



ENGAGE

November-December 2022 | Volume 2 | Issue 6



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From the President's Desk

We step into 2023 on a very positive note for our sector. The year gone by has witnessed a sharp revival of tourism. We are seeing an evolution in customer behaviour which is geared towards more travel and celebrating life today. Reported results thus far for the hospitality industry are reflecting these favourable trends with a 20% + increase in revenue over the pre pandemic levels.

The New Year brings with it a slew of opportunities, the most significant being India's G20 Presidency. 300+ meetings are expected to take place during the Summit, most of which will be hosted within the corridors of the finest hotels across the country. Hospitality companies are leaving no stone unturned to showcase India's cultural essence, and the inherent warmth of *Atithi Devo Bhava* in our service philosophy. Using the Summit to highlight India's unique and differentiated travel offerings, India can deservedly claim its position on the world tourism stage.

India today is among the top five world economies and the only large economy reporting a GDP growth of 6.5% +. This coupled with quality sports infrastructure and convention centres makes it a favourable Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) destination. The year begins with the World Cup Hockey being hosted in the state of Orissa. India is taking its place in the international entertainment arena with the famous Lollapalooza Music Festival being held at Mumbai. Later in the year the World Cup Cricket Tournament travels to India.

We have a huge opportunity to build the MICE vertical by increasing the pace of infrastructure development especially addressing the key areas of road and air travel. An integral part of unlocking this potential will also be increasing the number of "big box hotels" which can be facilitated by according infrastructure status to the industry. This would enable access to lower cost of funds for such a capital-intensive investment.

Our industry has always demonstrated resilience and gone from strength to strength. I remain optimistic that the hospitality industry will be at the forefront of realising our country's true potential. On this note, I wish all of you a very happy and healthy new year. **HAI**



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

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*On Cover design is the official logo of G20

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Magnificent Maharashtra

Boasting a multitude of natural landscapes, heritage spots, MICE venues, spiritual escapes and adventure tourism options, across all budgets, the western Indian state is a tourist's paradise.



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Awaiting a New Voice

Though the industry in general has revived largely, there are finer points of this revival which merit close attention. There is a need to worry more about revenue rather than numbers.



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MICE opportunity

India took the G20 presidency officially from December 1, 2022, which kickstarted with meetings at destinations that showcased their MICE facilities as well as tourism potential. Such meetings have been planned throughout the year to welcome delegates from across the world and it's India's turn to play a big role in the global MICE arena. India will host over 200 meetings, across 56 cities, of which many are proposed to be held in the northeast.

36 destinations in phase 1 of Swadesh Darshan Scheme 2.0

The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, has included 36 destinations spread across 19 States and Union Territories in Phase 1 of the revamped Swadesh Darshan 2.0 scheme. These 36 destinations are based on the State Perspective Plans submitted by the respective States to the central ministry.



Apeejay Group launches second biggest tearoom in the 'City of Joy'

Flurys, the iconic Swiss confectionery from Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels Limited (ASPHL) launches a new tearoom in Kolkata. The 95-year-old patisserie now expands to Purna Das Road, the café hub of Kolkata, in one of the heritage buildings of the 1930s. It is the second biggest tearoom opened after the flagship tearoom at Park Street.

Situated in the heart of South Kolkata, it retains an old-world charm and the design grammar of Flurys, while donning a fresh look.

Flurys is legendary for its chocolate cones, rum balls, chicken patty, baba cake and baked beans. The patisserie brand boasts 67 modern retail outlets with multiple formats such as a kiosk format, café format and restaurant format across India, in Kolkata, Delhi, Navi Mumbai and Mumbai.



World's longest river cruise Ganga Vilas

MV Ganga Vilas is the first-ever cruise vessel made in India which was flagged off from Varanasi for its 3200 Km maiden journey to Dibrugarh, in Assam. The luxury cruise has three decks, 18 suites on board with a capacity of 36 tourists, with all the luxury amenities. The 51-day cruise is planned with visits to 50 tourist spots including world heritage sites, national parks, river ghats, and major cities like Patna in Bihar, Sahibganj in Jharkhand, Kolkata in West Bengal, Dhaka in Bangladesh and Guwahati in Assam.



"India performing better than pre-covid times in some sectors"

In an exclusive interview to ET Business World, Ranju Alex, Fellow Member Hotel Association of India and Area Vice President - South Asia, Marriott International said: "It is well known that globally the hospitality industry is amongst the sectors most severely impacted by the pandemic. Most experts expected the Industry to come back to pre-covid levels slowly and not before 2023. Some others were even less optimistic and opined that recovery may happen even later - in 2024.

India seems to have defied all predictions and surmises and is surging back quickly and in fact performing better than the pre-covid era in certain aspects and areas. Posing a stark contrast to the rest of Asia, where seat capacity is still far behind the levels of 2019, India is leading the way globally with both international and domestic airlifts well underway in Q3 '22."

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*As per global syndicate study report of Honey category 2021-2022 by a market research agency, Dabur Honey is the highest-selling brand by volume in the world

Apeejay Group partners with Tata Power



Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels Limited is gearing up to roll out a nationwide sustainability initiative by catalysing electric vehicle (EV) adoption across cities. All the brands under ASPHL (THE Park Hotels, THE Park Collection, Zone by The Park, and Zone Connect) are installing public charging infrastructure at the premises – as part of the company's planet positive initiatives. ASPHL is working with Tata Power to incorporate these fleet-charging facilities for four wheelers. Tata Power has developed a user-friendly mobile App, enabling EV consumers to locate charging stations, which can be booked in advance, or as required, including payment of the same. ASPHL's hotels present in each city will also be a part of this application.

Keys Lite by Lemon Tree Hotels, Sreekanya, Vishakhapatnam

Lemon Tree Hotels Limited announced the opening of Keys Lite by Lemon Tree Hotels, Sreekanya, Visakhapatnam. The hotel is located in Gajuwaka, southwest of Vishakhapatnam, and features 44 well-appointed rooms and suites. This is the second property of the group in the city, strategically located near Gajuwaka, in the southwest of Vishakhapatnam. Vishakhapatnam, the "Jewel of the East Coast", is a major tourist attraction and is known for its beaches, ancient Buddhist sites and the biodiversity of the surrounding Eastern Ghats.



INTERNATIONAL

Hyatt Regency opens new hotel in London

Hyatt Hotels Corporation has announced the opening of a new Hyatt Regency property in London. The opening marks the arrival of the 13th Hyatt property in the UK, confirming the company's growth plans in the country for 2023 and beyond. Hyatt Regency London Albert Embankment is located in central London, on the banks of the River Thames. It offers guests easy access to key attractions and sites such as the Houses of Parliament, Trafalgar Square, Big Ben, and South Bank.



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“There is need for better convention facilities in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities”

KB KACHRU, Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor—South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, seasoned industry leader, suggests easing of VISA processes and infrastructure enhancement to boost MICE growth.

How are your Hotels preparing for G20 and MICE events in general?

The prestigious G20 summit will open new growth avenues for the Indian travel and hospitality ecosystem while bolstering the demand for high-quality accommodation. For us at Radisson Hotel Group, G20 is a national event of great pride and opportunity. The country is expected to host over 200 meetings at 56 locations and Radisson Hotel Group stands prepared to welcome delegate across our portfolio of 100+ hotels in over 60 locations. With a Radisson hotel every 4 hours in the country, we are participating in these series of events across India, and our teams are gearing up to give customized experiences to delegates with an international as well as a local flavour of the destinations they are visiting. With significant spaces dedicated to meetings and events venues across our hotels, we are looking forward to hosting guests and meeting their needs.

Our teams are gearing up to give customized experiences to delegates (G20 meetings) with an international as well as a local flavour

MICE was severely impacted due to covid-19. How can we revive it? What kind of support are you looking from the government?

This segment had been impacted because of restrictions on large groups, and low demand for business meetings during covid-19 but we have started seeing green shoots of recovery with domestic demand coming back.

Government initiatives that promote local travel and experiences have been game-changers for MICE in the past. With continued government initiatives and globally benchmarked standards and immersive local experiences, domestic properties will continue to attract MICE travellers, especially given the diversity and vastness of tourism offerings that India houses. Having said that, internal demand for MICE would regain strength with the opening up of more flight routes and ensuring a swift process in terms of issuing VISAs.



There are immense learnings and best practices from global destinations that the Indian MICE industry can benefit from to become a future MICE leader at a global level



India's market share in the global MICE industry is at a modest \$1.5 to 2 billion so far. There's tough competition from Australia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Why is that so?

In these countries, the visa process is perceived to be easier as compared to India. Lower flight prices, structured logistics arrangements, and active coordination between tourism and local bodies have also accelerated their market share in the global MICE industry. There are immense learnings and best practices from these global destinations that the Indian MICE industry can benefit and learn from in our pursuit to become a future MICE leader at a global level.

How will increasing digital penetration and the emergence of smart cities help MICE?

Smart cities and their digital penetration across India will improve overall operational efficiency.

We are witnessing an increase in MICE bookings across leisure destinations like Mussoorie, Dharamshala, Lonavala, and Vishakhapatnam – where organizers are looking to club work and play

Increased, easy accessibility will provide a better experience for MICE travellers as they will be surrounded by technology-first ecosystems that will help facilitate contactless, hassle-free events.

Traditionally, New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Kerala, that has four international airports, have been popular MICE destinations. How will other cities catch up?

On the back of multiple accessibility and infrastructure efforts by the government and technology advancements by the hospitality industry, we are noticing a strong boost from social MICE across our hotel properties. Corporate travel leads demand with MICE and MSME bookings picking up pace, especially in tier-1 and tier-2 cities like Bangalore, Pune, Mumbai, Goa, and Chennai. We are also witnessing an increase in MICE bookings across leisure destinations like Mussoorie, Dharamshala, Lonavala, and Vishakhapatnam – where organizers are looking to club work and play. Other cities like Amritsar, Udaipur, and Pune, are also catching up to these bleisure opportunities.

What kind of new marketing campaigns are needed for MICE, and to enhance bleisure travel?

Online and offline marketing campaigns highlighting local places you can visit, road distances, and ready reckoners of everything these destinations have to offer will give a holistic perspective to MICE travellers. It is also important to promote traveling by road as NHAI has worked very well in making world-class highways connecting cities which can act as easy links for MICE travellers moving inter-city.

What kind of upskilling is needed for MICE post covid?

MICE travel has become more individualized, and personalization will remain the most important way to deliver delight, even long after the pandemic is behind us. Moving ahead, technology will be a concrete and fundamental solution to achieve the goal of attaining contactless events, while retaining a personal touch.

Sustainable practices paired with viable commercial strategies will help accelerate growth and consideration for the domestic MICE sector. There is also a need for better convention facilities in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities as they have a lot to offer that can benefit India's play for market share in the global MICE sector. **HAI**

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MICE & BLEISURE: *Growth Opportunities*

With India taking on the G20 presidency, a huge opportunity presents to vastly improve MICE figures and showcase our beautiful and varied country to foreign delegates. Post pandemic, there has been a renewed interest in India in all spheres, from the IT sector to the infrastructure boost given by the reigning dispensation to allow the spotlight to fall on our growth story. That the west is veering away from China post pandemic also puts India in a sweet spot. India's inbound MICE tourism market is anticipated to exceed \$5 billion by 2025. These are all good tidings, and for Hospitality to fully leverage this potential growth area, a close focus is urgently needed.

Team HAI Engage



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India officially assumed the presidency of the G20 on December 1, 2022 and has planned to host more than 200 G20-related events in the country. Over 200 meetings will

be held in 56 cities. During these events, indigenous skills and regional hospitality will also be showcased. Foreign Minister S Jaishankar has said that he wants to make the G20 Presidency a “national celebration (including the regions of India).” It’s a huge opportunity for Hospitality to fully leverage the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) potential.

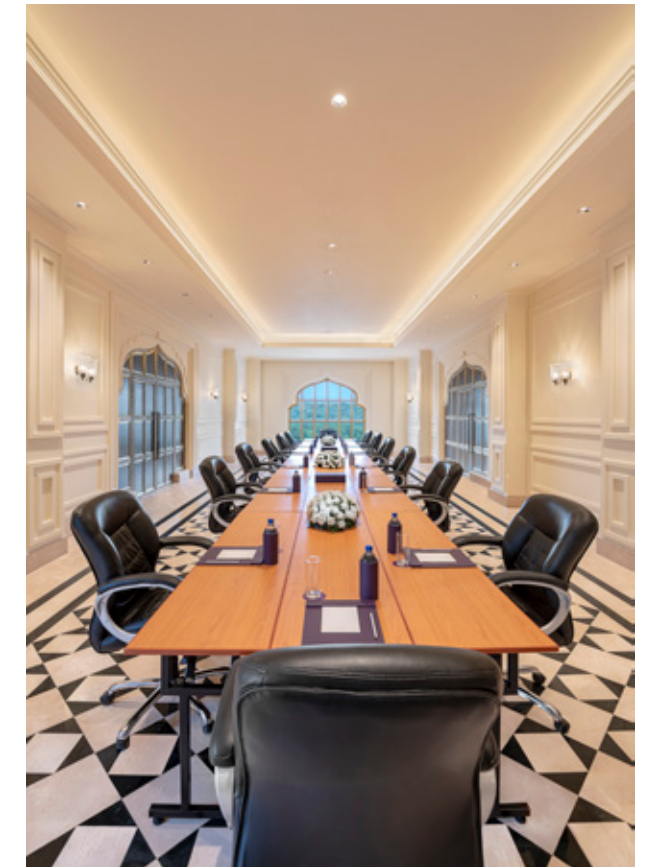
MICE is an important source of business for many hotels. Exhibitors and attendees fill many rooms at properties with meeting facilities or close to convention centres. A study from Hong Kong found that on average MICE guests pay 17.5% more than leisure guests. Having large events in town leads to high demand and the chance to charge premium room rates. Hotels that host on-site meetings or conferences may offer slightly

MICE IN INDIA THRUST

Amaresh Tiwari, Vice Chairman, India Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB), says that as part of G20 initiative ICPB is conducting iMICE (Incredible MICE in April 2023), a global MICE event for all states & G20 nations supported by the Ministry of Tourism (MoT). ICPB will be reaching out to all stakeholders for this mega event to be held this year. He recommends the following steps in the MICE Policy to boost the Indian MICE segment.

- Focused marketing of India as a preferred MICE destination:
 - a) Allocation of budget in MoT for promotion of MICE.
 - b) Brand India as a MICE destination under the tagline Meet In India.
 - c) Participation at international MICE trade shows like IMEX Frankfurt, IMEX Las Vegas, IBTM Barcelona, AIME Melbourne, IT&CMA Bangkok. India's presence at these shows creates interest in India among global buyers looking for new destinations with unique offerings.
 - d) Release of advertisements in leading International medical/academic journals--New England Journal, The Lancet, The Journal of the American Medical Association and MICE publications (print & digital).
 - e) MICE branding at airports.
 - f) Assistance of the MoT for development of MICE creative for release of advertisements, MICE films, collaterals and development of a global and domestic media plan to reach the target audience for positioning India as a MICE destination.
- Welcome dinner & cultural program: MoT to host Welcome Dinner for 500-800 delegates for prestigious international conferences and organise cultural programs to showcase India's rich cultural heritage.

- Support of MoT for site inspection of venues by international conference organisers to finalize India as the destination for their forthcoming conferences/events. Support by way of international air tickets (executive class), and accommodation for the site inspection teams.
- MoT to support fam tours for conference planners to familiarize them with MICE infrastructure in India. Financial assistance needed for air tickets, accommodation & local transport etc for hosting the conference organizers & for showcasing MICE infrastructure.
- MoT, through domestic India tourism offices, to assist in the logistic arrangements for pre and post conference tours.
- Permit reception counters at airports to receive delegates arriving for participating at international conferences.
- Allowing free entry of delegates at ASI monuments participating in the pre and post conference tours.
- Permitting one event per international conference at an iconic outdoor venue like ASI monuments in different cities.
- MoT may request all Central Government Ministries to bring one international congress to India.



“We need to create ‘Meet In India’ brand a sub-brand to the main ‘Incredible India’ campaign. MICE sector has the strongest direct correlation to the GDP more than any other tourism sector. We need a clear roadmap to undertake various measures to tackle pressing challenges of this segment”

AMARESH TIWARI,
Vice Chairman, India Convention
Promotion Bureau (ICPB)

discounted rates to organisers. However, they can drive additional revenue from meeting and F&B packages.

According to a research report titled “India Inbound Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) Tourism Market Report: 2018 – 2025”, available with MarketStudyReport, India's inbound MICE tourism market will exceed \$5 billion by 2025.

Before the pandemic, over 17.9 million foreign tourists arrived in India in 2019 compared to 17.4

million in 2018, representing a growth of 3.5%, making India the 22nd most visited nation in the world and 8th in Asia and Pacific. By 2028, international tourist arrivals are expected to reach 30.5 billion and generate revenue over US\$ 59 billion, as per India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF) figures.

According to the Ministry of Tourism figures, the percentage share of Foreign Tourist Arrivals in India during January-March 2022 among the top 15 source countries are - USA (26.18%) followed



by UK (13.05%), Bangladesh (11.18%), Canada (7.39%), Australia (5.67%), Sri Lanka (4.36%), Nepal (2.58%), Germany (1.77%), Portugal (1.71%), Maldives (1.67%), Russian Federation (1.61%), France (1.59%), Singapore (1.41%), Oman (0.96%), and Italy (0.96%).

Singapore, Thailand, UAE China, Macau and Malaysia are the preferred destinations in the SE Asian region, and we face tough competition. Rankings published by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) puts India at the 28th in rank with 158 meetings in 2019. Experts have suggested setting up of state and city MICE Bureaus, enhancing skilling and branding activities, improving air connectivity, institutional support for MICE, improving infrastructure, promotion of the of the country under 'Meet in India' banner and more. We spoke to some leading experts to understand how we can leverage the potential.

Says **Amresh Tiwari, Vice Chairman, India Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB)**: "The global miche industry is estimated to be upwards of \$ 800 bn and India's share pre-covid was estimated to be less than 1 % despite the natural and cultural advantages. In each vertical of MICE, be it meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions, the recall value of the Indian MICE is



considered low. MICE sector has the strongest direct correlation to the GDP more than any other tourism sector. We need a clear roadmap to undertake various measures to tackle pressing challenges of the MICE segment. Each Rs 100 spent on MICE in India could have an indirect impact of another Rs 160. We must target more than Rs 1 lakh crore direct economic and Rs 1.6 lakh crores indirect benefit to all our states."

"Thus our goal in the medium term would be to double our MICE share to 2.5% of the world and then doubling it over medium to long term. In the global International Congress Association rankings our goal will be to take India's rank to the top 10 in the world from 28 where we were pre-covid.

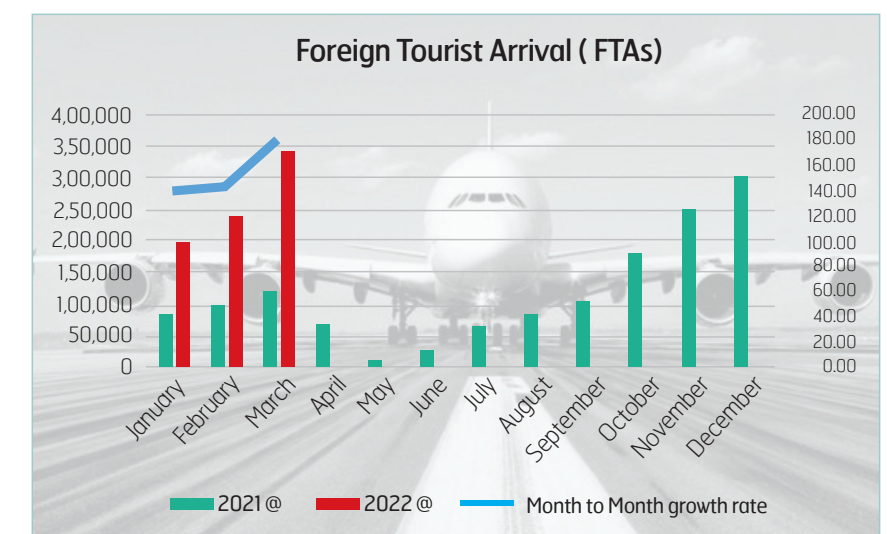
Pre-covid we had one city in the top 100 rank. Our goal must be to be have three Indian cities in the top 100 in the medium term post covid and six-ten cities in the top 100 in the medium to long term."

He adds: "We need to recognise MICE tourism as a distinct business segment and create 'Meet In India' brand a sub-brand to the 'Incredible India' campaign. We may target global congress, conventions and conferences, and social events, we need to create a global MICE bidding fund with a corpus for Rs 500 crore to enable our entrepreneurs to undertake techno economic bids for events which have a bid cycle of 2 years plus. We need city convention bureaus in our main cities which

will work with ICPB as their hub to carry out a global bidding activity."

Some of his recommendations include:

- Industry Status to MICE Infrastructure by states to enable power and utility rates levies at Industrial rates, amongst other benefits. Infrastructure status for financing of MICE Infrastructure; currently this is available only to 3-star and above hotels located outside the cities with population of 1 million and above.
- Institutional support for MICE events: ICPB as bureau acts as an agent, representative, marketer, leader and co-ordinator for MICE Industry. MOT will work with states to develop Data Collection and analysis mechanism for MICE Industry.
- We need to incentive Indian corporates to undertake domestic MICE and to prevent Indian MICE events from going abroad. For that we need to offer a 200% weighted income tax expense benefit to Indian companies which are undertaking MICE events in India.
- We need to enable IGST for our hotels which will complete the end to end GST chain and companies get GST setoffs for undertaking MICE events in states other than their state of registration. Also our GST rates are one of the highest in the world and to revive we should move immediately to a 12% GST rate for all MICE-related events with full set offs and gradually to below 10% in the medium term with full set offs.
- Of the Special Tourism Zones being planned, a mega tourism zone which should be fully



Source : Ministry of Tourism, Government of India

integrated world class MICE city.

- There is need to improve the competitiveness of Indian MICE with global markets. This will help attract Inbound MICE business and also help retain outbound MICE business.
- For India to be globally competitive, based on ICPB suggestions, ministry of tourism set-up "INDIA MICE BOARD" where all the major ministries, state govt and MICE stakeholders are members.

Adds **ITPO CMD, Pradeep Singh Kharola**: "MICE Tourism has an economic multiplier effect. It also has higher standards of requirements. India is a fast emerging major destination for international MICE tourism, especially with world-class infrastructure, better investment climate and also high quality human resources. In addition, established markets for MICE tourism are nearing saturation, opening up new opportunities for India."



"India is a fast-emerging destination for international MICE tourism, especially with world-class infrastructure, better investment climate and high quality human resources. In addition, established markets for MICE tourism are nearing saturation, opening up new opportunities for India"

**PRADEEP SINGH KHAROLA,
ITPO CMD**

He adds: "India Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO) has been providing excellent exhibition facilities in the heart of the capital. An ultra-modern new Convention Centre is nearing completion at Pragati Maidan. In addition, old exhibition halls have been modernized with state-of-the-art facilities and equipped with best of the technologies available. ITPO, through its joint ventures with the State Governments, is setting up new exhibition facilities in the States."

He cautions: "Promotion of MICE tourism cannot be the task of only one agency. Multiple stakeholders, Union Government, the State Governments, the aviation industry, the transportation industry, the hotel industry, the exhibition and convention centres, the marketing agencies, etc., all have to work in a concerted manner for development of MICE tourism. The need of the hour is to have convergence of efforts of various stakeholders involved in the process of development of MICE tourism."



"After almost three years of pandemic induced slowdown, the MICE industry is gaining momentum and it is expected to soon exceed pre-covid levels. At this stage, government support is critical for making India more attractive and competitive globally"

**PARVEEN CHANDER,
Executive Vice President, Sales &
Marketing, IHCL**

Parveen Chander, Executive Vice President, Sales & Marketing, IHCL, says: "G20 is the ideal opportunity to showcase India's impressive infrastructure of venues, hotels, and airports and position India among top 10 MICE global destination. After almost three years of pandemic induced slowdown, the MICE industry is gaining momentum and it is expected to soon exceed pre-covid levels. At this stage, government support is critical for making India more attractive and competitive globally."

He adds: "Indian MICE has less than 1% share in the estimated global MICE business. Infrastructure plays an important role in establishing a MICE destination and increasing domestic air connectivity to tier-2 & tier-3 cities will develop additional MICE cities like Jaipur, Bhopal, Ahmedabad and Varanasi etc. Therefore, upskilling and developing the talent pool for the industry is

the need of the hour. India needs a comprehensive marketing plan that focuses on reaching the target audience from multiple platforms and channels that is sustained over a long period of time in key source markets to accelerate inbound MICE movement.”

Says **Harleen Mehta, Senior Vice President-Sales, Lemon Tree Hotels**: “We are upgrading technology and digitalisation across hotels to cater to multiple segments, including MICE. We are seeing good demand in Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai, Punjab, Guwahati, Chennai, Chandigarh, Aurangabad, Indore, Jaipur, Kolkata, Lucknow, Pune, Surat, Udaipur, Rishikesh, Patna, Siliguri, Gangtok, Hyderabad, Bhubaneswar etc.” She adds: “Opening of convention centres like Jio



“Opening of convention centres like Jio World Centre in Mumbai, renovation of Pragati Maidan, and so on, give our country a great opportunity to not just revive but bring incremental International MICE. The right showcasing of handling an event of G20 scale will bring additional confidences for global events to India, thus driving demand”

HARLEEN MEHTA,
Senior Vice President- Sales, Lemon Tree Hotels



World Centre in Mumbai, renovation of Pragati Maidan, and so on, give our country a great opportunity to not just revive but bring incremental International MICE. The right showcasing of handling an event of G20 calibre will also bring additional confidence for global events to India, thus driving demand.”

She says that some of the key factors, which are common across different kinds of events while selecting venues are, accessibility, local support by authorities, city attractions, accommodation and meeting facilities, concierge/information websites for ease of planning and travel requirements, and so on. “In order to make this a priority, a government body along with business associations like CII, FICCI and ICPB should partner to create a department with a clear manifesto and agenda to drive this global business for India.”

She adds: “Infrastructure, along with offering India’s rich cultural heritage, needs to be showcased and made a part of the travel

itinerary to promote bleisure travel. A steady MICE campaign is the need of the hour, along with showcasing what we have by organising familiarisation trips/roadshows for Global MICE Bureaus, the calendar of events in India for MICE associations and planners, taking part in Global MICE events to showcase what we have to offer with structured campaigns.”

Says **Ankur Rara, general manager, The Raj Palace, Jaipur**: “Not just G20 but for every MICE event in general, security is the foremost important thing, so is showcasing the rich culture of our nation. The Raj Palace is all geared up in all areas to host any such event or meeting if they plan to do so in Jaipur. But we do need better infrastructure, good and clean roads in front of the hotel and obviously better working on AQI levels of the city.”

She adds: “India’s market share in the global MICE industry is at a modest \$1.5 to 2 billion so far. There’s tough competition from Australia,



“Not just G20 but for every MICE event in general, security is the foremost important thing, and so is showcasing the rich culture of our nation”

ANKUR RARA,
General Manager, The Raj Palace, Jaipur

Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. This is because we are still not able to give better infrastructure to the incoming MICE industry. We need to look at the visa situation, better exhibition grounds, transportation, access and so on. Traditionally, New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Kerala, that has four international airports, have been popular MICE destinations. Other cities can catch up with better connectivity, fastest routes and better infrastructure. We can take inspiration from the way Dubai promotes its tourism and get really creative with campaigns and upskilling as well.”

The Hospitality sector comprises a huge number of small, intimate hotels, restored palaces, boutique resorts, plantation retreats and jungle lodges that are trying to make a mark. An increase in MICE figures will go a long way in improving the market for the small scale hotels as well. **HAI**



“Infrastructure status to Hospitality will push Atmanirbharta in the sector”

PUNEET CHHATWAL, says all of HAI’s suggestions to the government centre around measures that are in tune with the broad government objectives like removing bottlenecks to growth, providing ease-of-doing business, or incentives that can energize the sector.



February is a month of expectations. People from all strata of society keenly look forward to the budget proposals, expecting that they would bring good tidings for their lives and livelihoods. The economy at large looks for macro-economic directions in the budget to facilitate enterprise and growth consistent with the vision @47.

True to the Indian tradition, the budget announcement is preceded by wide-ranging consultations with all stakeholders. The Hotel Association of India (HAI) is privileged to be part of such consultations. HAI submitted its formal recommendations to the government. All our suggestions centre around the measures that are in tune with the broad government objectives like removing bottlenecks to growth, providing ease-of-doing business or incentives that can energize the sector.

The recommendations broadly relate to rationalisation of taxes and tax rates, policy interventions needed to make the sector expand on its role of creating employment and inclusive growth, easy compliances, and ease-of-doing business. They are grouped under the heads of (i) Direct Taxes, (ii) Indirect Taxes Policy, (iii) Customs & Central Excise (iv) Policy and Other Issues. The logic and rationale of the suggestions are well explained and driven by one primary objective which is that the sector is poised to potentially grow three times compared to the pre-pandemic levels to touch \$250 billion by 2030 and further accelerate to reach \$1 trillion by 2047 with the supporting hand of the government.

Just to illustrate, our recommendations include allowing hotels a higher rate of depreciation, allowing business losses to be carried forward for 12 years instead of 8 years, carry forward of MAT Credit and CSR expenditure to be counted in computing business income, removing petroleum products and alcohol from excise and placing them under GST Act, and so on. HAI has also requested for restoration of the benefits to hotels under the Service Exports from India Scheme (SEIS)

The logic and rationale of the suggestions are well explained and driven by one primary objective, which is that the sector is poised to potentially grow three times compared to the pre-pandemic levels, to touch \$250 billion by 2030 and further accelerate to reach \$1 trillion by 2047

for at least 5 years beyond 2019-20, and maintaining hotel reward points under the Scheme at 5%.

The budget, apart from being a fiscal statement for the year, is also an instrument to announce the broad directions of economic policy of the government. HAI has therefore strongly suggested that an announcement on granting “infrastructure status” would be in keeping with some major objectives of the government. First, it will give a proper push to “atmanirbharta” – providing incentives to local enterprise to meet the gaps in accommodation. Second, the goal of achieving \$1 trillion tourism economy while making India one of the top 5 tourism destinations in the world as mentioned in the draft Tourism Policy of the government can be quickly put in position by such incentives. It will provide favourable impetus and boost to the industry, incorporating the required incentives, including regulatory ease, cheaper loans, tax concessions and contributing to a cycle of attracting more investments.

HAI earnestly hopes that the government will accept the suggestions. That will be a big boost to make Tourism & Hospitality the engine of growth of the Indian economy. As I have often mentioned, through collective action between industry stakeholders and the government, we can undoubtedly shape an even more thriving future for the industry--one that can make a positive impact to the economy and society at large.

“Budget should support demand”

CHANDRAJIT BANERJEE, Director General, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) says the Budget should aim at balanced and sustainable growth as India takes strides towards its ambition of becoming Viksit Bharat by 2047.



The Union Budget is being presented in the context of truly unprecedented times. Even as the pandemic seemed to be retreating, the world was hit by the Ukraine war. The war, rising fuel, food and commodity prices, soaring inflation and tightening monetary policy stance by major central banks have weakened the global growth prospects.

Indian economy has shown resilience and has been a bright spot amidst the bleak global growth expectations. However, being more integrated today with the world economy than ever before, India is not insulated to global shocks.

The spill-over from the evolving global situation could pose downside risks which need close monitoring. Private investment is slow to recover as investors wait for the external contingencies to stabilize and domestic demand to become more propitious. Similarly, the citizens have yet to fully emerge from the ravages caused by the pandemic. Global slowdown has muted India’s exports. And above all, inflation, though coming down in India, is still a matter of concern as it has shrunk household balance sheets.

The Finance Minister is faced with the trilemma of providing impetus to investment and growth, while containing inflation and keeping the fiscal deficit in check. Equally important will be to retain the focus on Honourable Prime Minister’s call for ‘Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas’ by addressing the expectations of the social, demographic, and geographical expanse of India’s citizens.

Against this backdrop, the first suggestion for the forthcoming Budget is to support demand. With regards to investment demand, despite the limited fiscal space Government support for capex led growth should continue especially in infrastructure. The Budget should increase allocation to capital expenditure by 35%, like last year, taking the total public capex to about INR 10

It is necessary to clear the backlog of projects for new investment plans to fructify. Investment in housing and construction should also be encouraged due to its multiplier effect on many sectors of the economy and job creation potential

lakh crores. Public investment in infrastructure would have a high spill-over impact on the economy and would crowd-in private investment.

Public investment must be readily supported by private investments. Currently, the NIP (National Infrastructure Pipeline), which anticipates that the private sector would come forward with about 20% share in the overall project investment, has seen only 15%. It is important to address the bottlenecks.

Some of the policy interventions that can boost private investment include expediting land acquisition, ensuring swift dispute resolution, and so on. Within the federal setup of our country, many approvals derive from states. Thus, a coordinated approach of both centre and states is essential. It is necessary to clear the backlog of projects for new investment plans to fructify. Investment in housing and construction should also be encouraged due to its multiplier effect on many sectors of the economy and job creation potential.

Apart from investment demand, reviving consumer demand is equally important for supporting growth. As we witness times of high inflation and falling disposable incomes, it is important that income tax slabs and rates for individuals be rationalized. A lower effective tax rate will put more money in the hands of consumers and increase consumption in the economy, which will create room for investments and jobs.

Second, while we focus on rejuvenating consumption and



investment demand, care must be taken to maintain fiscal prudence. This must be achieved by adhering to the fiscal deficit target of 6.4% of GDP for this fiscal and continuing the process of gradual reduction in the deficit in the next fiscal which should culminate in the deficit moving towards the goalpost of 4.5% by FY26.

The third suggestion is to provide a further boost to manufacturing. This is an important avenue for wealth creation as well as providing jobs on a large scale. It requires a focus on not only improving the ease of doing business, but also on reducing the cost of doing business.

Much progress has been made on Ease of Doing Business. It could be significantly improved through greater digitization of regulatory & compliance frameworks, faster & time-bound clearances, contract enforcement, and a genuine single window system encompassing central and state clearances. Further, all business facing laws should be decriminalised. No arrests or detention should take place in civil cases unless criminalization in business has been proved beyond doubt.

We are witnessing a new paradigm of co-existence of cooperative and competitive federalism in India. Given the success of the GST Council, the Government could look at forming similar councils for reforms in areas such as land, labour, power, and agriculture where consensus building is difficult and adds to the cost of doing business. This will be

Given the success of the GST Council, the Government could look at forming similar councils for reforms in areas such as land, labour, power, and agriculture where consensus building is difficult and adds to the cost of doing business

critical to unlocking India's manufacturing and growth potential.

Fourth, as India looks to harness its demographic dividend, employment generation is critical. It will improve the purchasing power of the masses which will boost demand for both manufacturing and services sectors. This can be facilitated by promoting more labour-intensive industries such as furniture, leather, toys etc through the PLI scheme; encouraging labour intensive services such as tourism, hospitality, pushing growth in infrastructure and construction sectors; promoting schemes such as ODOP at district level, raising outlays on MNREGA, among others.

Overall, a Budget aimed at balanced and sustainable growth would go a long way in nurturing sentiment and recovery as India takes strides towards becoming a Viksit Bharat by 2047.

“Budget should allocate funds for improvement of infrastructure”

RUNEEP SANGHA,
Executive Director PATA India Chapter, says we need to swiftly rise to the challenge and capture the hearts and minds of travellers.



India's Tourism industry stands at the threshold of boundless potential and endless possibilities. The pandemic has levelled the playing field for global tourism, with all nations starting anew. Triumph will now hinge upon our ability to swiftly rise to the challenge and capture the hearts and minds of travellers, propelling us into the ranks of the world's top 10 tourist destinations.

The Union budget of 2023-24 has a significant impact on India's potential as a premier tourist destination, not only boosting its GDP but also generating employment opportunities.

The Prime Minister has emphasized that 2024 should be the “India Tourism Year” and towards achieving this goal, it is imperative for India to have a tourism budget that prioritizes efforts to increase tourist inflows. To accomplish this, several initiatives need to be taken, including the establishment of efficient and result-oriented National Tourism Boards (NTBs). These NTBs should be set up to fast-track the process of attracting tourists to India and promote the country as a must-see destination.

Additionally, the budget should allocate funds for the development and improvement of infrastructure, such as airports, hotels, and transportation services. This will not only enhance the visitor experience but also make it easier for people to travel and explore India.

The government should also invest in creating awareness and promoting India as a safe and secure destination.

To boost tourism, it is essential to launch high-impact marketing campaigns in different global languages that

The Prime Minister has emphasized that 2024 should be the “India Tourism Year” and towards achieving this goal, it is imperative for India to have a tourism budget that prioritizes efforts to increase tourist inflows

use a scientifically-backed “Opportunity to See” approach.

This approach focuses on targeting the right audience, at the right time, with the right message. Incentivising FTOs (Foreign Tour Operators) and DMCs (Destination Management Companies) is critical to driving tourism growth.

To achieve success, it is crucial to have a strategy that includes marketing campaigns and incentives for industry players. Promoting tourism through subsidies for DMCs (Destination Management Companies) is important for driving sales. Investment in research-based marketing campaigns that target key source markets is also essential. Building visibility at global tourism trade shows and meetings will help in creating awareness and promote the destinations. It will also help in building brand reputation and attract more tourists.

Overall, a well-planned and executed strategy that includes subsidies for DMCs, research-based marketing campaigns, and high visibility at global tourism trade shows and meetings is crucial to drive tourism growth. **HAI**





Time to dovetail commercial interests of the private and public sectors for Incredible India

SUJIT BANERJEE former Secretary Tourism, Government of India & Secretary General, World Travel & Tourism Council, India Initiative, says marketing, promotions and publicity need a fillip with a new and reimagined Incredible India Campaign and a dedicated Tourism Marketing Board.

In the Government's planning for the annual budget exercise, there have been questions raised on the allocation of annual spending budgets for the Ministry of Tourism. The argument has been that the Government provides money for the development of infrastructure, railways, roads, communications, airports, civil aviation, and human resources development, which will, ultimately, help in the development of tourism. So why fund Tourism separately? It is the tendency of Governments in past and present to rely more and more on the private sector, with the belief that tourism is a commercial activity and that funds allocated for infrastructure dovetailed with the commercial interests of the private sector, perhaps can develop tourism. This line of thought has dominated policymaking since time immemorial. This needs a change.

Over the years, the Ministry of Tourism has seen upticks in budgetary allocations of Rs 2000 crore upwards, with allocations to infrastructure augmentation under Swadesh Darshan Scheme and PRASHAD. These are well received and India as a destination is mooting world-class infrastructure. However, marketing, promotions and publicity really need a fillip with a new and reimagined Incredible India Campaign and a dedicated Tourism Marketing Board. We need to compete with other destinations in our outreach to consumers. To achieve this, the current allocations of Rs 421.50 crore (Union Budget, 2022-23) have to be rounded to nothing less than Rs 1500 crore to start with. The best destinations – the Frances and Thailand of the world – spend top dollar on their marketing, bearing direct increment in footfalls and exponential earnings in foreign exchange for their economies. The

Government needs to market India smartly in the digital space by channelling resources which are beyond the means of the private sector.

Rebates on Tax for domestic spending on tourism and GST/VAT refunds for foreign tourists spending in the country are welcome and will definitely enhance India's position amongst competing destinations. Specifically, the accordance of infrastructure status to hotels, bringing ATF under GST, rejuvenating the Service Exports from India Scheme (SEIS) and restoring benefits for a period of beyond five years will be a boost for an industry ravaged by the pandemic. More importantly, smaller players within the industry will have an opportunity to be competitive and profitable. Another big fillip would be to encourage private sector participation in human capital development for tourism and aviation – the dearth of which is being felt post-pandemic – by providing tax and investment-related benefits.

As the cloud of recession lurks ahead in 2023, the effect of which, along with another onslaught of the pandemic could be grinding for economies worldwide. An INR 1500 crore capital could be made available under the Tourism Finance Development Corporation of India to help provide loan support on easy market terms for the smaller and medium players in the industry to survive another tragedy. Lastly, a free visa regime for foreign tourists for a period of 2 years, which heralds India's G20 Presidency and helms India as a destination of choice, giving it a significant competitive edge in these uncertain times. In planning for tourism, it is time to dovetail the commercial interest of the public sector and the private sector to make India truly incredible. **HAI**

Over the years, the Ministry of Tourism has seen upticks in budgetary allocations of Rs 2000 crore upwards, with allocations to infrastructure augmentation under Swadesh Darshan Scheme and PRASHAD

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MAGNIFICENT MAHARASHTRA

Boasting a multitude of natural landscapes, heritage spots, MICE venues, spiritual escapes and adventure tourism options, across all budgets, the western Indian state is a tourist's paradise.

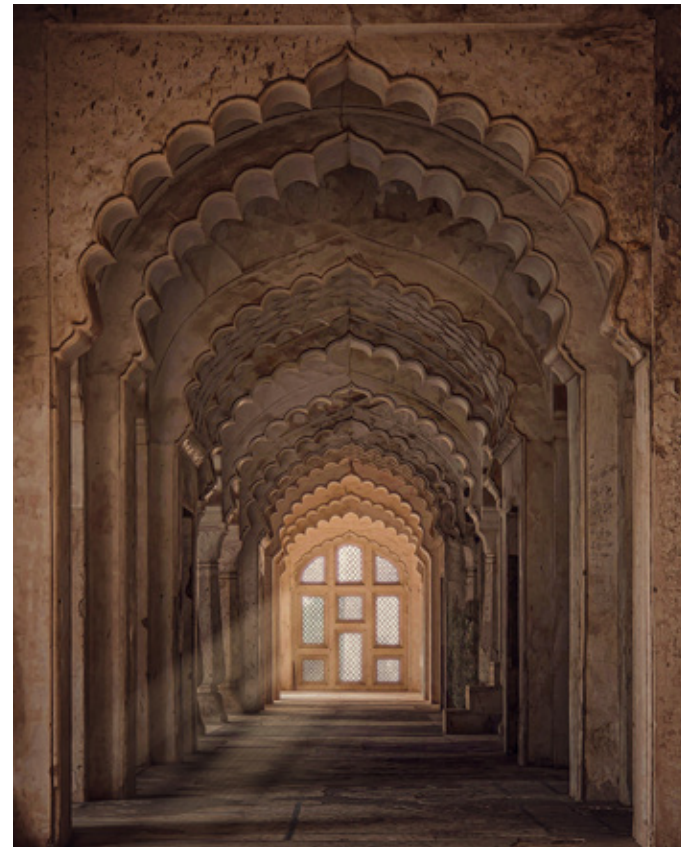
BY RIAAN JACOB GEORGE

The curious case of tourism in Maharashtra - with the megapolis of Mumbai being the capital and main gateway to western India, many tourists have often neglected the rest of the state. In recent times, however, travellers have learnt to look beyond Maharashtra's much-explored capital to discover its hidden secrets in its plains, mountains and along the magnificent palm-fringed coastline. Maharashtra is called the gateway of India because it is the largest commercial centre in India, given the economic capital city of Mumbai. The city, along with Pune and Nashik are major MICE hubs. Mumbai's new international-standard Jio World Convention Centre has just created a massive supply for large-scale expos, events and weddings. But from the tourist standpoint, for starters, owing to its

rich, royal history, the state is brimming with glorious forts, waiting to be discovered. Given the size of the state, one is bound to enjoy immense diversity of natural landscapes and some of its natural parks like Tadoba, are magnets for tiger-seeking travellers. Moreover, the coastline, stretching between Mumbai and Goa has, in recent times become a hotbed of tourist activity, attracting people in search of offbeat beach experiences, water sports and local food trails. And finally, spiritual tourism is an important draw for the state of Maharashtra as it has traditionally been home to many communities - Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jain s and even micro-communities of Jews and Parsis. While it would be impossible to list down all of Maharashtra's tourist marvels in one feature, we've attempted to summarise just what you need to be bookmarking this year, as the state is definitely a trending destination.

Points of historic significance

The second-most populous state in the country today has a history that ranges from the Maurya and Maratha empires to the Mughals, the British and the Portuguese. Traces of each of these can be seen dotting the state even today. Starting with Mumbai - spots like the Gateway of India, dating back to the reign of King George V and Queen Mary, the breathtaking Haji Ali mausoleum in the middle of the sea and the architecturally-rich neighbourhoods featuring Gothic, Indo-Saracenic and Art Deco styles....these are just a few of the many heritage spots in Mumbai. Another one that comes to mind is Aurangabad's Bibi Ka Maqbara, known as the Taj Mahal of the Deccan because of its unmistakable resemblance to the Taj Mahal. Built in 1660 by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, this mausoleum is dedicated to his wife Dilras Banu Begum. The ancient cave complexes of Ajanta and Ellora, accessible from Aurangabad, need no introduction and give insights into the Buddhist heritage of the region. Those chasing ancient Buddhist caves, will find a number of them in Mumbai too.



Bibi Ka Maqbara



Shivneri Fort



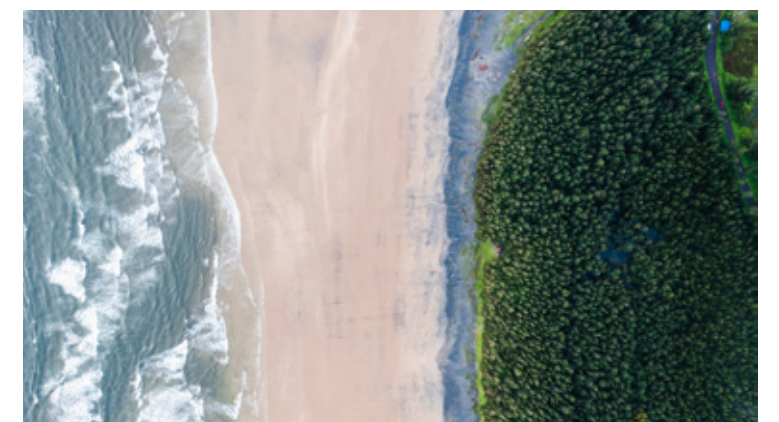
Vengurla Beach

Coastal Maharashtra and water sports

This state enjoys a magnificent palm-fringed coastline along its entire western part. The scenic, coastal roads of Maharashtra are increasingly becoming renowned amongst adventure seekers. Apart from its lush greenery, breathtaking waterfalls and winding roads, coastal Maharashtra now offers an array of aquatic sports, that is only a short drive away from the major city of Mumbai. Malvan beach, about 500 kms from Mumbai is considered to be one of the most sought-after beaches in Maharashtra for water sports. In recent times, it has also become a popular destination for scuba divers. As a result, around this beach, you will find a slew of affordably priced hotels, home stays and Airbnb options, that cater to tourists headed for water sports. For those looking for a short, weekend getaway, Alibag is perfect for some light sport, including jet skiing and paragliding. Another gorgeous village, which has been high on the radar recently is Kolad, lying on the banks of the Kundalika river in the Raigad district. If you enjoy white water rafting, this is definitely the place to be. June to February is the best time to visit as the river level rises during this period. A hop, skip and jump away from the river Karli lies Tarkarli, another little village famous for its white sands and tranquil, captivating beach. Becoming increasingly famous for snorkelling, and, if you are lucky, dolphin spotting. The best time to visit is in between the months of October and March.



Parasailing, Tarkarli



Aare Ware Beach



Raigad fort



Pandavleni



Alu Chi Wadi



Maharashtrian Thali- Veg

The magical forts of days gone by

While Maharashtra is well known across the globe as one of India's largest commercial and industrial centres, did you know that this culturally rich state is home to more than 350 forts? Designed to provide a strategic advantage against the enemy and protect the locals of the kingdom, most of Maharashtra's forts were built during the reign of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. One of the most famous forts in Maharashtra is the Raigad Fort. Also known as the King of Forts, it was built in the 14th century near the Sahyadri mountain range and was the capital of the Maratha Empire during Shivaji's reign. A visit to the fort offers you a panoramic view of the surrounding valley and beautiful Konkan coast. Another popular fort is the Sindhudurg Fort. Located on an island off the coast of Malvan, this fortress offers a glimpse into the region's maritime history. With many bastions, palaces, temples and a lighthouse, this place is ideal for history buffs. The Shivneri Fort located near Junnar is the birthplace of Shivaji Maharaj. The fort has a temple and a palace and a lake and visitors get the unique opportunity to see where Shivaji Maharaj was hidden during his childhood. Another unique fort to explore is the 1000-year old Sinhagad Fort. Located 1312 metres above sea level, it comes with a spectacular view of the Khadakwasla Dam on one side and the Torna Fort on the other. One of the biggest forts in Maharashtra and the entire Deccan region, the Panhala Fort connects the state to the Arabian Sea through Bijapur. The Fort's design features a bevy of motifs, bastions and other relics of different dynasties. It also features a dash of Indo-Islamic architecture and gives you the best 360-degree view from the peak. These forts today are not only architectural marvels but also a sense of adventure for tourists of any budget. Visitors can trek, rock climb and take historical tours that highlight interesting stories and legends associated with them. The best time to visit these forts is between October and April.

A Taste of Kolhapur

Located in the south western part of Maharashtra, Kolhapur is one of the oldest cities in the country known for its numerous forts, pilgrimage sites and Kolhapuri chappals. This former Maratha princely state boasts a hidden food culture that is hard to miss. Steeped in tradition and history, the city features a cuisine that is known for its variety of spices and local herbs. Like the quintessential homegrown lavangi mirchi and a dry coconut spice mix that form the renowned Kolhapuri masala and are the secret to Kolhapuri cuisine's sharp and peppery taste. Take a stroll across the city and you will come across multiple restaurants serving the popular mutton rasa plate. Often served with pandra (white) and tambda (spiced) soup like gravy, this spicy mutton curry is not to be missed.

Another popular dish is Kombdi fode, a type of spicy and crispy fried dumpling made from a combination of chickpea flour, wheat flour and spices. Located in the centre, Hotel Rupali and Hotel Sanket are notable restaurants and are ideal for first-time visitors. In case you don't have time for a hearty meal, drop by one of the local breakfast joints for some Kolhapuri misal. The potato slices with spicy rasa, a coconut garnish and sliced bread instead of the traditional laid pav, is a combination best understood when you try it yourself. Beyond the spice, Kolhapur is also famous for jaggery, the perfect candy after all the spice.

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Jain temple, Nagpur

Heritage Arts and Crafts

Maharashtra is home to a variety of arts and crafts, most rooted in ancient tradition. One is already familiar with the famous Kolhapuri chappals, famous for their distinctive design, unmatched leather quality and, most importantly, their durability. The earliest record of these locally handcrafted pieces of footwear date back to the 13th century. Another famous art form is one that originated in

the northern region of Maharashtra, in the Sahyadri range. Warli paintings, the famous, tribal art form that can be traced back to 3000 BC has now become a world-renowned pattern featured on various commercial products like books, bags, etc. Believed to be among the oldest art forms in history, the basis of this art is set in simple, geometric shapes and represents depiction of everyday life. With its origin based in the royal dynasties of

Pathan, the Paithani saree has become a must-find for those looking for authentic Maharashtrian crafts and designs. What is so special about these designs, you ask? Believed to be woven from the finest mulberry silk and adorned in heavy gold zari work, the craftsmanship of this saree is truly a sight to behold. During your trip to Maharashtra, make sure that you support local artisans and purchase one of these art forms.

Ganesh Mandir at Ganpatipule



Spiritual Tourism

From Mumbai's Siddhivinayak Temple, Haji Ali and Mount Mary church (if we only talk about Mumbai), spiritual tourism sees many takers in Maharashtra. The holy spot of Trimbakeshwar is revered by Hindus and attracts thousands of pilgrims, while the Ashtavinayak pilgrimage trail is extremely important for devotees of Ganesh. Shirdi attracts millions of devotees to Sai Baba's place of worship. Igatpuri's Vipaasana is also worth a mention. **HAI**



Images courtesy:
Department of Tourism,
Government of Maharashtra

Awaiting a New Voice

Though the industry in general has revived largely, there are finer points of this revival which merit close attention. There is a need to worry more about revenue rather than numbers.

By MP BEZBARUAH

Secretary General, Hotel Association of India



“For last year’s words belong to last year’s language. And next year’s words await another voice”

—*TS Eliot*

Philosophically the New Year is just another day, an artificial landmark in the march of the time juggernaut. Psychologically it is a new beginning, a new hope, a time to look forward and leave the failings of the times past in the past.

Tourism & Hospitality industries eagerly look forward to the new year for a new beginning. The scars of the traumatic years left behind have not yet healed fully. The year 2022 certainly brought a lot of cheer and much confidence. But everyone realizes that bigger challenges are ahead and it is time to lay the foundation for a strong, secure future.

Tourism & Hospitality industries, therefore, hope that the much-discussed new Tourism Policy will herald the new year. It can certainly be said that a policy is merely a statement of intent and often is left in the wayside unless committed implementation follows. Nevertheless, a policy is significant because it lays down the future directions of the journey, and all that makes the journey meaningful and successful.

There is much urgency because the draft policy has much to commend itself and many of the intended actions brook no delay. It is also meaningful that the draft coincided with the formulation of a new vision for a new India @47. The Ministry of Tourism had wide-ranging discussions with all the stakeholders and all conceivable issues, ideas, suggestions came up. Fortunately, the Draft Policy covers all the wish list of the industry. It talks of tourism as a global opportunity for India. It emphatically says that “national priority is a must”

for tourism—something that HAI has persistently been urging. Rightly, it recommends a holistic framework for tourism development—of various government departments, of central and state governments, of people and the private sector. It is a desirable framework but a difficult one to achieve and needs all the attention of the government to do so. The Draft Policy is built around five key guiding principles, five national missions and ten strategic pillars covering all that the industry had ventilated—digital reach, sustainable goals, skill development, professional destination management and so on.

It is understandable that the future vision has been expressed mostly in terms of impressive growth statistics—reflecting the demand side, like one trillion-dollar tourism economy, 100m FTAs, 2.3 bn domestic tourism visits, \$ 250 in foreign exchange earnings 100 m direct employment. In the enthusiasm often two key parameters get blurred. First, the need to worry more about revenue rather than numbers. Following what the HAI has been urging—the imperative need to look at the supply side—in infrastructure (transport, communication and all that), the trained technology savvy service providers creating an experience rather than a visit, and above all sustainable development of destinations and quality accommodation. The mismatch between the quantitative aspirations often expressed by the government and the realities on the supply side like air seat capacity, accommodation, and carrying capacity of known destinations, have not properly been addressed yet. Unless that is done carefully the vision may remain an unrealistic wish list.

The Draft Policy is a desirable framework but a difficult one to achieve and needs all the attention of the government to do so



In that context, the persistent pleading of HAI before the government to give “infrastructure status” to hospitality industry is based on impeccable logic and sound common sense. The logic extends the concept of “Atmanirbhar” and in essence, says – enable and empower the industry to come up with much-needed investments to fill the gap in accommodation. There will be no dent on government revenue and in fact, the long-term return to the exchequer will be enormous.

It also defies all logic and understanding as to why tourism and hospitality, the biggest industry in the world, the biggest employment generator, the best contributor to inclusive growth be not encouraged to grow manifold and contribute to national welfare by allowing to enjoy the benefits that the government extends to an organized industry. Everyone agrees—the Ministry of Tourism, the Parliamentary Standing Committee and all, and the PM calls it a pillar of development. Yet the industry languishes and a decision eludes. It is to be hoped that in the new year, someone will bell the cat.

Of greatest interest to the industry is the restatement in the draft policy of the fundamental principle of tourism promotion—a private sector-led growth. It has often remained a slogan. The Tourism and Hospitality sector is enthused by the concept of National Tourism Authority and State Tourism Authority. Of more interest was a subsequent statement from the MOT that a National Tourism Board was being set up. It will be a fitting implementation of the intention to lead tourism

HAI has been advocating that innovative and imaginative public-private partnership initiatives should be launched to protect the vulnerable from future shocks and unexpected disruption of business

promotion through the private sector. This was one of the key recommendations of the National Tourism Committee of 1987 and if properly constituted will bring in the type of professional tourism management that say Singapore Tourism Board signifies.

Though the industry in general has revived largely, there are finer points of this revival which merit close attention. Globally, as in India, the tourism and hospitality sectors comprise almost 80% of SMEs. This sector was badly mauled by the pandemic and its after-effects. Imaginative and constructive liquidity solutions are crucial to the full recovery and growth of this sector. HAI had advocated a long-term transparent and stable interest rate policy during the period of survival. There have been some ad hoc and sporadic responses to overcome immediate problems. The industry would look forward to a comprehensive and pragmatic policy package on the liquidity problems of the industry.

The Covid-19 pandemic was a great shock, a jolt difficult to withstand and overall, a great lesson on survival. HAI had advocated at that time that innovative and imaginative public-private partnership initiatives should be launched to protect the vulnerable from future shocks and unexpected disruption of business. It is possible to create a participatory future fund in the pattern of a social security umbrella.

Rightly, the new year starts with cautious optimism, because as is often said, the only thing that can be said about the future is that nothing can be said with certainty. For the Indian tourism and hospitality industry, it should be a time for reflection and for preparing for the journey armed with the lessons learnt. One unmistakable lesson, put in the words of UNWTO, is that Covid-19 “is a watershed moment to align the effort of sustaining livelihoods dependent on tourism to SDG and ensure a more resilient, inclusive, carbon neutral and resource-efficient future”. The trend is unmistakable—towards taking cognizance of environmental costs beyond economic costs; destinations moving towards a zero-carbon footprint; tour operators and hoteliers gravitating towards more responsible and meaningful experiences.; showcasing local for global; and positioning the host community as the centerpiece of the tourist experience, and technology ruling the roost. **HAI**



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