the fishing village and not a luxurious and grand vacation stays.

**Q. Many hotels have been working with local communities. How have you been engaging them for your travelers? Also, with the impact of the pandemic, how are you supporting them?**

**A.** We intend to provide original architecture of the land, which has been adopted over the course of time. We want to give an authentic and an unadulterated Kerala experience to our visitors. We have even created a paddy field and a fishing setup so that our customers can experience the earthy life of Kerala. We have another hotel named Spice Village where we encourage the guests to go for pepper farming. We introduced a program where travelers pay \$5 to the farmers for plucking pepper from their farms. People from different backgrounds and cultures come to us and we want to explore and celebrate the uniqueness of each one’s culture and traditions. Also talking about indoor air conditioning, we have put tags on roofs instead of public centers.

**Q. CGH Earth properties include the traditional Kerala art forms. Please tell us about the blending of art forms and music. While there is Kathakali, what are the new cultures and experiences that you have been offering?**

**A.** Firstly, every art that we display must have a close resemblance with the local Keralites. By doing this, not only do we value the artist’s craft, but the traveler’s mind also becomes curious. Even during performing arts we show the guests

the overall journey of the artform, the history and the evolution. We do not serve drinks or food during performances to encourage our customers attention to watch it first. Our local art is venerated by the Keralites. Tourism has to be the patron of this industry to encourage art, which gave employment or remuneration to the artists. This approach of ours serves two purposes - getting visitors to know more about the traditional culture and give more importance and respect to the local artists.

**Q. The hospitality sector has been badly hit just like any other sector. There are assumptions that footfalls are likely going to be lesser in the future as compared to the pre-pandemic days. What is the impact on the local communities which rely heavily on hospitality businesses for their bread and butter?**

**A.** Our first and foremost responsibility is the local habitant. Next is our workforce and we cannot put them at risk at any cost. Hence only those people who are following the pandemic protocols are allowed to enter. The situation has been difficult for us, but we resonated with the full consequence of it and took extreme steps as far as sanitization is concerned. In Cochin we have closed hotels and have offered them as a quarantine care.

**Q. How many rooms are going to be offered as quarantine or Covid-19 care facility??**

**A.** We have offered 70 rooms out of our hotel as quarantine care. Our product consists of two branches, one for holiday experience and the other for well-being. Two of our hotels are Ayurvedic hospitals. One is naturopathy based where the approach is to build body strength and immunity than giving medicines for cure. This logic is now supremely applicable for the current situation when one can get a vaccine but doesn’t know what and how it actually works for the next mutation of the disease. All we can do is to build the body’s

immunity and that's where Ayurveda and naturopathy will help. It will act as an immunity booster not just for Covid-19 but for everything else like autoimmune diseases or cholesterol and heart related problems.

**Q. Have you seen any recent increase in people coming to Ayurvedic centres?**

**A.** There are a lot of inquiries, but travel has been blocked. We are dependent on foreign travelers for a huge part of our business but even the domestic travel has become difficult. However, our current focus is to promote our properties to local population. For example, Keralite in Kerala and Cochinite in Cochin. I think that is a big market available for hotels. We can create local bubbles of safety for guests, local community, and the staff. We ensure that no compromise is made on the safety front as we care about our staff as much as we care about our guests. Safety is a non-negotiable for us.

Our complete marketing strategy is being revisited. The enterprise can remain viable and earn an income without causing any risk to local community or to the staff and incorporate positive value to the travelers too.

**Q. There has been a major shift in the traveling style and volumes. Travellers are now visiting places that are driveable. People are visiting destinations that have limited capacity, probably due to the safety and hygiene concerns. What are the kinds of SOPs that you have brought into your property?**

**A.** The design of the hotel itself is concise. Not only to deal with the Covid-19 situation but other reasons too, keeping it as accurately regulated as possible. Today, the hotel spaces have become extremely useful for even pandemic time. However, these spaces are only

**“ We introduced a program where travelers pay \$5 to the farmers for plucking pepper from their farms. People from different backgrounds and cultures come to us and we want to explore and celebrate the uniqueness of each one's culture and traditions ”**



**“ Our product consists of two branches, one for holiday experience and the other for well-being. Two of our hotels are Ayurvedic hospitals. One is naturopathy based where the approach is to build body strength and immunity than giving medicines for cure ”**

catering to people who are traveling in private mode of transportation. Smaller capacities would mean less crowding, of spaces.

This kind of approach makes a decent hotel more pandemic safe. Besides, there are no large gatherings allowed; we also don't have conferences and weddings. Our single motive is to respect the time of our guests and we take it very seriously. So, in many hotels we have wellness programs. These are one to two-week programs. We will also encourage people to travel long distances and engage with nature. They will definitely not be sitting together and sweating it out during their expedition; it is a rather radical and disruptive way of doing things. We believe that humanity needs to change their way of living life to deal with the pandemic.

**Q. Going back to safety measures, what are the sanitisation processes one has to go through when they check into your hotel?**

**A.** Today, all the processes of modern hotels are touch less. There are technologies used for checking the temperature. Shoes and stands are sanitized regularly. The baggage of visitors, car tyres are sanitized, and this is the SOP for all the hotels to follow and is not at all compromised. Apart from this, our hotels provide open air cottages and open-air restaurant. For example, in Hotel Spice Village there is 50 Mile Restaurant (Open air) where fruits, vegetables and even fish which is available within 50 miles is served. This practice helps in making the most out of the local produce, reduces transportation cost and is healthy and clean. All the meals are sourced from ultra-local spaces.

**Q. What other steps have you taken so far?**

**A.** We have been hit by the pandemic hard. Tourism is the worst hit sector and has been struggling with the consequences of the pandemic for the longest time.





The overall turnover has dropped to zero and in such a situation, our responsibility lies towards the local habitants and thus, we make sure no traveler carries any disease. Even if we must shut down, we won't hesitate to do so for the safety of people. However, surviving such chaos is easier said than done.

We have a program supporting vaccination for our staff and their family members. Public authorities here, have all the resource and the means to facilitate vaccinations. We think that hotel industry should now explore other sources of income. For example, farm is one of our sources of income. Destinations should not be dependent on tourism alone. You should have farm, craft, trade related sources during such difficult times. This has been a big lesson that the pandemic has taught us.

We know tourism provides employment and yes it does, but in situations like the pandemic we should now think of an alternative too. This can be seen in Bali where 80% of their economy is dependent on tourism and with the pandemic crisis the impact has been that much greater. So, as tourism players, we should keep it in our minds and learn from it.

**Q. How many rooms do you have in the Kochi hotel? How many of those are given as quarantine center?**

**A.** Our Kochi hotel is situated in the port area. There was a requirement of a Covid-19 quarantine center as incoming sailors and travelers needed to be quarantined. We offered our space for quarantine purpose.

Hospitals of the state are falling short of requirements and we don't know how long it might take for the current wave to end.

This is a big move to convert hotels into hospitals because it can only be done with the collaborative effort of both hotels and hospitals. Each one has their own expertise. Hotels can provide housekeeping, the space and even diets whereas medically trained hospital staff can provide the required medical care and attention with the highest degree of safety. This is the area where we can collaborate and offer our services to patients. We have expressed our interest to the hospitals and are taking our services to them.

**Q. Was there any particular training given to the staff to make them ready for the situation?**

**A.** We have educated and trained our staff about the use and handling of PPE Kits. Our trained staff have been the driving force behind our confidence for setting up a quarantine facility. We also, do not allow guests to come out for taking food and keep it outside their door. We use single-use disposable plates which are discarded properly by putting it inside the bag that is later incinerated. The entire process is followed vigorously.



**TOAST OF THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY.**

**I AM THE TOAST OF THE NEW WORLD. THEN AND NOW. THE PRODIGY OF PRODIGIES. CREATOR OF MY OWN DESTINY. PROVENANCE OF GREATNESS. SYMBOL OF A CEASELESS SEARCHING. THE SPIRIT OF NEW FRONTIERS OF IMAGINATION. CATALYST OF THE UNBELIEVABLE AND THE UNIMAGINED. A CELEBRATION OF THE ENTREPRENEURIAL. AN ODE TO YOUTH AND ITS ETERNAL OPTIMISM. THE ELIXIR OF A NEW GENERATION. BORN OF FEARLESS DARING AND BOLD THINKING. REDEFINING AND RE-CRAFTING TRADITION. CAST IN GRANDE CHAMPAGNE COGNAC CASKS. VELVETY, SMOOTH BUT WITH THE CHUTZPAH OF THE UNEXPECTED. AN UNDEFLECTING PASSION. THE SPIRIT OF OUR TIMES. RESTED FOR FIFTEEN YEARS. AWOKEN TO MARK EVERY MOMENT THAT CALLS FOR A CELEBRATION OF THE EXTRAORDINARY.**

# LEAD STORY

## Hospitality Warriors

### How the hospitality industry stood steadfast in their fight against the pandemic

Much has been talked about how the travel and tourism business around the world was and continues to be hammered by the pandemic. The industry, which has always welcomed people with open arms, was severely hit as international tourism came to a standstill; discretionary spends were down and leisure travel was completely wiped out. The industry in India was not left far behind and was equally, if not more, hit badly. Just when the cheer was beginning to return, the second wave hit and sent everyone back to ground zero. But this time, the situation was far graver than one could have anticipated. On one side where the fear of unemployment and an economic crash loomed large, the industry lost several lives to the pandemic. But there was one thing which did not change – the industry continued to reinvent. It did not shy away from its responsibilities.

The past few months and last year have shown us how volatile our business is and yet how resilient the industry can be. This is one industry where you can't work from home but the industry has remodelled itself to great extent, says Shailendra Yadav, Resort Manager, Signum Eco Dera Resort & Spa – Jaipur.

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**This is one industry where you can't work from home but the industry has remodelled itself to great extent, says Shailendra Yadav”**



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**To contain the spread of the virus in the current phase as well, we have again put a hold on some of the services and amenities for the better safety of our guests, says Stephen D'souza”**

Yadav adds, “Our team and associates have put in extra mile on every given day to ensure our Guests feel safe with us and with work ethos like never before. Every passing day brings in a new challenge and we stand to deliver to the best of our abilities.”

A similar sentiment is echoed by many from across the industry. Stephen D'souza, General Manager, Four Points by Sheraton, Navi Mumbai says, “In post Covid times, it has become imperative to maintain guest satisfaction and highest safety standards with strict protocols. At Four Points by Sheraton Navi Mumbai, we have put in place a multi-pronged approach designed to meet the health and safety challenges presented by Covid -19 for our guests and associates.”

During the onset of the Covid -19 outbreak, D'souza says, the hotel management was extremely proactive in taking precautions and additional safety measures even before the lockdown. “It helped us relook and reimagine many services and come up with innovative solutions for enhanced hospitality experience for our guests”, he asserts.

### Marriott brand's cleanliness commitments

- Introducing contact-less stay: By encouraging guests to use Marriott Bonvoy mobile app to check in and check out; Using QR codes for payment and menus for restaurant and in room dining.
- Minimizing Contact: Floor markers to crate social distancing in public areas and in elevators, awareness posters and digital videos in public areas, Glass shield at front desk, usage of PPE (as required) by all front line staff.
- Identification of common-touch points: The entire focus is on reducing the common touch points and sanitizing them at regular intervals. High traffic areas are sanitized every 2 hours.
- New Cleaning Technologies / Hygiene Partners: Implemented enhanced technologies including Electrostatic Sprayer and the highest classification of disinfectants recommend by our hygiene partners Johnson Diversey and Ecolab.

Following the first wave, the hotel had gradually reopened its facilities while simultaneously engaging with guests to reassure them and make them feel safe with stringent safety protocols in place. “To contain the spread of the virus in the current phase as

well, we have again put a hold on some of the services and amenities for the better safety of our guests. However, once we are over this phase, we shall gradually reopen the hotel's facilities, at least for vaccinated travelers", D'Souza adds.

Lemon Tree Hotels has been working closely with Diversey on a programme "Rest Assured" since May 2020. The programme is focused on sanitization of the hotel to ensure the safety and wellbeing of guests/employees. Similarly, its programme "Lemon Tree Cares" provides support by financing all vaccination expenses for employees and their families (dependants); medical expenses (including oxygen, if required) for home quarantine cases; additional expenses beyond the insured amount for hospitalization cases; three weeks paid leave; free hotel stay, medicines for employees needing to isolate; compensation in case an employee passes away. Rattan Keswani, Deputy Managing Director, Lemon Tree Hotels says, "this is a graded plan based on tenure in the company, and the spouse/child will be trained and employed."

**“ We have secured oxygen concentrators and deployed them at Moolchand Hospital in Delhi to be used by our colleagues, their family members or society at large, says K B Kachru ”**

While a lot of internalization, employee care, setting up of safety protocols is being carried out, the industry has not left any stone unturned to extend support to the larger populace either. From providing free meals to converting hotels into quarantine facilities and giving rooms for healthcare workers and medical staff, the industry has remained at the forefront of fighting the pandemic.

K B Kachru, Chairman Emeritus and Principal Advisor, Radisson Hotel Group, South Asia said, "Hospitality industry is uniquely positioned to support communities and frontline warriors as they deal with the pandemic. Keeping the safety and health of our employees and guests at the core of our operational plans, we continue to work with SGS, the world's leading inspection, verification, testing and certification company, to further strengthen our existing rigorous sanitation, cleanliness and disinfection program across all our hotels."

Apart from a slew of initiatives, Radisson has also taken steps to assist colleagues across its hotels and the corporate office. "We have secured oxygen concentrators and deployed them at Moolchand Hospital in Delhi to be used by our colleagues, their family members or society at large. The Group launched a worldwide campaign 'Radisson Cares' to raise funds in partnership with Red Cross in Americas, and United Way in Rest-of-the-World (RoW) for Covid -19 relief", Kachru said.

Across the Radisson corporate office, a dedicated taskforce consisting of 30+ volunteers have 'adopted' affected colleagues and continue to support them through their recovery by helping with medicines, meals, and information in timely manner. In solidarity with the families of our colleagues who lost their battle against Covid -19, Radisson is launching a structured financial and medical coverage plan for dependent children (<18 years) of bereaved colleagues.

Yadav added, "At Signum Hotel & Resorts, the safety and well-being of our guests and associates is paramount for us and it is important that our guests and associates feel equally safe during their stay or even at work. We stand to our commitment to vaccinate all our associates across all hotels and in line with government directions for our guest to be assured of a safe environment. Keeping our associates motivated and engaged has been our focus along with developing talent and providing exposure."

As the second wave of the pandemic impacts lives and livelihoods across the country, IHCL has once again extended support to India in its battle against the pandemic. The company has implemented a number of initiatives keeping the health and safety of its employees, guests, and community at the heart. "We have established a structured and holistic four-pillar framework with the aim to Prevent Infection, Protect Lives, Provide Support and Persevere in ensuring sustained safety of all our stakeholders", said CEO & Managing Director, Indian Hotels Company Ltd. (IHCL), Puneet Chhatwal.

**“ What the pandemic has glaringly brought to the fore is that one's health cannot be taken for granted, says Puneet Chhatwal ”**



**PepsiCo India in partnership with United Way launches 'Tidy Trails', a special initiative on plastic waste management in Mathura-Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh.**



Create effective and sustainable management of post-consumer plastic waste



A dedicated mobile van to be deployed across cities of Mathura-Vrindavan to collect dry plastic waste from over 200 establishments.



Collected plastic waste will be disposed of responsibly and repurposed into creating useful products like tables and chairs



Mass awareness drives to be arranged through public events, online workshops, competitions to be held across schools and communities



In support of frontline Covid warriors, IHCL has once again extended its #MealsToSmiles initiative through the Taj Public Service Welfare Trust in collaboration with TajSATS, and other donors. The company has delivered approximately 358,000 nutritious meals to healthcare workers at eight cities across eight states and 32 hospitals and Covid care centers to date. In addition to hosting over 10,000 room nights for doctors at its hotels across the country, IHCL has also partnered with hospitals to provide quarantine facilities for asymptomatic to mildly symptomatic patients. Currently 17 hotels across 12 locations are offering approximately 1,500 rooms, and the scope is expanding depending on the dynamic needs of the situation. These quarantine facilities extend to IHCL employees and their families too. The company

is also providing employees with critical medical, home care and logistical assistance as required.

IHCL will be focusing on providing sustained health support such as introducing more nutritious diets for employees at staff cafeterias to organizing annual vaccination drives to increasing awareness about regular medical- check-ups and other endeavors for the long-term commitment of the safety and health of employees.

Lemon Tree has partnered with state governments and converted hotels into quarantine centres. SOPs have been redefined based on guidelines from WHO, Ministry of Home Affairs and State Governments around hygiene/sanitization and nutrition. The hotel chain has partnered with hospitals under "Support By Lemon Tree" to provide early care to mild/asymptomatic Covid patients.

"What the pandemic has glaringly brought to the fore is that one's health cannot be taken for granted", Chhatwal concluded.

Although there is much left to do and the pandemic is far from over, HAI ENGAGE salutes industry captains and the entire fraternity for their tireless efforts and the selfless acts of kindness towards the larger benefit of fellow citizens.

## Sarovar Hotels and Resorts

Sarovar Hotels and Resorts in partnership with #iamgurgaon and Emoha Elder Care has dedicated to Gurugram a 60 bed Covid Care Center in the Golden Tulip Hotel Sector 29. In a time when the pandemic is causing so much stress for our elders, the center will be a 'home' for elders to recover in peace with dedicated oxygen concentrators, on-site clinical and nursing attention, vitals monitoring, online activities for emotional wellbeing and most importantly a caring homely atmosphere. This facility is aimed for elders who are Covid positive and are unable to take care of themselves in their homes. The initiative is partnered with Fortis Memorial Research Institute, Gurugram for Covid Consultations.

## ITC Hotels

ITC Hotels has achieved the distinctive milestone of being the First Hotel chain in the world to receive the PLATINUM level certification under DNV's My Care Infection risk management programme. Certification programme "My Care" by DNV, is developed at a global stage by a team of expert infection risk and hospital management professionals. The maturity model of the programme (Level 1 to 5) assesses and covers all facets of hotel operations on six different dimensions Governance, Strategy, communication, actions, data analysis and continuous improvement.

Embodying the ethos of Responsible Luxury, ITC Hotels, the world's largest chain of hotels with the maximum number of LEED Platinum Certified Properties has been accorded the global certification for it's one of a kind 'WeAssure' programme.

# IN THE NEWS

## Indian Hotels readies expansion plan

Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) is readying a post Covid plan which includes acquisition opportunities through its partnership with GIC, growing the Ginger brand, crossing the first hundred mark with its homestay brand Ama and doubling revenues on online platform Qmin. Speaking at an analyst call following the fourth quarter results, Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director & CEO of IHCL, said M&A activity will pick up speed if the pandemic's pace slows down in the next four to eight weeks.

## J&K govt announces '3 crore relief package for tourism employees

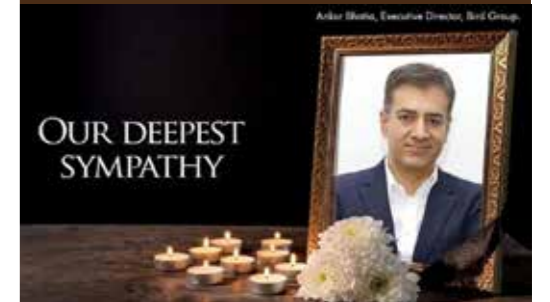
Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha announced a Rs. 3 crore relief package for people employed in the tourism industry, which has been severely impacted by the second wave of the Covid -19 pandemic. The tourism industry in Kashmir has suffered consecutive losses for the past three years, with the first lockdown, announced in 2019 during the repeal of Article 370, followed by the summers of the previous two years due to the pandemic.



## IATO urges members, tourism professionals to get vaccinated

Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), which represents more than 1,600 operators for inbound tourists, on Monday appealed to its members and tourism professionals to get themselves, staff and their families to register for covid-19 for vaccination on a priority basis. India has currently opened vaccination for all citizens above 18 years of age. However, the country is dealing with vaccine shortage. Rajiv Mehra, president, IATO said that it is crucial for the tourism and hospitality industry professionals to get vaccinated at the earliest possible and once the vaccinations is done, same should be conveyed to foreign tour operators to create confidence amongst them.

" We at Hotel Association of India are extremely saddened by the unfortunate and untimely passing away of Ankur Bhatia. An Industry stalwart, Ankur made a huge contribution to tourism and hospitality. A young, promising, dynamic leader, Ankur was a good human being, a friend and mentor to many in the Industry. We pray that God grant much courage to his family in this extremely difficult hour. Ankur will be deeply missed and never forgotten. Rest in eternal peace dear Ankur "



" Today we lost a stalwart in the industry. A doyen in the travel and tourism landscape, Anil made innumerable contributions to the growth of the sector. He also dedicated his efforts in the advancement of culinary talent and giving Chefs, their due recognition. I have many wonderful memories of working with him during my days with ITDC. Our deepest condolences to his family, friends and his colleagues "

Puneet Chhatwal,  
Managing Director and  
Chief Executive Officer, IHCL

## Dubai mandates hotels to comply with sustainability requirements by July 1

Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (Dubai Tourism) mandates that all hotels comply with the sustainability Requirements for Hotel Establishments by the deadline of July 1, 2021, as set by Dubai Sustainable Tourism (DST), an initiative to further enhance Dubai's position as one of the world's leading sustainable tourism destinations. Under the directive, hotels must also resume monthly submission of carbon emission drivers. The system has the long-term objective of advancing sustainability performance across the sector.

# LEADER **S**PEAK

## People will push back on leisure or non-essential travel

Zubin Saxena, Managing Director and Vice President Operations – South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group talks about measures taken by the hotel chain to contain the spread of the pandemic amidst hopes of recovery. In a conversation with HAI ENGAGE, Saxena outlines how Radisson has been at the forefront of fighting Covid-19 through innovative measures it has implemented to safeguard the safety of its employees while continuing to offer customer delight. “We have been at the forefront of care initiatives such as #RadissonCares where we leveraged our in-house expertise across a range of service areas to help make a positive difference in the lives of our guests and community”, Saxena says. Edited excerpts below:



**Q** How has the pandemic impacted your operations across the country? Can you elaborate the estimated business loss incurred; what has been the impact on employment?

**A.** The business impact of the pandemic has been far-reaching. Rates have been significantly impacted since the onset and will take 2-3 years to go back to pre-pandemic levels. We are yet to see the full impact of the second wave and how recovery will look. Early numbers indicate that business across the portfolio in tier I, II and III markets was trending low throughout April; the month of May seems to be worse because of partial or complete closures across the country and a worsening situation overall.

**Q.** How do you see recovery for RHG and the industry over the next 8-12 months?

**A.** We are yet to see the full impact of the second wave and how recovery will look. However, this time around, we expect Tier I and II cities to lead. Maharashtra and Delhi are expected to emerge sooner than many other markets. Tier III and IV will lag given the higher number of cases that are ravaging rural India at the moment.

The growth numbers from first quarter of this year have been promising and indicative of the fact that once the environment allows for it, consumer confidence in travel will return especially with government's efforts for nationwide vaccination.

While we stay nimble and prepare for future, our biggest priority remains safety of our guests and colleagues. We have renewed our partnership with SGS - the world's leading inspection, verification, testing and certification company recognized as the global benchmark for quality and integrity; and extended the global roll out of Radisson Hotels Safety Protocol. These efforts will help place our hotels as 'safe bubbles' for travelers.

**Q.** What are some of the measures taken by you to ensure safety of your staff?

**A.** Putting safety and flexibility at the core, we renewed our partnership with SGS which ensured continued global roll out of Radisson Hotels Safety Protocol. This includes enhanced supervision and regulation of health and safety procedures such as increased cleaning and disinfection especially in high touch point areas, sanitizing stations, team member personal protective equipment (PPE), physical distancing measures and improved air circulation, in all hotels validated by SGS.

Timely vaccination of our employees and partners remains a priority. We are working with authorities and partners to vaccinate our employees across the group – an enormous exercise considering our scale.

In these times of uncertainty, it is also imperative to give flexibility to employees to decide when, where and how to work. We have launched Radisson FLEX globally, our new hybrid work model. This model combines the best of remote working with benefits of a modern and dynamic workspace thus allowing team members to continue going to offices for engagement and collaboration and also having the opportunity to work remotely to fit their needs and preferences.

**“ We are yet to see the full impact of the second wave and how recovery will look ”**

**Q.** What measures have you introduced to offer a contactless experience to customers?

**A.** The shift towards a 360-degree contactless guest experience has become a permanent part of hospitality business. We have leveraged technology to streamline our operations and at the same time ensured our staff's productivity is not hampered. Apart from automating our check-in and check-out process, we had already widely deployed touch-free controls such as smartphone apps, sensor-based lighting, sensor taps and gesture-controlled mechanisms across our hotels. Especially in F&B, we have introduced digital menus, contactless food delivery and safe takeaway services to make our guests feel safe and confident towards the brand.

**Q.** How are you contributing to Covid-relief efforts? What %age of your properties has been committed as quarantine facilities?

**A.** Throughout the past year, Radisson Hotel Group's team members have supported their communities by volunteering over 20,500 hours providing accommodation to health workers, meals to frontline workers and to those in need. The Group's hotels and corporate offices raised significant support and have helped charitable organizations who provide meals, shelter and a brighter future for at-risk children and youth.

As the second wave engulfed us in an unprecedented way, many of our employees and their families have been affected directly or indirectly. We are leaving no stone unturned to ensure their recovery and physical, mental and emotional well-being.

We have secured oxygen concentrators to help with the needs of colleagues, their families and society at large. These have been deployed at Moolchand Hospital (Delhi) and donated to various causes across the country. The Group launched a worldwide campaign 'Radisson Cares' to raise funds in partnership with Red Cross in Americas, and United Way in Rest-of-the-World (RoW) for Covid -19 relief.

Across our corporate office, we set up a dedicated taskforce of 30+ volunteers that 'adopted' over 300 affected colleagues and continue to support them end-to-end through their recovery. These volunteers are establishing daily connect, identifying requirements ranging from meals, medical facilities, essential utilities, providing required assistance in a timely manner, and above all, providing emotional support in this very difficult hour. We are also working tirelessly towards creating a repository of verified resources in key

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**We have secured oxygen concentrators to help with the needs of colleagues, their families and society at large**”

cities to shorten waiting times and prevent loss of life due to information gap.

While we can never fill the void created by loss of life, at Radisson Hotel Group, we have taken some small steps to support the families of our colleagues who lost their battle against Covid -19. We are launching a well-defined and structured financial and medical coverage plan for dependent children (<18 years) of bereaved colleagues. The initiative is aimed towards reducing social, health, and educational uncertainties for minors and helping them achieve their ambitions.

**Q. The third wave, it is said, will impact children the most and likely to be worse than the ones we have seen yet. What according to you will be the impact on domestic tourism, especially families?**

**A.** The loss of lives and economic setback caused by the second wave of the pandemic have triggered a definite emotional block and people will push back on leisure or non-essential travel plans for a while, especially with families. While another wave would definitely delay the return to normalcy for the hospitality industry, we do believe that we are better prepared to handle it especially with vaccination drive gearing up and necessary monetary policy benefits being announced by RBI.

**Q.** Radisson’s recent initiative of vaccination packages received mixed reactions both from the consumers and the state alike. On the one hand where the government went ahead to stop such initiatives, consumers in general have been raising their voice on social media against the packages. What was the thought process behind launching such an initiative? Did you anticipate such a backlash and a clampdown by the government?

**A.** Radisson Hotel Group is not running and does not endorse any such offers. This was a localised unit level activity initiated by the hotel ownership without the brand’s consent. The unit is a franchised operation, managed by a third-party operator. At Radisson Hotel Group, we are committed to compliance with local government regulations at all times.

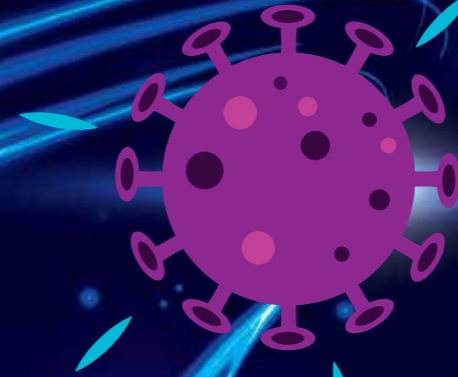
We have been at the forefront of care initiatives such as #RadissonCares where we leveraged our in-house expertise across a range of service areas to help make a positive difference in the lives of our guests and community. Radisson has always taken a scrupulous and highly responsible stand on principles and ethics of conducting business even in the absence of government notifications and regardless of ambiguity in law. We will continue to do so.

“  
**Radisson Hotel Group’s team members have supported their communities by volunteering over 20,500 hours providing accommodation to health workers, meals to frontline workers and to those in need**”



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## Northeast: In Search of an Unexplored Paradise

by Pramati Anand

One of the biggest opportunities that travel gives us is the chance to break down barriers; provided we give it the time to work its magic.


The Covid 19 pandemic turned my world upside down and rotated it from west to east - From getting trapped during the lockdown in Mumbai to traveling

back to Delhi (my hometown) and then finding a work opportunity as a filmmaker in Meghalaya)—it's been a tumultuous year.

Traveling to remote corners of the northeast, what I've realized over the last year is the fact that the narratives which are woven around the northeast give us anything but, the richness of the

people, cultures, and geography of this region.

As I trace my steps back to the myriad of experiences I've had over the last year, I hope I give you enough inspiration to pack your bags to explore and weave your own narratives of the unexplored gem that is the 'Northeast'.



### WAKING UP TO THE SUN'S FIRST RAYS IN DONG VILLAGE, ARUNACHAL PRADESH

My travel inquiries often originate from poetic enquires. An attempt to bask in the first rays of sunlight as they enter our country seemed to be something that would satiate both the physical and spiritual aspects of what I look for in a journey. And so, in mid-October, right when I completed another year of my being, I sought to begin my 27th year with a fresh perspective.

Kibithu marks the endpoint of the easternmost road in India. Reaching Dong isn't exactly easy — the nearest town is Tezu, the headquarters of Lohit district. From Tezu you take up a Sumo to Walong which is about 10kms. The trek to Millennium Point (the sunrise point in Dong) begins after a 20-minute drive from Walong. It was still dark as I made my way through the ups and downs of the trail with a local guide. As I sat there, soft wind breezing past and hot coffee warming my insides, awaiting the sun to shine on me, I felt my mind clear up. The dawn came through, the sun's rays hit across the hills illuminating my face and filling up my starved soul.



### How to reach:

Itanagar, capital of Arunachal Pradesh is accessible from Guwahati, Tezpur, Banderdewa by ASTC bus services. Lilabari airport in North Lakhimpur is the nearest airport to the Itanagar at a distance of about 57 kilometres. The best way to reach Arunachal Pradesh by rail is to come into Guwahati Railway station and continue onwards by train to Naharlagun which is about 15 kilometres to Itanagar.

A trip to Arunachal is incomplete without a visit to the Tawang Monastery. Located atop a hill (10,000 feet above sea level), this magnificent monastery is the largest monastery in India and second largest in the world after the Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet, offering a breathtaking view of the Tawang River and the entire valley.

Meghalaya, often known as the abode of clouds is also the abode of the 'Jingkieng Jri' or the Living Root Bridges. The aerial roots from the ficus elastica trees are weaved together, little by little till they inoculate and become one.

A web of these roots is weaved over time to make a bridge in deep gorges to go across rivers. There are hundreds of living roots bridges in remote areas of Meghalaya, built to connect villages to markets for centuries. A pearl of the age-old wisdom that has been passed through oral traditions of the Khasi, Jaintia tribes— the bridges are a living testament to the philosophy of co-existence with nature.



## How to reach:

Regular bus and cab services are operational from Guwahati—the gateway to the Northeast, which is about 100kms or around 3 hours away.



## Living in India's first green village in Khonoma, Nagaland

Khonoma, situated near the Indo-Myanmar border, in the Indian state of Nagaland, is a small village at an altitude of 1200 m, 21 km west of Kohima, the capital town of Nagaland. Khonoma's journey to becoming the first green village of India has been full of challenges for the Angami community which was culturally embedded to hunt.

I spent a few days staying in this Homestay Inn called Dovipie, run by the ever-smiling Neikedolie Hiekha, who also happens to be a great conversationalist.

A trek to Dzukou Valley is something that you must not miss. The crisp winter wind froze my face as I stood on the back of a carrier truck that dropped us to the beginning of the trail. It was lush green and covered with signages of no littering and mindful traveling. As we reached the top, the entire valley opened up before us, covered in myriad hues of green. I imagined myself tumbling down as Heidi used to in the animated series by the same name!

## How to reach:



Dimapur airport or railway station, about 70kms away from Kohima—the capital of Nagaland is the most accessible way to enter Nagaland.



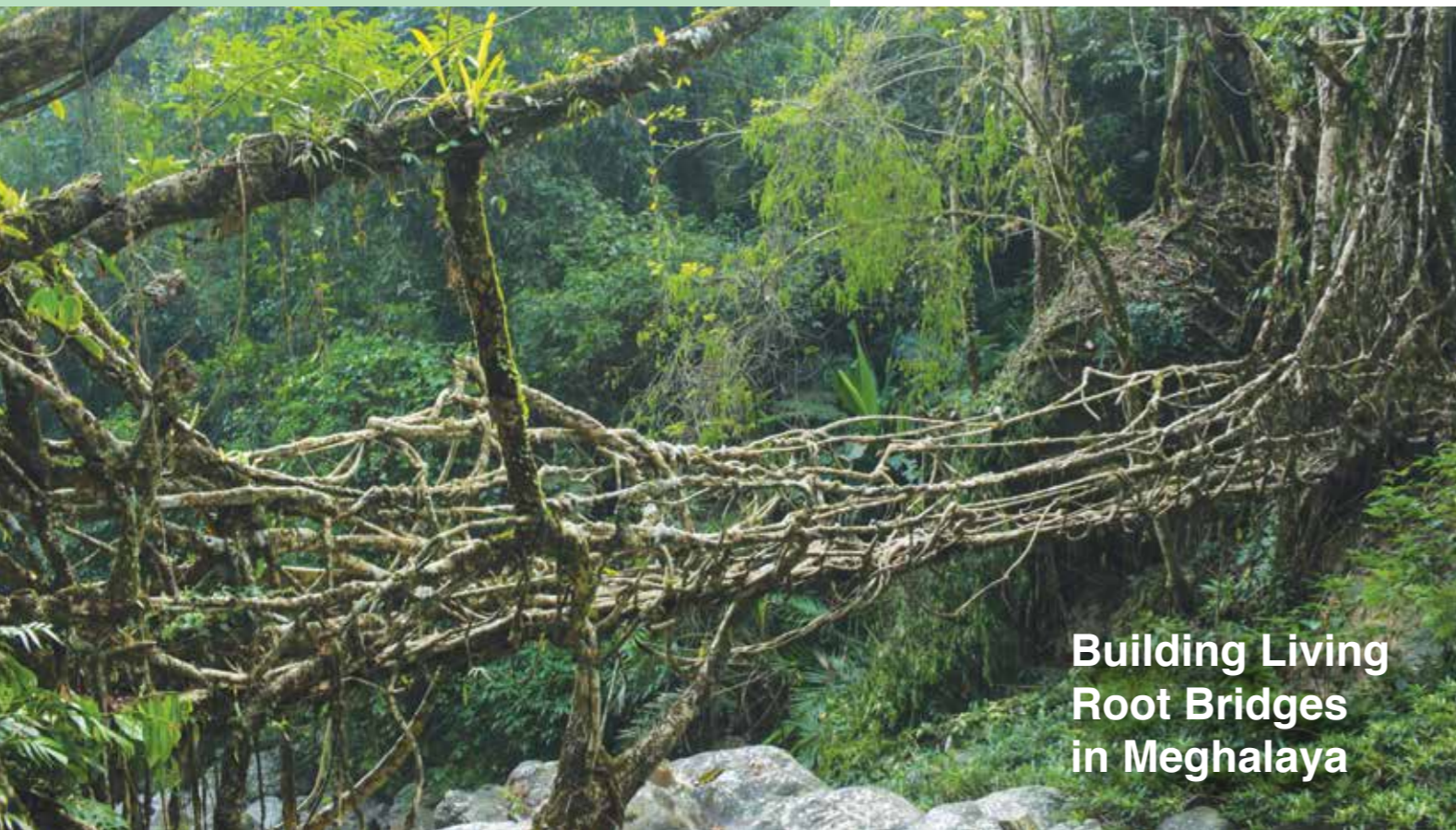
## Burning Meji during Magh Bihu in Assam

The harvest festival in Assam is a vision to experience. Magh Bihu is celebrated on the first day of the Magh month of the Assamese calendar. This normally occurs around mid-January. This time it was on the 15th of January. I was in Jorhat, the tea capital of Assam which is about 300kms from Guwahati. On the actual day of Magh Bihu, everyone takes an early bath and assembles near the Meji (a temporary structure made by piling firewood one over the other) which is lit by a village elder.

As I sat there watching this huge structure go up in flames, I felt like I was sucked into one of Andrei Tarkovsky's films. It was beautiful yet terrifying. Magh Bihu marks the end of harvest for the community and the onset of summer. For me, it marked the beginning of another year on the road.

How to reach : Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi Airport, Guwahati, Assam is the most accessible airport from rest of the country.

The most prominent festival of Assam is the spring festival—Bohag Bihu when the trees are ablaze with colours; when the rhythm of the Bihu dance and sound of the Dhol vibrates in the air. A visit to Kaziranga National Park is something that one must experience during a visit to Assam—An unforgettable journey by a steamer in the majestic Brahmaputra with the sightings of the famous one horned Rhino.



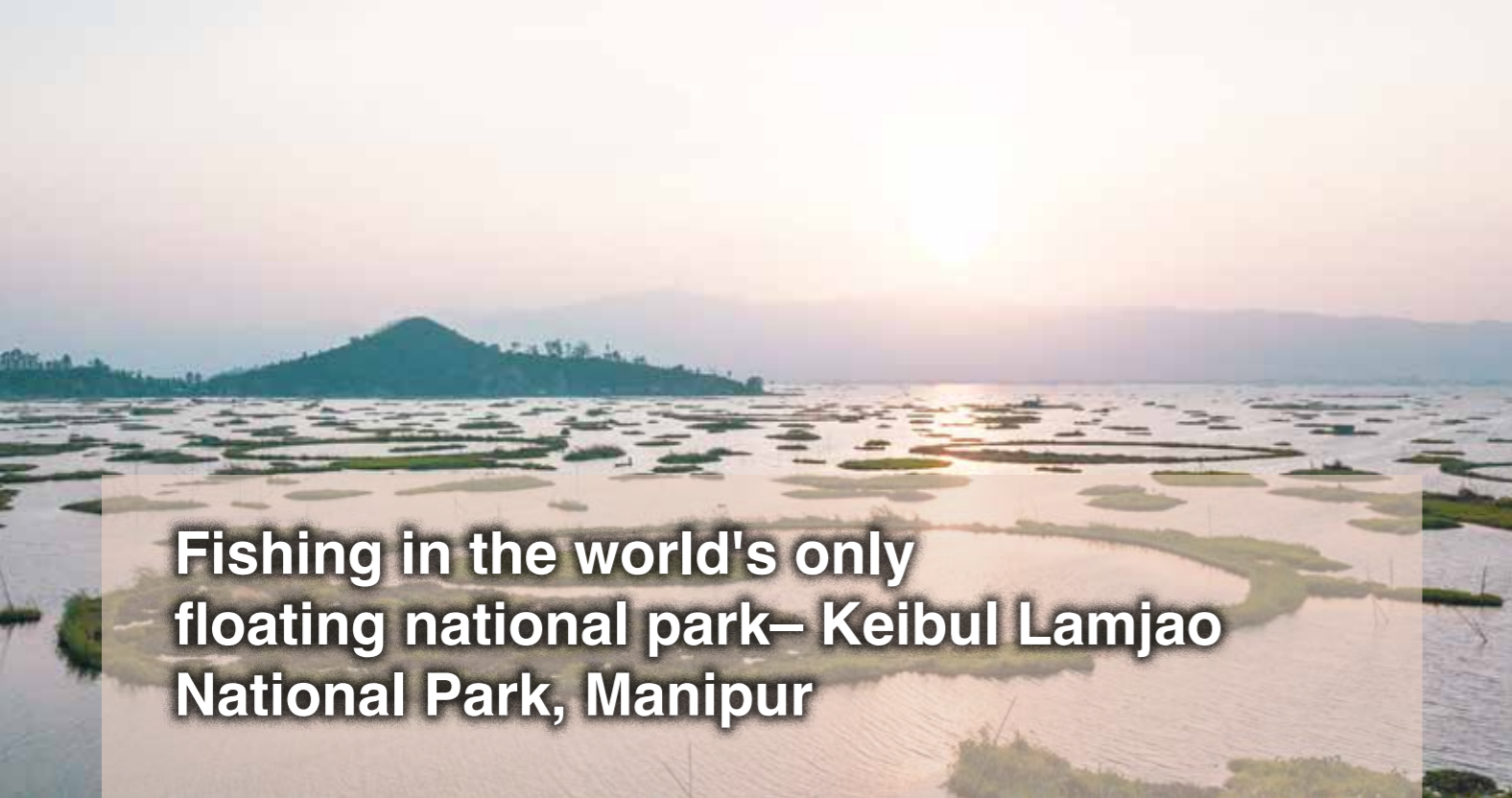
## Building Living Root Bridges in Meghalaya

The fascinating thing about these bridges is the fact that, unlike any other engineering marvel, they become stronger as they grow older. The Double Decker Living root bridge called Umshiang in the Nongriat village is one of the most accessible ones and perhaps the only one that travelers go in search of but once you make connections with the locals you realize that there are villages and trails just waiting to be explored.

Meghalaya is the also home to the wettest place in the world — Mawsynram and the cleanest village in Asia — Mawlynnong. A number of homestays are available here for people who would like to slow down and engage with the community which are also one of the world's largest surviving matrilineal cultures.

The Northeast is known for its craft and culture. Try drinking tea in a cup made from the traditional Black Pottery of Meghalaya, buy a saree made from the Muga silk of Assam, feast your eyes to the exquisite cane and bamboo work of Tripura or go through the shawls made by different tribes of Nagaland, where each pattern bears testimony to the unique history of the tribes. If music runs in your veins then the Duitara will call out to you. The 4 stringed traditional instrument of Meghalaya, embodies the sound of the northeast.





## Fishing in the world's only floating national park— Keibul Lamjao National Park, Manipur

Keibul Lamjao National Park is situated on the floating Loktak Lake of Manipur, one of the largest freshwater lakes in India. It has a vast wetland populated with dense dead and decaying floating vegetation called 'phumdi'. The phumdi vary in sizes and form little islands throughout the freshwater lake. It is also home to the unique Brow-antlered deer—Sangai, an endangered species.

Camping under the stars on a floating homestay at Loktak Lake and getting up early to go out on a fishing trip with the locals during the wee hours of the dawn is next on my bucket list.

### How to reach:

**Imphal Airport is a domestic airport located 7 km. south of Imphal, the capital of Manipur.**

### About the author:

Pramati Anand is a traveler, filmmaker, photographer, and storyteller. What draws her most is the journeys people take, whether mentally, physically, or spiritually. It is these journeys that she enjoys depicting in her films and in the stories, she writes.

After having completed her post-graduation in filmmaking from the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, she is currently working as a freelance writer and filmmaker.

There are still so many more places within the northeast that I'm aching to travel next—Gurudongmar Lake which is one of the highest lakes in the world and India, located at an altitude of 17800 ft (5430 m), in the state of Sikkim. The Dampa Tiger Reserve in Mizoram, which has the highest density of clouded leopards and marbled cats in South-East Asia in the wild. A trip to Unakoti hills, known as the pilgrimage of Lord Shiva and is one of the most interesting and revered places of Tripura.

One of the most untouched regions in India, the northeast for the same reason is an explorer's dream. Each state bears a unique identity, a unique history, beliefs, and a rooted dependence on nature and each other as a community.

If my words haven't worked wonders yet perhaps it's best to experience it to believe it.

# THE LAST **W**ORD



**M P Bezbaruah**  
Secretary General  
Hotel Association of India

## Tourism during and after Covid-19 A World View

Travel, John Naisbitt had joyously stated in his book "Global Paradox" in 1994, has made the world a global village. Three decades on, as travel and tourism come to a standstill that village is quiet. International tourism, UNWTO stated, has gone back thirty years. At stake is \$1.3 trillion of tourism earnings, global GDP loss of \$2 trillion and 100-120 million direct jobs.

Spurred by vast advances in aviation technology, for 40 years of the last century tourism had grown at a rate higher than the growth of the world economy, to become one of the biggest industries. And then at the very beginning of the new millennium the very symbol of tourism—aircraft --was used as the vehicle of doom in 9/11 and tourism growth was dented for the first time. Disasters followed in quick succession—SARS, Tsunami, Financial crisis. But each time tourism bounced back, so much so that international tourist arrival reached 1.4 billion in 2018, two years ahead of forecast.

Two important lessons were learnt from the experience of the decade of turbulence—lessons that are valid now also. First, travel is in the DNA of human beings and tourism will again bounce back. Second, when international tourism was halted, domestic and regional tourism sustained tourism.

As the enormity of the unprecedented catastrophe slowly sunk in, even in the early stages, many countries responded with relief measures for the tourism and hospitality sector. These measures can be broadly put into four categories.

**First**, postponement of dues, such as taxes, rents or insurance payments. Egypt, Bulgaria, Italy, Mauritius were among the first to announce such measures. In Malaysia Tourism tax and service tax are exempted for hotels and entertainment tax for theme parks until 31 Dec 2021. There is a concession of 10-15% in electricity dues payable.

**Second,** Direct aid to companies primarily as pay-roll support. Serbia, Slovenia and Slovakia and Jamaica announced direct payments to companies (or a percentage of salaries) forced to close due to the pandemic. Montenegro provided grants for salaries. Namibia announced a wage subsidy to aid businesses in retaining jobs. Japan provides 75 to 100 percent of daily salary with limit of JPY 15,000 per day as cap. Malaysia provides RM 600 per employee as wage subsidy.

**Third,** Liquidity issues. Egypt offered tourism facilities low-interest funds and relaxed repayment facilities. Lebanon allowed economic institutions to lend money without interest for five years to help them pay salaries.

**Fourth,** assistance to workers. Flexibility in terms of social security contributions was implemented by, among others, Greece, Argentina, Kuwait, Morocco, Mongolia, Samoa. In Hungary, state took over 70 per cent of lost wages. Gabon, Botswana and South Korea gave employees, placed on technical unemployment an allowance between 50 to 70 per cent of their gross salary. Cambodia provided retraining and upskilling programmes and 20 per cent of the minimum wages for laid-off workers. Japan provides 80% of daily salary with a limit of JPY 11,000 per day as cap.

In India, stunned by the devastating impact of the lockdown measures on the economy, government came out with macro-economic measures to revive the economy. The benefit of some of these measures were expected to percolate down to the hospitality sector as well. But the hospitality sector faces some specific problems and they need specific solutions. HAI has been persistently bringing to the notice of the government the nature of relief needed and they are similar to the broad four categories of global problems mentioned above. We have urged for attention to the liquidity problems—review of the interest rates, moratorium and restructuring of loans. Credit is the basic requirement of sound business and the ROR depends on the cost of credit. When the revenue return is almost zero, due to circumstances beyond the control of the industry, it becomes incumbent on the government to review the policy. The recently announced ECLGS seeks to address some of the problems of the industry but as HAI has pointed out to the FM, many of the well-intended measures are far removed from the ground realities and in effect full benefits do not flow to the intended beneficiaries. The industry is expectantly waiting for positive decision on its dues under the SEIS. HAI's constant advocacy and contact has resulted in some positive response from some state governments like Maharashtra, Punjab and Karnataka on benefits of "industry" status, deferment/waiver of taxes and dues for the period of lockdown.

The Pandemic is shrouded in uncertainty. It has continued longer than originally thought, the second wave has come with greater ferocity and the fear of a third wave is in the air. The industry, particularly the SMEs are struggling to stay alive. Reportedly about 20% have gone under.

**“ The most optimistic assessment of UNWTO experts is that international tourism will come back to normal in 2023 ”**

Rightly, government have focussed on domestic tourism to push recovery. But the primary facilitators of tourism, the travel agents, the tour operators, the hospitality industry and all other tourism service providers are shattered. Unfortunately, the total impact is not yet known. It is essential that to enable government to frame its policy on firm data, an assessment, even if tentative of the damage should be undertaken.

Some relief measures here and there, and some in some states, have trickled in. It is in the interest of the country, considering the crucial role played by tourism in inclusive growth, considering its multiplier effect in creating jobs, income and demand leading to economic growth, that a plan for relief and revival of tourism is drawn up without delay. It should be comprehensive; it should be national, and it should be built on pragmatic PPP that provides for a systemic, continuous participatory consultation with the private sector.

When tourism comes back, it would have changed considerably. As the recent G20 discussions and the Punta Cana Declaration of the tourism nations have pointed out, "trust" would be the new currency in travel and sustainability will no longer be an option, it will be a necessity.



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