



ENGAGE

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HOSPITALITY INDIA'S ENGINE OF INCLUSIVE GROWTH



BUILDING A TOURISM POWERHOUSE

HARIKISHORE S.

Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India



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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK



K.B.KACHRU
President, Hotel Association of India
Chairman - South Asia,
Radisson Hotel Group

The Union Budget 2026–27 arrives at a defining moment for India's tourism and hospitality sector. With its emphasis on accelerating economic growth and a decisive push on infrastructure, the Budget reinforces two core drivers that underpin tourism development. The renewed focus on the services sector, coupled with recognition of tourism's role in employment generation, foreign exchange earnings, and local economic expansion, is both timely and encouraging.

Several proposals in the Budget align closely with the sector's priorities. The announcement of a National Institute of Hospitality marks an important step towards strengthening industry-aligned skilling, research, and leadership development. As this Issue of HAI highlights, skilling and inclusive growth are central to the sector's future. Hospitality remains one of India's most powerful platforms for inclusive employment, offering pathways for women, youth, and first-generation professionals from non-metro and rural regions. Sustainable growth will depend not only on expanding capacity, but on building structured career pathways, investing in training, and ensuring that technology enhances opportunity rather than replaces people.

The Budget's focus on infrastructure development across Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, the East Coast Tourism Corridor, and medical-value tourism is expected to improve hotel viability, diversify India's tourism offerings, and strengthen global competitiveness. Forward-looking initiatives such as content-creator labs and the proposed National Destination Digital Knowledge Grid, signal a recognition of the role of technology in destination development, storytelling, and visitor engagement.

At the same time, some long-standing concerns of the hospitality sector remain unresolved. Comprehensive infrastructure recognition continues to be a critical need. Expanding infrastructure status beyond select destinations would improve access to capital and reduce financing costs. Allowing hotels to avail the benefits that are given to Industries will reduce hotel operations costs. Placing tourism on the Concurrent List would enable better Centre–State coordination, while rationalisation of GST would enhance competitiveness and ease of doing business. These structural reforms are essential to fully realise the impact of current policy initiatives and support long-term, sustainable growth. We have been actively engaging with policymakers to address these issues. Another major concern is that of the long-term demand-supply gap which is a threat to the sustainable growth of the Sector as it puts pressure on rates and on refurbishment, renovation and up-gradation plans of hotels. Improvements in the ease of doing business, implementing practical land and licensing policies, granting an enhanced Floor Space Index (FSI) are other measures that are required. We remain optimistic about achieving positive policy interventions that will benefit both travellers and the industry in the long run.

Encouragingly, the government's intent to engage with the sector is clear. We look forward to constructive post-Budget discussions on sector-specific measures, including a stronger and more coordinated approach to marketing India overseas, to translate policy intent into tangible outcomes on the ground.

With aligned policies, sustained investment in skills, and a shared commitment to inclusive growth, the hospitality sector can play a transformative role in India's economic and social progress. **HAI**

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By M. P. Bezbaruah, Secretary General, HAI





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JYOTSNA SURI HONoured FOR DEI



Dr Jyotsna Suri, Chairperson and Managing Director of The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group, has been conferred the prestigious Vande Mataram Vande Virasat Award by C. V. Ananda Bose, Governor of West Bengal, in recognition of her exemplary contributions to the hospitality industry and her steadfast commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI).

The award recognises Dr Suri's visionary leadership and her role in shaping India's hospitality landscape through innovation, inclusive growth, and people-first practices. Under her stewardship, The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group has emerged as a pioneer in luxury hospitality, setting industry benchmarks for equal oppor-

tunity, gender diversity, and LGBTQ+ inclusion.

A strong advocate of inclusive workplaces, Dr Suri has championed initiatives that empower women and marginalised communities, embedding DEI as a core organisational value. Her efforts have not only transformed the Group's internal culture but have also influenced broader industry practices. Presenting the award, the Governor acknowledged Dr Suri's contribution to nation-building through hospitality and her role in fostering a more inclusive and equitable industry. Accepting the honour, Dr Suri expressed her gratitude and reaffirmed her commitment to building a hospitality ecosystem that celebrates diversity, equity, and meaningful social impact.



IHCL TO ACQUIRE CONTROLLING STAKE IN BRIJ HOTELS

Indian Hotels Company (IHCL), India's largest hospitality company, has signed agreements to acquire a 51% stake in Brij Hospitality, the owner of the boutique experiential leisure brand Brij. The acquisition gives IHCL ownership of the Brij brand and marks a strategic move to scale the boutique leisure segment in collaboration with the founding promoters. Announcing the deal, Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director and CEO of Indian Hotels Company, said the transaction strengthens IHCL's leadership in leisure tourism and adds depth to its portfolio across offbeat destinations such as Jaipur, Varanasi, Ranthambore, the northern hills, the Northeast, and Goa. With this acquisition, IHCL's portfolio expands to 610 hotels, with 253 in the pipeline, keeping the company on track to reach its target of 700 hotels under its Accelerate 2030 strategy.



NAILA FORT JOINS OBEROI LUXURY PORTFOLIO

The Oberoi Group has announced the opening of Naila Fort – An Oberoi Luxury Residence, marking the group's first foray into dedicated luxury residential stays. Perched on a hilltop near Jaipur, the 19th-century heritage retreat blends historic preservation with contemporary high-end hospitality. Originally built in 1849 by the Champawat clan, the fort has undergone a meticulous restoration to transform it into an ultra-luxury four-bedroom residence.

THE PARK NAVI MUMBAI GETS IGBC CERTIFICATION

The Park Navi Mumbai has been awarded the Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) certification, reaffirming the hotel's strong commitment to sustainable hospitality through responsible design, efficient operations and environmentally conscious practices. The certification recognises the hotel's continued efforts to minimise its environmental footprint while maintaining high standards of comfort and service.



ITC EXPANDS CLOUD KITCHEN FOOTPRINT



Residents of Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Pune can now order ITC's signature dishes—from kebabs and dal makhani to biryanis, khichdi, and crystal dimsums—through food delivery apps from the comfort of their homes. Building on this momentum, ITC plans to scale up its food-tech business by expanding into new geographies, strengthening distribution, and widening its portfolio of flagship dishes for home delivery. Beyond its current presence in three South Indian cities and its recent entry into Maharashtra, ITC's cloud kitchen business is set to foray into key North Indian markets, including Delhi, Gurugram, and Noida, in the next financial year.



MARRIOTT BONVOY NAMED ICC'S OFFICIAL ACCOMMODATION PARTNER TILL 2029

Marriott Bonvoy and the International Cricket Council have entered into a strategic partnership under which Marriott International's award-winning travel platform has been appointed the ICC's Official Accommodation Partner through 2029. The partnership brings together the global appeal of cricket with Marriott Bonvoy's portfolio of travel stays and experiences, offering its 260 million members access to exclusive opportunities linked to the sport across continents. The association also provides the ICC with a platform to showcase Marriott Bonvoy's extensive hospitality offerings to cricket's vast and passionate global fan base. "Cricket continues to grow as a global sport, with rising fan engagement worldwide," said Peggy Roe, EVP and Chief Customer Officer, Marriott International. "With more than two billion fans globally, we are proud to serve as the ICC's Official Accommodation Partner and look forward to delivering exclusive access and once-in-a-lifetime experiences for our members who are passionate about cricket."

LEMON TREE-FLEUR SPLIT CREATES SEPARATE ASSET-LIGHT AND ASSET-HEAVY PLATFORMS

Lemon Tree Hotels and Fleur Hotels are undergoing a major restructuring that will split ownership and management into two distinct entities. Under the proposed scheme, Lemon Tree Hotels will operate as an asset-light hotel management company, while Fleur Hotels will become the dedicated asset-heavy platform for owning and developing hotels, backed by a significant investment from Warburg Pincus.

The move separates the capital-intensive ownership business from the high-margin management business, allowing each entity to pursue focused growth strategies and potentially unlock greater shareholder value. Fleur Hotels will manage hotel ownership and development, while Lemon Tree will continue to operate and manage brands such as Aurika, Lemon Tree Premier, and Red Fox. Fleur is also expected to be listed separately on the NSE and BSE.

As part of the restructuring, Patanjali Govind Keswani, Founder of Lemon Tree Hotels, will serve as Executive Chairman of Fleur Hotels and later transition to a Non-Executive role at Lemon Tree. "This scheme is intended to create a simplified, transparent, and growth-oriented structure for both companies, which we believe will enhance long-term value for our shareholders," Keswani said.



HYATT EXPANSION

Hyatt Hotels Corporation and Indo-China Kajima have announced that the Wink brand in Vietnam will join the Unscripted by Hyatt brand, marking the global debut of Hyatt's newest lifestyle offering. The strategic agreement will expand Hyatt's presence in Vietnam to new destinations including Can Tho, Tuy Hoa, and Hai Phong. Under the partnership, six operating Wink properties—Wink Saigon Centre, Wink Danang Centre, Wink Danang Riverside, Wink Tuy Hoa Beach, Wink Can Tho Centre, and Wink Hai Phong Centre—



will be rebranded under the Unscripted by Hyatt collection, taking Hyatt's portfolio in Vietnam from four hotels to ten. A seventh property, Wink Hanoi Westlake, is scheduled

to open in late 2026. Together, the Wink properties will add more than 2,000 rooms across key urban, coastal, and cultural destinations in Vietnam.

HAI WELCOMES SHWETANK SINGH AS CEO & MD OF CHALET HOTELS



The Hotel Association of India (HAI) welcomes Shwetank Singh on his appointment as Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director of Chalet Hotels. HAI also congratulated Sanjay Sethi on his distinguished journey in the Indian hospitality industry. On behalf of the Executive Committee, President HAI expressed gratitude for his active contribution to the Association, saying, "While we at HAI are saddened by your decision, we totally understand and respect it. We value your contributions immensely." HAI looks forward to Singh joining the Executive Committee. His formal onboarding is expected to take place at the Annual General Meeting and Executive Committee meeting in March.



BUDGET 2026 ANOTHER PUSH FOR TOURISM & HOSPITALITY GROWTH

From infrastructure and skilling to niche tourism and tax relief, Budget 2026–27 signals continuity with ambition, but execution will determine its true impact on the hospitality sector.

Team HAI Engage

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's Budget 2026–27 has placed travel, tourism and hospitality firmly within India's economic growth narrative. Moving beyond seasonal positioning, the Budget frames tourism as a year-round employment generator and a strategic contributor to India's \$5 trillion ambition.

At the heart of the announcements is a clear infrastructure thrust. The proposed ₹5,000 crore "Growth Connector" framework aims to strengthen city economic



"The renewed emphasis on the services sector, coupled with recognition of tourism's potential to generate employment, boost foreign exchange earnings, and expand local economies, is encouraging"

K.B. KACHRU

President, Hotel Association of India,
and Chairman – South Asia, Radisson
Hotel Group

regions through high-speed rail, multimodal integration and last-mile connectivity. By bridging metros with emerging destinations, the government is attempting to convert geographic potential into economic opportunity.

Seven new high-speed rail corridors — including Mumbai–Pune, Delhi–Varanasi and Chennai–Bengaluru — are expected to enhance inter-city mobility, support pilgrimage circuits and open up secondary destinations. Complementing this, environmentally sustainable cargo corridors, expanded inland waterways, and incentives for indigenous seaplane manufacturing could unlock access to remote coastal and island destinations.

For the hospitality industry, improved connectivity translates directly into occupancies, RevPAR growth and new



asset viability across Tier-2 and Tier-3 markets.

A significant institutional reform is the announcement of a National Institute of Hospitality. The institute is expected to strengthen professional education, leadership development and service standards — addressing long-standing skill gaps in the sector. Parallely, a 12-week pilot programme to train 10,000 tourist guides across 20 iconic destinations signals a push towards improving on-ground visitor experience. Budget 2026 also introduces a National Destination Digital Knowledge Grid to digitally map India's cultural, spiritual and heritage assets. This unified repository is expected to support destination planning, visitor management and data-driven marketing — a much-needed step towards structured tourism governance.

One of the most immediately impactful measures for the travel trade is the sharp reduction in Tax Collected at Source (TCS) on overseas tour packages — cut from up to 20% to a flat 2%. For outbound tour operators and leisure segments facing liquidity constraints, this move is expected to ease cash flow pressures and stimulate demand.



“One of the most significant positives of this Budget is continuity. The government has stayed the course with policies that have been in place over the last few years, particularly post-COVID, with a strong and consistent focus on infrastructure development”

AJAY K. BAKAYA,

Chairman, Sarovar Hotels & Director,
Louvre Hotels India

Inbound tourism, meanwhile, receives targeted support through five proposed regional medical tourism hubs integrating hospitals, diagnostics, AYUSH and rehabilitation services. With healthcare travel already a strong inbound segment, structured hubs could improve coordination and international branding.

Spiritual and heritage tourism have also been prioritised. Buddhist circuits across the North-East are set for development, including monastery preservation and improved connectivity, positioning the region for Asian pilgrimage flows. Fifteen archaeological sites — including Dholavira, Rakhigarhi and Sarnath — will be upgraded into experiential destinations with enhanced interpretation and visitor infrastructure, creating deeper itinerary options beyond traditional circuits.

Nature-led tourism features prominently. Scenic mountain trains in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, eco-trails in Araku Valley



and Pothigai Malai, bird-watching routes around Pulicat Lake and turtle trails in coastal states reflect a clear tilt toward sustainable, community-driven tourism. For the hospitality industry, these initiatives expand the map of investible destinations and diversify demand across segments — from wellness and pilgrimage to adventure and eco-tourism.

Industry leaders have broadly welcomed the direction while calling for sharper execution. K.B. Kachru, President, Hotel Association of India, and Chairman – South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, said, “Budget 2026–27 reflects a strong focus on accelerating and sustaining economic growth, with a decisive push on infrastructure — both critical drivers for the tourism sector. The renewed emphasis on the services sector, coupled with recognition of tourism’s potential to generate employment, boost foreign exchange earnings, and expand local economies, is particularly encouraging.”

He emphasised the need for post-Budget engagement on sector-specific reforms, including stronger overseas marketing, to translate policy intent into measurable outcomes.

Ajay K. Bakaya, Chairman, Sarovar Hotels & Director, Louvre Hotels India, observed, “One of the most significant positives of this Budget is continuity. The government has stayed the course with policies that have been in place over the last few years, particularly. **HAI**

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India is reshaping its tourism ecosystem to compete with global leaders in MICE and leisure travel, says **Harikishore S.**, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, and Chairman, India Convention Promotion Bureau.

BUILDING A TOURISM POWERHOUSE INDIA'S INFRASTRUCTURE- LED PUSH

India's tourism infrastructure is undergoing a decisive transformation, backed by targeted policy reforms and sustained public investment. India is not merely upgrading destinations. We are redesigning the tourism value chain.

A key driver has been improved connectivity. Under the UDAN scheme, air routes have been extended to previously underserved destinations. New greenfield airports and expanded terminals are strengthening regional access. Investments in national highways, tourism circuit roads and Vande Bharat trains are steadily closing last-mile connectivity gaps. The objective is clear: reduce friction in travel and unlock new destinations.

Parallel investments are strengthening India's position as a global MICE

(Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) hub. World-class convention centres and exhibition facilities are being developed across major cities, while liberalised FDI norms, streamlined approvals and PPP frameworks are attracting private capital into hospitality. Hotel inventory is expanding across Tier2/3 cities as well as pilgrimage circuits.

The policy foundations are in place. The infrastructure pipeline is strong. India is not merely aspiring to compete with Asian and Middle Eastern hubs, India is ready to lead.

Infrastructure expansion has been matched by institutional reforms. The Ministry has formulated a National Strategy and Roadmap for the MICE Industry, providing a structured growth framework. Guidelines for City-level

MICE Promotion Bureaus have been issued to States and Union Territories, building a decentralised ecosystem that empowers cities to compete globally.

Brand positioning is being strengthened through the 'Meet in India' sub-brand under the Incredible India campaign. It highlights India's connectivity, knowledge economy strengths and diverse tourism offerings to international planners. The Bureau is also actively engaging at global MICE platforms to convert interest into confirmed events.

The alignment between branding and ground-level improvements is deliberate. Our approach ensures that brand promise is backed by infrastructure.

The 'India Says I Do' campaign is positioning heritage palaces, beaches and mountain destinations as premium wedding venues, driving high-value tourism into emerging cities. India's hosting of over 200 G20 meetings across 60 cities during its Presidency validated infrastructure readiness beyond Tier 1 hubs, bringing global visibility to newer destinations.

To further strengthen competitiveness, the Ministry has launched a Comprehensive Digital MICE Catalogue covering infrastructure across 60 cities — detailing convention centres, connectivity, facilities and nearby attractions. This unified digital platform enhances transparency and ease of planning for global event organisers.

The Ministry has formulated a National Strategy and Roadmap for the MICE Industry, providing a structured growth framework

Yet, infrastructure development is not confined to convention tourism. One persistent challenge is seasonality and over-concentration in a handful of hotspots. The Ministry is addressing this through product diversification and infrastructure-led regional development.

Niche tourism segments — wellness, adventure, cruise, eco-tourism, heritage and golf — are being systematically promoted to position India as a 365-day destination. The identification of such segments is treated as dynamic, responding to evolving global travel trends and India's diverse regional strengths.

Swadesh Darshan 2.0, along with PRASHAD and its Challenge-Based Destination Development sub-scheme, is driving holistic transformation. These initiatives focus not just on beautification but on upgrading accommodation, transport, visitor facilities and sustainability standards across the tourist ecosystem.

In addition, the government is working toward developing 50 globally benchmarked tourist destinations. Once implemented, this initiative could significantly decongest traditional hotspots while raising quality standards nationwide.

At its core, the strategy reflects a shift from isolated projects to integrated ecosystem development. Tourism competitiveness today depends on seamless infrastructure, professional management and strong brand positioning working together.

With connectivity expanding, convention infrastructure strengthening, branding aligned with delivery and niche tourism unlocking new regions, India's tourism sector appears poised for its next growth phase.

The ambition is clear: to bridge infrastructure gaps, attract sustained private participation and advance India's standing among the world's leading tourism economies, not merely as a destination, but as a global tourism powerhouse. **HAI**





Dr Jyotsna Suri, Chairperson and MD & Keshav Suri, Executive Director, The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group

“GOVT, INDUSTRY MUST WORK TOGETHER TO PROMOTE HOSPITALITY AS A CAREER OF CHOICE”

Keshav Suri, *Executive Director*, The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group, says local hiring, integration of regional cultures and cuisine, and development practices that respect environmental and heritage sensitivities, are all part of inclusive growth that leaves no one behind.



Inclusive growth is often discussed in macro terms. From a hospitality leader's lens, what does inclusion mean in terms of local sourcing, and in leadership?

From a hospitality lens, inclusion should not just be a philosophy; it must be a daily practice. On the shop floor, it means dignity, safety and equal respect for every team member, regardless of gender, identity, caste, disability or background. At The LaLiT, this is enabled through gender-neutral policies, accessible infrastructure, regular sensitisation and zero tolerance for discrimination. Our teams reflect the diversity of India, including persons with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ individuals and acid attack survivors.

In local sourcing, inclusion means building long-term partnerships with communities. We work closely with local farmers, artisans, women-led enterprises and social organisations so that tourism creates economic value within the destination itself. In leadership pipelines, inclusion is about access and fairness. Structured mentorship,

transparent growth frameworks and conscious removal of systemic barriers ensure that women, first-generation professionals and queer individuals can progress into leadership roles. Inclusion, for us, is embedded in how we hire, develop and lead every day.

Hotels are among the largest employers of first-generation workers. How can the hospitality sector become a stronger engine for upward social mobility?

The hospitality sector plays a critical role in enabling social mobility. For many first-generation workers, employment in hotels provides their first exposure to formal workplaces, financial stability and structured professional growth. To ensure this mobility is sustained, the industry must invest beyond entry-level employment. This includes comprehensive induction programmes, language and life-skills training, access to wellbeing support and clearly defined career progression pathways.

At The LaLiT Suri Hospitality School,



The under representation of women in senior hospitality roles reflects structural design challenges. Traditional operating models rely on rigid assumptions around time, mobility and caregiving responsibilities, limiting progression despite strong capability

initiatives such as structured training and education-led programmes reflect this belief, demonstrating how purposeful investment in people can bridge skill gaps and expand access to opportunity not just within one organisation, but across the hospitality industry.

Tourism growth is often uneven, benefiting select destinations while bypassing others. What role can hotel groups play in spreading growth to Tier-2/3 cities without compromising quality or sustainability?

Hotel groups can act as anchor institutions in emerging destinations. Expansion into Tier 2/3 cities must be grounded in the local

context rather than standard replication. This includes local hiring and training, integration of regional culture and cuisine, and development practices that respect environmental and heritage sensitivities. Service quality is strengthened through sustained investment in people and place.

Sustainability must remain integral to growth strategies, with a clear focus on water management, energy efficiency, waste reduction & management, and community engagement.

Women's participation in hospitality is strong at entry levels but declines at senior levels. What structural changes are required to make leadership truly inclusive?

The underrepresentation of women in senior hospitality roles reflects structural design challenges rather than a lack of talent. Traditional operating models often rely on rigid assumptions around time, mobility and caregiving responsibilities, limiting progression despite strong capability.

Meaningful change requires redesigning work structures through flexible shift models, gender-neutral parental leave policies, outcome-based performance evaluation and equitable access to leadership and profit-and-loss roles. Addressing unconscious bias in promotion decisions is essential.

At The LaLiT Suri Hospitality Group, almost 50% of leadership positions are held by women, reflecting a sustained commitment to inclusion and diversity. This demonstrates that when intent is supported by structure, hospitality can build leadership teams that truly reflect its people.

As India positions tourism as a one-trillion-dollar opportunity, how should policy, skilling institutions, and the private sector collaborate to ensure growth is scalable and equitable?

Tourism will reach its full potential only if growth is incentivised upfront and linked to employment and inclusion. Policy must go beyond building infrastructure and reward organisations that create jobs in underserved regions, invest in skilling, hire inclusively and operate sustainably. Incentives should be tied to livelihoods generated, not just assets created.

Skilling institutions must train for real jobs, not theory. Curricula need to be industry-aligned, practical and respectful of the dignity of labour. At The LaLiT Suri Hospitality School, we focus on hands-on training from the start, with clear pathways from education to employment across our hospitality ecosystem.

Looking ahead to India's long-term growth story, what is one uncomfortable truth the hospitality industry must confront to lead responsibly and inclusively?

The most uncomfortable truth the hospitality industry must confront is that despite India's young demographic and hospitality's immense job-creation potential, there is a continued shortage of skilled workforce. The Indian youth is not choosing to enter the hospitality sector. There is a strong perception that hospitality is demanding, underpaid, temporary with slow career growth, which has led to a persistent workforce shortage.

There is a strong perception that hospitality is demanding, underpaid, temporary with slow career growth, which has led to a persistent workforce shortage



This is not just a skilling issue; it is an image issue. There is not enough done to communicate the scale of opportunity, career progression and global exposure that hospitality offers. We need to make the sector aspirational again.

Government and industry must work together to actively promote hospitality as a career of choice—one that offers mobility, leadership opportunities and meaningful employment at scale. At The LaLiT Suri Hospitality School, we focus on industry-ready training, hands-on learning and clear career pathways, so young professionals see hospitality as a long-term profession, not just a stopgap.

The road ahead holds both challenges and promise. But with unity of purpose, we are well-positioned to build a stronger, safer, and more globally competitive hospitality sector for the country. **HAI**

HOSPITALITY INDIA'S ENGINE OF INCLUSIVE GROWTH

The sector is moving beyond being a gateway to employment, towards becoming a platform for careers, leadership, and social mobility. Inclusion is no longer defined only by who gets hired, but by who grows, who stays, and who leads.

Team HAI Engage

India's hospitality sector is emerging as one of the country's most powerful engines of inclusive growth. The industry employs over 80 million people directly and indirectly. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women comprise 51.2% of the workforce in the hospitality sector—one of a handful of industries where women are a majority. Crucially, hospitality is among the few organised sectors where first-generation professionals, migrants, and youth from non-metro and rural regions can enter formal employment without advanced degrees, and grow through structured training and on-the-job learning.



As tourism expands beyond metros into Tier 2/3 cities, hospitality is also becoming more geographically inclusive. Hotel brands and investors are increasingly turning away from saturated Tier I markets and focusing on fast-growing Tier II, III, and IV cities. Emerging destinations—from Bhubaneswar, Nagpur, and Dehradun to Surat, Raipur, Udaipur, Indore, and Coimbatore—are seeing a sharp rise in hotel development, brand signings, and operational activity, driven by rising domestic travel, better connectivity, and a growing demand for quality accommodation across non-metro India. The real opportunity, however, lies in ensuring that inclusion does not stop at hiring—but translates into career progression, leadership access, and long-term employability. That shift is now visibly underway.

KANIKA HASRAT, Senior Director–Operations, Hilton South Asia, speaks from personal experience. “When I joined the industry, hospitality was seen as a fulfilling long-term career—one where you learnt discipline, the art of service, people skills, and resilience. However, today, with demand for hospitality skills across other sectors, very few imagine it as a lifelong profession unless they are already on a management track.”

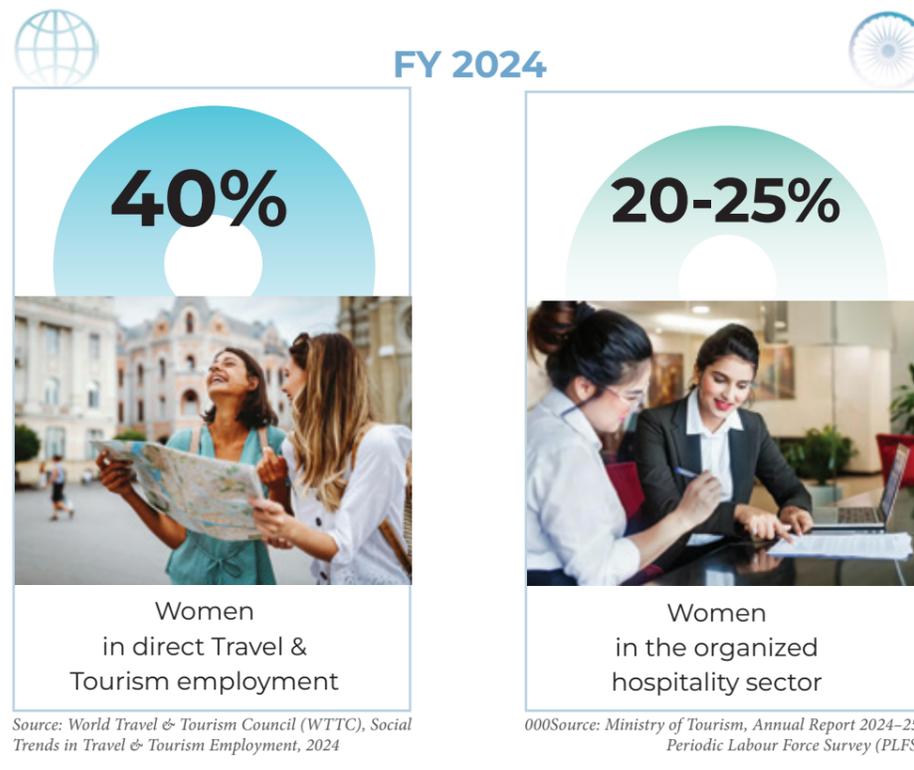
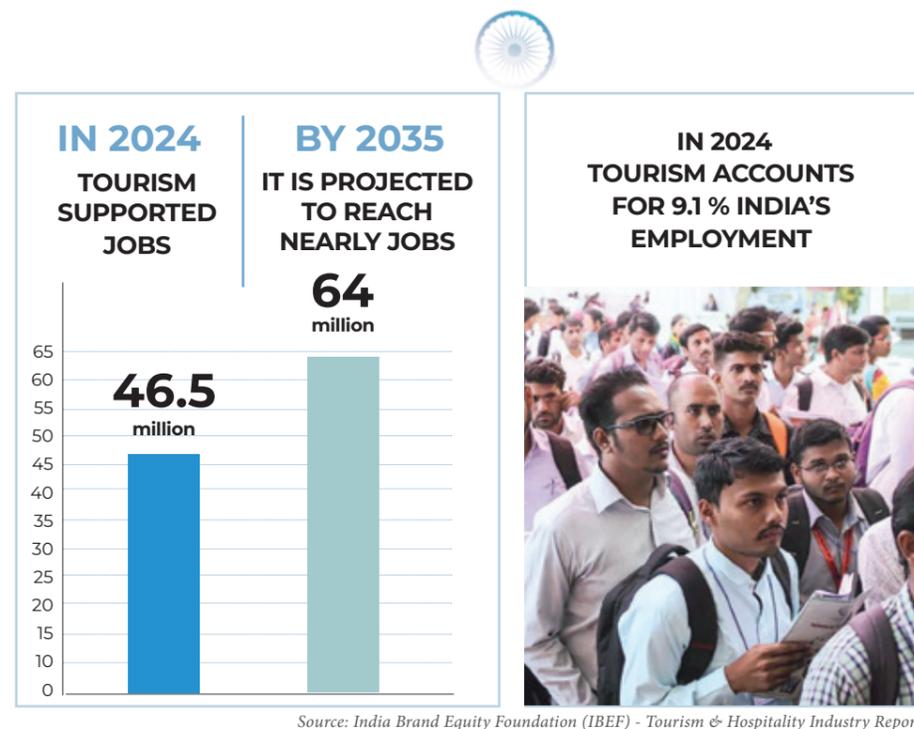
What has changed over the years, she says, is not the core nature of the work, but the scale and complexity of the business. Hotels today are multi-brand, asset-heavy in some cases, and deeply technology-enabled. This, she notes, opens up opportunities to build real, tangible careers across operations, finance, commercial roles, development, and people management.



“

As a woman leader, I am deeply aware that inclusion is built—or broken—by systems. Representation matters, but what matters more is what happens after hiring. Intentional mentorship and skill development programmes are needed to ensure that high-potential but underrepresented talent is seen, supported, and offered stretch roles

KANIKA HASRAT
Senior Director–Operations,
Hilton South Asia

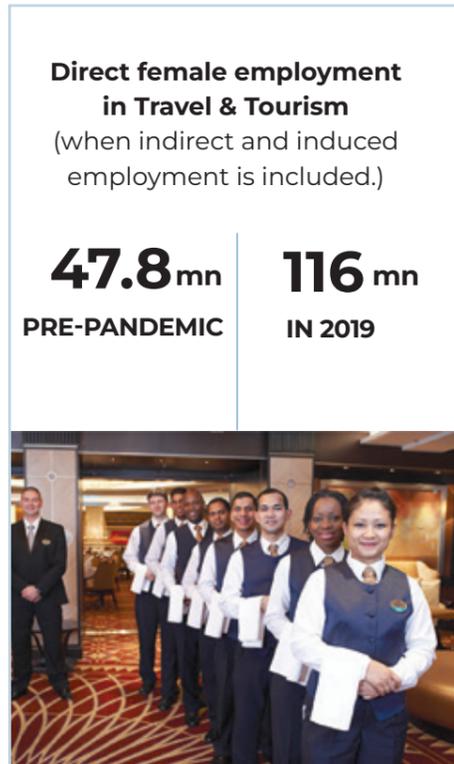


As the sector expands into smaller cities, hospitality is not only creating new destinations but also building immersive local experiences rooted in community pride—making local hiring both natural and necessary.

For many young people—especially

first-generation professionals from non-metro and rural communities, as well as women—the challenge is not ambition, but visibility and access. The sector’s evolution, Hasrat argues, lies in narrowing that gap by identifying talent





Source: WTTC Gender Equality Research; TravelPulse, State of Women's Equality in Travel & Tourism



Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2022-23, Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI)



GENDER PAY GAP & EMPLOYMENT QUALITY



Source: ILO, Global Wage Report 2024



Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24

early, providing cross-functional exposure, and creating opportunities that allow high performers to be seen.

That, in turn, requires structural change. Early responsibility, she says, must be paired with “early investments.” Hospitality is a sector where young people become consumer-facing faster than in almost any other industry. “In the hyper, digitally connected world, what would be prudent is matching that exposure with early investments—focusing on training, mentoring, and designing career paths so responsibility is directly proportional to growth.”

This means designing careers, not just roles. From the moment someone joins, they should be able to see how a frontline or supervisory role can lead to

leadership, cross-functional expertise, and decision-making responsibilities. Structured learning, early empowerment, and visible role models are critical to making aspiration real.

Career opportunities, she adds, must also become portable. For many candidates from non-metro cities, aspirations stall when progress depends on early migration to metros. By investing in local training partnerships and institutes, companies can build local talent pipelines and reduce barriers to entry. “This is especially true for women. When immediate migration to metros is not required, we unlock ambition in places where opportunity has traditionally been limited.”

On technology, Hasrat is clear that it must be a force for empowerment, not exclusion. “In hospitality, the most

valuable roles of the future will sit at the intersection of human judgement and digital fluency. As routine tasks get automated, value will shift towards roles focused on guest problem resolution, personalisation, data-enabled operations, and leaders who can manage both human and tech-assisted teams.”

Crucially, digitisation must expand opportunities rather than narrow them. Digital skills, she stresses, cannot reside only in corporate or specialist teams; they must be embedded into frontline roles. When new systems are introduced, they must be accompanied by structured upskilling and clear pathways into higher-responsibility roles.

“As a woman leader, I am deeply aware that inclusion is built—or broken—by systems,” she says.

Representation matters, but what matters more is what happens after hiring. Intentional mentorship and skill development programmes are essential to ensure underrepresented talent is supported and offered stretch roles. Workplace design, she adds, must reflect real life—through flexibility, pay parity, childcare support, safe accommodation and transport, and zero tolerance for harassment.

Finally, inclusion must be measured and managed. Leadership diversity, internal mobility, and progression rates, she argues, should be tracked with the same rigour as financial performance.

A similar emphasis on structured inclusion runs through Wyndham Hotels & Resorts’ approach.



“

For youth from non-metro and rural backgrounds, exposure, access, and structured progression are critical. Industrial training, internships, and hands-on operational experience in live hotel environments help bridge the gap between education and the workplace. Beyond entry, building transparent career pathways, internal mobility, and leadership development ensures hospitality is seen not as a stop-gap job, but as a profession offering global, lifelong growth

RAHOOL MACARIUS
Market Managing Director, Eurasia,
Wyndham Hotels & Resorts

RAHOOL MACARIUS, Market Managing Director–Eurasia, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, says hospitality has the potential to be a powerful platform for upward mobility. While the sector provides large-scale entry-level employment, the real opportunity lies in transforming these roles into long-term, aspirational career pathways.

“For youth from non-metro and rural backgrounds, exposure, access, and structured progression are critical. Industrial training, internships, and hands-on operational experience in live hotel environments help bridge the gap between education and the workplace,” he says. Beyond entry, transparent career pathways and leadership development ensure hospitality is seen as a profession offering global, lifelong growth.

As technology reshapes the industry, Macarius notes that roles combining operational expertise with digital capability are becoming increasingly important—from guest experience design and revenue analytics to



LGBTQIA+ Inclusion in Hospitality

The hospitality and tourism sector leads Indian industries in LGBTQIA+ inclusion, with **72% of employers actively recruiting LGBTQIA+ apprentices.**

Source: TeamLease Degree Apprenticeship Outlook Report (2024–25)

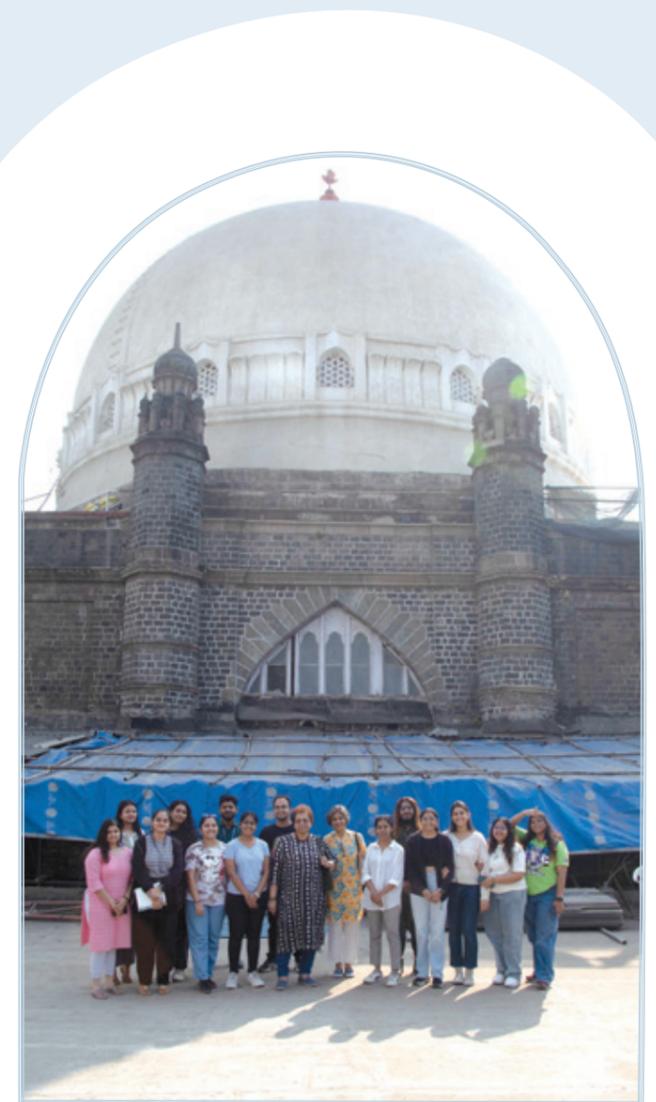
Only **38% of Indian companies have formal LGBTQIA+ inclusion policies**, and fewer than half provide targeted benefits or structured employee networks.

Source: Corporate Diversity & Inclusion Surveys



cybersecurity and asset optimisation. At the same time, he stresses that digitisation must expand opportunity rather than create exclusion, making workforce development a strategic imperative. Wyndham’s partnerships with institutions such as IIM and SRM focus on continuous learning, upskilling, and internships to build a future-ready talent pipeline.

“True inclusivity in hospitality goes beyond hiring targets; it requires clear career pathways, mentorship, and skills development for women, first-generation workers, and migrants,” Macarius says.





By 2034, India's travel and hospitality sector is projected to require an additional **6.1 million** workers, with women expected to account for approximately **24.5%** of the projected workforce.

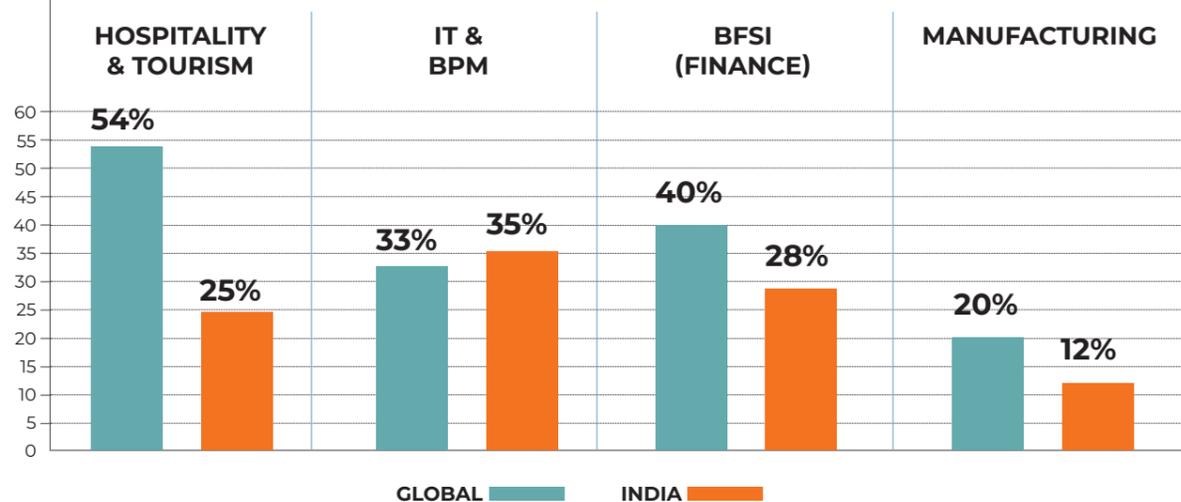
Source: Industry projections based on WTTC growth forecasts

In India tourism exhibits a strong employment multiplier, where each direct hospitality job generates multiple indirect jobs across the local economy, many of which are informal and female-intensive.

Source: Ministry of Tourism, TSA; ILO Informality Studies

GENDER DIVERSITY: Where Does Hospitality Stand?

Globally, hospitality is a leader in gender diversity. In India, however, it competes with more established service sectors for female talent.



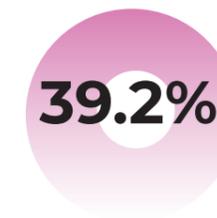
GLOBAL CONTEXT



Tourism employs a higher share of women



The broader global economy



INDIA CONTEXT

Hospitality trails the IT-BPM sector, which has been more aggressive in implementing flexible "Work from Anywhere" policies that favour female retention.



Source: NITI Aayog Services Sector Report 2025; McKinsey Women in the Workplace 2025.

Source: World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) Economic Impact Research 2025



“

To ensure digitisation expands opportunity, the industry must invest seriously in upskilling. Frontline colleagues need access to training that builds comfort with workplace technologies

KIRAN ANDICOT

Senior Vice President of
South Asia for Marriott International

At Marriott International, the same shift is evident. **KIRAN ANDICOT**, Senior Vice President–South Asia, observes that hospitality is increasingly being seen as a long-term career choice rather than just an entry-level option. Clear progression—from frontline roles into leadership across functions—builds aspiration and credibility.

“Skill development is central to this shift,” he says, pointing to partnerships with hospitality institutes, NGOs, and corporate partners. Programmes such as the Accenture partnership, the Emerging Leaders Program, and the Global Voyage University Leadership Development Program link training directly to employment and leadership outcomes. Initiatives like Integrated Jobs (iJobs) further support multi-skilling, retention, and operational efficiency.

Women’s participation, Andicot emphasises, is equally critical. Through initiatives such as Project Pranita, Marriott is investing in hotel management education for underprivileged girls, offering stipends, accommodation, and employment pathways. Technology, too, is being used to support—not replace—people, through tools that optimise scheduling, workload distribution, and frontline productivity.

“To ensure digitisation expands opportunity, the industry must invest seriously in upskilling,” he says. Inclusive leadership, supportive policies, and flexibility across life stages are essential to retaining talent and enabling progression.

Taken together, these perspectives underline a broader transformation underway in hospitality. The sector is



Differently-Abled Persons (PwDs) & Inclusive Employment

Only **around 36% of India’s persons with disabilities (PwDs)** are employed, with participation in organized sectors remaining especially low.

Source: Government of India Disability Employment Statistics

India has an estimated **21.9–30 million persons with disabilities**, of whom only a fraction are integrated into formal employment.

Source: Census of India; Disability Surveys

Social enterprises such as **Echoes Café and Mitti Café** operate hospitality models staffed predominantly or exclusively by persons with disabilities, demonstrating inclusive employment viability.

Source: Industry Case Studies; Social Enterprise Reports



moving beyond being a gateway to employment, towards becoming a platform for careers, leadership, and social mobility. Inclusion is no longer defined only by who gets hired, but by who grows, who stays, and who leads. As tourism expands and technology reshapes work, the hospitality industry’s success will increasingly be measured by how effectively it combines growth with dignity, opportunity, and long-term inclusion. **HAI**



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NO PAUSE BUTTON THE SANJAY SETHI PLAYBOOK

Hospitality stalwart **Sanjay Sethi**, Managing Director and CEO of Chalet Hotels, has handed over the reins to Shwetank Singh after a distinguished career in the sector. Widely respected for his industry stewardship, he serves on the CII National Committee on Tourism, is Honorary Treasurer of the Hotel Association of India, and has received multiple awards for his contribution to Indian hospitality. Excerpts from a tete-a-tete with the luminary:

For Sanjay Sethi, hospitality was never part of a carefully charted life plan. It emerged, almost accidentally, from a newspaper cutting sent by a pragmatic father who had begun to sense that the traditional engineer's path might not suit his son. In the mid-1980s, hospitality was hardly considered a serious career option in India. Yet that small nudge would set Sethi on a journey that now spans decades, cities, crises, and the quiet evolution of leadership in one of India's most people-intensive industries.

Born into a typical upper-middle-class family, Sethi's childhood was shaped by mobility. His father worked in the corporate world, which meant moving between Delhi, Calcutta, and back again. Eventually, Mumbai became home—and remains the city he has lived in the longest.

Today, looking back, Sethi is unequivocal. "If I had to live my life again, I would choose hospitality as my career all over again." Sethi's wife is also a hotelier, though not currently working. His two daughters are professionally independent—eldest daughter works at the Accor corporate office in Dubai, while his younger daughter is based in Mumbai with Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL).

Sethi is candid about his uneven start. His early career included stints in small hotels and even a short-lived entrepreneurial foray. Stability eventually drew him back to salaried roles. But it was his posting in Varanasi, at the age of 23, that became a key turning point.

Assigned initially as an assistant manager in food and beverage, he became the hotel's de facto deputy general manager within six months.

What shaped him, however, was not the rapid rise, but the intensity of lived

"In hospitality, you don't get the luxury of time...your product is created, delivered, and judged simultaneously. There is no R&D window, no pause button. You learn on your feet—or you fail publicly"

experience. In those 18 months, Sethi faced situations most management textbooks never cover: a knife brandished outside the hotel, a crude bomb hurled at his car, and three university students holding a gun to his head in his office over an unpaid bill.

"In hospitality, you don't get the luxury of time," he says. "Your product is created, delivered, and judged simultaneously." There is no R&D window, no pause button. You learn on your feet—or you fail publicly.

From those moments emerged a lesson that still anchors him. A quote he encountered then remains on his LinkedIn banner today: Everything you dream of lies on the other side of fear.

Fear, he reflects, is often quiet and paralyzing: Should I act or step back? What will people think? Over time, the way one answers these questions shapes habits. Habits become personality. Personality, eventually, becomes reputation.

LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT RESPONSE, NOT CONTROL

One of Sethi's most consistent beliefs is that leadership—at any level—is not about control. "Whether you are at the bottom of the pyramid or at the top, control is an illusion," he says. What truly matters is the quality of one's response to situations, especially under pressure.

Early in his career, his mantra was simple: build strong domain knowledge,





Team of the All Women Operated hotel - The Westin Hyderabad Hitec City

“People don’t remember your title. They remember how you made them feel—especially under pressure”

work hard, and remain humble. But leadership, he believes, is ultimately forged through experience—often through mistakes.

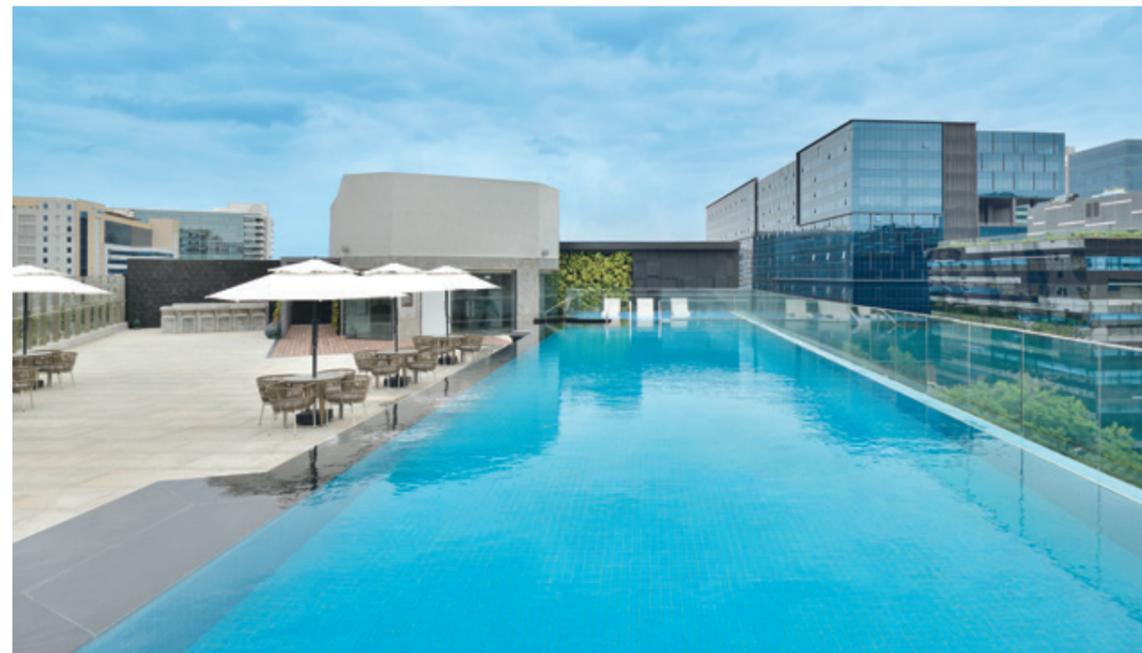
He recounts one such moment with unusual candour. After reacting angrily in a project review—publicly and uncharacteristically—he returned home unhappy. The incident lingered in his mind for months. Eventually, he chose to apologise openly at a town hall. The lesson was enduring. “People don’t remember your title,” he says. “They remember how you made them feel—especially under pressure.”

DO THE RIGHT THING-LEADERSHIP CODE

Values, in Sethi’s view, are meaningless unless lived. Organisations may articulate five or eight neatly worded values, but the real test lies in daily decisions. For him, everything collapses into one overarching principle: do the right thing. That principle guides his approach to shareholders, guests, employees, vendors, and communities alike. In hospitality, he argues, professionals don’t just manage operations or narratives—they manage trust.

This philosophy extends to partnerships as well. At Chalet Hotels, where Sethi has served as Managing Director and CEO, the group spent years as asset managers with global brands operating its hotels. Over time, Chalet has built its own operating capabilities and has introduced a new age premium lifestyle brand Athiva Hotels & Resorts, with its first property in Khandala last October.

The logic, he explains, is straightforward: consistency of guest expectations, stronger negotiating power with partners, and long-term strategic flexibility. Chalet remains open to external brands or co-branding where it makes sense. “Every asset is judged on its own merit,” he says. “We are comfortable with a multi-brand portfolio.”



ON PEOPLE, DIVERSITY, AND THE LONG VIEW

When asked about the changing nature of young managers, Sethi points out the responses of millennials and Gen Z are shaped by their own realities. Leadership potential, he argues, goes beyond technical skill. Competence is non-negotiable—but hunger matters more. Hunger for personal growth, for the business, and for doing right by stakeholders. Without alignment between individual values and organisational ethos, even hard work fails to deliver results.

On diversity, Sethi takes a similarly expansive view. At Chalet, inclusion goes beyond gender ratios to encompass economic background, disability, and identity. Through partnerships with Trust for Retailers & Retail Associates of India (TRRAIN), the group has enabled skilling and employment for people from economically weaker sections and the differently abled.

Looking ahead, Sethi sees technology—especially AI—not as a replacement for human interaction, but as a complement. Hospitality will remain a deeply people-centric business, even as technology reshapes processes and expectations. As millennials, Gen Z, and Gen Alpha become dominant consumer groups, the ecosystem will evolve—but the essence of hospitality, he believes, will endure.

THE QUIET TAKEAWAY

Sethi resists grand conclusions. His career, he insists, was not built on dramatic “aha” moments, but on steady growth, course corrections, and periodic re-strategising. His advice, distilled, is simple: choose integrity over convenience. Do the right thing. Keep your head high—but your feet firmly on the ground. In an industry defined by perception, pressure, and people, that may be the most enduring leadership strategy of all. **HAI**

INDIA'S MANY CRUISES



From Mumbai's short ocean sailings to Ganga river journeys and Kerala's backwaters, cruising in India has moved beyond a single idea—emerging as a layered, distinctly Indian travel experience shaped by coastlines, rivers, and local rhythms.

By Riaan Jacob George

Cruise tourism within India and from Indian ports has moved from being just an idea to an active and growing industry. While India's cruise market is still small compared to established global cruise hubs like Europe, the Caribbean, or Southeast Asia, it has reached a stage where real operations, defined routes, and identifiable operators now exist. Cruising in India is no longer speculative. It is happening.



In Kerala, cruising takes on another form through the state's extensive backwater network, particularly around Alleppey. Backwater cruises, especially traditional houseboats, are one of India's most well-known and long-standing cruise experiences



This growth reflects a wider change in how India is thinking about tourism, transport, and maritime infrastructure. Coastal tourism, inland waterways, and port development are increasingly being viewed as connected systems rather than separate sectors. As a result, the idea of cruising in India has expanded. It is no longer limited to large ocean-going ships. River cruises, coastal sailings, and backwater journeys all play a role, together forming a layered and distinctly Indian cruise landscape.

The domestic ocean cruise market is currently led by Cordelia Cruises, which operates regular, year-round sailings aimed primarily at Indian travellers. Cordelia has helped introduce cruising as a short, accessible holiday option rather than a long, international luxury experience. Its main domestic routes operate from Mumbai and include Mumbai-Goa, Mumbai-Diu, Mumbai-Kochi, and Mumbai-Lakshadweep. These itineraries usually last between two and five nights and are designed to fit into short holiday windows, long weekends, and festive breaks.

On these cruises, the ship itself is positioned as the main destination. The experience focuses heavily on onboard entertainment rather than

Cruise Bharat Mission

The Ministry of Tourism, in collaboration with the Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways, is actively promoting cruise tourism through initiatives like the Cruise Bharat Mission, launched in 2024. The aim of the mission is:

- Development of world-class infrastructure and destinations
- Adoption of technology to provide a seamless, non-intrusive experience of embarkation, disembarkation, and destination visits
- Promote cultural, historical, and natural destinations and circuits of the Indian subcontinent
- Ensure inclusive and equitable growth of all stakeholders--ports, cruise lines, vessel operators, tour operators, service providers, and local communities.
- Enable responsible involvement of all regulatory agencies – customs, immigration, CISF, state tourism department, state maritime agencies, district administration, local police, etc.
- Target is to double cruise passenger numbers by 2029 from 4.71 lakh (FY 2023-24).



Expected Outcome



10
Sea Cruise Terminals,
100 River Cruise Terminals,
05 Marinas

1million
Sea Cruise Passengers with over **500** Cruise Calls

1.5 million river cruise Passengers over **5000+** km of operational waterways

Rank in top **5** for Cruise Asia-Pacific

0.4 million jobs

Source: Cruise Bharat Mission 2024 Report, Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways, GOI

extended time on land. Programmes include Bollywood-style shows, family-friendly activities, and special sailings linked to festivals and school holidays. Shore visits are brief and carefully planned, often limited to half-day excursions that allow passengers to sample a destination without having to deal with complex logistics.



Mumbai acts as the main home port for these sailings, supported by the Mumbai International Cruise Terminal. Other destinations such as Goa, Kochi, Diu, and Lakshadweep function as ports of call. Each of these ports are at a different stage of infrastructure readiness, which influences the type and length of shore experiences that can be offered.

Alongside Cordelia, Angriya Cruise provides a different kind of coastal experience through overnight sailings between Mumbai and Goa. Angriya sits between luxury cruising and practical sea transport. It attracts travellers who are looking for an alternative to flying or long road journeys, especially during peak travel seasons. Its continued demand highlights an interest in coastal sea travel that values comfort, novelty, and experience rather than scale or large ships.

At present, domestic ocean cruising remains focused on India's west coast. Calmer sea conditions, better port infrastructure, and proximity to major population centres make the region more viable for regular operations. Despite India's long eastern coastline,



consistent domestic cruise services from ports such as Chennai, Visakhapatnam, or Kolkata have yet to develop at scale.

RIVER CRUISES

River cruising forms a separate and increasingly important part of India's cruise ecosystem. These journeys offer a different experience from ocean cruises and appeal to a different type of traveller. River cruises are slower, more immersive, and closely tied to culture, history, and landscape.

Antara River Cruises operates luxury, all-suite cruises on the Ganges, with routes such as Kolkata to Mayapur. These journeys focus on slow travel, heritage exploration, and environmental awareness. The ships are designed for shallow rivers and operate with a strong emphasis on sustainability. River cruising here is positioned as a premium cultural experience rather than a mass-market holiday.

At present, domestic ocean cruising remains focused on India's west coast. Calmer sea conditions, better port infrastructure, and proximity to major population centres make the region more viable for regular operations



Assam Bengal Navigation operates cruises on both the Brahmaputra and the Ganges, with a strong focus on Northeast India. Its itineraries combine river travel with cultural visits, wildlife encounters, and interaction with local communities. These cruises often attract international travellers, as well as Indian passengers seeking deeper and more meaningful regional experiences.

River cruising benefits from India's growing investment in inland waterway development,

but it also faces specific challenges. Seasonal changes in water levels, navigation permissions, and coordination with local authorities play a major role in whether routes can operate smoothly and consistently.

In Kerala, cruising takes on another form through the state's extensive backwater network, particularly around Alleppey. Backwater cruises, especially traditional houseboats, are one of India's most well-known and long-standing cruise experiences.

Alongside standard houseboats, luxury offerings such as the Nefertiti cruise provide smaller group sizes, carefully planned routes, and higher service standards. These journeys focus less on distance covered and more on scenery, local food, and the rhythm of life along the waterways. This reinforces the idea that cruising in India is often about staying within a place rather than moving quickly between destinations.

Backwater cruising operates within a tightly regulated environmental framework. There

is growing focus on waste management, fuel use, noise control, and limits on the number of boats operating at any given time. The long-term success of this sector depends on balancing tourism demand with the protection of fragile ecosystems.

India is also emerging as a starting point for international cruise travel. Mumbai serves as the main departure port, with Kochi and Chennai playing smaller roles. MSC Cruises operates itineraries from Mumbai to destinations in the Middle East, including Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Doha. These sailings appeal to Indian travellers who want to visit multiple countries without repeated flights.



Programmes include Bollywood-style shows, family-friendly activities, and special sailings linked to festivals and school holidays. Shore visits are brief and carefully planned



Costa Cruises has run seasonal routes connecting Mumbai with Sri Lanka and parts of Southeast Asia, placing Indian ports within wider regional cruise networks. Large global brands such as Royal Caribbean International and Celebrity Cruises include Indian ports as stops on longer Asia itineraries, mainly catering to international passengers.

Across oceans, rivers, and backwater cruising, responsible tourism will be central to long-term growth. Aligning cruise activity with local capacity, working with licensed guides and artisans, and protecting sensitive coastal and river environments will determine whether cruising brings lasting benefits to host regions.

Cruising within and from India is no longer a single idea or format. It is a mix of coastal routes, river journeys, and regional experiences. Its future will be shaped not just by expansion, but by how thoughtfully these different forms of cruising are developed and integrated into India's wider tourism and infrastructure plans. **HAI**



HOSPITALITY MUST ONBOARD THE REFORM EXPRESS

With ambitious targets for 2047 and tourism firmly on the reform agenda, India needs regulatory and investment reforms to bridge capacity gaps, unlock private capital, and turn mission-mode intent into on-ground results.

By M.P. Bezbaruah
Secretary General, Hotel Association of India

Reforms—are in the air. In recent times the Prime Minister has repeatedly referred to the era of reforms, calling it a Reform Express. “Express” connotes an element of urgency and speed. The PM has also often talked about tourism’s contribution to employment creation and economic development. The FM in the budget speech has reiterated the importance of tourism as an economic development tool and has framed the budget with “reforms” as one of the three core concepts. The announcement by the Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, that tourism is one of the sectors that the high-power committee on regulatory reforms will look into has created much optimism.

In fact, when FM had stated in the budget speech of 2023 that tourism would be developed in a mission mode it was an indication of a reformed approach to development. The common sense interpretation of a mission would be that development will be taken up in a dedicated, professional manner. That would involve setting goals, working backwards to identify the gaps, devising strategy, assigning responsibilities, monitoring performance and enforcing accountability. There is some amount of ambiguity about the mission but one can go by the generally talked about goal of 100

million Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) by 2047. While devising strategy, this goal should also take into account the booming domestic tourism estimated to become 15-20 billion visits by 2047. Even the target of FTAs is a ten-fold increase in two decades. Daunting though, it is possible but obviously it cannot be business as usual. It requires big, speedy reforms. Reforms must be comprehensive and not piecemeal. They should address the following key areas at least:

- Creating accommodation and removing mismatch of demand and supply.
- Develop the existing destinations to take care of small things like safety, cleanliness, and shopping too. At the same time develop new sustainable destinations to ensure that the existing ones do not suffer from unsustainable over tourism.
- Create good connectivity.
- We are in the age of “experience economy”. Tourists primarily look for sustainable and unique experiences. Therefore, service quality must meet the expectation and skill development becomes crucial. We have at present great gaps in this area.
- Tourism needs organisational reforms to match the Vision 2047. That should include creating a strong public private partnership and defining the role of the states for a pan India approach with convergence and harmonisation of widely varying rules and policies.

If we take a close look at the hospitality sector, in accommodation, for example, the picture, to say the least, is dismal. There is big mismatch between demand and supply. While 4 lakh branded accommodation are required, there are only 1.8 lakh rooms. There are 1.65 million unbranded rooms against the need for 2.8 million. A tenfold increase in FTAs on top of phenomenal increase in domestic tourism requires huge additions urgently. A modest estimate in the Tourism Policy of 2002 suggests that every additional million tourists require 30,000 hotel rooms. By this estimate, an additional 90 million arrivals over current levels would need about 27 lakh rooms—equivalent to more than 1 lakh new rooms a year over the next two decades. The task is daunting but achievable, as both domestic and global players in the hospitality industry have the capacity to make these investments. However, three major challenges must be addressed. First, access to capital needs to be facilitated. Second, capital investments are time-consuming and therefore cannot afford delays. Third, the many roadblocks that slow down investments must be removed.



There are 1.65 million unbranded rooms against the need for 2.8 million. A tenfold increase in FTAs on top of phenomenal increase in domestic tourism requires huge additions urgently

some justified incentives like the infrastructure status. It will facilitate availability of credit and also reduce cost of credit much needed for the scale of investment. There is no logical reason for depriving hospitality of this benefit. In real terms there is likely to be no cost to government as the returns in taxes, employment and income generated will far outweigh the cost of incentives.

Similarly, a suitable and pragmatic land policy is a sine qua non for speedy investment. Even though tourism is not an organised industry, to encourage entrepreneurship and uplift tourism services and facilitate movement towards a \$3 trillion economy, such benefits should be extended to the sector.

The most important reform that can transform tourism and help achieve the desired goals is the creation of a robust PPP. Tourism is primarily a private sector driven industry. Yet collaboration is not systematic, nor is there any institutional arrangements for such collaboration. The 1989 National Committee on Tourism had recommended the establishment of a National Tourism Board for professional, accountable tourism management. At a time when the country has decided on an ambitious tourism vision for 2047, it is appropriate to assess if the existing organisational capacity and competence match the ambitions. It is, therefore, an appropriate time to revisit the old recommendation. **HAI**

If this gigantic task of creating required accommodation within a short time is to be achieved the industry would benefit from some justified incentives like the infrastructure status

In short, to move towards our goals the mission approach should start with determined reforms to make ease of doing business industry-friendly and reasonable incentives should be provided to take on this big challenge.

It has been estimated that a hotel investment has to go through more than 100 different licenses, approvals in its life cycle, including pre-construction, post construction and pre-opening approvals. The net result is that capital investment becomes uncertain and the delays increase costs.

Many of the regulations are archaic, old and irrelevant, like the Sarai Act of the 19th century. Some are central rules, some are state rules. They vary widely between states and need convergence and harmonisation. Many of them are sequential and, therefore, time-consuming.

Some basic reforms should include at least the following:

- Check relevance of each requirement and rationalise.
- Clear timeline for each activity.
- Harmonise procedures across the country for a pan-India approach.
- Wherever possible, allow concurrent handling of different approvals.

If this gigantic task of creating required accommodation within a short time is to be achieved the industry would benefit from

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