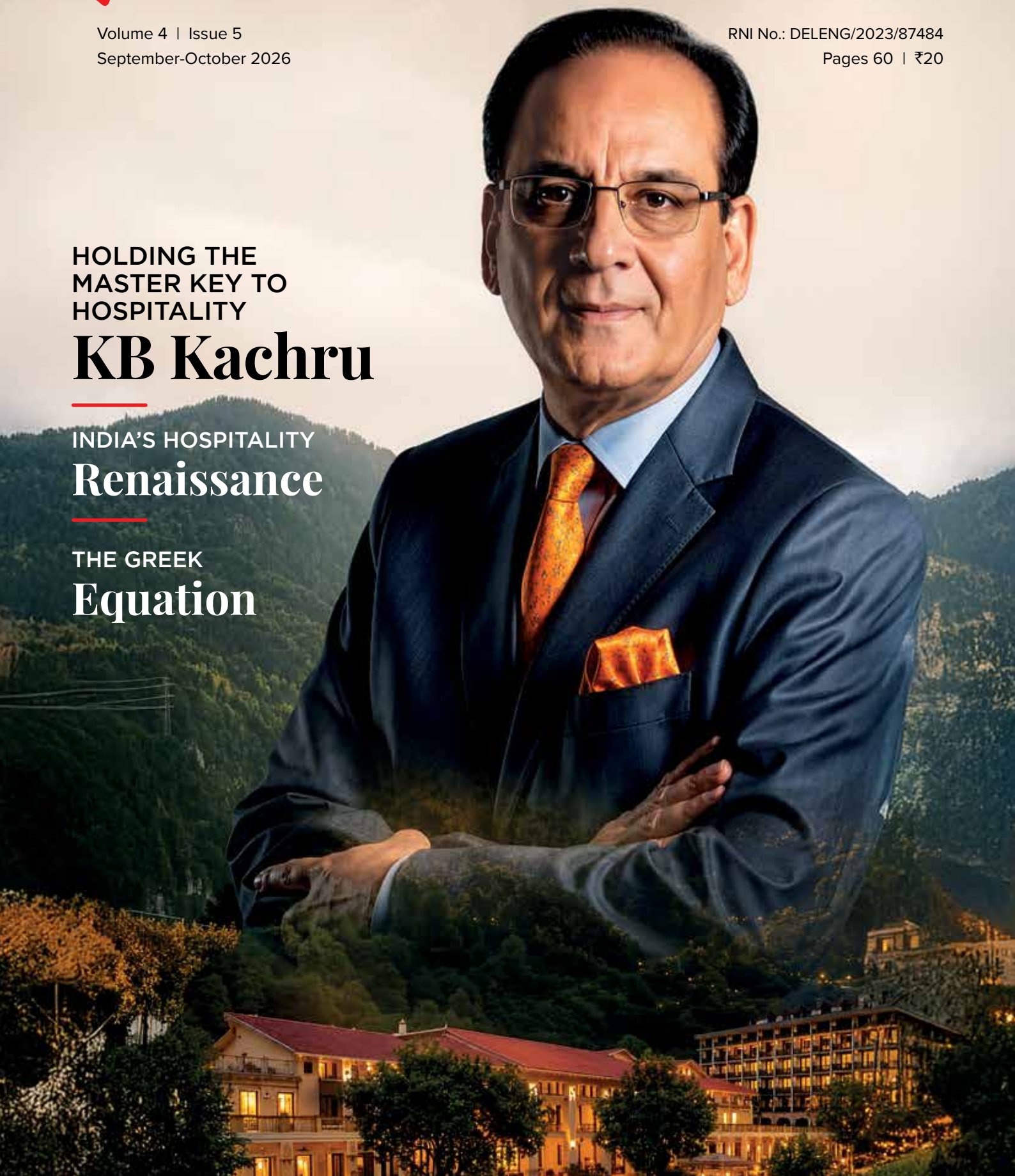
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KB Kachru

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> *Guests are likely to accept the fundamentals of differential pricing on different occasions, but not the feeling of being taken advantage of.*

In hospitality, we have always known how to put a price on a room. The more difficult question today is whether we know how to put a value on trust.

There is nothing new about hotels applying dynamic rate strategies and charging different rates at different times. Experienced hoteliers have always understood the relationship between supply, demand, seasonality, and price. What has changed is the speed and sophistication with which prices can now move.

Technology can monitor booking patterns, competitor rates, events, flights, and remaining inventory, and adjust prices almost in real time. From a revenue-management perspective, it allows hotels to optimise inventory, protect rate integrity, and capture demand that might otherwise be lost. And frankly, hotels should use it.

But hospitality has another asset that does not appear on a balance sheet. Trust. And that is where this becomes more complicated.

Guests do understand the dynamics of demand and supply to some extent and are likely to accept the fundamentals of differential pricing on different occasions, but what they will not accept as easily is the feeling of being taken advantage of. That distinction matters.

The question is not whether hotels should charge more when demand is high. They should. The real question is how far should they go, and what does the guest receive in return? The more dramatic the increase, the greater the expectation of value. Aggressively hiked pricing does change the psychology of the stay.

This is why I believe the next evolution of revenue management must include something that cannot be calculated by an algorithm: judgement. A hotel must know its market, its positioning, and, above all, the relationship it wants to build with its guests. Short-term revenue is important, but a loyal customer may be worth far more.

The best hotels have always understood this. They know when to maximise. They also know when to show restraint. That is not weak commercial thinking; it is mature commercial thinking.

Dynamic pricing will remain an essential part of hospitality. The industry should not apologise for it. But perhaps we need to remind ourselves of one fundamental truth: Trust is much harder to sell and much harder to rebuild once it is lost.

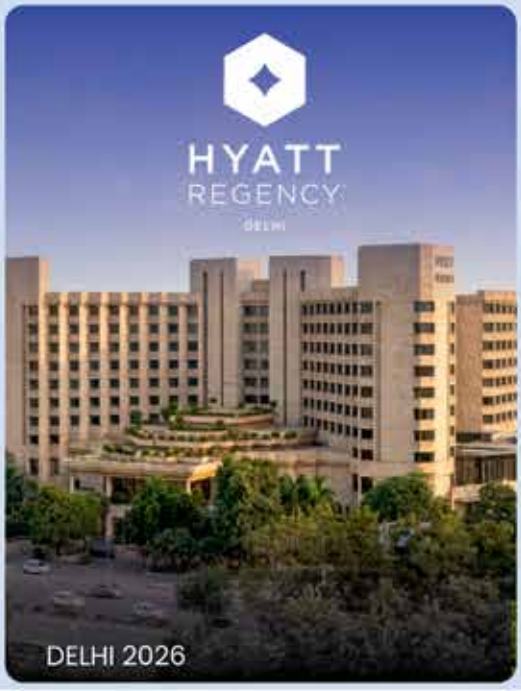
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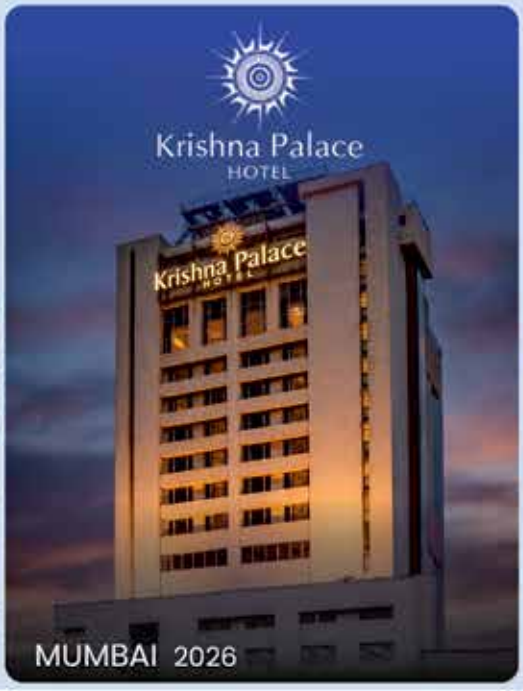
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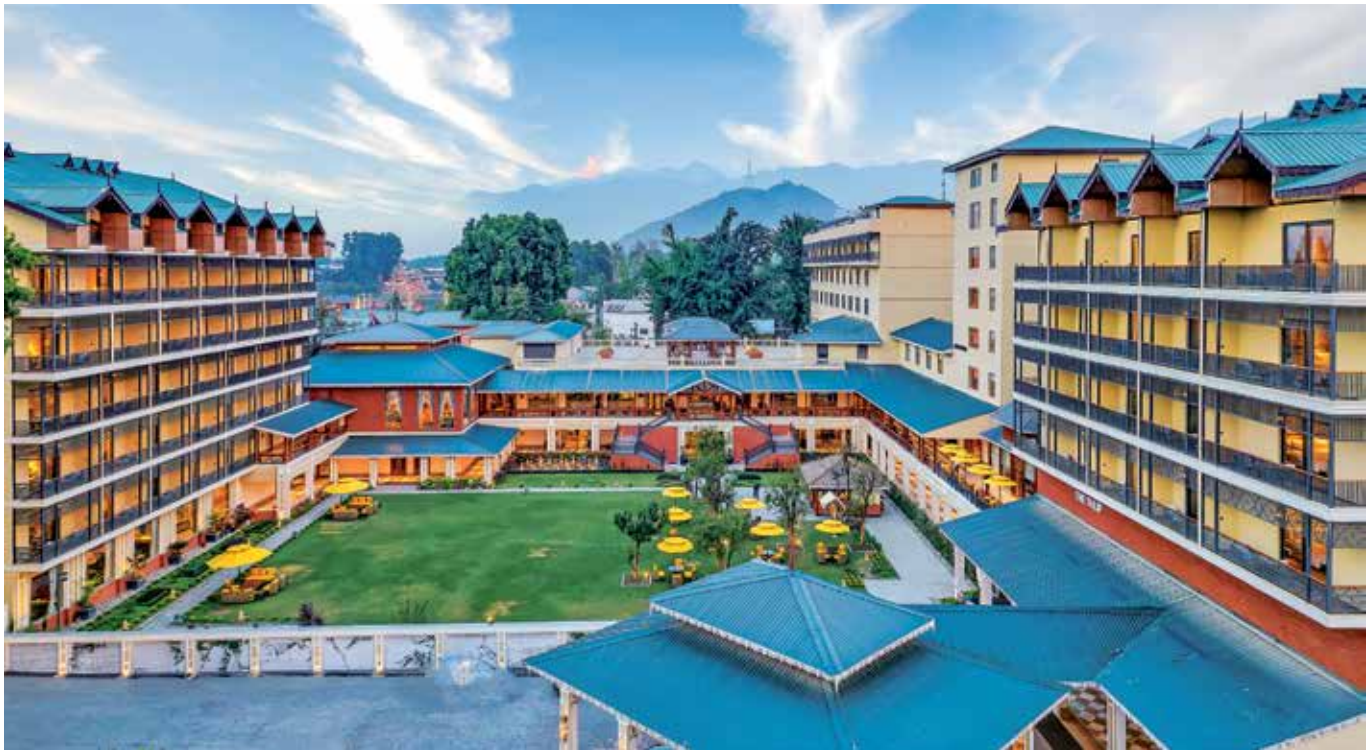
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Bengaluru tops ARR growth charts at 17-19%

India's hotel market surged in June 2026, driven by resilient domestic demand, double-digit ARR growth, and occupancy improvements.

WORDS BY **HT BUREAU**

India's hotel sector recorded exceptional year-on-year (YoY) growth in June 2026, supported by resilient domestic demand and a weak June 2025 base, when geopolitical tensions, the early monsoon, the Air India crash, and subsequent flight disruptions had adversely affected travel sentiment. The industry's average room rate (ARR) stood at ₹7,900–8,100 in June 2026, remaining stable compared to May 2026 while registering a 10–12 per cent YoY increase.

ARR growth

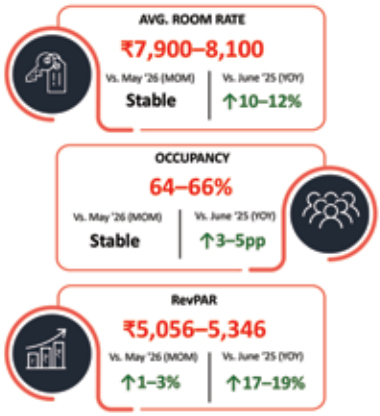
Among major markets, Bengaluru emerged as the strongest performer, recording the highest ARR growth of 17–19 per cent YoY. It was followed by Chandigarh at 13–15 per cent, while Pune and Gurugram reported growth of 12–14 per cent. Hyderabad recorded ARR growth of 11–13 per cent, and Jaipur posted 10–12 per cent growth.

Meanwhile, Goa, Ahmedabad, and Chennai witnessed relatively moderate increases of 7–9 per cent, 6–8 per cent, and 5–7 per cent respectively.

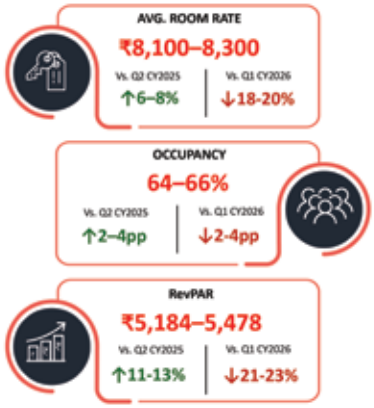
The industry's average room rate stood at ₹7,900–8,100 in June 2026, remaining stable compared to May 2026



HOTEL SECTOR PERFORMANCE
India hotel sector performance - June 2026



QUARTERLY HOTEL SECTOR PERFORMANCE
India hotel sector performance – Q2 CY2026



Occupancy growth

National occupancy levels improved year-on-year, supported by stronger demand across both metropolitan and emerging markets. Chandigarh, Ahmedabad, and Hyderabad recorded the highest occupancy gains, ranging between 8 and 10 percentage points (pp). New Delhi registered growth of 6–8 pp, while Kolkata and Goa each witnessed increases of 5–7 pp. In contrast, Chennai was the only market to report a decline in occupancy, down 2–4 pp.

Branded hotel market

The branded hotel sector signed 28,268 keys in YTD June 2026, representing an 8 per cent increase from 26,069 keys during the same period in 2025. The number of signed properties also rose to 259 hotels, up 6 per cent from 245 properties recorded in YTD June 2025.

The report showed that the share of signings is distributed across different city tiers. Tier I cities recorded 29 per cent in both 2025 and 2026. Tier II cities declined from 31 per cent in 2025 to 27 per cent in 2026. Notably, there is a significant shift in new hotel signings towards tier III & IV cities, an increase from 40 per cent in 2025 to 45 per cent in 2026. **HT**

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India's next leap demands a unified strategy

KB Kachru believes India's true potential can only be realised through a cohesive approach that connects infrastructure, destination development, and global outreach with sustained execution at scale.

WORDS BY **SUNIL GHADIOK**





KB Kachru
President, Hotel Association of India (HAI) and Chairman, South Asia, **Radisson Hotel Group**

Q. With a career spanning decades and a front-row view of the evolution of Indian hospitality, how would you assess the industry's report card today? Where does the sector still need to do more work? Looking back, is there anything you would have approached differently in your own journey?

A. The transformation of Indian hospitality has been significant. When I began my career, hotels were largely perceived as an indulgence accessible to a relatively small section of society. Today, travel and hospitality have become an essential part of how Indians work, celebrate, and experience the country. We are seeing demand develop across every segment, from luxury and lifestyle hospitality to midscale, economy, and emerging aspirational formats. Domestic travel, weddings, business travel, spiritual tourism, and experience-led leisure have collectively given the industry a much broader and more resilient foundation. However, our report card is still one of strong progress rather than a finished job. India remains substantially undersupplied in terms of quality accommodation. We have fewer than 200,000 branded rooms, while the requirement by 2030 could be several times that number. The opportunity is therefore considerable, but achieving it will require faster approvals, better connectivity to emerging destinations, recognition of hotels as infrastructure, easier access to capital, and sustained investment in skills. We also need to ensure that growth is responsible, environmentally sustainable, and connected to local communities.

▼ Radisson Resort Mount Abu



"India remains substantially undersupplied in terms of quality accommodation."

Personally, I have been fortunate to participate in the development of Indian hospitality across different stages of its evolution, from my formative years with ITDC to helping establish and expand Radisson Hotel Group's presence in South Asia. Every phase brought its own lessons. If there is anything I might have approached differently, it would be investing aggressively and continuously in talent development. But I have always believed that leadership is not about avoiding every mistake; it is about learning from experience, building institutions, and leaving behind capable people who can take the industry further.



Radisson Resort Goa Baga

Q. What would be your advice to hospitality leaders on attracting, nurturing, and retaining talent?

A. The talent challenge cannot be solved only by recruiting more people. We must first make hospitality an attractive long-term career. Young professionals today are looking for meaningful work, faster learning, mobility, recognition, and a visible path to leadership. Our responsibility is to demonstrate that hospitality can provide all of these, not merely as a first job, but as a career that can take someone across functions, brands, geographies, and even countries.

We also need much closer collaboration between the industry and educational institutions. Curricula must keep pace with how hotels are actually changing, including technology, commercial capabilities, sustainability, and evolving guest expectations. At the same time, learning cannot end when an employee joins a hotel. Structured mentoring, cross-functional exposure, and continuous reskilling must become part of the employment proposition.

Retention ultimately comes down to culture. People remain with organisations where they feel respected, supported, and able to grow. Leaders must be accessible, recognise good work, and give young employees genuine responsibility. We must also address practical concerns around working conditions, compensation, accommodation, career progression, and employee well-being. Mentoring is not about creating people in our own image; it is about helping them recognise their strengths and giving them the confidence and opportunity to lead.

"The talent challenge cannot be solved only by recruiting more people but by first making hospitality an attractive long-term career."

Q. Where is India falling short in taking its tourism story to the world, and what needs to change?

A. India does not have a shortage of tourism assets. Few countries can offer our combination of heritage, spirituality, nature, cuisine, wellness, medical capabilities, wildlife, and cultural diversity. The gap lies in how consistently we package, market, and deliver these experiences to an international visitor.

Global tourism is intensely competitive. Destinations that have grown inbound travel have treated tourism marketing as a sustained investment rather than an occasional campaign. India needs a more aggressive, market-specific, and always-on international promotion strategy. We should define priority source markets, understand what motivates travellers in each of them, and communicate distinct propositions rather than relying on one broad message for every audience. The government, airlines, hotels, tour operators, and state tourism bodies must work together around a common calendar and measurable objectives.

Marketing, however, cannot be separated from the experience on the ground. International travellers require convenient air access, seamless visas, reliable last-mile connectivity, clean and well-managed destinations, multilingual information, predictable standards, and a strong sense of safety. We

"What Indian tourism requires now is continuity, coordination, and execution at a scale proportionate to the opportunity."

must also build bookable experiences around our tourism assets. A monument or destination alone is not a complete tourism product; its interpretation, accessibility, hospitality ecosystem, and surrounding experiences determine how long visitors stay and what they take back with them.

The India story is powerful. What it requires now is continuity, coordination, and execution at a scale proportionate to the opportunity.

Q. What issues are keeping hotel owners and operators awake at night, and what gives them confidence about the future?

A. For owners, the immediate concerns include the rising cost and complexity of developing hotels, the time required for approvals, access to capital, talent availability, and the ability to maintain service standards while scaling. Hotels are capital-intensive assets with long gestation periods. Greater policy certainty, rationalised licensing, and infrastructure status would help attract more patient capital into the sector.

Operators are equally focused on talent, technology, cybersecurity, sustainability, and rapidly changing guest expectations. They have to deliver greater personalisation and convenience without losing the human connection that defines hospitality. In emerging destinations, the challenge can extend beyond the hotel to local infrastructure, connectivity, and the availability of trained people.

What gives owners and operators confidence is the strength and diversity of demand. Indians are travelling more frequently and for more reasons than before. Hospitality is no longer confined to the traditional metro business traveller or the annual family holiday. Weddings, spiritual travel, wellness, short leisure breaks, business events, and travel to tier II and tier III cities are expanding the market. Demand is developing across price points, while quality room supply remains limited. That combination supports a compelling long-term case for the sector.

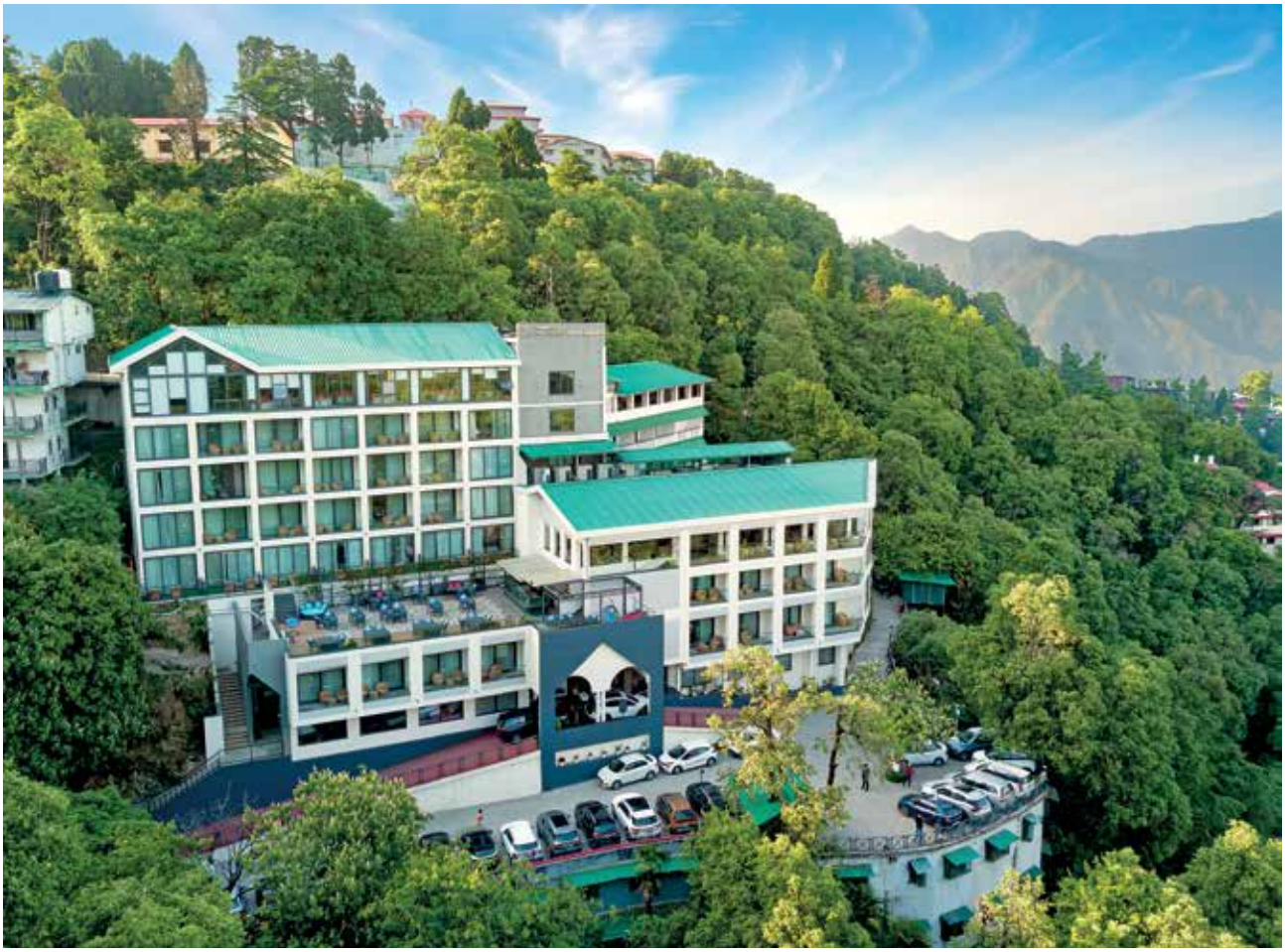
Q. Where do you see the next big opportunity for Indian tourism?

A. I do not believe these opportunities can be viewed in isolation. Tier II and tier III destinations, infrastructure, tourism experiences, and international marketing form part of the same value chain. Marketing a destination without making it accessible will not work; improving connectivity without developing quality accommodation and experiences will also limit its potential.

The next phase of growth will increasingly come from destinations beyond the established metropolitan and leisure circuits. Improved road and air connectivity is already making spiritual, cultural, nature-led, and regional business destinations



▼ Radisson Collection Srinagar



▲ The Oasis Mussorie, a member of Radisson Individuals

more accessible. State capitals and staycation-led travel can also play a role in maintaining heritage and supporting local communities, particularly in select offbeat locations. These markets can support multiple hospitality formats, particularly midscale and upscale hotels that combine trusted standards with local character.

India must now move from simply identifying destinations to developing complete tourism ecosystems around them. This means accommodation, mobility, trained guides, food, interpretation, public amenities, safety, and experiences that encourage visitors to stay longer. Development should also involve local communities so that tourism generates livelihoods and preserves rather than dilutes the character of a destination. For inbound tourism specifically, sustained international marketing remains critical. But the strongest marketing ultimately comes from an experience that visitors are willing to recommend. Our real opportunity is to connect infrastructure development, destination creation, and global promotion under one coherent tourism strategy.

Q. How is Gen Z changing what hotels need to offer and how they operate and manage talent?

A. Gen Z is challenging the hospitality industry to become faster, more transparent, and more authentic. As guests, they expect technology to remove friction from the journey — from discovery and booking to communication and payment. At the same time, they do not want a standardised or impersonal experience. They value local culture, sustainability, flexibility, and experiences that feel distinctive and shareable. Hotels must therefore use technology to improve convenience while preserving the human engagement at the heart of hospitality.

Their expectations are also influencing hotel design and operations. Traditional distinctions between work, leisure, dining, and social spaces are becoming less rigid. Guests increasingly seek flexible communal areas, wellness options, local food, and experiences that connect them with a destination. They are also more likely to assess a brand by whether its environmental and social commitments are visible in practice.

As employees, Gen Z expects a more open relationship with the organisation. Hierarchy alone will not command loyalty. Young professionals want regular feedback, access to leaders, faster development, and clarity on how their work contributes to the larger purpose of the business. This requires managers to move from directing people to coaching them.

The fundamentals, however, remain unchanged. Technology can automate a process, but empathy, judgement, and genuine care cannot be automated. The organisations that will succeed are those that combine the speed and openness expected by a new generation with the enduring values of hospitality. **HT**

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Create hospitality infra to get more tourists

India has demand & destinations, **Puneet Chhatwal** averred that the next phase of tourism growth requires more hotel rooms, skilled talent, stronger last-mile connectivity, and sustained global promotion.

WORDS BY **HT BUREAU**

India has spent decades talking about its enormous tourism potential. Perhaps it is time to ask a different question. What is stopping us from realising it? India has 7,500 kilometres of coastline, six major mountain ranges, 43 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, hundreds of beaches, extraordinary wildlife and arguably one of the richest combinations of culture, cuisine, spirituality, heritage, and wellness anywhere in the world.

Yet **Puneet Chhatwal,** Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer, IHCL, believes India has barely begun to tap what all of this could deliver. Speaking at the FHRAI's 56th Annual Convention in Varanasi, Chhatwal put the opportunity into stark perspective.

Paris alone receives around 25 million visitors. India receives fewer international tourists than that. "There is no reason why we should not get at least the same number as just one city gets," Chhatwal said. For an industry accustomed to hearing about India's tourism potential, his message was different. The potential is not in question. Execution is.

When demand explodes

Varanasi has become one of the most powerful examples of India's domestic



Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer, **IHCL**

India wants more quality hotel rooms, particularly in emerging destinations, but high land costs are making development increasingly challenging



tourism transformation. Spiritual tourism is booming, infrastructure is expanding, and visitor numbers have surged. But the city also illustrates the challenge that comes with success.

Chhatwal pointed to approximately 11 million visitors, while foreign visitation remains extremely small. At the same time, branded hotel inventory remains limited. Airport capacity, meanwhile, is expected to rise dramatically. More flights. More visitors. More demand. But where will everyone stay? That question goes far beyond Varanasi.

He emphasised that hotels, restaurants, experiences, transport, trained manpower, cleanliness, safety, and last-mile connectivity must grow alongside it.

New destinations, not just tourists

One of Chhatwal's most important arguments concerned where India's tourists are actually going. Around 75 per cent of leisure tourism activity, he said, remains concentrated across only 15 to 20 destinations. That is not sustainable if India intends to multiply tourism activity over the coming decades.

The answer is not simply squeezing another million tourists into destinations that are already struggling with congestion. It is creating new destinations.

He noted that the announcement of 50 destinations for mission-mode development could therefore become one of the most consequential tourism interventions if implementation follows quickly. India also needs new cultural circuits, spiritual destinations, wellness hubs, MICE centres, border tourism, sports tourism, and experiences that take travellers beyond the familiar map.

Economics of building hotels

Chhatwal raised an important issue that should concern every hotel developer and policymaker — land. In a viable hotel development, he said, land would typically account for around 12–15 per cent of project cost.





In India, it can sometimes exceed 50 per cent. Then come financing costs, utilities, permissions, etc. The contradiction is difficult to ignore. India wants more quality hotel rooms, particularly in emerging destinations. But if the economics of creating those rooms become increasingly difficult, where will the investment come from?

"We must talk about returns. We must talk about financial viability," Chhatwal said. For years, hospitality has spoken about infrastructure status, industry status, and incentives. But ultimately, capital goes where returns justify risk.

World-class last mile connectivity

Chhatwal was equally clear that India has made extraordinary progress on infrastructure. Airports, highways, expressways, and trains have transformed connectivity across the country. But tourism does not end at the airport. He highlighted that the last-mile connectivity continues to be one of India's weakest links. A beautiful mountain property becomes less attractive when a five-hour road journey can become ten. For international visitors in particular, the entire journey matters: connectivity, hygiene, safety, and reliability.

India's young demographic edge

Hospitality businesses across several mature economies are struggling to find workers. India has the opposite opportunity. Its young population could become a formidable competitive advantage for tourism and hospitality.

But having people is not the same as having skilled people. Chhatwal called for significantly greater emphasis on skilling, formal training, recognition, and global partnerships. The opportunity is bigger than filling vacancies in hotels.

Despite extraordinary progress on infrastructure, last-mile connectivity continues to be one of India's weakest links

The power of six Ps

Chhatwal distilled the way forward into six deceptively simple Ps. Planning. Place. People. Policy. Processes. Promotion.

Plan tourism growth before destinations become overwhelmed. Develop new places rather than relying indefinitely on existing ones. Skill people at a scale capable of meeting future demand. Create policies that make investment viable. Simplify processes for both travellers and businesses. And promote India consistently and confidently around the world.

According to Chhatwal, the opportunity sitting on the other side is enormous. More foreign exchange. More investment. New destinations. New hotels. And potentially millions of direct and indirect livelihoods. He averred, "The potential of India has not yet even been touched by five per cent. We have not even scratched the surface." For India's hotel industry, the opportunity is clear. The question now is whether capacity, investment, and policy can keep pace with the demand India is capable of creating. **HT**

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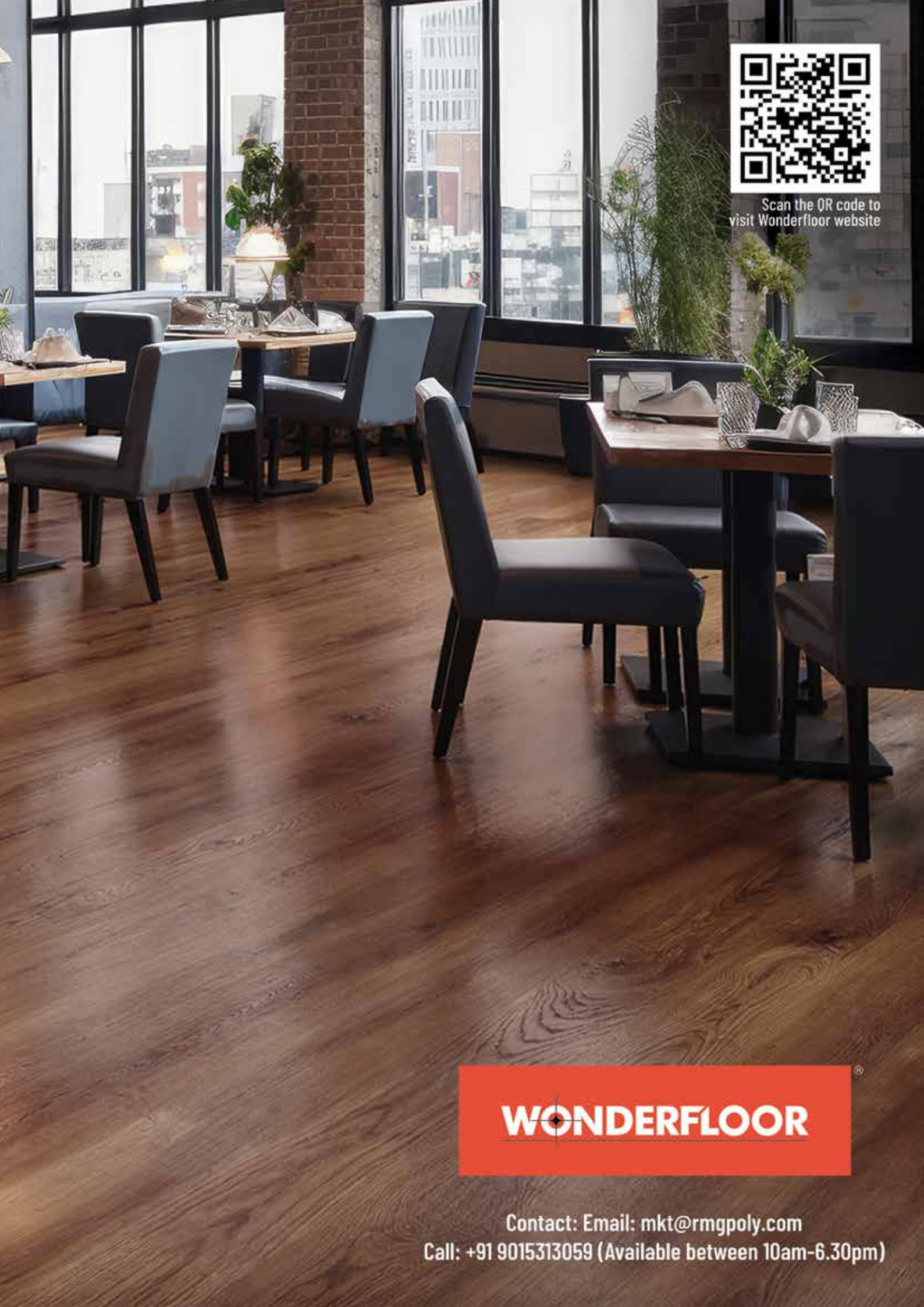
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The Greek equation

Greece has 9 million people and 35 million tourists, while India has 1.4 billion people and 10 million tourists. **Dimitris Manikis** sees Wyndham's global reach as a lever to close that gap.

WORDS BY **LIPLA NEGI**

While impressed by the pace of India's infrastructure expansion and the opportunities it is opening up for the hospitality sector, **Dimitris Manikis**, President EMEA, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, sees the country's low share of international travellers as an imbalance that needs correcting, bringing global visitor numbers closer to India's true tourism potential.

Looking at India's tourism potential through a comparison with Greece, he highlighted how much room India still has to grow as an international tourism market. "Greece has a population of about 9 million and receives roughly 35 million tourists a year. Tourism contributes around 20–25 per cent of the country's GDP and generates about US$ 25 billion in revenues. India, by comparison, has a population of 1.4 billion but attracts around 10 million international tourists. For me, it doesn't make sense," said Manikis.



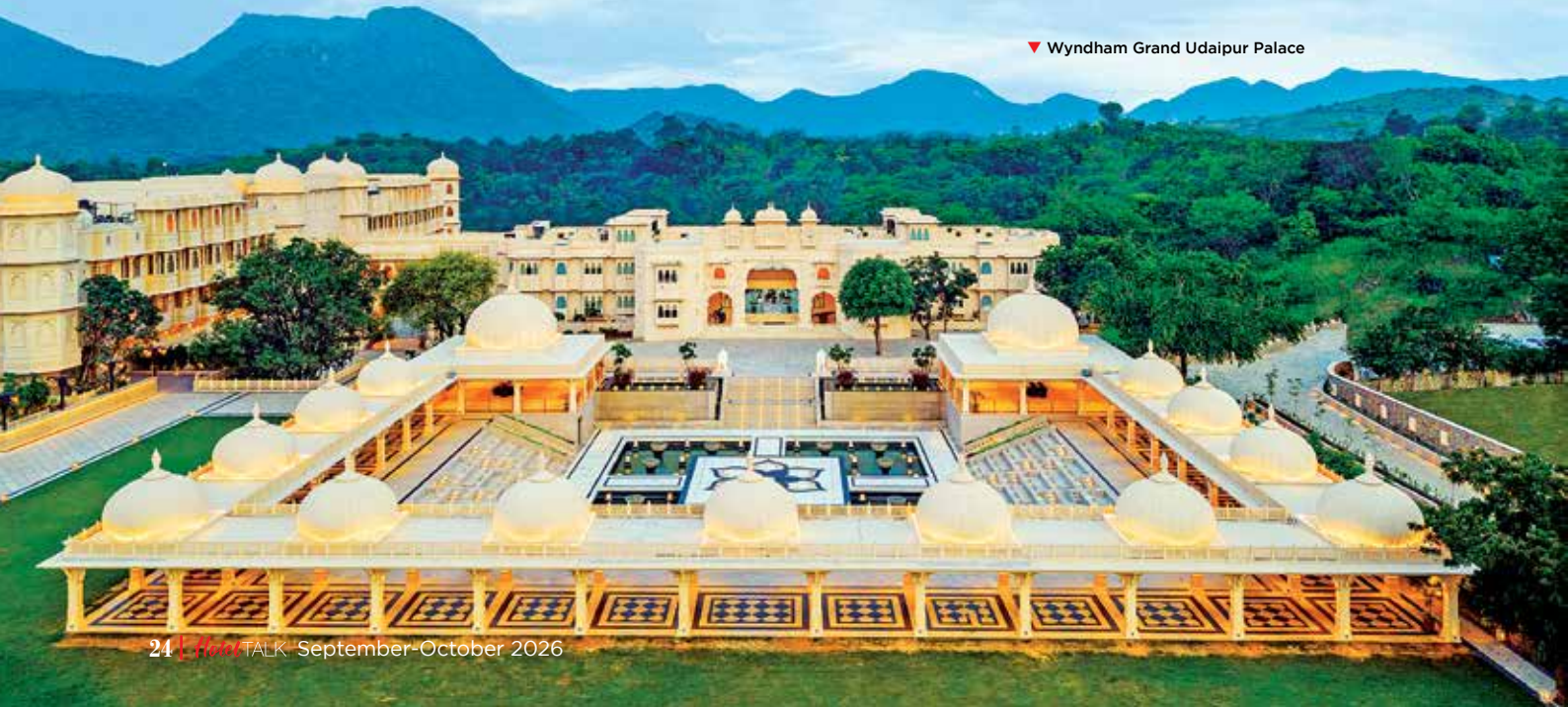
Dimitris Manikis,
President EMEA
Wyndham Hotels & Resorts



Taking India to the world

His observation goes to the heart of Wyndham's India strategy. The brand wants to add hotels in the country while also using its global loyalty platform to encourage more international travellers to visit India.

"We want to make sure that everybody understands 'Incredible India'. One of our top priorities, being here in this country, is to bring more international guests to India," said Manikis. Currently, the brand



▼ Wyndham Grand Udaipur Palace

"One of our number one priorities, being here in this country, is to bring more international guests to India"

▼ Fateh room, Wyndham Garden Udaipur



has around 140 million Wyndham Rewards members globally, giving it a substantial international customer base that can potentially be directed towards India.

India is moving faster

Wyndham's expansion in India initially focused heavily on tier II and tier III markets. But rapid infrastructure development has quickly altered the status of those markets. "I think India is moving the strategy faster than we could ever anticipate. Suddenly the tier III became tier II. Tier II became tier I in two or three years," he highlighted.

For Wyndham, that has significant implications for where and how quickly it develops. Improved connectivity is bringing smaller cities closer to major commercial and tourism centres, expanding the addressable market for branded hotels. He pointed to airport development as one measure of the pace. Around 25 airports are currently being built in India, compared with what he described as zero airport construction in Europe. The result is that Wyndham now needs to execute its existing India strategy faster. "Our strategy has not changed. What has changed is the pace. We need to do it faster. We need to do it more strategically," he said

The next major opportunity is therefore shifting towards India's metros, following Wyndham's expansion across smaller cities. "We have been very successful in tier II and tier III. Now tier I is the next opportunity for us," he shared.

Selective expansion

Wyndham is expanding the range of brands and formats it offers in India. The company has introduced Dolce, and recently signed its first 100-key Vienna House Easy property in Vrindavan. It is also assessing opportunities in branded residences and other new concepts. The company announced its H1 results recently, with the brand now operating in over 750 hotels across EMEA, with over 99,000 rooms, reinforcing the region's role as a key engine for sustainable growth.

India continues to be one of its fastest-growing markets globally, supported by 11 new hotel signings and a portfolio of 150+ hotels operating and in development across the country. Manikis, however, believes the strategy is not about putting every Wyndham brand into every market. "We want to bring brands that make sense and we want to do it at locations



▲ Jharokha room view

and with owners that make sense," he said.

The approach reflects a more selective phase of expansion, with brand, location, and ownership becoming increasingly important as the brand moves into more competitive markets. In a nutshell, the opportunity is two-sided: India's infrastructure and domestic market are creating the conditions for faster hotel expansion, while its relatively low international tourist numbers leave significant headroom for growth. **HT**

Build ecosystems, not just inventory expansion

With a call for regulatory reforms, **Priya Paul** believes hospitality's growth opportunity lies in tier II and tier III cities as improved connectivity fuels domestic travel.



WORDS BY **JANICE ALYOSIUS**

India's hotel sector is no longer measuring growth by the number of rooms being added. The bigger story is where that growth is happening and how brands are repositioning themselves to capture a new generation of travellers. As infrastructure improves and domestic tourism spreads beyond the traditional gateways, hotel companies are betting on smaller cities, lifestyle-led brands, and destination experiences to sustain the next phase of expansion.

The shift also comes at a time when regulatory reforms and skilled manpower remain among the industry's biggest concerns. **Priya Paul**, Chairperson, Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels, believes India's hospitality sector has reached an important turning point, with regional India offering the biggest opportunities over the coming decade.

Small cities: The next frontier

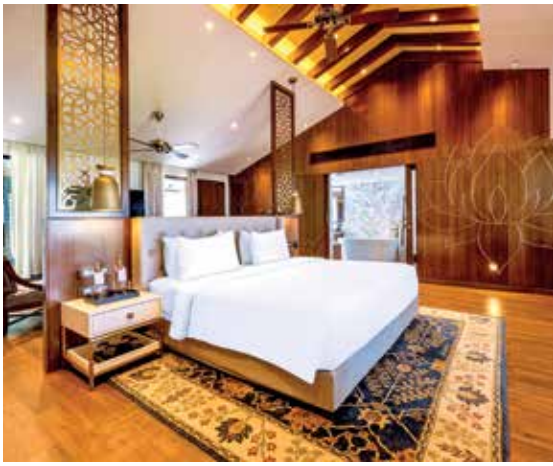
Paul said, "We are at a particularly exciting inflection point. Demand for travel continues to outpace supply in many markets, creating significant opportunities across the spectrum — from established metros to emerging tier II and tier III destinations. As connectivity improves and domestic travel becomes more frequent, we are seeing a much broader and more diverse tourism landscape emerge." This confidence is reflected in the



Priya Paul
Chairperson
Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels



With branded hotel penetration still below 10 per cent, the opportunity remains significant in smaller cities



group's own expansion strategy. Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels currently operates 42 hotels across 32 cities and union territories with 2,677 keys and plans to almost double its footprint to 85 hotels with over 6,600 keys by FY30.

However, Paul cautioned that smaller cities cannot become successful hospitality markets by simply increasing room supply. She added, "Success depends on creating an ecosystem, not just adding hotel inventory. Investments in infrastructure, skilled talent, marketing, and year-round demand drivers such as MICE, weddings, and cultural tourism are critical."

With branded hotel penetration still below 10 per cent, she said the opportunity remains significant. This outlook has driven the expansion of Zone by The Park and Zone Connect by The Park, both designed for India's fast-growing regional markets.

Experience-centric expansion

According to Paul, guest expectations have permanently changed, with travellers increasingly choosing destinations that offer immersive experiences rather than conventional accommodation. "Long before experiential travel became an industry buzzword, we were creating hotels that served as cultural hubs within their cities. Our restaurants, bars, entertainment venues, design collaborations, and local partnerships are as important to the guest journey as the accommodation itself."

The approach has also strengthened commercial performance. Food and beverage now contributes around 43 per cent of the group's revenue through more than 100 restaurants, bars, and nightlife destinations, underlining how diversified revenue streams are becoming central to hotel profitability.

Looking ahead, Paul identified policy reforms as one of the biggest catalysts for future growth. "Whether it is licensing, land acquisition at viable rates or taxation, a more streamlined and consistent framework would help hospitality projects move forward with greater efficiency. These are some of the most practical opportunities to unlock growth, especially in newer destinations where tourism is beginning to flourish."

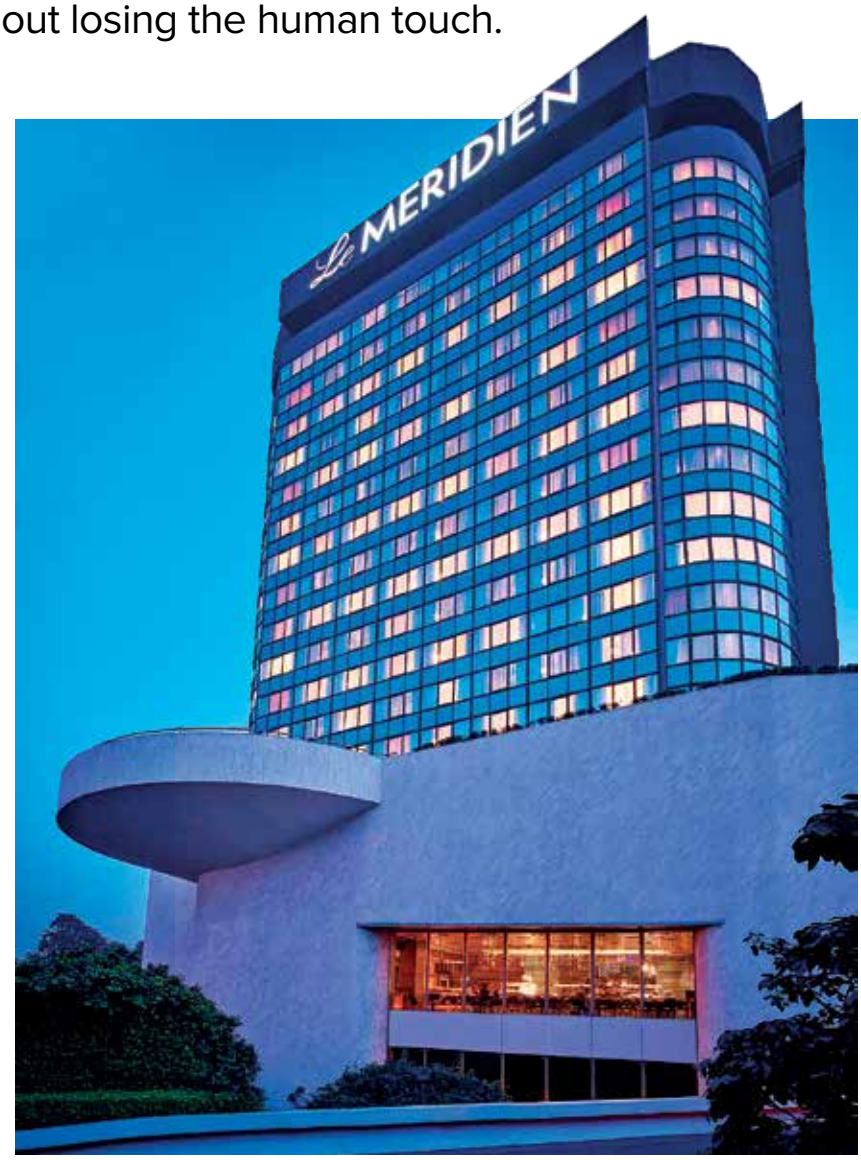
She added that while The Park continues to expand across luxury, heritage, and upper mid-scale segments, its core focus remains on creating locally rooted lifestyle experiences rather than standardised hotels. **HT**



Keeping people, profit, and AI in sync

From evolving guest expectations to next-gen innovation, women leaders discuss how finding a middle ground can be a game changer without losing the human touch.

WORDS BY **NISHA VERMA**



There has been a dramatic change in hospitality over the past decade. We have seen technology altering how guests interact with hotels, expectations have become more immediate, luxury has moved away from simply being about opulence, and hotel leaders are under increasing pressure to balance guest satisfaction with commercial performance. Still, despite all the change, the fundamentals of hospitality remain remarkably constant. That was the central theme explored at the ninth edition of the TravTalk ThinkTank, 'Hospitality's Balancing Act: People, Profit, and Innovation'.



Meena Bhatia
Vice President & General Manager, **Le Méridien New Delhi**

"Hospitality still means a warm human welcome, and that should never change."

What to hold on to?

For **Meena Bhatia**, Vice President & General Manager, Le Méridien New Delhi, who has spent four decades in the industry, technology and changing expectations have transformed how hospitality is delivered. "Things have evolved very fast, especially in the last decade. And technology has made a lot of difference," she said.

Guests today want things delivered "seamlessly, quickly" and increasingly through technology. Yet, she believes, "Hospitality still means a warm welcome by a human being, and that is something



Preeti Makhija
General Manager
The Leela Palace New Delhi

"Today's guest is more informed and well-travelled and no longer defines luxury simply through the grandeur of the property."



that should never change in the hospitality industry."

The biggest shift is visible in the luxury traveller. **Preeti Makhija**, General Manager, The Leela Palace New Delhi, explained that today's guest is more informed, well-travelled and discerning, and no longer defines luxury simply through the grandeur of the property. "It is more about the experiences, the level of hyper-personalisation done for them, and authentic experiences planned for them," she said. Guests, she added, are looking for genuine warmth rather than a transactional interaction. For The Leela, the challenge is to retain the brand's graciousness and warmth while constantly evolving how that hospitality is expressed.

Retain talent, not just fill vacancies

The industry has long discussed a talent shortage and changing workplace culture. "There is a talent shortage, and that is because there are multiple opportunities that have come up now," Bhatia said.

Young professionals have more choices and are more willing to experiment with careers. At the same time, hotel operations have limitations that other industries do not. "Working in shifts and being there when needed, is something the industry can't avoid. Work from home is not an option for a career in hospitality," Bhatia stressed.

Hotels, she added, are responding with five-day working weeks, higher salaries, and other measures to remain attractive. But career progression may be the bigger issue, she explained by adding, "The other big thing is growth, which many youngsters





question — "Where will I be?" The same philosophy is reflected in the career of **Lakshmi Sridhar**, General Manager, Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach. She began as a telephone operator and progressed to become a General Manager. For her, understanding individual potential is critical. "It is very important for all of us to read the mind of our talent, know them better, and interact with them regularly," she said. Employees need more than a job. They need to see where they can go. "You need to understand the talent potential first, their pros, likes, dislikes, and everything to show them a career path. As mentors, we need to show them a path to grow, give them exposure to different departments so that they can learn and grow along with the company," she added.

Makhija echoed the importance of recognition and internal mobility, particularly in luxury hospitality, where guest expectations are exceptionally high. Her approach includes incentives linked to upselling and performance, along with frequent interaction between senior leaders and employees. "We have started getting into a one-on-one conversation rather than talking to their managers," she said.

Rates must rise with demand

"If there is demand, we must optimise our shares, be it from the occupancy, or from average rates," Bhatia said. She argued that dynamic pricing is a normal function of supply and demand, with hotels also discounting when demand weakens. The challenge, she said, is that Indian consumers often accept premium pricing overseas more readily than at home.



Lakshmi Sridhar
General Manager, **Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach**

"If we manage guest and our team, everything will fall into its place automatically."

Guest experience & profit

Sridhar rejected the idea that guest experience and profitability are competing priorities. "They can go hand in hand. If we take care of the guest and if the guest feels valued, the business will automatically fall into place." She argued that discounting is not the only way to win business. Guests can choose a hotel even when a competitor is cheaper if the experience justifies the difference. For Makhija, hotel performance goes beyond revenue metrics. She looks at guest satisfaction, repeat guests, personalisation, employee engagement and retention, training, internal talent development, and F&B performance. "The culmination of all this put together will really define the priorities for a luxury hotel," she said.

AI won't change hospitality

There was little disagreement that AI is here to stay. Bhatia claimed, "Technology is for betterment. There is no other way. AI is here to stay and is the next transformation." But technology should remain a tool, not become the definition of hospitality. "We have to always keep ourselves relevant to change with the times as it goes, but the one thing that should not change is the essence of hospitality," added Bhatia.

Makhija sees AI's strongest opportunity in using data to anticipate guest preferences and create intelligent personalisation. But she does not see technology replacing people in guest-facing areas. "These are areas where human touch still matters, and people are present to handle guests," she commented.

Sridhar put the distinction most succinctly, saying, "I feel the future is high tech. I have no doubt about it, but high touch is the core."

The balancing act

When asked to choose between people, profit, and innovation as the single priority for a hotel's success over the next five years, all three GMs chose the same answer: people. Their choice reflected how technology can make service faster, revenue management can optimise rates, and data can personalise experiences. But none of these works without people who understand hospitality. The future may be high-tech, but it cannot afford to become low-touch.

The balancing act, therefore, goes beyond the hotel P&L. It is about developing the right people, using tech intelligently, and preserving the human connection that makes hospitality. **HT**

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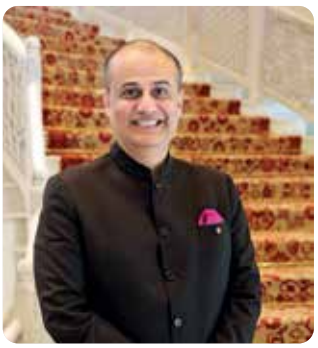
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Performance by The Shillong Chamber Choir at Taj Mahal, New Delhi

Global events can set off an inbound surge

If concerts, games or summit visits can evolve into leisure stays and repeat trips, global events could deliver greater value for inbound tourism, highlights **Dr Anmol Ahluwalia.**



Dr Anmol Ahluwalia
Area Director–Operations and General Manager
Taj Mahal, New Delhi

WORDS BY **LIPLA NEGI**

Q. As India bids to host more international events, from music festivals and MICE conventions to diplomatic summits and technology expos, how can the industry leverage these opportunities to convert event-driven travel into sustained inbound tourism growth?

A. For us, the real measure of a successful international event is not simply how many visitors it brings into a city, but how many leave with a desire to return. That requires the tourism ecosystem to work in a more connected manner, from ease of arrival and movement to dining, cultural discovery and opportunities to extend the journey beyond the event itself.

Hospitality has an important role because, for many international and domestic travellers, the hotel becomes one of their closest encounters with the destination. At Taj Mahal, New Delhi, we have created a diverse culinary landscape that reflects both India and the cosmopolitan character of the capital. From contemporary Indian dining and Indraprastha-inspired experiences at Varq and limited-time showcases such as the Parsi legacy menu, to the re-imagined flavours of House of Ming, the contemporary energy of Rick's,

"Our tourism narrative needs to bring forward the depth of our regions."



and the wine-led experiences at Captain's Cellar, guests can discover very different flavours and moods within one address.

Beyond the hotel, we also need to make it easier for event-led travellers to extend their journeys across India. If a three-day summit visit becomes the starting point for a leisure journey or a reason to return, global events can create far more enduring value for inbound tourism.

"Large-scale international events also place very different demands on hotel operations."

Q. Delhi is increasingly evolving from being a transit gateway to a destination in its own right, hosting marquee events, global summits, concerts, and exhibitions. How do you see this shift shaping the capital's hospitality landscape?

A. Delhi today is increasingly becoming a reason to travel, rather than simply a point of arrival. Its growing calendar of global events, coupled with its history, culture, cuisine, and contemporary energy, is giving hospitality an opportunity to present the city in newer and more engaging ways. We witnessed this during global events such as G20, India AI Impact Summit 2026, art & film festivals, sports & concerts, when heightened international and domestic travel created demand across accommodation, dining, and meeting spaces in the capital.

At Taj Mahal, New Delhi, we have focused on creating distinctive experiences that offer guests different perspectives on the city and the country. Rendezvous at The Chambers brings together global culinary talent, thought leaders, and storytellers, while *Bhoole Bisre* revisits forgotten culinary traditions through a contemporary lens.

Marquee events can bring travellers to Delhi, but it is the richness of these experiences and the character of the destination that can encourage them to stay longer, return, and discover more of India.



Q. Large-scale events trigger a steep rise in hotel tariffs. While demand-based pricing is a global practice, where should the industry draw the line between commercial opportunity and preserving guest trust?

A. Dynamic pricing is an established part of hospitality and will naturally



reflect periods of exceptional demand. However, hospitality is ultimately a relationship business, and no short-term commercial opportunity should come at the cost of long-term guest trust.

Large-scale international events also place very different demands on hotel operations. Security requirements increase, staffing and logistics become more complex, meeting and dining needs intensify, and properties often operate at significantly higher utilisation. Demand-led pricing may therefore be expected during exceptional periods, but it remains proportionate to the value and experience being delivered.

Transparency is equally important. Guests should understand what they are paying for, and existing commitments must always be respected.

Revenue management, in our view, must look beyond the yield of a particular night and consider the lifetime value of the guest relationship. Strong hospitality brands are built over decades through consistency and trust. How a guest is treated at a moment of peak demand can have a lasting influence on that relationship.

Q. From an industry standpoint, what are the key gaps, and what immediate interventions could boost inbound tourism?

A. India does not have an experience deficit. Few countries can offer the breadth of heritage, cuisine, wellness, wildlife, spirituality, landscapes, festivals, and contemporary culture that we can. The opportunity lies in making that diversity easier for an international traveller to discover and navigate.

India is naturally more layered, and that complexity is part of what makes the country extraordinary. Greater ease of visas, stronger international and domestic connectivity, efficient last-mile access, destination infrastructure, etc. can all make a meaningful difference. Equally important is how India tells its story globally. Our tourism narrative needs to include iconic landmarks, and beyond — bringing forward the depth of our regions, contemporary culture, wellness, design, cuisine, and natural landscapes.

Q. How are the evolving expectations of Gen Z travellers influencing hotel operations, brand strategy, and investment priorities for hospitality brands?

A. Gen Z is challenging conventional definitions of luxury. They are digitally fluent, but what they increasingly seek from travel is individuality, flexibility, discovery, and spaces that feel relevant to the way they live today.

For younger travellers in particular, the room is no longer simply a place to return to at the end of the day. It can be a space to work, unwind, entertain, dine or spend meaningful time during the stay. That is pushing hospitality brands to think more holistically about how accommodation is designed and how seamlessly it connects with dining, wellness, social spaces, and the wider destination experience.

Technology remains an important enabler of this journey, but it should make the experience more intuitive rather than more impersonal. Ultimately, investment will increasingly follow what creates relevance — better-designed spaces, stronger personalisation, and experiences that give guests more reasons to engage with the hotel beyond the traditional stay. **HT**



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Deck In Raya Wing, Araiya Hotels

Making of a hoteller

In hospitality, early exposure to the family business can shape a hotelier's perspective, but does it define the growth trajectory? Two next-gen hoteliers weigh in on the relative influence of instinct, experience, and legacy on success in the sector.

WORDS BY **LIPLA NEGI**

Every family business leaves behind an inheritance. In hospitality, it is often less about assets than accumulated instinct. It is years spent watching destinations take shape, iconic hotels being built, guests becoming regulars, and service standards turning into culture. For the next generation of hoteliers, that early exposure is now finding its own expression, as they move beyond preserving a legacy to shaping one of their own for a traveller whose definition of luxury is constantly evolving.

The early years

For Amruda Nair, a third-generation hotelier from the illustrious Leela family, hospitality was never abstract. Growing up around hotels shaped



Amruda Nair
Founder
Araiya Hotels & Resorts

"My job is to carry forward what was handed to me while making sure it speaks to a world my progenitors could not have imagined."

her understanding of the business long before she chose it as a career and later founded Araiya Hotels. "It was the smell of a lobby, the way staff greeted returning guests by name, the quiet pride in a perfectly turned-down room. That generation built something extraordinary: service standards, operational rigour, and relationships that spanned decades," she reminisced.

The industry's evolution, according to the next generation of hoteliers, is less about replacing legacy than redefining it for a new traveller. "My parents' generation built destinations that people aspired to visit. While the previous generation mastered the art of building iconic destinations, my generation's challenge is to build genuine connections by understanding every guest as an individual," said Deeksha Suri, scion and Executive Director of The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group.

Decoding Gen-Z traveller

More in sync with the way Gen Z and younger millennials perceive luxury travel, these hoteliers know authenticity is what drives revenue at the end of the day. Looking beyond what meets the eye and what is served on the table, the new-age traveller is not here for the grand show. Nair shared, "They have called the bluff on traditional luxury. They are not impressed by marble lobbies or thread counts alone. What they want is harder to manufacture: authenticity, a genuine sense of place, and the feeling that an experience was made for them, not just available to them."

The core principles of hospitality remain timeless, but the execution must evolve with the modern traveller. Suri elucidated, "Today, luxury is less about grand gestures and more about relevance. This generation can quickly tell whether a brand is simply talking about values or actually living them. It's about anticipating needs, creating personal experiences, and making every interaction effortless. At the end of the day, luxury is how you make people feel."

Leading beyond legacy

So, is hospitality instinctive, inherited, or a craft that must be learnt? Or does it become all three over time? Nair believes instinct may be inherited, but the craft is earned. She said, "Growing up in this world, you absorb something that's difficult to articulate



Deeksha Suri
Executive Director
The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group

"While the previous generation built iconic destinations, my generation's challenge is to build genuine guest connections."

▼ The Lalit Goa







▲ The LaLiT Bekal

— an orientation towards people, a reflex to notice what someone needs before they ask for it. That's not really teachable in a classroom. But leadership? That's forged through experience — through difficult guests, unexpected crises, watching a mentor handle a situation with grace, and learning to do the same."

For Suri, instinct alone is not enough; leadership also demands discipline, systems, and a willingness to keep learning. "Leadership, in my view, is not inherited. Values are. The belief that every guest should feel welcome, and every team member should feel valued, is something I have learnt from my parents, and it continues to guide the way I work," she emphasised.

Echoing this sentiment, Nair believes that while values are passed down through generations and foster an instinct for attention to detail, each generation must reinterpret them for its time. "My job is to carry forward what was handed to me while making sure it speaks to a world my progenitors could not have imagined. When I think about what we have built at Kinwani House or Aalia, the warmth and attentiveness at the core is not new — it's something deeply familiar, handed down," she explained.

Values drive growth

The values shape their growth and expansion strategies, which are not only carefully calculated but also consciously curated. "Growth for us has never been about adding the maximum number of hotels. Our approach has always been guided by my mother's philosophy — we develop destinations, not just hotels," said Suri. The brand looks for places with a unique story and the potential to create long-term value for the local community. "Bekal, Khajuraho, Mangar, and Srinagar are all examples of destinations we believed in," she added.

Offering a different perspective on location strategy, Nair places 'brand fit' above everything else. "We could chase markets or follow demand curves, but if a destination does not have soul and if it does not allow us to build something genuinely rooted in that place, then the numbers do not matter," she said. **HT**

▼ Araiya Hotels, Main Deck

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Memory of walls

Erin Juhl elucidates how reimagining historic buildings for hospitality spaces is a balancing act, where the past & present must coexist seamlessly.

WORDS BY **HT BUREAU**

Every building tells a story — in the grain of its timber floors, in the proportions of a doorway sized for another century's silhouette, in the light that has fallen through a jali screen for two hundred years. When we are commissioned to transform such a space into a hotel or restaurant, our first task is not to choose a palette or draw a floor plan — it is to listen.

Giving historic buildings new life and purpose as hospitality destinations sits at the intersection of preservation and innovation. When done well, this creates hospitality spaces that embody the architectural heritage and cultural history of a place, guests feel not merely hosted but connected to the context and history that it bears.

Reading the bones

Before we assemble a single concept board, we will conduct what we like to





call an architectural archaeology. We move through the property slowly, noting not just what is beautiful or structurally sound, but what carries memory, such as mouldings that speak of a craftsperson's hand or notes left behind a wall by the original builder. These details are not automatically worth preserving, but they must be understood before any decisions about their fate are made.

This reading informs every aspect of our design approach.

What to keep, what to change

No transformation can preserve everything, nor should it try. Reimagining heritage buildings should balance historical reverence with contemporary vision. The art of adaptive reuse lies in curation — deciding which elements are so intrinsic to the building's identity that their loss would be an erasure, and which elements are incidental, alterable, or in need of fresh interpretation to serve a hospitality concept.



Erin Juhl
Design Director
DesignAgency

DesignAgency's Pendry Natirar project for Pendry Resorts & Hotels is a country property centred around a 1912 Tudor-style mansion converted from a historic residence into a luxurious 66-room hotel. Once a vacation home of King Hassan II of Morocco, the mansion's historic character was preserved through original interior elements, including stately carved stone fireplaces, ornate plaster ceilings, and handsome wood panelling and flooring. Fresh layers signal a new era of luxury while respecting the building's heritage. A newly built garden room accommodates a restaurant that connects to the central Great Room. The mansion's original brick façade now forms the backdrop for the bar area, while full glazing provides wrap-around views of the location's rolling hills.

Successful adaptive reuse lies in curating what to preserve and what to reinterpret to meet contemporary needs





Creating a new identity

A luxury hotel or restaurant must have a point of view — a legible identity that embodies the brand, supports operational functionality, and shapes the guest experience. But, a historic building is not a blank canvas. Its established point of view is simultaneously its greatest asset and its toughest constraint. Our task, as designers, is to integrate the building's existing story and the new identity our client wishes to project. It is through that integration that the most compelling spaces are realised.

A listed, art deco property that has always been a prestigious department store in Toronto, Canada, Leña is an early morning to late-night restaurant, bar, lounge, and event space. DesignAgency created an array of interiors, each with its own ambience, but universally celebrating the restaurant's joyful inspirations and its historic setting.

Challenge & gift

Of all the complexities in transforming a historic property, none is more delicate than the client's own attachment to the space. This can present real challenges: clients who resist necessary changes, or who carry a fixed nostalgic image that obscures what the space could become.

And yet, handled well, attachment is not merely a difficulty to manage — it is a resource. There is something profound, too, in being trusted with a place someone loves and meeting that trust with rigour and care is some of the most meaningful work we can do.

The luxury of depth

A building that has stood for two hundred years carries something that cannot be manufactured: the gravitas of time. In an age of rapid construction and globalised aesthetics, that depth stands out — and it is precisely what guests are seeking when they cross



the threshold of a great historic hotel or restaurant.

The interior designer's task is to honour it — to add to the building's story without overwhelming it, to create spaces that feel both fresh and ancient. When that balance is right, no explanation is needed. **HT**

The views expressed are solely of the author. The publication may or may not subscribe to the same.

Business case for hospitality circuits

Hotels that prioritise destination networks over standalone properties, particularly in emerging markets, can yield more commercial returns.



Sumit Mitruka
Founder & CEO
Summit Hotels & Resorts

WORDS BY **RAHUL BHADANA**

For decades, hotel expansion has been measured by geography — more cities, more properties, more keys. Yet as leisure travel becomes increasingly experience-driven, a different growth model is beginning to emerge — hospitality circuits.

Rather than operating isolated hotels, some regional brands are creating interconnected destination ecosystems. In markets such as the Eastern Himalayas, where guests often combine multiple destinations into a single itinerary, this approach is creating both operational and commercial advantages. "Summit's growth philosophy has always been centred around building strong destination networks rather than pursuing expansion for scale alone," said **Sumit Mitruka**, Founder & CEO, Summit Hotels & Resorts.

The strategy has helped Summit build its presence across Sikkim, Darjeeling, Siliguri, and neighbouring destinations, creating what Mitruka describes as a hospitality circuit, rather than isolated properties.

Summit's focus remains on building strong destination circuits for a more seamless travel experience

The concept goes beyond guest convenience. Multi-destination networks can improve reservation management, procurement efficiency, and service consistency while encouraging travellers to remain within a single brand ecosystem.

"Guests often travel across multiple locations, and our presence across the circuit allows us to create a more seamless travel experience," said Mitruka. "Operationally too, this model gives us significant advantages in reservations, procurement, and service consistency." The approach also challenges a long-held assumption within hospitality development that demand must exist before investment follows.

"We strongly believe that hospitality can also play a role in creating destinations rather than simply following demand," Mitruka noted, adding, "There is a perception that demand must always exist before supply enters a market, but in tourism, quality supply often creates demand as well."

As regional tourism markets mature, brands that build destination ecosystems rather than isolated assets could be better positioned to capture long-term traveller loyalty. **HT**



Smart, sustainable & durable

Designed to elevate luxury hospitality experiences, Sealy Posturepedic Mattresses blend sleep science, sustainability, and innovation to deliver long-term value beyond guest comfort.

WORDS BY **HT BUREAU**

Today's guests are moving beyond quality and comfort; sustainability has become a defining factor in the hospitality experience. To meet these evolving expectations, the industry is placing greater emphasis on wellness, sustainability, and operational efficiency. Recognising this shift, Sealy Posturepedic has continued to innovate by incorporating eco-friendly materials, advanced sleep technology, and designs that seamlessly blend durability with aesthetic appeal.

Vinod Khatri, Head–National Contract & Export Sales, Sealy India, said, "Our mattresses are engineered for long-term usage while maintaining consistent comfort, reducing replacement cycles, and operational costs. We also collaborate with hotel partners to customise solutions that fit brand identity and guest expectations."

By combining science-backed support with sustainable practices, Sealy ensures its products remain relevant to modern hospitality, delivering long-term value while enhancing the guest experience in line with the industry's evolving demands.

Unique edge

What sets Sealy apart is its unique position at the intersection of sleep science and hospitality. More than just mattresses, Sealy's solutions are designed to support wellness, recovery, and long-term guest satisfaction. As Mr Khatri explained, "With patented technology, rigorous durability testing, and eco-conscious materials, we deliver solutions that meet both operational and experiential goals."

Sealy prioritises consistent comfort while reducing replacement frequency and operational costs





Vinod Khatri
Head — National Contract & Export Sales, **Sealy India**

By treating quality sleep as a cornerstone of luxury hospitality, Sealy helps hotels to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive market. This commitment to innovation, performance, and sustainability ensures their products remain integral to the evolving definition of luxury.

Lasting impact

Despite progress, one challenge the industry continues to face is balancing sustainability without compromising guest comfort. Hotels are under pressure to reduce their environmental impact while maintaining the highest standards of luxury. Achieving this balance requires innovation in materials, supply chains, and product longevity.

Without sacrificing performance, Sealy Posturepedic is committed to addressing these challenges by investing in eco-friendly technologies and durable designs. However, Mr Khatri emphasised that industry-wide collaboration is essential to overcoming this challenge by aligning guest expectations, operational realities, and sustainability commitments to create solutions that truly stand the test of time. **HT**

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Chef Abhiru Biswas

"We would like to express our sincere appreciation to Chef Tarun and his team for delivering highly informative, insightful, and knowledge-rich technical presentations during the show. The sessions provided valuable insights to professional chefs from commercial bakeries and leading hotels, enabling them to explore new technologies, techniques, products, and the latest developments in the industry."

President, Eastern India Culinary Association (EICA)





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New destinations emerge beyond gateways

PATA Travel Mart 2026 reinforced its strategies to support emerging hubs, while Sarawak is betting on India as a key source market.



(L-R) Noor Ahmad Hamid, Chief Executive Officer, PATA; Henry Oh, Chair, PATA; Dato Sri Haji Abdul Karim Rahman Hamzah, Minister for Tourism, Creative Industry and Performing Arts Sarawak and Minister for Youth, Sports, and Entrepreneur Development Sarawak; and Dr Sharzede Datu Haji Salleh Askor, Chief Executive Officer, Sarawak Tourism Board.

WORDS BY **JANICE ALYOSIUS**

PATA Travel Mart (PTM) 2026 brought together more than 1,100 delegates from 48 countries, including 221 buyers representing 215 companies from 29 source markets and more than 365 sellers from over 200 organisations and destinations. Held from 18–20 August at the Borneo Convention Centre Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia, the event generated more than 4,000 scheduled business appointments.

Dispersing tourism

For **Noor Ahmad Hamid**, CEO, PATA, taking PTM to Sarawak reflects the association's broader 75th anniversary strategy of supporting secondary destinations and moving tourism beyond established gateways. "This is our 75th anniversary, and this is the opportunity for us to turn it around. Especially in the last few years, our focus has been very clear: to work with secondary destinations and all our national tourism organisation members, whether it's Malaysia and other destinations around the world," Hamid said.

He further said that tourism promotion is increasingly shifting from national to state-level destinations. "The trend now is that tourism is not only at a national level. It's been dispersed to the state level," he said. Citing India as an example, Hamid said, "While the Ministry of Tourism of India is promoting tourism aggressively, including domestic tourism, they are also dispersing the power to the state tourism boards. The state tourism board is being empowered to do more because people are not just going to the capital city; people are going all over the destination."

"Our focus has been very clear — to work with secondary destinations and all our national tourism organisation members."

India opportunity

The strategy has particular significance for Sarawak, with India emerging as an important source market despite the lack of direct flights. **Dr Sharzede Datu Haji Salleh Askor**, Chief Executive Officer, Sarawak Tourism Board, said, "India has been a very important market for us. It's growing very well and very encouraging. Yes, there are no direct flights, and we understand the issues of preferably having a direct flight. So, we are working through hubs now. And now that we have AirBorneo, it is definitely going to be in the pipeline." She added Sarawak is currently working with airlines to improve access to the destination. "What we do now is collaborate with other airlines. And hopefully that encourages them to travel to Sarawak," she said.

Sarawak recorded 2,345,319 visitor arrivals between January and June 2026, with international visitors accounting for 58 per cent and domestic travellers for 42 per cent. The state is targeting around five million arrivals this year. Tourism receipts have averaged more than RM1 bn a month over the past two years, according to **YB Dato Sri Haji Abdul Karim Rahman Hamzah**, Minister for Tourism, Creative Industry and Performing Arts Sarawak. HT

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Where coastline, culture & luxury converge

InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort sets a new standard for beachfront living experience, balancing global vision with local character.



WORDS BY **HT BUREAU**

InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort, part of IHG Hotels & Resorts' luxury & lifestyle portfolio, has launched the final chapter of its transformation, redefining Chennai's beachfront experience. The reimagined resort features an ocean-facing ballroom along with expansive beach lawns, new restaurants and bars, luxury suites with plunge pools, a sports pavilion, and a meditation garden.

Key amenities

The 110 modern and contemporary guestrooms and suites are reimagined to offer an elevated beachfront living experience, with views of the gardens, the pool, and the Bay of Bengal.

The Grand Presidential Suite offers an ocean view, a jacuzzi, and a steam room. The Presidential Suite has a private pool and a spa room, while the Rathi Suite comes with a plunge pool, a steam room, and scenic greenery views.

"The reopening of InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort marks an important milestone for our luxury portfolio in India," said **Sudeep Jain**, Managing Director, South West Asia, IHG Hotels & Resorts. He further noted, "This multi-million-dollar transformation reflects our commitment to delivering destination-led, experience-rich stays that combine world-class hospitality with a strong sense of place."

Reimagined for a new era

Set across 15 acres of landscaped beachfront along the scenic East Coast Road, the resort drew inspiration from the Shore Temple. It blends contemporary design with the cultural richness of Mahabalipuram, offering guests a distinctive coastal retreat.

"This reflects our commitment to delivering destination-led, experience-rich stays."



Anand Nair
General Manager
InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort

Reflecting on this new chapter, **Anand Nair**, General Manager, InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort, commented, "This relaunch marks a proud milestone for us, unveiling a truly transformed resort. Envisioned as a coastal icon reimagined, it brings together the richness of South Indian culture with modern luxury." **HT**

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INSP20D	230VAC 50HZ	500	296x370x75mm	Inbuilt	275x350mm	Inbuilt	4.5Kg
INS2BRA	230VAC 50HZ	1000	800X400X100mm	Inbuilt	787X387mm	Inbuilt	9.700Kg
INS3BRA	230VAC 50HZ	1500	1200X500X82mm	Inbuilt	1205X505mm	Inbuilt	25.338Kg

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Where hospitality innovation meets business of tomorrow

By uniting stakeholders across the value chain, IHE 2026 highlights how hospitality is evolving rapidly through smarter sourcing, sustainable solutions, and innovation-led growth.



WORDS BY **SHREYA BANSAL**



Barun Gupta
COO
Indeva Hotels & Resorts



Amitabh Awasthy
Founder & CEO
Homescapes

As India's hospitality industry moves into a new phase marked by a growing focus on operational efficiency and evolving guest expectations, the India International Hospitality Expo (IHE) 2026 provided a comprehensive overview of the innovations and market trends shaping the sector. Held from 5–8 August at the India Expo Centre & Mart in Greater Noida, the ninth edition brought together more than 1,000 exhibiting brands from over 16 countries and attracted more than 40,000 visitors. The four-day platform covered the wider hospitality and HoReCa ecosystem, spanning technology, interior design, operating supplies and equipment, food service, wellness products, and sustainable hotel supplies.

Fostering innovation

For hoteliers and hospitality buyers, the value of IHE increasingly lies in bringing the entire hospitality supply chain together under one roof. **Barun Gupta**, COO, Indeva Hotels & Resorts, described the expo as a comprehensive sourcing and innovation platform. "When I talk about a one-stop solution for the hospitality industry, it is at IHE itself. This is a great platform for hoteliers to do one-stop shopping and see the innovations coming into the hospitality industry," he noted.

He emphasised the event serves as an important forum for new product launches and industry dialogue, stating, "IHE has become a key platform for innovation launches as well as knowledge sharing." Summing up the essence of the expo in a single word, his verdict was 'Innovation'.



Focus on sustainable growth

Beyond sourcing, exhibitors pointed to changing customer expectations as a key driver of product development. **Amitabh Awasthy**, Founder & CEO, Homescapes, highlighted the business value of engaging with both existing and prospective buyers. "This is a good platform where we are able to reconnect with our existing clientele. Besides that, we are also able to connect with new prospective clients who come to us with their requirements." Those requirements, he said, are increasingly influenced by wellness and responsible consumption. "We are highly attuned to the changing requirements of our customers. There is a growing trend towards products that are more oriented towards wellness." For Awasthy, commercial considerations must be balanced with a wider sense of responsibility. He said, "Business and commercial performance are important dimensions of any business, but we also have a huge responsibility towards the planet and society. We need to keep our social responsibility uppermost in everything we do."

Customisation as a key differentiator

King Koil has been participating in IHE for eight years, making it a valuable platform to connect with hospitality decision-makers and understand the evolving needs of the industry. **Mayank Sharma**, Business Head, Hospitality (India and Subcontinent), King Koil, said, "IHE has been phenomenal for us. Over the years, it has helped us engage with hotel owners, housekeepers, procurement teams, and other key stakeholders, creating meaningful business opportunities." He emphasised that King Koil's strength lies beyond supplying mattresses, with innovation and customisation at the heart of its hospitality strategy.

"We are very strong in new product development (NPD). We offer customised bedding solutions across our mattress portfolio, tailoring products to the specific requirements of every hotel brand and category. For us, customisation means understanding the property, room category, and guest profile, and developing the right sleep solution," he said. Sharma added, "A mattress is one of the most important pieces of furniture in a hotel. Sleep quality directly influences guest comfort and satisfaction. Our focus is therefore on combining comfort, support, durability, and innovation to deliver solutions that create value for hotels and, ultimately, a better experience for the guest."



Mayank Sharma
Business Head, **Hospitality (India and Subcontinent), King Koil**



Vikram Khurana
Founder & CEO
Kaapi Solutions



Shikhar Kaushal
Manager Sales and Marketing
Frill Hospitality



Seema Khurana
Managing Partner
Venus Industries



Prasanna Deshpande
Founder
Tungsten Shoes

Next-gen innovation

Technology is undoubtedly reshaping hospitality operations, particularly in the beverage segment, with growing emphasis on automation, consistency, and efficiency. **Vikram Khurana**, Founder & CEO, Kaapi Solutions, said, "The hospitality industry is evolving rapidly, and beverage programmes are becoming an increasingly important part of the overall customer experience and business profitability. At Kaapi Solutions, we are continuously expanding our portfolio to address this evolution — from advanced commercial espresso machines and automated coffee solutions to grinders and complete beverage solutions. Our focus is on helping businesses achieve consistency, speed, and quality at scale, while also giving them the flexibility to create better and more innovative beverage experiences. We are seeing a growing demand for smart automation solutions that can simplify operations without compromising on the quality of the cup."

He said technology is intended to complement, rather than replace, skilled hospitality professionals.

Eco-conscious approach

The impact of sustained participation at IHE was particularly evident in the experience shared by **Shikhar Kaushal**, Manager Sales and Marketing, Frill Hospitality. Recalling the company's journey, he said, "When we started the company 10 years ago, we had only about 10–15 clients per month. However, after participating in IHE over the last four years, our customer base has grown to more than 1,200 as of now." Kaushal's remarks also reflected the growing emphasis on environmentally conscious hospitality products, asserting, "We are moving towards eco-friendly solutions, which is why all our products are paraben-free and vegan. We also use herbal extracts to make safe and sustainable products. Additionally, we are a service-based company; we prioritise service excellence and quality assurance."



Quality inspires trust

For established suppliers, IHE remains an important platform for building relationships and strengthening industry credibility. **Seema Khurana**, Managing Partner, Venus Industries, said, "Venus Industries is one of the largest manufacturers serving the hospitality industry for the past 63 years. We deal in a wide range of HoReCa products and offer a wider range of customised solutions. We are here to support the industry and also ensure customer satisfaction." She further stressed, "IHE has always given us valuable networking opportunities, industry insights, as well as a platform to connect with like-minded entrepreneurs."

She opined that Venus Industries does not only manufacture goods, but also ensure to build trust with the product quality.

Designed for all-day comfort

The expo's focus on hospitality operations extended beyond guest-facing products. **Prasanna Deshpande**, Founder, Tungsten Shoes, said the company's participation was driven by both brand visibility and relationship-building: "Participating in IHE has generated a good response for us. We are here primarily to strengthen our brand presence, and it is good to meet our existing clients in one place."

Positioning the company around a specialised hospitality requirement, he said, "We are totally focused on the hospitality sector. We have a one-stop solution for all footwear requirements, whether for F&B staff, housekeeping staff, sales personnel,





Siddhi Agarwal
Director
Goyal Kitchen Equipments



Gurpreet Singh Dhaliwal
Founder & CEO
Ecoclean Hospitality LLP

or front-desk employees." He added, "We have evolved over time, providing default stitching in our shoes to ensure durability during long working hours for staff."

Operational efficiency

The changing tourism landscape is also influencing back-of-house infrastructure. **Siddhi Agarwal**, Director, Business Strategy, Goyal Kitchen Equipments, explained, "We provide complete turnkey solutions for commercial kitchens to restaurant owners, hotel owners, and food business owners. Our expertise supports operations that require bulk food preparation."

She linked the growing demand for efficient kitchen infrastructure to the rise of spiritual tourism, particularly in Uttar Pradesh and other parts of India. "Spiritual tourism, particularly in Uttar Pradesh and other parts of India, is increasing. People require more efficient kitchens that can prepare and supply food more quickly and bring food to the table faster."

Her message to the industry was one of collective responsibility and ethical business practices. "We all should work together, and we should not engage in any foul practices in the market. If we are supplying something to the customer, we should be able to justify it."

Green solutions

Ecoclean Hospitality LLP is driving sustainability-led operational efficiency in the hospitality industry through the manufacturing of eco-friendly solutions. **Gurpreet Singh Dhaliwal**, Founder & CEO, Ecoclean Hospitality LLP, shared, "We are an industrial laundry equipment manufacturing company with a strong presence across India. At present, we have more than 5000 installations across India, supported by a team of more than 50 service engineers."

He highlighted how product development is increasingly focused on resource savings and operational constraints. He added, "Over the last few years, we have developed products that help save water and reduce electricity costs. Additionally, we have reduced the space problem and also minimised electrical load issues faced by our customers."

Speaking about the company's domestic manufacturing capabilities, Dhaliwal noted, "We are a fully 'Make in India' company with end-to-end in-house manufacturing capabilities. We ensure seamless after-sales service and support."



Towards next-gen operations

Collectively, the voices from IHE 2026 point to a hospitality supply chain that is becoming more seamless, responsive and efficiency-driven. With its large B2B ecosystem and emphasis on sourcing, networking, and new launches, IHE continues to position itself as a meeting ground for the industry, where hospitality's next set of solutions can move from the exhibition floor into real-world properties. **HT**

India's hotel market poised for strong growth in H2FY27

Despite geopolitical headwinds, India's hotel sector remained resilient in Q1FY27 performance and is expected to strengthen further ahead.

WORDS BY **HT BUREAU**

India's hotel industry is projected to experience stronger growth in the second half of FY27, driven by robust domestic leisure demand and a steady recovery in corporate and international travel, Phillip Capital said in a sector report.

The hospitality sector remained resilient in the first quarter despite geopolitical disruptions, with industry occupancy rising 2-4 percentage points year-on-year, average room rates (ARR) increasing 6-8 per cent and revenue per available room (RevPAR) growing 11-13 per cent, according to the report.

"The Indian hotel industry delivered healthy growth in Q1FY27 despite geopolitical disruptions and normal seasonality."

Positive outlook in Q2FY27

The report noted that recovery could strengthen in the coming quarters, supported by a heavier wedding calendar, improving meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) activity, and the seasonal rise in international travel from October. Limited new hotel supply in key markets could also support room rates and RevPAR as demand improves. "Demand outlook remains positive for Q2FY27, with domestic leisure demand staying strong, corporate travel gradually normalising, and international demand recovering, as connectivity improves," the report said.





The report noted that demand was stronger in leisure markets than in business-focused locations during Q1FY27. Rajasthan and Goa recorded high-20 per cent growth in RevPAR for Indian Hotels.

Corporate travel remained softer, partly due to geopolitical conflict and uncertainty, as well as tighter travel budgets, while international traffic was affected by disruptions linked to the West Asia conflict. Domestic air passenger traffic grew just 1.2 per cent year-on-year to 86.3 million in Q1FY27, while international traffic declined 10.2 per cent to 17.9 million. Overall passenger movement fell 0.9 per cent to 104.2 million.

However, monthly trends showed signs of improvement as the quarter progressed. Domestic passenger growth reached 7.7 per cent in May before declining 1.2 per cent in June, while the fall in international traffic narrowed from 18.3 per cent in February to 4.7 per cent in June.

Growth amid geopolitical crisis

Among companies covered in the report, Leela reported 28 per cent revenue growth and 41 per cent EBITDA growth in Q1FY27, while The Indian Hotels Company Limited 's operating revenue rose 15 per cent and EBITDA increased 18 per cent. ITC Hotels' RevPAR rose 8 per cent, while Lemon Tree's occupancy improved by 314 basis points.

"The Indian hotel industry delivered healthy growth in Q1FY27 despite geopolitical disruptions and normal seasonality," the report said, adding that industry pricing remained intact even in markets where occupancy softened. **HT**



The grand confluence of hospitality

Hosted in Varanasi from 21–23 August 2026, the FHRAI 56th Annual Convention attracted over 1,400 delegates from India and abroad, reinforcing its position as the most sought-after platform to connect, collaborate, and shape the future of the hospitality industry.



























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MOVEMENTS



Manoj Jangid
General Manager
Le Méridien Surat

Le Méridien Surat has appointed Manoj Jangid as its General Manager. An accomplished hospitality leader with over two decades of experience across globally acclaimed luxury hotel brands, Manoj will spearhead the hotel's vision of delivering elevated guest experiences while strengthening its position as one of Surat's leading premium hospitality destinations.■



Neelabh Sahay,
General Manager
Novotel Bhubaneswar Janpath

Novotel Bhubaneswar Janpath has appointed Neelabh Sahay as its General Manager. He will lead the hotel through its pre-opening phase and position it as a landmark hospitality destination in Odisha's capital. His mandate includes establishing robust operational systems, cultivating a culture of excellence, driving commercial performance, and delivering contemporary guest-centric experiences.■



Amit Maini,
General Manager
Westin Hyderabad Mindspace

Amit Maini has been appointed as General Manager of the Westin Hyderabad Mindspace. With over 15 years of experience, he brings extensive expertise in commercial strategy, business performance, and stakeholder management across diverse markets in South Asia. He will focus on strengthening the hotel's market positioning, while driving operational excellence.■



Sajeev Kulangarath,
General Manager
Shilton Dee Cee, Chennai

Shilton Hospitality has named Sajeev Kulangarath as General Manager of Shilton Dee Cee, Chennai. He will lead overall operations at Shilton Dee Cee, focusing on enhancing guest experiences, empowering team performance, and driving sustainable business growth. His mandate centres on elevating the property's operational standards while expanding its market presence.■



Nikita Singh Paul,
Director of Sales,
ONE Atmosphere

ONE Atmosphere has appointed Nikita Singh Paul as Director of Sales at ONE Atmosphere Suites at Corner Walk. In her new role, Nikita will lead the property's overall sales strategy, business development initiatives, corporate partnerships, key account growth, and revenue generation efforts. She will also play a key role in the pre-opening commercial strategy.■



Ravindar Singh
Dhami, Director of
Food and Beverage, Raffles Udaipur

Raffles Udaipur has promoted Ravindar Singh Dhami to Director of Food and Beverage. He will focus on strengthening the resort's food and beverage operations, team leadership, and innovative dining experiences. Over the course of his career, he has worked across leading brands, including The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, and The Oberoi Group.■



Rahul Chauhan,
Resident Manager,
The LaLiT Chandigarh

The LaLiT Chandigarh has appointed Rahul Chauhan as its Resident Manager. He is equipped with more than two decades in luxury hospitality. In his new role, Chauhan will oversee the hotel's day-to-day operations, with a focus on enhancing guest experiences, driving operational efficiencies, strengthening service excellence, and supporting the property's continued growth.■



Nagesh Singh
Food & Beverage
Manager, **Aravali**
Marriott Resort & Spa

Nagesh Singh has been named the Food & Beverage Manager of Aravali Marriott Resort & Spa. He will oversee the resort's food and beverage operations across its restaurants, banquets, and in-room dining services. He will be responsible for driving service excellence and menu innovation while working closely with the operations teams to elevate dining experiences.■

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