

# HOTELS & RESTAURANTS INDIA

# fhrai magazine

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A MONTHLY ON HOSPITALITY TRADE  
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**FOCUS ON QUALITY**

# MAKING EVERYDAY HEALTHY

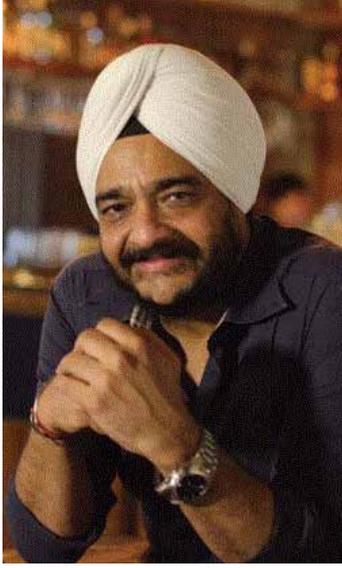


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**Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**  
Vice President  
FHRAI

*Dear fellow members,*

**F**irstly let me begin by wishing all of you and your families and staff a very happy, healthy, prosperous and safe 2021. We are all aware that 2020 was the biggest blow to our industry which besides contributing immensely to the GDP, Forex earnings and being highly labour-intensive, did not get any reprieve from the government. Yet being a resilient lot, we stood as a strong support to the government and the citizens throughout this pandemic. With the vaccine out, I expect within the next few months, a stimulation in demand whereby visitors would feel more comfortable and safe to travel to our country. The focus now is to stimulate such demand and for that we need the government's help initially.

The entire industry is looking forward for our industry-specific announcements and I would expect this Union Budget to be that game changer for the industry, which will help the most affected hospitality and tourism Industry to start trickling out of its damaged position. We have already submitted our representation to the Finance Ministry and sincerely hope that this time at least, hospitality and tourism would get the place it deserves with a strong mention in the FM's Budget speech imparting the much-needed push for the industry.

Out of the 75,000 organised hotels in India less than 1% are classified presently, owing to the contradictory and punitive guidelines and more and more hotels had and are continuing to relinquish classifications. We had approached the govt to take immediate remedial measures so that more and more establishments volunteer to get classified. The DOT due to our several and constant representations, have taken notice and decided to revisit and revise the guidelines.

Congratulations to Dr. Himanshu Talwar, our young and dynamic ASG for been given the

responsibility of the FIHM, our state-of-the-art institute at Noida which is readying itself to re-open after the pandemic.

A special mention for those states which have risen to the occasion and have come forward with positive announcements for the industry. Maharashtra, MP, Chattisgarh, Telangana are some such states that deserve a mention for introducing pathbreaking measures for resurrection of hospitality and tourism and while they may be small, they are steps in the right direction especially keeping today's scenario in mind.

FHRAI offers its deepest condolences to the family and kin of Shri Ratan Marothia, Past President of HRAEI and FHRAI, who passed away recently. Mr. Marothia was a gregarious person who epitomised the maxim that age is just a number. I pray to Almighty to grant peace to his soul and strength to the family, to bear this huge loss.

Rest assured dear members, your association is not leaving any stone unturned. With this terrible period behind us, I am confident that true to our nature, we will bounce back with more vigour and zest.

Be safe.

**Note:** The January 2021 edition of the FHRAI magazine will not be available as a printed version due to the pandemic. However, the e-version of the same shall be available on the FHRAI website and circulated to all members as broadcast on registered email.

*With kind regards,*  
*Gurbaxish Singh Kohli*  
Vice President, FHRAI



**With the vaccine out, I expect a stimulation in demand whereby visitors would feel more safe to travel to our country**



# JANUARY 2021

## POISED FOR RECOVERY

11

Stalwarts of the hospitality industry share that they are optimistic for the New Year and are looking at capitalising on new opportunities for revival in the post-vaccine 2021.

COVER IMAGE:  
PATRIKA GATE, JAIPUR, RAJASTHAN



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FHRAI EC members discuss how lowering the threshold limit for infrastructure status for hotels will benefit the industry.

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## FOCUS ON QUALITY, PRODUCTIVITY 24

The Udyog Manthan webinar on tourism and hospitality services, organised by DPIIT, focused on challenges related to quality and productivity in the industry.



## A GLOBAL OUTLOOK 28

Hoteliers opine that in the post-COVID world, the need to think global and act local, sustainable design, personalised stays & integrated cloud-based systems is the way ahead.



## QUALSTAR FOR SAFETY PROTOCOLS 32

Customers easily trust the adherence of branded hotels to safety protocols, but for the smaller ones, surety lies in the QualSTAR COVID Safety Compliance scheme.

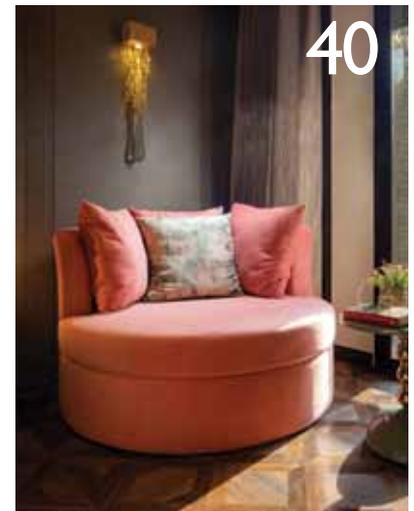
## IDEATING CONCEPTS 34

Focusing on staycations, safety measures, cloud kitchens, home deliveries and DIY meal kits became our mantra for the way ahead, says Anil Bhutoria, MD, The Stadel.



## READY FOR GOOD TIDINGS 36

At the virtual session of IHE Expo 2020, Priya Paul, Chairperson, Apeejay Surrendra Group spoke about the current scenario in the industry.



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This issue of FHRAI Magazine contains 40 + 4 pages cover

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# Pre-budget memorandum

Specific to the business losses accrued due to COVID, FHRAI has recommended a MAT waiver be given to the industry for a period of three years beginning April 2021 to March 2024.

**F**HRAI has submitted a comprehensive pre-budget memorandum encompassing direct tax and policy recommendations for the upcoming Union Budget 2021–22. Specific to the business losses accrued due to COVID-19, the apex hospitality association has recommended a MAT waiver be given to the industry for a period of three years beginning April 2021 to March 2024. The FHRAI has requested for treating payments received from international tourists as foreign exchange for the purpose of EPCG scheme

not received much support so far, we are hoping that the upcoming Budget will have special focus on the hospitality industry and certain longstanding recommendations such as review of the Kamath Committee recommendations, industry and infrastructure status to hotels, resorts and restaurants across the country, to raise threshold limit of hotel room tariff for charging GST, to allow IGST billing to hotels for corporate and MICE bookings will be addressed to rescue us from the downward spiral," says **Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**, Vice President, FHRAI.

by the Kamath Committee for restructuring of loans have made the restructuring plan unfavourable for the hospitality industry. The benchmarks suggested in the scheme are more stringent than what the banks used to offer to the industry in the original loans," says **Pradeep Shetty**, Jt. Hon Secretary, FHRAI.

"We also request the government to consider increasing the threshold limit of hotel room tariff for charging GST at 18 per cent to be raised to ₹9,500 from ₹7,500. Indian tourism sector is losing a fair bit of global tourist and MICE traffic in these segments. It is also standing to lose domestic traffic in this segment which is going to the much cheaper South East Asian destinations," adds Shetty.

Among other demands, the FHRAI has recommended enhancing funding limits to raise the SEIS rates to 10 per cent for hospitality industry to enhance the quality of accommodation and to enable discharging GST liabilities.

"SEIS is a way to set off indirect tax levied to reduce our cost of exports. It was also allowed to discharge service tax liabilities through the scrips. This will enable to discharge GST liabilities through the SEIS scrips. It will also enable investments into developing more globally acceptable products and will help in earning higher foreign exchange.

Also, IGST billing to the hotels for corporate bookings and MICE must be allowed. This will enable the companies to avail GST input credit which will incentivise them to spend their annual budgets in Indian cities instead of turning to holiday destinations of South East Asia," says **D. V. S. Somaraju**, Hon. Treasurer, FHRAI.

"We sincerely hope this year's Budget to take our industry most seriously. This Budget will make or break our dream of Incredible India. The FHRAI hopes that government considers us as an inclusive part of the economy, one which cannot be ignored," concludes Kohli.



**Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**  
Vice President, FHRAI

**“We are hoping the Budget will have special focus on hospitality”**

and that the time to perform export obligation under the scheme be extended by five years. Being a highly capital-intensive industry, it has asked to extend investment linked benefits from section 35 AD to ongoing cap-ex of hotels and resorts to promote high-quality brownfield cap-ex and capacity expansion.

"Over the last eight months the hospitality industry has been severely battered by the pandemic. The upcoming Union Budget will determine which way we go from here. The industry has a lot of expectations from the government. Since the industry has



**Pradeep Shetty**  
Sr. Vice President, HRAWI

**“GST at 18% must be raised to ₹9,500 from ₹7,500”**

"Currently hotels built with an investment of ₹200 crores or more have been accorded infrastructure status. This threshold has to be brought down to ₹25 crores per hotel. This will enable hotels and restaurants to avail term loans at lower rates of interest and also have a longer repayment period.

Giving industry status to hospitality sector is a must. Setting up a corpus fund for industry status to hospitality infrastructure will ensure its national industry status by compensating states for any losses. Also, the stringent conditions and the unrealistic parameters suggested

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# Excise licence fee waived

Maharashtra government has waived off the excise license fee on pro-rata basis along with the roll-back of the 15 per cent annual fee increase for the year 2020.

**T**he Hotel and Restaurant Association of Western India (HRAWI) and the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) have welcomed the Maharashtra government's decision to waive off the excise license fee on pro-rata basis along with the roll-back of the 15 per cent annual fee increase for the year 2020. The two associations had jointly submitted multiple representations requesting for the waiver. FHRAI and HRAWI have thanked the Hon. CM – Shri Uddhav Thackeray, Deputy CM – Shri Ajit Pawar, Minister of Tourism and Environment – Shri Aaditya Thackeray, Minister of Excise and Labor Department – Shri Dilip Walse-Patil. The associations have also thanked the Principal Secretary Tourism, Culture, Excise and Aviation – Ms. Valsa Nair Singh for standing with the industry and facilitating the above.

"This is a major relief for the restaurants in the state and we thank the government for giving us the waiver on the excise license fee. The eight odd months of lockdown has wrecked almost every other player in the hospitality industry. An annual fee should be payable if a service is rendered for the entire year. The HRAWI had been contesting the applicability of the fee ever since restaurants were asked to remain closed during the lockdown. Also, the 15 per cent increase in the annual fee at a time when hotels and restaurants remained shut was unfair. We are especially thankful to Ms. Valsa Nair Singh for understanding our concern and escalating it to the ministry," says **Sherry Bhatia**, President, HRAWI.

**Valsa Nair Singh** tweeted – "Government of Maharashtra waives license fees for excise pro-rata vis-à-vis number of days the unit remains closed. The annual increase in renewal also waived off. A big step to normalcy in the sector."

"In our recent meeting with Ms. Valsa Nair Singh, we expressed our restaurant members' concerns with regards to the hike in the excise license fee. We made a strong case for the waiver of the fee, as was done by the Madhya Pradesh government and Delhi government



**Sherry Bhatia**  
President, HRAWI



**Waiver on excise license fee is a relief for the restaurants**

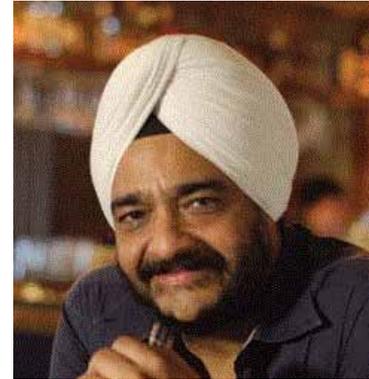


**Pradeep Shetty**  
Sr. Vice President, HRAWI



**We congratulate every restaurateur on this significant win**

last month. Restaurants had not voluntarily closed business but were asked to do so, as per government orders during the lockdown. The government, especially our Hon'ble CM and Tourism Minister have been very receptive to our pleas throughout the crisis and we are



**Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**  
Vice President, FHRAI



**Govt has been receptive to our pleas throughout the crisis**

relieved to hear the announcement. I would be failing if I did not thank Ms. Valsa Nair Singh, Principal Secy. Tourism & Excise for making this possible," says **Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**, Vice President, FHRAI & Former President and Spokesperson, HRAWI.

The night curfew announced by the Maharashtra government has dampened the spirits of hotels and restaurants in the state but the waiver of the excise fee is expected to bring a reason to cheer for the hospitality industry.

"This announcement brings the industry a major relief. We appreciate the Maharashtra government for hearing us out and for understanding our demand for the waiver on the excise license fee. Also, recently hospitality industry in Maharashtra was declared an industry by this government which shows its commitment towards tourism. The efforts made by the members of FHRAI and HRAWI to convince the government, has made this possible and we congratulate every restaurateur and hotelier on this small but significant win," concludes **Pradeep Shetty**, Sr. Vice President, HRAWI.

# 'Extend restaurant timings'

HRAWI has requested Maha govt to extend the closing time of restaurants from 11:30 pm to 1:30 am as it has the potential to generate between ₹50 cr to ₹75 cr per day.

**T**he Hotel and Restaurant Association of Western India (HRAWI) has written to the state government to allow restaurants to operate for an additional two hours effective from December. The HRAWI in its letter to the government has stated that an extension of two hours to the existing closing time of 11:30 pm, has the potential to generate anywhere between ₹50 cr to ₹75 cr per day. Prior to the lockdown coming into effect earlier this year, restaurants were allowed to operate until 1:30 am. The association has also requested that dine-ins be allowed to accommodate customers at full capacity.

"We are requesting the government to allow restaurants to revert to their original operation hours. It would also be necessary to point out here that restaurants mostly receive customers only post 8 pm, especially in the cities. Closing



within three hours of prime business time has a major downside. Besides, it would help in maintaining the distancing norm as the crowd would be spread over few more hours," says **Sherry Bhatia**, President, HRAWI.

The HRAWI has also pointed out that allowing restaurants to operate for the full hours will allow re-employment of the staff. The association has estimated that roughly

50,000 people across the state could become employed with this small change. "Not only will hotels and restaurants benefit from this change but we are sure even patrons will appreciate it. We are requesting the government to allow restaurants to operate until 1:30 pm like it was in the pre-COVID times and help the industry recover, even if in a small capacity," concludes **Pradeep Shetty**, Sr. Vice President, HRAWI.

## In Memoriam: Ratan Marothia

(10.01.1949 – 22.12.2020)



**Ratan Marothia**

**W**e are deeply saddened by the demise of Ratan Marothia, former President, FHRAI (2010-11) who passed away on December 22, 2020.

Marothia started a successful business with interests in the logistics and steel industry. However, driven by his entrepreneurial zeal and passion for hospitality, about 30 years ago, he ventured into the hotel business. From an early age, he had been extremely fond of travelling and enjoyed interacting with people from diverse backgrounds, and this probably explains his deep interest in the industry. Marothia's experience over the years had made him firmly believe that in a country like India, which is blessed with a rich culture and history and abundant natural beauty, tourism

can truly serve as a catalyst for economic and social development. He considered himself fortunate for having had the opportunity to contribute towards this goal.

Marothia had vast experience in legal matters, management and operation of hospitality business. He served FHRAI as an Executive Committee member for a long time. Marothia was also one of the Founding Members/ Visionaries of Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality (FAITH), New Delhi. He was a Special Patron of the All-India Marwari Federation.

The FHRAI fraternity will miss him and we convey our heartfelt condolences to his family. May his soul rest in peace.

# Industry status on the cards

FHRAI has emphasised on the importance of conferring the hospitality sector the status of an industry for both the betterment of tourism & hospitality in the state of Telangana.

**T**he Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) has expressed optimism about the hospitality sector getting recognition as an industry in Telangana after a constructive meeting with Hon'ble Tourism Minister of Telangana – Sri Srinivas Goud.

A delegation of the state's hospitality representatives under the leadership of D. V. S. Somaraju, Hon. Treasurer, FHRAI and Executive Committee Member, SIHRA along with S.P. Reddy, Director, Marriott Apartment Hotel, Hyderabad and Venkat Reddy, President of Telangana Hotel and Restaurant Association met with the Minister to discuss the several issues impeding the sector.

Somaraju submitted a representation to the Minister emphasising on the importance of conferring the sector the status of an industry for both the betterment of tourism and hospitality in the state. "We thank the Hon. Minister of Tourism for meeting with us and hearing us out. The Minister was aware



**D. V. S. Somaraju**  
Hon. Treasurer, FHRAI

of the need for giving the hospitality sector the status of an industry and reciprocated positively. We put across the sector's concerns and challenges and submitted a proposal to expedite the growth and its development. Against this backdrop, the government announced and also released an order for single-window clearance for all approvals, licenses and renewals; and the hospitality industry is grateful to the government for it. The state has been taking progressive measures

and has introduced policies aimed at socioeconomic development and we feel positive that the hospitality sector will soon also be given the status of an industry," says **D.V.S. Somaraju**.

The COVID-9 pandemic has caused significant and far-reaching economic damage to the hospitality sector in the country. The industry is waging a battle for its survival amidst increasing requirements of working capital vis-a-vis negative cash flows, threats of insolvency and millions of jobs losses.

"The hospitality sector is labour-and capital-intensive and depends entirely on travel. Hospitality was the first casualty of the pandemic and will be the last one to revive. The recovery of the sector is going to be a long-drawn-out affair without full-fledged resumption of domestic travel in the country.

There is no foreign business to India since March 2020; and with no sign of international business resuming soon, the road ahead is full of uncertainties and difficulties. The morale is at an all-time low and granting hospitality the status of an industry will prove to be a much-needed boost to the sector," concludes Somaraju.

**SIHRA**



**Granting industry status will provide a much-needed boost to the sector**

## Mandatory TV channels

**T**he Central Government in pursuance of Section 8 of Cable Television Network (Regulation) Act, 1995 has notified that 25 Doordarshan channels along with Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha TV channels are to be mandatorily carried by each cable operator on its TV network. Non-carriage of mandatory TV channels is likely to attract

punitive action under Section 11, Section 12 and Section 16 of the said Act. The Ministry of I & B has requested FHRAI to disseminate this information to its members for ensuring compliance of the Act by its member hotels. The 27 mandatory TV channels include DD National, DD News, DD Bharti, DD Urdu, DD Sports, DD India, DD Kashir, DD Punjabi,

DD Ginar, DD Sahyadra, DD Saptagiri, DD Malayalam, DD Podhigai, DD Chandana, DD Bangla, DD North East, DD Bihar, DD Uttar Pradesh, DD Rajasthan, DD Madya Pradesh, DD Oriya, Gyan Darshan Channel, Lok Sabha Television Channel, Rajya Sabha Television Channel, DD Kisan, DD Arunprabha and DD Yadagiri.

# Poised for recovery

Stalwarts of the hospitality industry share that they are optimistic for the New Year and are looking at capitalising on new opportunities for revival in the post-vaccine 2021.

**G Kamala Vardhana Rao**  
**Chairman & MD, ITDC**

My mantra for 2021 is to be innovative and think out of the box. Tomorrow is created today, and we are doing just that. The biggest takeaway from 2020 would be that every crisis presents itself with an opportunity, provided you have the keen outlook towards converting it.



**Puneet Dhawan**  
**Senior VP, India & South Asia**  
**Accor**

We are cautiously optimistic for the New Year. I believe that continuing to be agile and thinking on our feet will be key for us. It will be imperative to drive consistency across the board to deliver a guest experience that continues to keep the guests' safety and hygiene at the helm.



**Pushendra Bansal**  
**COO**  
**Lords Hotels and Resorts**

The New Year gives us a clean slate, a chance to re-evaluate our journey, do better, go farther and apply our learnings from the past year. An opportunity to capitalise on exclusive experiences lies ahead, as we build a strong brand presence across India and beyond.



**Sarbendra Sarkar**  
**Founder & MD**  
**Cygnett Hotels & Resorts**

With the holiday season here, our hotels are running busy. We are excited that domestic leisure travel is picking up. We have re-opened 16 properties and all our leisure destinations are doing good business. We received many reservation requests for the New Year weekend.



**Davinder Juj**  
**General Manager**  
**Eros Hotel New Delhi**  
**Nehru Place**

Actual revival could be seen in the next 12 to 18 months. Our focus will remain on achieving breakeven and exploring all opportunities that will help us in sustaining ourselves. Safety and hygiene will remain at the forefront.

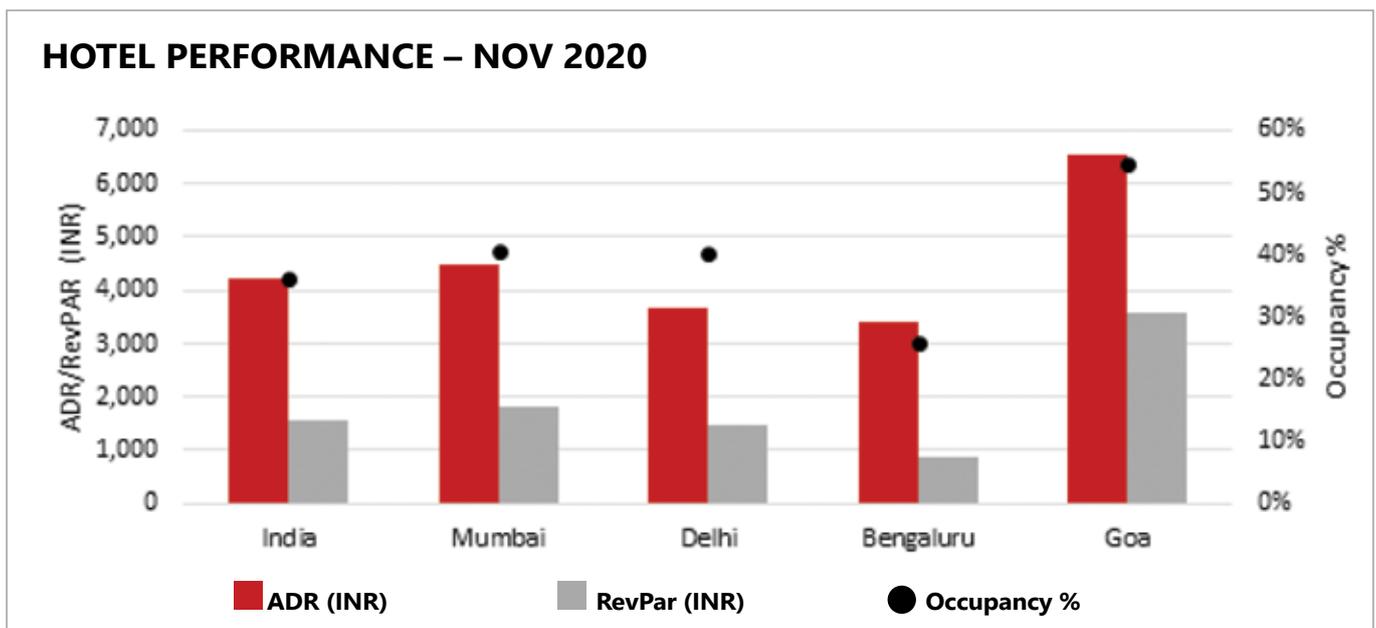


**Rohit Katyal**  
**National Sales Head**  
**Justa Hotels & Resorts**

We are bullish about 2021 and likely to come up with three to four new projects in Tier-II and III cities as niche hotels and resorts. The need for the future is to diversify and create multi-locational hotels, streamline costs, but not compromise on quality.

# Hotel occupancy levels cross 35% sector-wide

The revival of the sector has primarily been driven by leisure 'revenge travel' during weekends & the festival season, weddings and food & beverage demand, according to JLL.



Source: STR

With the emergence of recovery indicators, the hospitality sector has also witnessed a revival in room night demand in the last quarter of 2020, as compared to the previous quarters of the year. Occupancy levels have grown month on month since September 2020 to cross 35 per cent sector-wide in November 2020 (as per STR data), which is the highest since beginning of the nation-wide lockdown in March 2020.

The revival of the sector has primarily been driven by leisure 'revenge travel' during weekends and the festival season, weddings and food & beverage demand.

Leisure markets in close proximity to major source markets including Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru are likely to continue to benefit from weekend business.

Goa, India's most sought-after leisure market, witnessed considerable growth in recent months achieving a market-wide occupancy level of almost 55 per cent in November



## Domestic business travel is expected to pick-up pace from March-April 21 onwards

### OUTLOOK FOR 2021

- Large restaurants in hotels with all necessary health and hygiene protocols could start seeing the benefits from F&B demand and weddings ceremonies will likely take centre stage again providing seasonal impetus to the hospitality sector.
- Repurposing of brownfield hotel assets for alternate uses such as co-living, senior living and student housing facilities may start happening, subject to demand in specific markets.

2020. Luxury and upper upscale hotels in Goa performed well in November 2020, achieving healthy occupancy levels ranging between 60 per cent and 70 per cent as compared to occupancy levels in November 2019 that ranged between 65 per cent and 75 per cent.

"Domestic business travel is expected to pick-up pace from March-April 2021 onwards, as employees return to workplaces and travel advisories by companies are softened.

Additionally, domestic leisure will continue to drive occupancies across the country. Food & Beverage demand will continue to grow as eating out will increase albeit cautiously" says **Jaideep Dang**, Managing Director, Hotels and Hospitality Group, South Asia, JLL.



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# Stimulating DEMAND

FHRAI EC members discuss how lowering the threshold limit for infrastructure status for hotels will benefit industry.



Neha Rawat



Sherry Bhatia

**Sherry Bhatia**  
Managing Director, Golden Swan Group

**How will lowering the threshold limit for infrastructure status for hotels affect the industry?**

Presently, the govt has granted infrastructure status only to hotels with a project cost of more than ₹200 crore each (excluding land costs), and to convention centres with a project cost of over ₹300 crore each. Out of the total projects proposed in the hospitality sector, only a minuscule of 10-15% qualify under the criteria. However, bringing down the threshold limit to ₹25 crores per hotel for classification as infrastructure for hospitality projects will enable hotels to avail term loans at lower rates of interest & also have a longer repayment period. This will not only help the hotel industry but will also enhance quality accommodation supply and therefore stimulate higher global and domestic travel demand.

**Will the move promote new hotel projects?**

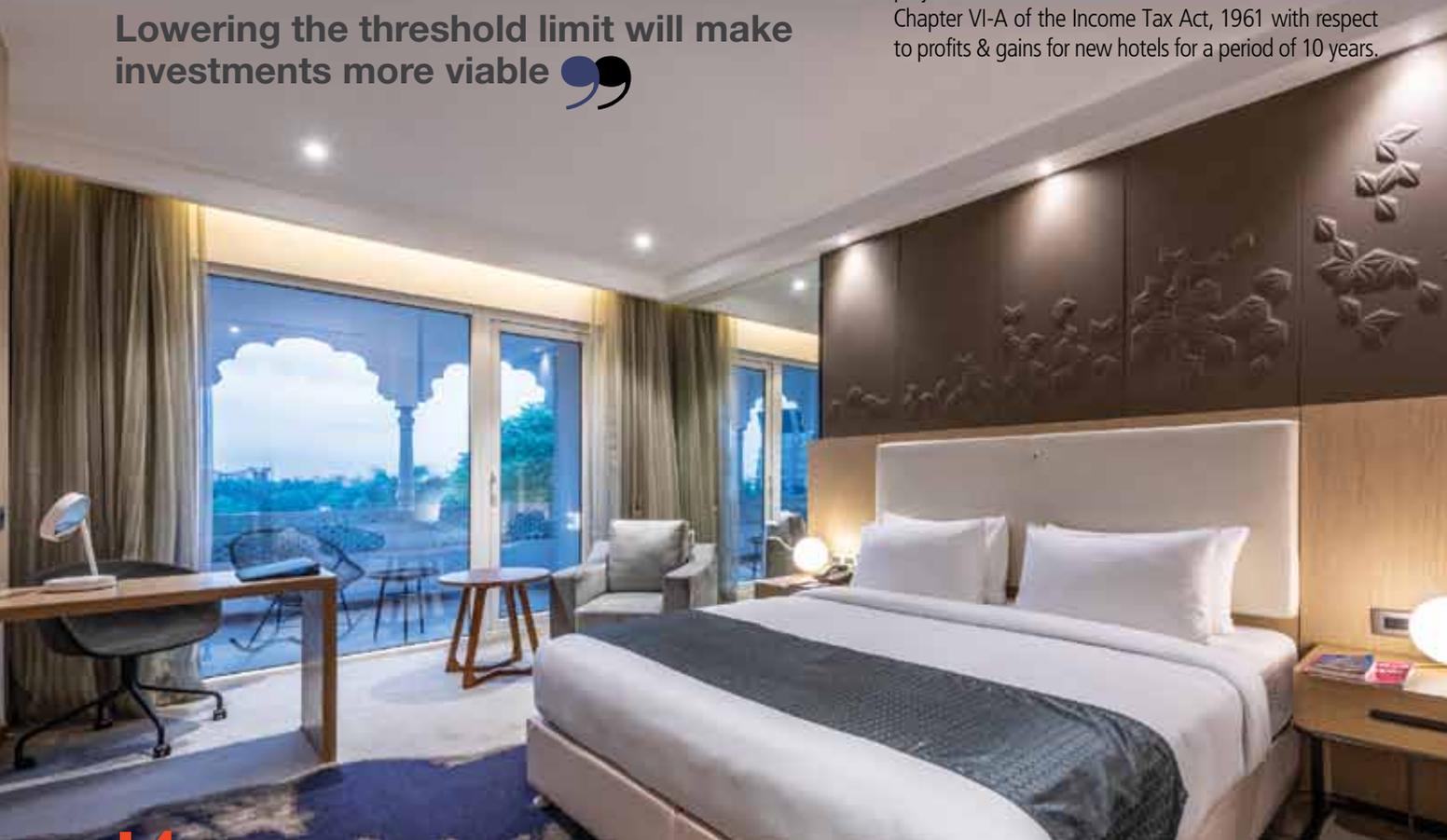
Lower interest rates, lower electricity charges and longer repayment of loans will give fillip and incentive to players to invest in new hospitality projects. There is a big gap in supply and demand in quality accommodations in India. Lowering the threshold limit to ₹25.00 crores per hotel will make investments in the sector more viable which in turn, will help bridge the gap in the supply-demand in quality accommodations at affordable price points.

**How will it help in the financial aspect of the hotel business?**

Lower interest rates, electricity & other utility charges at industrial rates, will shorten the gestation period of projects. Thus projects can then generate surplus funds to reinvest in new hospitality projects. It is recommended to classify hotels & resorts as infrastructure so that hotel projects can avail benefit of 100% deductions under Chapter VI-A of the Income Tax Act, 1961 with respect to profits & gains for new hotels for a period of 10 years.



Lowering the threshold limit will make investments more viable





**Is your  
covid certificate  
authenticated  
by the  
national board  
of the country?**





Param Kannampilly

## Param Kannampilly Chairman and Managing Director, Concept Hospitality

### How will lowering the threshold limit for infrastructure status for hotels affect the industry?

In the year 2012, the Central government provided the infrastructure status to the three-star or higher category hotels outside cities with a population of over one million. Subsequently in 2013, the government granted infrastructure status only to hotels with a project cost of more than ₹200 crore each (excluding land costs),

and to the convention centers with a project cost of over ₹300 crore each.

In a memorandum to Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, FHRAI has asked for lowering of the current threshold limit of ₹200 cr to ₹25 cr per hotel for classification as infrastructure for hospitality projects without any additional riders. According to the Federation, keeping a higher threshold for infrastructure status is not helping the cause of the industry stakeholders, thereby keeping almost 90 per cent of the investors out of the ambit of the threshold.

Asking for a review of the threshold, FHRAI's memorandum states, "It is a well-known fact that out of the total projects proposed in the hospitality sector today, only a minuscule of 10-15 % will pass muster under this criteria.

At the outset, it was construed as a step in the right direction. But, in the hindsight, it is not. This ₹200 crore mark is not doing any good. The government needs to drastically bring this down to promote investment and development of the hospitality sector in the country."

Lowering the threshold limit from ₹200 crores to ₹25 crores would help the mid-market / budget segment investors. As demand for rooms is more in the mid-market segment, recent research has proved that investors are inclined to invest in the 3-star or 4-star category, thus bridging the gap in the shortage of number of classified rooms, which is the need of the hour.

### Will the move promote new hotel projects?

A lower threshold limit will certainly promote more investors with increase in benefits and better returns. Cheaper loans and longer repayment cycles with land costs included in the project cost would be the attraction.

The move may lead to many new hotel projects being set up by companies re-investing their profits in the hotel sector apart from fresh investment.

Additionally, the Federation says that by classifying the hospitality sector as a permissible infrastructure activity under Section 54EC of the Income Tax Act, 1961, hotels will be able to raise tax free bonds through notified financial institutions.

### How will it help in the financial aspect of the hotel business?

Demand for hotels rooms has increased in the mid-market budget segment in tier-2 & tier-3 cities, leading to increase in occupancies, better room rates and greater cash flows which makes the hotel business a viable one.



**Demand has risen in the mid-market budget segment**





Do you have  
a **Global**  
**recognition**  
for  
Covid safety?





**Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar**

**Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar**  
**Executive Director, HRH Group of Hotels**

**How will lowering the threshold limit for infrastructure status for hotels affect the industry?**

In a memorandum to the Union Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, FHRAI has asked for lowering the threshold Infrastructure status for hospitality projects to make it beneficial for broader segments of the hospitality projects and convention facilities. The Federation had included this earlier as an important demand in the pre-budget suggestions to the Finance Ministry, too. The hotel Federation has asked for lowering of the current threshold limit of ₹200 cr to ₹25 cr per hotel for classification as infrastructure for hospitality projects without any additional riders. This, according to FHRAI, will enable hotels to avail term loans at lower rates of interest and also have a longer repayment period.

I have always lauded the efforts of FHRAI in campaigning for friendly and progressive policies for the hotel industry as a whole. In this COVID era, we cannot be looking at the earlier older solutions to the problems of growth. We have to think afresh and look deeper. Travel and hospitality are interlinked; till the time, world travel and tourism doesn't reach normalcy, all the policy decisions will make little or no impact. It's a paper chase in this COVID time. Right now, we are witnessing our country's GDP which has contracted beyond imagination;

let's think of ways and means to help all the industry segments survive and get back on track.

**Will the move promote new hotel projects?**

Undoubtedly new hotel projects do benefit when infrastructure policies change, when tax-breaks and financial incentives make a huge tangible difference. In today's COVID-time and age, I wonder who is promoting new hotel projects? The entire hotel industry has been hit by the COVID tsunami; mere survival and seeing through another year is the goal for everyone. If the biggest of the hotel players are planning new projects, all the best to them.

FHRAI and the Ministry of Finance should provide financial assistance where it is needed most, that is, to the small and medium players who were steadily growing with the high tide of travel and tourism. Today, they are grounded; let's come up with ways and means to directly help those who are facing huge cash flow problems and are unable to pay their vendors and suppliers, while being barely able to take care of their staff strength.

**How will it help in the financial aspect of hotel business?**

The organised travel and tourism industry is deeply enmeshed in the world of high finance. I wish I could answer all the queries, but I am not a financial whiz kid. I am an operations and marketing professional and I sincerely wish 2021 will slowly see our world set right. My prayers and good wishes for all..

**“We should provide assistance to the small and medium players”**



**Government of India**



**Ministry of Commerce  
& Industry**



**QCI**  
**Quality Council of India**



**NABCB**  
**National Accreditation  
Board of Certification  
Bodies**



**QualStar**



# A safe experience

The spread of COVID-19 has given rise to smaller and intimate gatherings, says **Sylvain Laroche**, Director of Operations, ibis & ibis Styles, India,



Sylvain Laroche

**T**he global pandemic has made social distancing the norm, which has in turn globally affected the way people celebrate. The spread of COVID-19 has given rise to smaller and intimate gatherings as the big fat Indian weddings turned leaner this year. With fewer people being able to travel, virtual ceremonies have been paving the way for technological advancements at hotels across the world. Watching the rituals on the big screen is a whole-new experience for guests. From attending office meetings to online lectures, attending weddings online is fast emerging as the latest trend.

The wedding industry in India was pegged (according to Digital Classified in India 2020 by KPMG India and Google) at an estimate of \$50 billion and a rapid annual growth rate, which was attributed to the fact that half of India's 1.3-billion people were aged below 30 and an estimate of 10 million weddings held annually. Popular online wedding platform Shaadi.com said that a 20-30 per cent surge in the online matchmaking industry during the lockdown is going to result in a reasonable uptick in the number of weddings.

At ibis, we are delighted to see a gradual uptick in wedding queries and bookings over the last few months. Few of our hotels like ibis Jaipur Civil Lines and ibis Delhi Aerocity offer exquisite poolside venues ideal for intimate weddings. While some couples have been postponing their wedding, the others are looking for curated food menus and fine décor for their D-day. Pool-side venues that were earlier used for pool parties are now being used for bachelor's night and haldi ceremonies. With the shift in trends, there is a pent up demand due to all the weddings and events that were put on hold during the lockdown period.

Good food, music and décor are at the heart of any celebration. At ibis, self-help buffets have been replaced with one-bowl eats, pre-plated food options served by the team. Our interactive kitchen concept at Spice It – the restaurant, also offers confidence to guests. The food culture at different cities ranging from Kolkata to Delhi to Jaipur is extraordinary. We aim to blend different cultures through food under one roof. We promise and aim to make every moment personal for the bride and the groom. We don't hesitate to go that extra mile to make the biggest and brightest day of their life a safe and memorable experience.

*(The article has been written by Sylvain Laroche, Director of Operations, ibis & ibis Styles, India, the views expressed are the author's personal views.)*



**Buffets have been replaced with one-bowl eats, pre-plated food options**



**The  
only  
accredited  
Covid  
compliance  
certification  
body  
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# Book directly

Regional Presidents speak about FHRAI's soon to be launched Go-direct campaign which seeks to convey to consumers that they should book directly rather than through OTAs.

**Neha Rawat**



**Sherry Bhatia**  
President, HRAWI

## AN EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

The pandemic has affected hotels and restaurants across India and many are on the brink of closure or have scaled down operations. As of today, there have been no foreign exchange earnings and the revenues stand at less than 10 per cent of pre-pandemic levels. The hospitality sector is facing an existential crisis. As things stand today, achieving even 25 per cent of pre-pandemic revenues in the near future seems very unlikely.

## #GODIRECT CAMPAIGN FOR SURVIVAL

Of the 50 million employed by the hospitality and tourism

**We ask guests & patrons to support us by booking rooms and venues directly and ordering food**

industry in the country, hotels and restaurants account for 35 million or around 12.5 per cent of the total employment directly and indirectly. #Godirect is just a measure of survival for the industry. Online Travel Aggregators (OTAs) and Food Service Aggregators (FSAs) aided by the power of online apps and backed by global investors have choked the entrepreneurial aspirations and enterprise of our members. While this model of business is profitable to these OTAs and FSAs, it's gradually stifling hotels and restaurants. The #Godirect campaign seeks to eliminate such intermediaries and save exorbitant commissions charged to hotels and restaurants.

## A HELPING HAND

The hospitality industry is a Corona Warrior which distributed lakhs of free meals every day for months and sheltered several health workers during the country's worst crisis. A helping hand during such distressed times would help the industry get back on its feet.

The industry is looking to save as much as it can in outgoings to ensure that it survives this phase. With this in mind, we ask our esteemed guests and patrons to support us in these tough times by booking rooms and venues and ordering food directly from the hospitality establishments and thereby support FHRAI's #Godirect Campaign.



**Sudesh Poddar**  
President, HRAEI

## REACHING OUT TO GUESTS DIRECTLY

The launch of #Godirect Campaign by FHRAI will be a judicious move expected to eliminate intermediaries and save exorbitant commissions

**OTAs initially charged 15-18% as commissions, but it went up to over 40% last year-end**

to hotel aggregators, especially when the hospitality sector is going through a critical situation. We at HRAEI have been fighting against the arm-twisting tactics of the aggregators for quite some time. Last year we had decided to stop taking bookings from two top online travel portals for charging heavy commissions from

hotel owners and offering indiscriminate discounts to customers through their platforms. Other hospitality industry associations across the country also have been opposing major OTAs who charge heavy commissions from hotels and restaurants and offer hefty discounts to guests. These online booking portals initially charged between 15 and 18 per cent as commissions, but the figure climbed to over 40 per cent last year-end.

## IMPLEMENTING A PROVEN MARKETING STRATEGY

It's time for our industry to implement a proven marketing strategy. This will not only maximise the number of direct bookings that a property is driving through its own website, but also a strategy that uses OTAs for their intended purpose to find new guests. In other words, if you have used OTAs in the past to find and book new guests, now tap those guests directly. We have a massive advantage over the OTAs when it comes to developing & nurturing a relationship with the guest. The relationship between the OTA & the guest exists only online or through phone calls, but we have the distinct privilege of actually hosting the guest and the opportunity to build a real and meaningful relationship with him/her.



**K. Syama Raju**  
President, SIHRA

### **FACILITATING DIRECT BOOKING**

SIHRA welcomes the move to launch Go-direct concept which will prevent hotels from paying huge unilateral commission decided by the OTAs. Through SIHRA we are educating our members to strengthen their digital marketing knowledge and improve their website to facilitate direct booking through SIHRA Connect webinar series.

### **PROMOTING TOURISM**

We had an interactive session with T. K. Anil Kumar, IAS, Principal Secretary, Department of Tourism, Govt of Karnataka and all the Mysuru hoteliers. Sumalatha, Hon Member of Parliament; Rohini Sindoori, IAS, DC Mysuru District; and Manjunath, Director of Mysuru Airport also addressed the gathering. Mysuru hoteliers and other stakeholders had a productive interaction with the officials to promote tourism in the region and also provide solutions to their grievances.

### **RAISING FUNDS THROUGH TAX FREE BONDS**

A memorandum is being submitted to the Hon'ble Minister of Finance, GOI, through FHRAI, requesting for reduction in the threshold limit for classification of hospitality projects under the infrastructure

activity and for classification of hotels and resorts as permissible infrastructure activity which could help the hotels to raise funds through tax free bonds through notified financial institutions.

### **EXTENDING INDUSTRY STATUS**

Syama Raju, President of SIHRA met the Hon Chief Minister of Karnataka and requested to extend industry status to the

 **We are facilitating direct booking via SIHRA Connect webinar series** 

hospitality sector during these trying times. The Hon Chief Minister was very positive, and the government is working on the proposal and we can expect good news soon. SIHRA Vice President Suresh Pillai met the Hon Industries Minister, Kerala and submitted a request letter to extend industry status to the hospitality sector. Also, he personally met the Hon Tourism Minister and submitted a request letter to recommend electricity bills to be paid in six equal instalments due to poor occupancy in hotels.

### **PAYMENT DUES TO HOTELIERS**

SIHRA consistently followed up on the payment dues to hoteliers from Tamil Nadu government for the accommodation provided to doctors and nurses for the months of August and September. Since the government ordered an audit on the pending bills, SIHRA's proposal to pay an ad hoc amount to hoteliers to ease the burden was accepted by the government.



**Surendra Kumar Jaiswal**  
President, HRANI

### **AN UNETHICAL PRACTICE**

The practice of acquiring discounted rates from a hospitality establishment and then further discounting it by OTAs/ FSAs on their online platform is a vicious and unethical practice. It also brings disrepute to the brand's / establishment's image. There are grave discrepancies in the clause which curbs the freedom of an establishment. This is a matter of crucial concern for the hospitality industry.

### **A GREAT INITIATIVE**

Nowadays hotels put more effort on developing their direct booking websites. Hoteliers want customers to know about their online presence, which should be more convenient and cost-effective rather than the OTAs.

Direct booking allows hotels to use loyalty programmes and target repeat customers with special offers and packages. By using a direct booking system, it is easier for hotels to make use of guest data available to enhance guest experience levels for every visitor.

Direct websites is the digital front door of hotels. Engaging contents like photographs and fun videos give customers more vision of your hotel.

Also, maintaining updates on hotel websites can make an unforgettable first impression on your customers. When hoteliers integrate booking systems on their website and encourage their guests to book directly from their website, they can save more money and increase their revenue because they won't be paying OTAs commissions anymore.

The launch of Go-direct campaign by FHRAI to call upon the 'guest' and 'customer' to support the hospitality industry by booking rooms and venues and ordering food directly from the hotels and restaurants is a great initiative in these tough times.

### **BUILDING STRONGER RELATIONS**

I am hopeful that with this campaign, the probability of getting direct guest visits and reservations will surely increase. It will also help the member establishments of FHRAI to get the best data when guests book / order directly with them. The hotels and restaurants will also be able to collect valuable information to personalise the guest experience and gain repeat business.

 **Go-direct will allow hotels & restos to personalise the guest experience** 

With this campaign, the hotels and restaurants will have the chance to build stronger relations with their guests and they can save a huge amount on commission costs. This will help them to build a sustainable future for themselves.



# Focus on quality, PRODUCTIVITY

The Udyog Manthan webinar on tourism and hospitality services, organised by DPIIT, focused on challenges related to quality and productivity in the industry.

**M**oderating Udyog Manthan's webinar on tourism and hospitality services, **Dr. Aishvarya Raj**, Senior Director- Quality Council of India(QCI) said, "On behalf of DPIIT, Department of Commerce MPC, BIS, QCI, SEPC and industry chambers like TII & FICCI, chambers at the Tech Council and all our partners, I welcome you to the Udyog Manthan. The idea behind this Manthan is to understand the challenges and opportunities concerning productivity and quality across Indian industry sectors and build a mass scale movement of awareness on quality and productivity. So Udyog Manthan is a marathon which has focused webinars on promoting productivity and quality in the Indian industry. In this session on tourism and hospitality services, I am honoured to introduce Ms. Rupinder Brar, Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism."

In her opening remarks, **Rupinder Brar**, Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism, said, "I would just like to, as you said, set the tone for today's brainstorming session. So taking things forward, it's obviously been a very challenging last few months. COVID has obviously taken not just us but the world also perhaps a few steps back. But in many ways, I think it also exposed a few areas where we weren't lucky. And probably we would not have been working on those areas with the same kind of zest unless we had not been pushed by the pandemic."

One of the key issues that came up before the ministry was that what was truly missing was a very robust database. Tourism, as you all understand, and I say tourism and hospitality is a sector which is so multi constituted, there are so many constituents in the supply chain, that we did not even have the databases for the most obvious sectors, what of the not so obvious ones. And that really started coming as a major roadblock and realising that how to take the country forward in that context, I think, therefore, it was good that quality control actually has come on board with the Ministry of Tourism. And we started working on creating some form of database. We started looking at how to improve the whole issue of quality, and now quality was in the context of COVID. So there is the more immediate need to sort of send a message out on quality. And we found ourselves with a lot of gaps on that. And that's why I think the timing of the Udyog Manthan could not have been more appropriate."

"In terms of creating databases, the ministry through its Market Research Division, is working towards a massive survey exercise and building databases. And that's where we look for a lot of support from everyone who's here. And we will carry the message from here that we hope that we can work together to get a lot more data. No good policies can be driven only on the basis of pure intuition. Unless we have databases, there's no way we

can make rational decisions. We can work together to create the framework, get the database in place, and then push the right policies," she shared.

"Quality and high level of service is undeniably the need of the industry. It is not negotiable. Quality Assurance is also a long-term commitment. It does have costs factor to it. But I'm sure you'll all agree that when we do the cost benefit analysis of any organisation, and if I say even at a country level, because benefit analysis of any investment that goes into creation of quality and keeping it in that way, would take us a long way as a country."

**Rajendra Kumar Sharma**, Principal Incharge and Member Secretary, IHM Lucknow, said, "Let me start with a quote from Alvin Toffler, a writer and an author who says the illiterate of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will not be those who cannot read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn. In the education sector the challenge is, how to make our curriculum keep pace with such a dynamic industry."

I feel that the most important thing is going to be the industry-academy interface. As far as the IIMs are concerned, we are there to prepare the students for a professional career in the hotel industry. But now, I think we need to be looking at the curriculum designed as per the strategies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which have to be more learner based rather than knowledge based.

We need to have the mainstream players coming and joining hands with us, in our institutions, so we look forward to a lot of participation from industry, personnel to come and share their experiences with the future hoteliers so that they get a better idea of the situations that they're going to face and what the real industry is all about. We look forward to collaboration with hotel companies and hoteliers. We welcome hoteliers to come and join us in a robust partnership. In all the institutions we have at least two specialists who are from hotels. They guide our boards on what's happening in the industry. We are also revising our curriculum to cater to the needs of the industry, so I think that process has to be more dynamic."

"We must look at frequent quality audits and accreditations. With the help of the industry and government, we have to offer degrees that are acceptable globally, because in a number of countries still when people go out with our degree, they have to do a bridge course or they have to take some extra credits to be able to get admissions into higher studies. So, that is one more area we need to be working on. As of now, a lot of standardisation and quality work is going on. But more needs to be done, and I look forward to support from all corners of our industry in helping us achieve what we are setting out to do."



**Rupinder Brar**

“**We can work to create the framework, get the database in place**”



**Rajendra Kumar Sharma**

“**The industry-academy interface is going to be important**”



**Chef Vineet Manocha**



**We must focus on regional cuisine with regional produce**



**We need to look at the guest feedback, which is important**



**Dheeraj Kukreja**



**Dheeraj Kukreja**, COO, Piccadilly Holiday Resorts, opined, "We all are aware that hospitality industry employs a large number of people across the length and breadth of the country. It is not confined to one state or union territory. And it's not limited to five-star hotels or four-star hotels but goes on to include restaurant chains, standalone restaurants, dhabas, wedding caterers, canteens, industrial catering, Railways, airlines etc.. The industry employs a large number of people and hence contributes significantly to the country's GDP.

I would like to emphasise on the quality of manpower which is available. Not all the hotel companies can afford to have their own hotel management colleges. In India and overseas, a couple of hotel companies have their own colleges and hence they are able to groom students to meet their requirements. However, midsized companies like ours and many other smaller companies cannot afford to have hotel management

colleges. Hence, we are heavily dependent on the institutes of hotel management and colleges.

Now, we realise during interviews with students when they come over for jobs or for internship, that there sometimes is a basic lack of information. So, we really do not know what to expect from someone you see, for example, you are expected to know us so what I'm trying to say is that the private colleges as well as government colleges need to have some sort of standardisation in terms of infrastructure, instead of the quality of faculty, the curriculum. There should be training or visits by the professionals from the industry on a regular basis, so that people are aware of what to expect. Also, if institutes and colleges are given some kind of rating, it would be easier for us as hotels to decide where to pick up the students from and for what sort of positions. It will also help the students to decide whether or not they should be joining a college and what is in store for them when they pass out. So

some sort of system or I would say star rating of the colleges is something that I recommend.”

“Another very important point is regarding the classification of hotels. We know for a fact that out of thousands of hotels which are in India, only a minuscule number go in for classification. We need to have an improved classification matrix for a better update. Currently, the classification takes care of the hardware aspect of the facilities only. So you have a checklist to be a three-star or a four-star or five-star hotel, and you need to factor-in hardware aspects like the size of rooms, lobby, restaurants, etc. However, we need to probably have a system of classification which is more inclusive, and where we take into account the software aspect like looking at the guest feedback for instance, which is extremely important,” he shared.



**Chef Vineet Manocha**, Senior Vice President - Culinary at Lite Bite Foods, said, “We belong to the food service industry wherein only 35 per cent is organised and is often overshadowed by its big brother which is the hotels food service industry which employs 7.3 million people with a current market size of 4.23 lakh crores. It’s time to create a global conversation about the wealth of Indian cuisine and translate it into accessible actions.

The knowledge of what, why, where, when, and how to eat is now more easily available than ever before. So it’s time that we this ancient intelligence that we have as it can help us sail us through the maze into healthy ways in a country where language, climate, soil and its produce changes almost every 100 kilometres. It’s time we embrace that diverse ethnicity to harness the natural bounty that we are blessed with in compliance with the Honorable Prime Minister’s call for Atmanirbhar Bharat. I propose that we should promote culinary

tourism. We must focus on regional cuisine cooked with regional produce. We have never marketed our cuisine to the world, now is the time to do it in international symposiums and tours.”

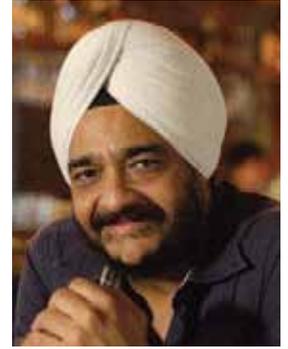
**Ashish Kumar**, Co-Chairman of FICCI Travel and Technology Committee, said, “If you look at the travel and tourism landscape in India, it’s a highly fragmented industry. In an industry which has on offer a 200 rupees bus ticket to a two lakhs cruise liner you’ve got to provide quality across the board. Today we are looking at a mosaic of a huge pipeline which needs to be automated. Automation means to be able to service your customer in the most intelligent and efficient manner.. I also want to draw the attention of the audience to the fact that tourism is not just about five-star hotels, ratings etc., but also about mass tourism.

What is needed is a national blueprint which addresses the needs of putting this mosaic of a disparate industry together into one platform which embraces emerging technologies. The government needs to be able to draw an end-to-end blueprint which covers each of the product segments and to see how those will be automated and how a public private partnership can be built.”

**Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**, VP, FHRAI, concluded, “We are going through the biggest crisis of the century in form of the pandemic, which has impacted more than 200 countries. The hospitality sector has been the biggest casualty. When we speak about quality, the hospitality industry is segmented into different classes, hotels are classified as per their star ratings and restaurants by their grade, each of these ratings are quite different from each other.

The expectation of quality among the high star hotel categories is different. What is expected as standard in a four or five-star hotel is not mandatory and may not even be desirable in the lower quality categories. So the same yardstick cannot be used across the spectrum for different types of hotels and restaurants.

I think standards should be realistic keeping the area of operation in mind. We generally ape the West by trying to implement standards that cannot exist in this country. I propose that we look at self-certification, a tool which a responsible industry uses to certify itself and mystery audits can be done by a third party. The challenge is the need for developing standards for almost 60 to 70 per cent of the unorganised sector. We now look forward to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to provide a more facilitative environment based on the outcome of the deliberations for the hospitality sector under its ambit by considering the fact that the sector is one of the most badly affected one due to the pandemic, but also keeping in mind that it holds the potential to get the country out of the slump almost singularly.”



**Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**

“  
**The same yardstick cannot be used across the spectrum**  
”

“  
**The travel & tourism industry is highly fragmented**  
”

**Ashish Kumar**

# A global outlook

Hoteliers opine that in the post-COVID world, the need to think global and act local, sustainable design, personalised stays & integrated cloud-based systems is the way ahead.



Neha Rawat



Akaal Manchanda

## **Akaal Manchanda Founder & Director of Operations Zuper Hotel Solutions**

### **How has the COVID period been for your brand?**

Along with our partner hotel brands we had to first cope with the lockdown. Occupancy and RevPAR levels were down to zero in that period. As restrictions gradually eased, we started seeing footfalls from early movers, workcation & staycation seekers. We had to adapt quickly to the new normal like ensuring sanitisation & safety protocols. We have now started seeing families and groups looking at weekend getaway destinations. The New Year and Christmas weekends helped, and occupancy levels went up.

### **Hospitality professionals need to think globally. What is your say in this?**

The world is a much smaller place today and it is important for all professionals to have a global outlook on business. Global does not have to mean only the Western world. Upcoming Asian destinations like Cambodia or Vietnam may also have some new learnings to offer. Most guests these days have already experienced global standards of service either in India or abroad. They will always tend to benchmark services they get against those standards.

### **Is sustainability the future for hotels?**

In the post-COVID world, I think both sustainability and technology are the future. Studies indicate that

globally more people are inclined to choose hotels that offer sustainable accommodation. In India, however, most people are not making sustainability a criterion while booking a hotel. Indian hotels would do well to work on their sustainability efforts as one could expect tighter policies in future on issues of public health, climate change, water management and food security.

### **A major shift in decision-making and buying power is changing the hospitality industry. How are you preparing for this?**

We have quickly adapted to some of the shifts in decision-making post-pandemic. For example, guests today prefer personalised holiday experiences. People are enquiring about how we can make their stay more memorable and unique. They want experiences rather than monotonous stays. Our boutique hotel partners can easily deliver such customised experiences and we make sure to market these services to our guests.

### **Demand is still growing, and the peak is yet to come. How is your brand working for the same?**

I believe there is still a huge pent-up demand for leisure travel. Workcations, staycations are in vogue. We are already offering high standards of safety to guests, digital check-ins and check-outs, socially distanced seating arrangements in restaurants & banquets. Our premium boutique hotels are starting to see a surge in demand as guests prefer staying at smaller properties to keep pandemic worries in check. We are confident our boutique properties will pick up pace in 2021.



**Our premium boutique hotels are starting to see a surge in demand**







Armuda Nair

**Armuda Nair  
Founder and Director  
Araiya Hotels and Resorts**

**How has the COVID period been for your brand?**

The Araiya brand was created to focus on destination-led, immersive experiences, seamless service delivery driven by technology. The past year has reinforced our belief that sustainable design, personalised stays, and integrated cloud-based systems is the way forward. The trends we are seeing in terms of adoption of digital technologies, conscious consumption and customisation have been building for a few years. Given our investments over the past three years, we at Araiya Hotels are well positioned to respond to the acceleration of these trends.

**Hospitality professionals need to think globally, what is your say in this?**

I could not agree more with the need to think global and act local. This past year has been challenging for all and the hotel industry has indeed come together to

help support one another. As members of the Global Hotel Alliance, the CEO Committee meets every quarter to share our experiences. Personally, it has been greatly beneficial to interact with the leadership of 35 other hotel brands from across the world to share ideas and learnings.

**Is sustainability the future for hotels?**

Spatial design for leaner systems, responsible sourcing and energy efficiency has always been fundamental to the Araiya design and construct guidelines. The use of locally available building materials at Araiya Palampur not only reduced carbon footprint but also the cost of maintenance in the long-term. By enforcing sourcing from local vendors, we were able to overcome disruption in the supply chain during the pandemic and this also helped support the local community. We believe that the hotels will be designed with a stronger focus on maintenance, material selection and ventilation design.

**A major shift in decision-making and buying power is changing the hospitality industry. How are you preparing for it?**

Trust in the brand is playing a large role in the decision-making process. As business recovered in Q3, we saw a significant rise in direct bookings through the brand's website and reservation channels. Travellers are spending more time on research and communication with the hotel prior to arrival and are making buying decisions after being reassured about safety and hygiene standards by the team on the ground.

We have also seen increased demand for premium rooms at Araiya Palampur as they provide multiple bedrooms and large common areas for private group gatherings. Having an intuitive, robust digital platform with responsive UX/UI has enhanced communication, engagement and also conversions.

**Demand is still growing, and the peak is yet to come. How is your brand working for the same?**

We were early beneficiaries of the demand for small, leisure destinations within a drivable distance, and this trend is expected to continue well into 2021. Travellers are now looking to soak in the outdoors and adventure focused activities without compromising on the hygiene and sanitation practices.

We have two openings planned in 2021, a luxury golf resort in Ahmedabad and a spa resort in Kerala. Both locations are well placed to benefit from the continued demand for activity-led, wellness-oriented, boutique destination resorts.



**Q3 saw a rise in bookings via the website and reservation channels**

# Eyeing global growth



COVID-19 has forced hotel & restaurant chains to explore alternate tech solutions which has caused wider adoption of our products, says **Amlan Ghose**, MD, Prologic First.



Neha Rawat

## **How are your contactless tech solutions supporting the hospitality industry?**

Prologic First is committed to providing smart hospitality solutions, which are innovative, new age and backed by what is acknowledged to be the industry's best technical support. Our solutions are rich in features & functions and serve the needs of demanding customers like multi-unit hospitality enterprises. We offer a self-service app by which diners can browse an interactive menu, place orders including options & special instructions, request additional services, make payment and provide feedback without needing to touch anything but their own smartphone. We do this for all F&B establishments, irrespective of whether they use our POS or not. We also offer an app that enables guests at hotels that use our WISH and mycloud PMS to pre-register, view folios and pay without contact with any device, paper or person at the hotel.

## **Who all are your clients and how are your products/services helping them?**

We have over 2,000 customers in more than 40 countries. But, let us consider only a few of the most recent that we added, surprisingly, while the industry has been dealing with the consequences of COVID.

- IHCL have standardised our Web Prol'IFIC Back Office system and new IHCL properties are now opening with Web Prol'IFIC as their back office ERP system.
- The Meydan Hotel and Bab Al Shams luxury hotels in Dubai chose to switch to our Touché POS, for use with their installed Opera PMS from Oracle. In spite of all other choices they had, they chose us for new-age features like Business Intelligence (BI) and for delivering great value.
- The boutique, ultra-luxury chain of Evolve Back Hotels has chosen our mycloud integrated hotel management platform for their three hotels in India and one in Botswana.

## **Were such tech solutions always in demand or has this post-COVID scenario created a market for this?**

Some of the needs were already being felt, for example, hotels were already assessing cloud solutions. There was already some interest in analytics and BI. Hotels have explored self-service applications since long. COVID has focused greater attention and has nudged hospitality businesses into more definitive action. It has forced hotel and restaurant chains to explore alternate solutions within their tech stack which has caused wider adoption of our products, especially Touché POS and the Web Prol'IFIC Back Office system.

## **How will your brand shape the hospitality industry in the near future?**

We are determined to make IT painless, convenient and affordable for the hospitality industry. Our integrated cloud-based hotel management software platform allows us to offer plug & play convenience with pay-as-you-use terms. Our customers eliminate upfront investment in technology and ongoing maintenance & administration effort. And, we are working to drive down costs to be able to deliver greater value to users.

## **Where is your company headed?**

Our philosophy has always been to put customer service ahead of all else. We have been able to improve scalability dramatically due to cloud technologies. We can deliver the same level of services without the barriers of needing more offices, manpower & money. Our aim is to grow aggressively and on a global scale.



**We have been able to improve scalability due to cloud technologies**



Amlan Ghose

# QualSTAR for safety protocols

Customers easily trust the adherence of branded hotels to safety protocols, but for the smaller ones, surety lies in the QualSTAR COVID Safety Compliance scheme.



Today, the discerning traveller has adapted his travel needs to the changing world around him. Numerous studies and research conducted across the globe suggest that for the tourism and hospitality industry to recover from the devastating effects of the pandemic on business, building traveller confidence is paramount. To achieve that, it is imperative to assure prospective customers and clients of the strict adherence to safety and hygiene guidelines. But, merely following a set protocols is not enough; it is important to put a stamp on these measures, so customers can differentiate between a COVID-safety-compliant and non-compliant enterprise.

While customers easily trust branded hotels and believe in their adherence to safety protocols, it is difficult for the smaller ones (including apartment hotels, other rental accommodation and banquet halls) to compete on that ground. Thus comes in the QualSTAR COVID Safety Compliance scheme.

## What is the QualSTAR COVID Safety Compliance scheme?

QualSTAR COVID Safety Compliance scheme is a certification that assures patrons of the respective hotel's or accommodation provider's strict adherence to COVID-safety guidelines. It has been accredited by National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies (NABCB) that falls under the umbrella of Quality Council of India (QCI), an undertaking of Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India. It aims to provide an objective assessment of the preventive measures adopted by hotels to mitigate COVID-related risks and hazards.

QualSTAR is the first and only COVID Compliance Certification Agency in India which has been accredited by NABCB (a member of International Accreditation

Forum or IAF) in line with international standards for the accommodation sector. The QualSTAR COVID Safety Compliance scheme is based on guidelines by WHO, Ministry of Tourism, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and other government organisations.

## How does the scheme work?

The QualSTAR certification process broadly involves three crucial stages, with several steps under each for the impartial certification of accommodations.

**Stage1: Registration** – Registration for the QualSTAR COVID Safety Compliance scheme is a completely automated, online process that is available free of charge. Those interested just need to log on to <https://qualstar.co.in/> and register.

**Stage2: Application** – The next stage in the process is completion of application documents to gain access to the guidelines incorporated into the COVID compliance standard. This facilitates submission of the self-assessment form leading up to the site audit.

**Stage3: Audit** – The site audit and subsequent COVID Compliance certification forms the final stage of the process. Once all criteria are diligently met, the certificate is issued for a period of two years. As many as four surveillance audits (mandatory inspections) are conducted by the QualSTAR team to ensure continual adherence to a 200-point checklist.

## THE QUALSTAR ADVANTAGE

QualSTAR COVID Safety Compliance scheme has been formulated by industry experts with years of extensive experience behind them, and founded under the patronage of Shree VK Duggal, former Governor of Manipur and Mizoram; former Director General



Anil Jauhri

**A third-party COVID compliance certification carries more weightage**



– Tourism, Government of India; and former Union Home Secretary. Speaking about the certification’s authenticity and benefits, **Anil Jauhri**, Lead Assessor – NABCB, Lead Evaluator – APAC and IAF Evaluator, says, “COVID compliance is top of everyone’s priority today and certainly of the hospitality industry. A third-party COVID compliance certification for hotels carries more weightage than a self-declaration. The common man is bombarded with lots of claims and for him, an accredited certification should mean that he can be assured that he is dealing with a credible, competent certification body that is under the oversight of a national body.”

**MS (Kuki) Chawla**, Director, QualSTAR, says that the idea behind COVID Safety Compliance certification was primarily to build traveller confidence as a stepping stone in the recovery of the hospitality sector. “It has repeatedly been said in recent times that for the sector to recover, traveller confidence is a priority. Recognising the absence of an accredited certification in the field, QualSTAR formulated the COVID Safety Compliance certification to initiate the hospitality sector on to a path of recovery. The certification, through its extensive checks and mystery audits, will assure the guest of the accommodation’s conformity to safety and hygiene guidelines,” he adds.

**Priya Singh**, Chief Executive Officer, QualSTAR, says, “Keeping the nuances of guest service in mind from the point of view of the user as well as the service provider, and adapting it to international auditing standards for rating and classification, is something that QualSTAR has been able to execute after almost seven years of research and development. Being accredited by the national body of the country is a step in the right direction in bringing Indian hospitality standards on a par with the rest of the world. Safety and preventive measures were built into the classification standard to deal with both natural as well

as man-made disasters.” During these unprecedented times, Singh adds, QualSTAR took the lead and with the assistance of stakeholders from various relevant fields, launched COVID compliance audits to assist hotels in getting back on their feet.

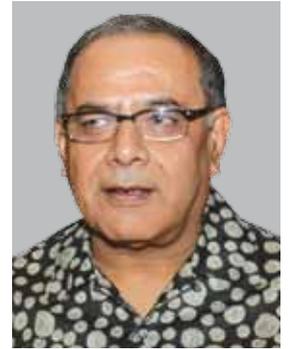
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#### ABOUT QUALSTAR

QualSTAR is the first and only NABCB (National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies under the umbrella of QCI –Quality Council of India) accredited certification body in the country to provide classification and rating of tourist accommodations. Founded under the patronage of Shree VK Duggal (former Governor of Manipur and Mizoram; former Director General – Tourism, Government of India; and former Union Home Secretary), its classification services act as a third-party assurance with an aim to boost the confidence of visitors on the quality and safety of the related product and services.

International quality audits and rating criteria based on the current needs of the hospitality industry are the USP of the QualSTAR classification system. Audits are undertaken by the very best minds, armed with a skill set of over 25 years of hospitality experience in leading hotel chains such as ITC, Taj Group of Hotels and catering services, as well as The Oberoi group to name a few.

Global standardisation, transparency and surveillance on adherence to quality and hygiene are its hallmark. The certification scheme covers hotels, apartment hotels and resorts in India within the framework of ISO/IEC 17065:2012 and QUAL Standards QPL 01 2020 & QPL 02 2020 (Criteria Standards).



**MS (Kuki) Chawla**

“Checks, audits, will assure the guest of the hotel's conformity to safety guidelines”



**Priya Singh**

“Accreditation is a step in bringing Indian hospitality on par with the rest of the world”

# Ideating concepts

Focusing on staycations, safety measures, cloud kitchens, home deliveries and DIY meal kits became our mantra for the way ahead, says **Anil Bhutoria**, MD, The Stadel.



Neha Rawat



Anil Bhutoria

## What is the USP of your hotel?

The Stadel is a boutique hotel within the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan, also popularly called as Salt Lake Stadium, Kolkata. It is perhaps the only hotel in India to be built under the ramps and galleries of a soccer stadium. As a brand, The Stadel, under the aegis of Samcon Resort & Hotel has a legacy of providing unparalleled hospitality solutions and is a much sought-after venue for corporate and social functions. It is a foodie haven and in the course of its 17 plus years of existence, it has managed to tick all the right boxes when it comes to ideating new concepts, avenues & a plethora of events. As you

wind your way through the corridors of The Stadel you discover a comprehensive bouquet of hospitality services from rooms, suites, speciality restaurants, bakery & confectionery, private dining area, large conference and banquet spaces with outdoor lawns.

## How has 2020 been for your brand?

Business was badly hampered last year with hardly any support from any quarters since the pandemic started. We tried to stay afloat by creating new strategies and innovative hospitality solutions. Focusing on staycations, safety measures, cloud kitchens, home deliveries and DIY meal kits became our mantra for the way ahead. We strongly believe that things will get better this year.

## What changes have you made to gain back guest confidence?

Safety and hygiene of our guests is a priority for us and has become a critical factor in this 'new normal'. Our managerial team has undergone a FSSAI (Food Safety Standards of India)-approved COVID-19 Awareness Program of Food Safety Training and Certification (FoSTaC) and conducts continuous internal training with the whole team to enable strict adherence to the best practices in safety hygiene and sanitisation in the industry. Our team strictly follows all FSSAI & WHO-certified safety and sanitisation regulations under our Extra Cover initiative.

## Are there any upcoming MICE events?

The Stadel is well known in Kolkata for having multiple venues for all kinds of events. We have five banquets, three manicured lawns and multiple conference rooms. The year 2021 has started on a good note and we have multiple MICE & wedding events in the coming days. We are open to customisation as per guest needs & help clients with end-to-end solutions. We also curate and organise various kinds of theme parties which include musical festivals, special theme nights, talent hunts, silent disco, food festivals, farmer's market, marathon etc.

The Stadel is a very popular venue for wedding parties, anniversaries, birthday parties and several similar events. As things are opening up, we are registering a lot of social events including weddings and receptions. We are also taking bookings for corporate & MICE events. However, we are doing so with a lot of precautions.



**We are registering a lot of social events including weddings and receptions**





# On **expansion** spree

**Anshu Malik, MD, ARRA Hotel Group, shares what the group's two brands – ARRA and Twist – stand for, and plans of expanding into the international market by 2022.**

**H**elmed by **Anshu Malik**, a passionate hotelier by choice who learnt the reins of the business under the patronage of Late Captain Nair, Chairman of the Leela Group of Hotels, the new – ARRA Hotels – promises to offer the best of modern amenities, warm hospitality and unmatched service.

Sharing his plan for the company, Malik says, “We have signed 25 properties pan India, which are under various stages of reinvention as per our standards and will be operational by end of the year. We will operate these properties under our flagship brand – ARRA – which is our upscale brand, and Twist – which is the budget brand with a young feel. We have opened our first hotel in Gurugram and the second would open in Manesar. By February, we will have five hotels in our kitty in Gurugram, Manesar, Jim Corbett, Nainital and Dehradun, with an inventory of 450 rooms.”

The USP of the brand, according to Malik, is the service level they offer. “We will create a niche in the market. The brand has a very young and dynamic team that will take the brand forward. Our motto is ‘Atithi Devo Bhava’, and with this vision, we believe that guests will experience a feel-good factor once they come and stay with us at both our brands,” he claims.

Hotels will be launched in the most exotic locations across the country, right from popular tourist places, business hubs and exotic locations to religious sites.

The group, according to Malik, will be targeting all segments, including leisure, FIT, corporates, airline crew and travel agents. The company is currently on a hotel acquisition spree and will be following different models for the same – revenue sharing, sales & marketing, franchise and gross operational profit. “While 2020 wasn’t a very good year for the industry, it worked for ARRA to acquire new properties. “Because of COVID, people were apprehensive, they were leaving the lease and the hotels. On the other hand, we were acquiring properties and that, too, at very good deals. I believe that our return on investment will be much faster,” he insists.

Malik is quite upbeat about the future. “We are quite optimistic and I believe that the market will open up soon. We will do great business, and the industry would prosper,” he claims. The strategy forward will be aggressive marketing, shares Malik. “We are acquiring as many hotels as possible, taking advantage of the situation. We want to be the market leaders in the industry and aim to be the youngest and fastest growing chain in India. We are planning to enter the international market next year,” he concludes.



Anshu Malik



**By Feb, we will have 5 hotels in our kitty with an inventory of 450 rooms**



# Ready for good tidings

At the virtual session of IHE Expo 2020, **Priya Paul**, Chairperson, Apeejay Surrendra Group spoke about the current scenario in the industry.

 Neha Rawat



**Priya Paul**

**A**t the outset, Priya Paul said, "Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels has added more numbers in the last few months even as there's talk of doom and gloom in the industry. However, I think in the case of Park Hotels it's not about numbers but the ideas that drive the hotel and that is what I find personally very exciting."

## THE JOURNEY SO FAR

"The Park Hotels is over 50 years old, our first hotel opened in 1967 in Calcutta, followed by the second in Visakhapatnam and the third one in New Delhi. I joined the business when it was 20 plus years old. At that time, it was a small business with three hotels. The economy was growing at a slow pace. Things started changing in the country in late 80s, followed by the economic liberalisation of 1991. My ideas and vision were influenced by liberalisation as well as what was happening globally. I realised that hotels needed to be vibrant places, which were well-connected to the city. In 1993, we came up with exciting concepts for our hotels in Calcutta and New Delhi; we ensured that they became happening places.

Today, we've grown into 22 hotels, and are operating across the country. It has been quite an exciting journey. We have a deep understanding of what's happening in these 22 locations across multiple brands. Our portfolio comprises of distinctive hotels with large number of rooms in tier-1 cities, while Zone by The Park hotels in tier-2 and tier-3 cities have come up in partnership with developers and real estate owners. We have about 12 of them right now operating across the country. Also, we offer 20 to

40-room boutique hotels with striking architecture & design," she added.

### HOTEL DESIGN

Talking about the design aspects, she pointed out, "I think hotel design has also changed significantly across the world. In India, over the last decade or so, hotel design has evolved with unique and refreshing concepts. What I am saying is that ten years ago it was somewhat mediocre and even though sometimes people had reputed designers they didn't really push them to deliver the right products. I have always believed that even though our hotels may look global they have to be rooted into what is the local vibe of a destination. For instance, The Park Hotel in Chennai replicates the world of cinema in a contemporary style. Each floor of the hotel offers a particular cinema theme, there's a story behind everything. The Park hotel in Chennai is located where the famous studios Gemini Studios used to be, the cinema theme draws inspiration from the erstwhile studio. There are many hotels which are experimenting with such original ideas."

### FARM-TO-FORK CONCEPT

Emphasising on the interesting farm-to-fork concept, she stated, "The pandemic has also driven hotels to start thinking about the farm to fork concept. There is a lot of discussion about it. And though it seems okay to adopt the concept in one or two restaurants, a major issue is whether it can be implemented for the entire hotel. That's the conversation we've been having within our company too. It may not be possible to adopt the farm to fork concept everywhere as you'll always have big banquets where you do a lot of catering. For many people the costings may not work out. However, in the next few years there will be more focus on the farm to fork concept and sustainable sourcing. During this COVID time it has become important to know about where we're getting our food from."

### IMPACT OF COVID-19

Paul continued, "Also, the effects of climate change have become paramount and this brings me to the long-term impact of COVID-19. It's clear that the pandemic is not going to go away that soon. We need to look at what's happening in America and Europe, they're seeing a resurgence of the pandemic which has affected air travel." Commenting on the uncertainty prevailing in the industry, she said, "The government needs to be more proactive when it comes to the hospitality sector. We must take into consideration what may happen in the next one to two years as well as at the micro at the macro level. I do anticipate a situation where there will be a lot of stressed assets and a lot of hotels going out of business. What I believe is that if you're an investor this is a great time to pick up distressed assets coming into the market. The F&B business is taking a big hit even in hotels, a lot of returns are operating without say one or two or even three restaurants which were there earlier. There are sadly a lot

of hotels that are going to struggle not just because they do not have loans but because the business is still very uncertain. Some people may not be able to manage the situation. After being shut for six to eight months, it can be very tough to restart a business, especially if you're a small operator. Also, a lot of people may have other issues, so I think by February or March it will be clear as to who's opening and who's not opening. Industry estimates suggest that 20 per cent of the hotels will not open."

### EMERGING TRENDS

Speaking on the trends which are emerging in the industry, she said, "Occupancies will be low, and rates are going



**Hotel rooms are going to be available at very attractive rates**

to be depressed, hence hotel rooms are going to be available at very attractive rates for people who want to travel. A positive development is that hotels are looking at innovative solutions to tide over the crisis. It is heartening to know that many hotels have used made good use of these trying times by opting for renovation and refurbishment. Another positive fallout of this pandemic has been the home delivery business, which has grown by leaps and bounds. We've also seen that people are very happy to eat in any of our restaurants, particularly outdoors. Also, people are very happy to frequent bars and nightclubs, so we've seen a resurgence of demand in most of the cities, which has been pretty good for us. As of now, we need to be optimistic as COVID-19 vaccines are being rolled out. I think the moment people start witnessing the efficacy of these vaccines, they will feel much more confident about coping with the pandemic in 2021."

# Leveraging tech

The use of tech in streamlining of logistics has gained significance in the last few months to ensure enhanced guest experience, says **Rajneesh Malhotra**, COO, Chalet Hotels.

**T**he unprecedented pandemic has brought in a new set of challenges as well as opportunities for the hospitality industry. Even though the industry was badly hit, it was quick to react and respond with transformation and innovation. The resilience exhibited on a global scale catalysed innovation as hotels rapidly shifted gears to focus on the new normal. Over the last few months, evolving guest preferences have played a significant role in shaping the overall hospitality and travel offerings.

While hospitality was always about experience and comfort, today, it is imperative for hoteliers to adopt practices and technologies that will instil 'confidence' in guests, fundamentally centering around hygiene and safety. Contactless/ touchless services are the new buzzwords, with digital solutions being implemented across hotels to minimise human interface and leave guests feeling reassured. Hoteliers need to meticulously plan and implement these solutions, while ensuring zero compromise on the service delivery levels, and adapting with agility to the ever-so-fast-changing landscape.

At Chalet, our hotels have implemented robust measures benchmarked to global standards. We benefit from our global brand partners – Marriott and Accor who have implemented the latest



Rajneesh Malhotra

“  
**At Chalet, we have focused on cross-training our people across functions, making them tech-savvy**  
”

and superior solutions from across the world at our hotels in India. We are in the process of implementing keyless mobile check-in option at our Marriott branded hotels, where guests can directly walk to their allotted room and access it using the keyless mobile check-in app. Guests will also be able to view and sign the registration card and guest folio on the touch screen tablets, through our digital check-in facility.

'Touchless Hospitality' is one such change that we foresee becoming the norm. We are adopting changes which will provide both assurance and delight to the guests. All outlets that are open at the hotels now feature digital menus that are accessible via QR Codes placed on tables which enables the guests to go through our elaborate and well planned menus, doing away with any contact with physical menus. Digital payment solutions as an offering have always been there across our outlets and have been revived as a practice now more than ever. We have also enabled digitalisation of services like room directory, TV guide, IRD, spa booking, laundry pickup, and hotel info along with an integrated digital payment wherever required.

For the industry, which relies extensively on its employees for the guest experience, employee training on protocols, meeting new expectations, sensitivity, and the ability to adapt to the new normal is critical. At Chalet, we have focused on cross-training our people across functions, making them tech-savvy and ensuring that they are fully trained on the latest health and safety protocols.

The aim is to help employees carry out operations swiftly and efficiently, while keeping health and safety protocols at the core. The use of technology in streamlining of logistics has gained significance, whether through mobile apps or IoT, to ensure reduced physical interaction and enhanced guest experience. The government's support for the industry, the news of vaccines on the horizon, easing of lockdown rules coupled with people's improved confidence in dealing with the new normal, augurs well for the industry.

*(The article has been written by Rajneesh Malhotra, COO, Chalet Hotels, the views expressed are the author's personal views.)*



**Wondering** where this is?



Crystal-clear Lake Tahoe is the jewel of Nevada and a water-sports paradise all through the year.

**Lake Tahoe**

## Ashley launches coffee tables

◆ Ashley Furniture Home Store has launched a new collection of versatile coffee tables brought to India by Dash Square. The coffee tables come with a smart lift-top mechanism allowing them to do double duty as impromptu dining spaces or as workplaces. The traditional looking Barilanni lift-top coffee table is made of veneers and hardwood in rich dark brown finish with bronze toned hardware. Style and functionality are the mainstay of the clean-line Gately coffee table that impresses with subtle molding. Made of veneers, wood and engineered wood, the coffee table is hand-finished and accented with antique bronze-tone hardware.



## MADS luxury chairs

◆ MADS Creations has launched a new collection of statement chairs conceived in on-trend styles and rich materials. The chairs range from rounded structures covered in a vibrant printed velvet fabric and sleek metal legs, to options upholstered in a printed suede fabric on the outside and a plain fabric on the inside and standing on wooden legs with metal pegs.

## Kohe knives, peelers

◆ Kohe, manufacturers of a range of premium knives and peelers, bring products backed by years of expertise. The Pizza Cutter is exclusively designed with burr-less edge for precise and smooth cutting of pizza, sandwiches and pastries, while Cleaver's high-quality stainless steel and laser tested cutting edge angle offers high cutting power required for chopping and cutting through thin bones and sinew.



## Ellementry tea mugs

◆ Lifestyle home décor brand Ellementry has launched a collection of elegant tea mugs to help you enjoy the winter chill even better as you savour your favourite flavour. The collection includes the Carbon ceramic mug set of two; the Earth ceramic mug set of two; Peach Life ceramic mug set of two, Aqua rustic ceramic mug set of two & Fiore ceramic mug set of two. These tea mugs come with multi-functional ceramic lids that keep your brew warmer for a longer time, and also work as coasters. Ellementry's tea mugs come in soothing colours and charming designs.



# Marketplace



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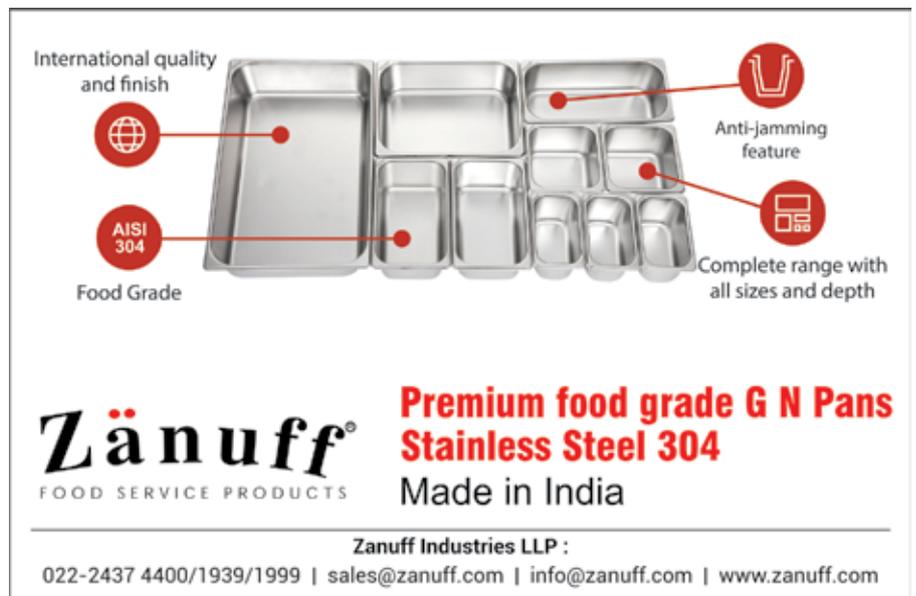
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**Ravichandran, (CHA, MIH)**  
CEO and Co Founder

# Appointments



**SHARAD PURI**

Cluster General Manager  
Sheraton Grand Bengaluru

★ Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Center and Aloft Bengaluru Cessna Business Park has appointed Sharad Puri as the new Cluster General Manager. Puri brings with him an experience of over 25 years in the luxury hotels business. In his new role, Puri will oversee the complete operations and management of the hotels, to ensure the highest levels of guest engagement, profitability and continue to build on the positioning and reputation of both the hotels.



**CHANDRASHEKHAR JOSHI**

General Manager  
The Leela Palace Jaipur

★ The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts has appointed Chandrashekhar Joshi as the General Manager of The Leela Palace Jaipur. In his new role, Joshi will launch the soon to open 200 room Palace, a reflection of modern palatial grandeur, inspired by the Rajputana heritage. With over 20 years of extensive hospitality experience, Joshi has worked with hotels like Le Meridien Pune, JW Marriott Juhu Mumbai, Renaissance Mumbai. Prior to joining The Leela, he was the GM at Renaissance Bali Uluwatu Resort & Spa.



**SHIV BOSE**

General Manager  
Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa

★ Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa has appointed Shiv Bose as the General Manager of the property. He has almost two decades of experience in the industry. In his new role, Bose will be spearheading the team and developing the hotel's operations to deliver stellar service standards. He believes in getting the basics right and finding new age methods to deliver enhanced hospitality. Prior to joining Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa, Bose was General Manager at Courtyard by Marriott Bengaluru Hebbal.



**AJAY KANOJIA**

General Manager  
Sayaji Hotels Pune

★ Sayaji Hotels Pune has appointed Ajay Kanojia as their General Manager. He has almost 15 years of experience in the luxury and upscale hotel segment. In his new role, he will be responsible for delivering high levels of customer service. Kanojia will also be responsible for curating strategic initiatives that will lead the hotel to continue its guest-focused approach and consolidate its leadership position. He has the additional responsibility of delivering year-on-year growth and spearheading corporate social activities.



**PARUL DIWAN**

Assistant Manager – Marketing  
Crowne Plaza Greater Noida

★ Crowne Plaza Greater Noida has appointed Parul Diwan as Assistant Manager – Marketing. Diwan has an incredible wealth of knowledge in the fields of Marketing and PR. She has a proven track record in managing media relations for various travel and hospitality brands like The Kingsbury Hotel and Amaya Resorts in Sri Lanka and Maldives, Destination Canada, Visit Maldives, and many more. In her current role, she is committed to plan and execute result-oriented marketing communications activities.



**AMIT KOCHAREKAR**

Executive Chef  
The Resort, Mumbai

★ Amit Kocharekar recently took over as the Executive Chef at The Resort, Mumbai. With over 17 years of culinary experience, Kocharekar brings a dynamic and innovative energy to The Resort's varied gastronomy scene. Known for his astute knowledge of the food industry, Kocharekar holds an excellent track record of managing budgets and resources to facilitate streamlined operations. His impressive career spans various stints that include working for the Renaissance hotel, The Oberoi hotel, and JW Marriott.



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