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Waxpol Hotels & Resorts Forays in Kanha National Park with The Riverwood Forest Retreat

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Nestled in the tranquil buffer forest, this premium resort provides a serene escape, allowing guests to unwind in the lap of luxury while preserving and honoring the surrounding environment.

The Riverwood Forest Retreat Kanha stands out as a distinguished collection within the Waxpol Hotels & Resorts portfolio.

The resort features 18 spacious premium cottages, thoughtfully designed to embrace environmental consciousness. Large glass windows allow natural light to illuminate the interiors while providing breathtaking views of the verdant surroundings. Each cottage offers a cozy seating area, inviting guests to relax and immerse themselves in the tranquil ambiance. Equipped with modern amenities

such as LCD TVs, satellite channels, soaking tubs, water heaters, mini-fridges, and tea and

coffee machines, every cottage ensures guests' comfort and convenience. ■



New government-owned platform ONDC challenges food delivery giants

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

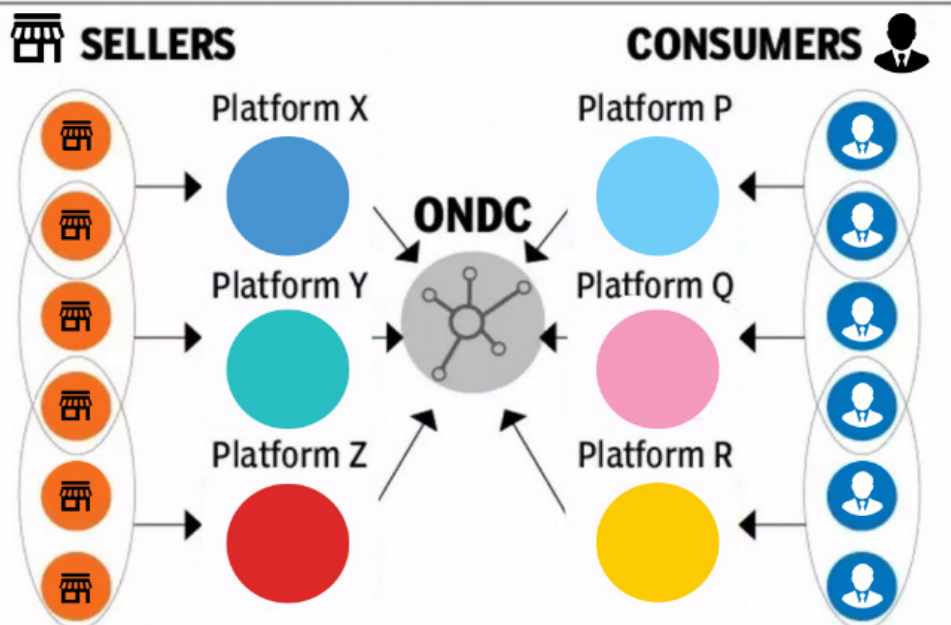
The government-owned platform, ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce), has emerged as a new player in the food

delivery industry, challenging the dominance of established players like Zomato and Swiggy. Unlike other delivery aggregators, ONDC enables restaurants across the country to sell food directly to customers, without the need for intermediaries. Recent comparisons

of food delivery prices between ONDC, Swiggy, and Zomato have revealed ONDC to be the cheapest, with the cost of a 'Big Tandoori Paneer Burger' being around INR 270 on ONDC, compared to INR 359 on Swiggy and Zomato.

ONDC also offers customers the convenience of buying clothes, groceries, movie tickets, electronics, and booking cabs with just one click. It aggregates all products and services in one app, accessible through the Paytm app by typing 'ONDC' in the search bar. However, not all restaurants are selling food through the ONDC platform, as it is still new to the public. As of September 2022, ONDC had more than 29,000 sellers selling over 36 lakh products." ■

Transactions Across Platforms



The Ascott Limited strategising aggressive growth in India through service apartments and hotels



HBI Staff | Mumbai

The Ascott Limited (Ascott), a lodging business unit wholly owned by CapitaLand Investment Limited (CLI) has a large portfolio of a mix of serviced apartment, co-living, senior-living and hotel brands including Ascott, Citadines, lyf, Oakwood, Quest, Somerset, The Crest Collection, The Unlimited Collection, Préférence, Fox, Harris, POP!, the Vertu and Yello. The global brand has recently reached its current target of 160,000 units.

With this big achievement, the brand is now contemplating on a franchise base model as the company is mostly focused on being asset-light and usually prefers signing management agreements to grow faster and diversify its portfolio across the globe. Speaking about their plans for India Vincent Miccolis, Managing Director of the Middle East, Africa, Turkey & India, The Ascott Limited said, “We now have the spotlight on India, and there is a lot of focus on the country. The acquisition of Oakwood Worldwide by Ascott Limited in 2022 has been a big boost for us in India. We already have some projects in the pipeline for India. We are opening a property in Goa very soon. In Mumbai, we are in talks with a couple of projects, such as our co-living brand Lyf which is perfectly designed for millennials. We are also trying to push Ascott which is our flagship brand in India. We have one Ascott in Gurugram, however, it’s under development. Another brand of ours is Citadines, which will open by this year in Gurugram. We have two properties in Chennai, one of them is Citadines, the

other being Somerset, and both are doing extremely well.”

Discussing their next 5-year target for India Miccolis said, “Our target is to double the inventory that we already have. We currently have approximately 5,600 units and we have a target to grow 10% Y-o-Y. Now we want to capitalise on opening and introducing various brands of ours. The merger with Oakwood was beneficial for us and it will enable us to grow much faster in the country. We are witnessing that the concept of extended stay is more resilient post-pandemic, which helps us to make our occupancy steady, our breaking costs lower, and returns higher. Being a service apartment brand is always beneficial as one can convert that service apartment into a hotel later, as per their choice however a hotel will always be a hotel. The flexibility of this asset is quite advantageous. We want to capitalise on these plus points and create more brand awareness. Our focus will be more on the marketing part for India. I believe that once the Citadines opens in Gurugram we will surely attract more visibility.”

While speaking about their occupancy levels in the country, Hoshang Garivala, Country General Manager-India, The Ascott Limited said for the last six months they are witnessing over 85% occupancy across their six properties in India. “We have seen an increase of about 25% in India. Even during the pandemic, all our properties were doing exceptionally well.



Hoshang Garivala
Country General Manager – India,
The Ascott Limited



Vincent Miccolis
Managing Director of Middle East,
Africa, Turkey & India, The Ascott Ltd.

In our case, Covid has made people aware of service apartments. All our properties gave positive GOPs (Gross Operating Profit) all throughout covid. Our Bengaluru property was doing around 55% while our Hyderabad property was doing 70% during covid. All in all we had done quite well during covid. We see that currently our ARR is doing exceptionally well; it’s around 20-25% which is over 2019. Our Pune and Hyderabad properties’ ARR ranges between 25% -27%.”

Informing about their strategy for the next 3 years in India Miccolis said, “Currently we have around 5,600 units. We are targeting 10,000 units by 2026-2027.” Garivala added that they are not only focusing on service apartments and co-living but with exceptionally good ARR and occupancy rate they are now eyeing on competing with hotels. “In our portfolio, we have Oakwood Hotel and Apartments under the brand. We have signed up 3 hotels in India, and we already have many hotels under Oakwood Hotel and Apartments in Japan, Bangkok etc. and they are receiving overwhelming response from the properties. We aim to receive same response from Indian market as well,” he concluded. ■

‘We are always looking for opportunities to expand our brands into new territories, which supports our long-term growth plans’

Thailand-headquartered Minor Hotels is now planning an aggressive expansion strategy in India, after growing its European footprint via the acquisition of a 94% stake in Europe-based NH Hotels. The brand has recently announced its first hotel in India, Anantara Jaipur Hotel. In a conversation with **Asmita Mukherjee, Dillip Rajakarier, CEO of Minor Hotels** expressed that the brand is eyeing solid global expansion of its eight hotel brands for which they continue looking at opportunities to grow their portfolio through acquisitions or investments in India as well.

Q Minor Hotels has acquired a 94% stake in NH Hotels. Was it a calculated move to explore the European market?

Minor Hotels acquisition of NH Hotel Group was a calculated opportunistic move! Our growth is both strategic and opportunistic at the same time. We are always looking for opportunities to expand our brands into new territories, which supports our long-term growth plans. NH was perfect in this regard, as it allowed us to achieve an even balance of hotels and resorts; owned, managed and leased, across a more global spread of countries – without cannibalizing our existing brands. In addition, we balanced a leisure-heavy portfolio and a corporate-heavy portfolio through the acquisition and integration.

Before acquiring NH, 80% of our portfolio was in Asia Pacific and we were keen to pursue a diversification strategy. Countries like Thailand have been prone to political unrest, and ensuring a more balanced portfolio was essential as we grew the portfolio.

Five years on from our acquisition of NH Hotel Group, Minor Hotels is accelerating the exchange of guests and growth of brands between Asia and Europe, including moving into city hotels. As well as adding Anantara and Avani properties in Europe – a strong strategic focus for us. In addition, we are growing the NH Collection and NH Hotels brands in Asia and the Middle East with a number of exciting launches.

Q Do you have any such plans to acquire stakes in other markets as

well, specially for India, in which you have recently opened a property through a management contract?

Minor Hotels continues to eye solid global expansion of our eight hotel brands, with 50 new hotels earmarked to open globally in 2023 and 2024, adding more than 10,000 keys to the portfolio in major gateway cities and resort destinations. That said, we continue to look at opportunities to expand our portfolio through acquisition or investment. It's all about adding stakeholder value. Such expansion can be both organic and inorganic. Any additional acquisitions need to be the right fit and at the right price.

We firmly believe in the potential of India as a growth destination for Minor Hotels and are currently in several discussions for opportunities for our core brands.

Q How important is the Indian market for Minor Hotels?

India has great potential, both from a domestic perspective and also from an outbound perspective. I recently attended HICSA in Bangalore as we firmly believe in the potential of the Indian hospitality sector. Given the recent announcement of our first Anantara in India, I look forward to ramping up our development plans over the course of 2023.

Q As a global brand is Minor Hotels following an asset-light model?

Minor Hotels follows an ‘asset right’ strategy which ensures a sound balance of owned, managed, leased and JV. As a hospitality and lifestyle operator, our vision is not to be the biggest company, it is to be the



most profitable while delivering a superior experience to all stakeholders.

Q According to you, is the occupancy and REVPAR in Asia doing better than in Europe?

Europe is doing well, Asia is doing well, Australia is also doing well etc. This is our first-year post-COVID that we have no restrictions in any of the regions that we operate, so there is a clear resurgence in travel. We believe this trend is here to stay for some time, and it is our role to maximise the opportunity and continue to drive our business forward.

Q Which products of Minor Hotels are you planning to promote in the next 3 years?

We will continue expanding our existing 8 brands into new territories and grow our portfolio of hotels to 600 through organic growth and perhaps inorganic acquisition, depending on the opportunity. We will also continue to change the hotel market mix by introducing our Asian-based guests to our European (and elsewhere) hotels and, of course, our Europe-based guests to our Asian portfolio.. ■

asmita.mukherjee@saffronsynergies.in

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Hospitality BIZ

www.hospitalitybizindia.com

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF & CEO

Sheldon Santwan

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Prasenjit Chakraborty

+91 9819263364

prasenjit.chakraborty@saffronsynergies.in

EDITORIAL TEAM

Mumbai

CHIEF SUB-EDITOR

Disha Shah Ghosh

disha.shah@saffronsynergies.in

Hyderabad

SR.REPORTER

Asmita Mukherjee

asmita.mukherjee@saffronsynergies.in

CONTRIBUTORS

Anurag Yadav (Delhi)

Nivesh Bhagtani (Delhi)

Marcellus Baptista (Mumbai)

Bhisham Mansukhani (Mumbai)

Dominic CostaBir (Mumbai)

MARKETING TEAM

Mumbai

HEAD - SALES & MARKETING

Ajay Wadode: +91 8087127814

ajay.wadode@saffronsynergies.in

COORDINATION, SUBSCRIPTION & DATABASE

Gauri Sawant: +91 8369080796

gauri.sawant@saffronsynergies.in

*Responsible for selection of news under the PRB Act



Saffron Synergies

MUMBAI

Sterling House, 5/7 Sorabji Santuk Lane,
Opp. Dr. Cawasji Hormasji Street, Dhobi Talao,
Marine Lines (E), Mumbai 400 002

Tel: 91-022-6101 1700 / 701 Fax: 91-022-6712 1854

BANKING ON LIZZIE TO CHARLIE

There are doubters among British optimists who expect an economic windfall for the hospitality business from the coronation.



A few days back, it was a surprise to see some friends raising eyebrows and moaning that a popular Thai restaurant in London's Soho had raised prices twice in the last few months. This coming from gentlemen who nonchalantly and regularly downed more beer and wine than the entire bill handed to them any other evening, was astonishing indeed.

If such regular splurgers are getting uncomfortable, hospitality and eating out in the UK's capital must be in serious trouble indeed. This was buttressed by news in a luxury journal that one of the city's leading Michelin-starred chef has slashed menu prices at his Mayfair flagship restaurant since he fears Londoners are being priced out of regular West End dining.

He reportedly stated that his customers 'were feeling increasingly "alienated" by the rocketing cost of eating out at a time when they were having to cut back on spending in other areas because of soaring inflation'.

This news appears to be a see-saw of sorts, if not a knee-jerk reaction. A decision to actually reduce prices to encourage guests to use fancy restaurants more often could at best be a marketing strategy.

Meanwhile, just last year, the late Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee celebrations saw an extra 2.6 million visitors to London. The new king's coronation this month is expected to repeat that feat. Pubs will be allowed to stay open two hours longer in that week, thereby hopefully raking in a bonanza for the outlets. However, maybe statistics and statisticians should take a break for now.

Despite the fall in occupancy rates just before last year's end, the spike in London room rates immediately thereafter underlined hotels' ability to still milk consumers who didn't seem in any mood to pipe down their enthusiasm. But how long for this euphoric stupor to pop?

Experts opine that a pendulum movement will persist and the hospitality business will manage its costs to fob off pressures. Yet passing on costs to consumers and maintaining RevPAR will remain challenging.

In India, touting long queues and hard-to-get reservations at upmarket eateries as a sign of a happy economy is definitely a lazy analyst's job. The hospitality industry could be better without such gung-ho experts.

London is getting a taste of this medicine.

As regular guzzlers and veteran party animals, and not the types to shy from watching their wallets, if my friends are now raising eyebrows and have started reading the prices column on menu cards, perhaps it's time London's hospitality businesses take a leaf from the Michelin chef's strategy.

Anurag Yadav
Industry Expert

Anurag Yadav is a travel author and columnist, writing on hospitality and design. An avid traveller, he has published five books and divides his time equally between Delhi and London.

The views expressed in the column are of the author, and may or may not be endorsed by the publication.

BRANCH OFFICES

NEW DELHI

C/o Economic Research
India Ltd
D-100, 1st Floor,
Okhla Industrial Area
Phase - 1, New Delhi -
110020
Tel: 91-011-
26810964/65/66
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BANGALORE

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KOCHI

Poothully Lane,
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CHENNAI

709 - 701,
Bathari Road,
Office No. 204,
Prince Center, 2nd Flr.,
Chennai - 600006.
Tel.: 91-44-2855800
Fax: 91-44-28552497

GOA

402, Fourth Floor,
Central Towers, Near Sai
Mandir, Boca-da-Vaca
Road, Panjim - 403001
Cell: +91-9822100020
Harshad Bhonsle
Head - Goa
+91-8999047490
harshadrhonsle@gmail.com

HYDERABAD

Saffron Media 302 Dega
Towers, Rajbhavan Road,
Somajiguda,
Hyderabad: 500 082
Tel.: 040-66103103

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Ranjan Chopra, MD, Avataara Goa



Avataara : A Unique Blend of Luxury, Music, and Personalised Hospitality in Goa's Vibrant Market

Asmita Mukherjee | Hyderabad

Ranjan Chopra's hospitality journey began in 2011 with Zorba Entertainment, a platform that celebrated his love for music and created unforgettable experiences. Zorba quickly gained popularity as a sought-after event space and premium wedding venue. Chopra's dedication to exceptional dining led to the establishment of Qla, a renowned restaurant offering breathtaking views of the Qutub Minar. In 2018, he ventured into nature-centric luxury with Tatva Hills, emphasizing organic farming and sustainability.

His latest endeavour, Avataara, introduced during Diwali 2022 in Goa, aims to win guests with its personalised hospitality. Asmita Mukherjee spoke with Ranjan Chopra, Managing Director, Avataara Goa to explore the hotel's unique offerings and USP.

Avataara situated at the heart of North Goa, boasts 60 well-equipped rooms, accommodating up to 120 guests. The spacious accommodations cater to individuals, groups, and families, ensuring a comfortable stay.

While speaking about the features of Avataara that makes it stand out from the heavy competition in the vicinity, Chopra highlighted Avataara's distinctive features in the competitive Goa market. He said, "Avataara, nestled in the vibrant state of Goa, stands out among the multitude of resorts and spas with its unique offerings and customer-centric approach. From the moment guests arrive, they are greeted with a warm welcome and their choice of a refreshing chilled coconut water or beer, symbolizing a sense of homecoming.

Setting itself apart from traditional schedules, Avataara allows guests to savour

their breakfast until 2 pm, enabling a relaxed start to the day while revelling in the captivating views of the property. This flexibility ensures that guests can enjoy a leisurely morning without disrupting their sleep patterns after an evening of festivities.

Understanding the importance of relaxation, Avataara provides guests with access to popular OTT platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney Hotstar in all rooms.

To add to the comfort of their stay, Avataara offers complimentary mini bar setups in every room. Guests can indulge in a variety of high-quality beverages, snacks, nuts, candy, and chocolate bars at their convenience, ensuring a delightful and personalized experience.

Revitalisation is at the core of Avataara's philosophy, with the spa serving as a sanctuary of peace and relaxation. Offering a range of treatments including massage therapy, facials, and body wraps, guests can rejuvenate their mind, body, and soul, achieving a perfect balance and restoring harmony in their lives."

Highlighting that the location of Avataara is a plus point for the property, Chopra said, "Convenience is another winning proposition of Avataara, with its proximity to the airport and top party destinations. Located just five minutes away from popular party places and events, guests can experience the vibrant nightlife while enjoying the tranquillity of their surroundings."

In 2022 Goa hoteliers witnessed a significant increase in Average Room Rates (ARR). Speaking about Avataara's ARR, Chopra said, "We prioritise offering a dynamic rate structure that caters to the guest's ever-changing requirements. Our

flexible rates ensure that our guests receive optimal value for investment, regardless of the season or day of the week. This approach enables us to maintain affordable prices for budget-conscious travellers without compromising on the quality of our accommodations. In fact, our price positioning is deliberately set a few steps below standard Western rates, making it effortless for cost-conscious travellers to discover an option that aligns perfectly with their budget."

As a new entrant in Goa's hospitality market, Avataara's USP is live music. Chopra elaborates on how he planned to amalgamate music and hospitality, "Music is an integral part adding to the ingrained vibe of the resort. Every night, a talented pianist provides guests with beautiful music to enjoy as they relax and take in their surroundings. Recently, the resort has begun to feature jazz concerts as well, adding a unique twist to the musical offering.

Avataara's jazz concerts are becoming a favourite among guests. Not only are the performers highly talented, but the selection of music is also unique and diverse. From original compositions to classic jazz tunes, the concerts provide an unforgettable experience for every visitor."

The hotel has ambitious plans for expansion and investment. Speaking on their expansion plans, Chopra said, "We are committed to bringing our unique brand of luxurious hospitality to more cities and destinations. With the success of our current venture, we are excited to announce that there are more Avataara properties in the pipeline, each designed to offer a new wave of unparalleled luxury and exceptional experiences for our valued customers." ■

asmita.mukherjee@saffronsynergies.in

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'For 2023 our major focus areas will be Inbound Tourism and Corporate Travel'



Crowne Plaza New Delhi Okhla has established itself as a premier destination for integrated hospitality, catering to both business and leisure travellers. With a strong focus on creating a harmonious blend of work and life experiences, the hotel aims to provide exceptional dining and wellness offerings that exceed guest expectations. In a freewheeling conversation, **Shuvendu Banerjee, General Manager, Crowne Plaza New Delhi Okhla** shared his strategic plans to continue the upward trajectory of the balance sheet and keep up the high spirits of his team with **Asmita Mukherjee**.

Positioned as “Making Business Travel Work,” Crowne Plaza New Delhi Okhla offers unparalleled connectivity and state-of-the-art infrastructure to ensure a seamless stay for corporate guests. The hotel has carved a niche for itself in the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) and wedding segments, with its well-appointed venues and comprehensive event offerings. It has become a prominent landmark for business and dining in South Delhi.

While speaking about one of the key advantages of the hotel Banerjee pointed out about its strategic location within The Golden Triangle, a popular tourist circuit encompassing iconic landmarks such as Qutub Minar, Lotus Temple, and Humayun’s Tomb, which make his hotel a preferred choice for inbound travellers.

Under the leadership of Banerjee, the hotel has undergone significant transformations in recent years. Speaking about the changes that resulted in increasing the number of repeat clientele to the hotel Banerjee said, “I joined Crowne Plaza New Delhi Okhla in June 2021, right after the second lockdown. The journey kick started by creating a well-rounded business and communication strategy focusing on our domestic clientele. This included launching concepts such as Staycations, Work-cations, Dial-A-Chef, Office Spaces, Takeaway Happiness menu & more. Gradually, we initiated thematic food festivals and culinary experiential events to welcome our guests back with confidence. We also worked on strengthening relationships with our stakeholders from the Travel and Tourism fraternity, which helped in reviving our business.”

According to him, as the market gained momentum during the second phase, the hotel has witnessed an acceleration in business as corporates started moving, international flights were resumed and restrictions in terms of wedding guest lists took an about turn. “We reworked on our market strategy to cater to the modified target segments by adding a value proposition to our offers, such as Soulful Suppers at ChaoBella (integration of entertainment quotient), Dip & Dine Sunday Brunches (complimentary pool access), Walk-In wine cellar & more. Our renovated swimming pool, lounge and alfresco areas were integrated with ‘Grills by the poolside’ and barbecue experiences for winter socialising. All these initiatives helped us with generating great



revenues and driving non-resident footfalls,” Banerjee added.

In the new financial year Crowne Plaza New Delhi Okhla has set ambitious targets and identified key focus areas. “The average occupancy at our hotel has been between 85-90 % in the last year. We were able to not only meet our revenue targets but exceed them, securing record-breaking numbers for the financial year. For 2023 our major focus areas will be Inbound Tourism and Corporate Travel.”

Banerjee also added that the MICE and wedding segments will continue to be a priority for them, and the hotel plans to launch new restaurants and curate immersive culinary experiences to provide guests with unforgettable dining journeys.

Banerjee stated that they understand the significance of food and beverage experiences in a hotel’s success. He said they are now focusing on offering a diverse range of gastronomical delights that cater to modern-day travellers’ preferences. “Curated food festivals, kitchen takeovers, food pop-ups, and interactive culinary extravaganzas are on the agenda, ensuring that guests can indulge in immersive dining experiences. The hotel’s restaurants, including ChaoBella and Edesia, have gained popularity for their thematic food festivals and innovative menus.”

Not only Dine-in, the hotel is also eyeing to generate revenue through innovative takeaways as well, “Keeping the corporate crowd into consideration, we are looking at revamping our takeaway offerings with the launch of Bento Boxes, Dim sum Corporate Lunch packages & more,” Banerjee concluded. ■

asmita.mukherjee@saffronsynergies.in

HICSA 2023 : Betting Big on the Future

Innovation and Growth Take Centre Stage in Bengaluru

HBI Staff | Bengaluru

The 18th Hotel Investment Conference – South Asia (HICSA) was held in Bengaluru from 11th to 13th April 2023, and it attracted hotel owners, operators, developers, architects, consultants, and other hospitality professionals from 15 countries. With nearly 600 attendees, including almost 150 hotel owners, HICSA 2023 drew the second-highest number of participants since its inception in 2005.

Innovation was the theme of HICSA 2023, as the conference was designed differently from previous iterations. The event kicked off with a golf tournament followed by an owners-only meet on day one. The main conference was held over the next two days, and the entire venue was packed to capacity with multiple sponsors and hotel brands showcasing their products and services.

The overwhelming response from the attendees suggests that HICSA 2023 was a success. With its innovative format, the conference provided a platform for meaningful discussions and insights into the latest trends and developments in the hospitality industry.

The agenda for the conference not only included traditional topics related to tourism and hospitality but also relevant subjects that impact the industry and its future. For the first time since its initiation, HICSA 2023 was assigned a theme with three A's – Artificial Intelligence, Astute Investments and Aesthetic Interiors. These three topics were discussed by a panel of experts in breakout sessions during the course of the conference.

Speakers who addressed delegates at the conference included a celebrated list of hospitality industry professionals including Anthony Capuano, President and CEO Marriott International,

Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director and CEO at IHCL, Chris Nassetta, President and CEO of Hilton, Jitu Virwani, Chairman and MD, Embassy Group, and Dimitris Manikis, President and MD-EMEA, Wyndham Hotels and Resorts, Megna Shankaranarayanan, Industry Head - Travel & Food Tech, Google, Elie Younes, Executive VP and Global Chief Development Officer, Radisson Hotel Group, just to name a few.

The conference also saw the announcement of four new landmark hotel signings including the country's first Radisson Collection in Hyderabad, the first Anantara Resort and Spa in Jaipur, the first Waldorf Astoria in Jaipur and India's fourth Fairmont in Agra.

HICSA 2023 HIGHLIGHTS:

The pandemic has undoubtedly brought unprecedented changes to the travel and hospitality industry. However, the industry has started to adapt and evolve to the new normal, with leaders like Chris Nassetta, President and CEO of Hilton, discussing the latest travel trends and sharing his plans for the Indian market.

During a session named "Defining The Next Golden Age Of Travel," Nassetta spoke about how post-Covid travel has accelerated due to people realizing that their freedom could be taken away, which they could never have imagined. This realization has prompted people to live their lives to the fullest, including traveling for business to build relationships with clients and customers.

Nassetta expressed his ambitious plans for the Indian market, which he believes is an under-explored market with plenty of opportunities. He said, "I think nobody yet in this market really gotten into the scale yet. We have pretty ambitious plans for the Indian market. I think in the next 3 years we should have 75



Highlights From the Event

The topics under discussion could be categorised into the following – post pandemic revival of the hospitality industry, challenges that plague the industry and new trends and concepts shaping the future of industry.

Some key takeaways that can be drawn from the conference are as follows:

- Hotels across India have seen an astounding surge in performance. They have witnessed 25% or higher growth in RevPar across all segments over the year 2019. The last time such levels of growth were seen was prior to 2008. Furthermore, the overarching belief is that these levels of growth are sustainable and are here to stay. The projection is that business travel will continue to remain strong as the leisure footprint will soften compared to the two pandemic years.
- The growth in per capita levels across the country is acting as a tailwind for the hospitality industry. Hotels are an aspirational commodity and with the increase in disposable income there is bound to be greater demand for travel, hotels and aviation. That is the driving factor behind airlines increasing its fleet size and hotel companies building aggressive expansion plans.
- The next layer of growth in hotels will be seen in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities in India. With increased connectivity, urbanization and infrastructure development, hotels will have greater access to new, untapped markets. Leisure traffic driven by wildlife and religious destinations located in remote parts of the country will see higher traction.
- It is no surprise then to see that hotel brands have robust expansion plans in place for India. For example, Marriott International plans to operate 250 hotels in its portfolio in India by 2025. Hilton Worldwide plans to expand from 24 hotels to 75 hotels in India by 2026. Other hotel brands had large growth projections for India.
- Although artificial intelligence technologies have a lot of practical uses and will help enhance the pace and quality of service delivery, it cannot replace personalized, local interactions.
- While management contracts have traditionally dominated new hotel signings in India, franchising as a concept is picking up pace among major hotel brands, both domestic and international.

hotels combined.”

Anthony Capauano, President and CEO of Marriott International, also shared his plans for the Indian market during a session. He revealed that they plan to have at least 250 hotels across India by 2025, creating 10,000 new jobs across the country.

Capauano emphasized Marriott Group’s commitment to sustainability practices, stating, “We have set a goal to achieve Net Zero by 2025 and made commitments towards water and energy conservation. While we have made progress on climate, we recognize that there is a significant issue with ESG food waste, with 40% of the world’s produced food going to waste, leading to food insecurity globally. Therefore, we are focusing on setting meaningful goals in various areas to address this issue.”

Manav Thadani, Founder and Chairman of Hotelivate, spoke at length about the infrastructure and road connectivity that India is

experiencing, which has led to a significant growth in the industry. He emphasized the importance of sports tourism and big fat Indian weddings as great fillers for the industry.

However, Thadani also brought up an important point about the work-life balance of employees in the hospitality industry. He suggested that hoteliers must ensure that their employees have a good work-life balance to retain them.

As the travel and hospitality industry continues to adapt and evolve to the new normal, it is essential to have leaders who can bring innovative ideas and solutions to the table. The plans and strategies shared by Nassetta, Capauano, and Thadani show that the industry is moving towards a more sustainable and employee-centric future.

As per the Hotelivate HICSA 2023 seminar on “Owners Challenges: Is Anyone Listening?”, the hospitality industry has been





facing several challenges, including rising costs, labor shortages, and an oversupply of hotel rooms. The panel discussed the need for hotel owners to be heard and how to address these challenges.

The panel included several industry experts, including hotel

owners and operators, who shared their insights and experiences. They stressed the importance of hotel owners having a seat at the table in decision-making processes and being involved in the development and execution of strategies.

They also discussed the need for a more sustainable approach to hotel development and operation, including the implementation of eco-friendly practices and reducing carbon footprints. The panel emphasized the need for collaboration between hotel owners, operators, and other stakeholders to address these challenges and ensure long-term success.

Overall, the seminar highlighted the importance of addressing the concerns and challenges of hotel owners and finding ways to work together to ensure a sustainable future for the hospitality industry.

The conference ended with an evening of revelry and a unique bar-hop experience at some of Bengaluru's finest bars. The Seven-Rivers Brewing Co at Taj, MG Road Bengaluru, was the final stop before HICSA 2023 officially concluded. ■

Issues Pondered Upon

While a lot of positive commentary was heard about the industry at large, there were some challenges and risks that were discussed. These included the following:

- Acquisition and retention of talent has become a major challenge in the hotel industry. The industry is suffering from high attrition levels due to long working hours and inadequate compensation levels at the grassroots level. Furthermore, there is little being done by hotels to change this trend.
- Hotel owners continue to face regulatory challenges when it comes to setting up new hotels. These challenges may vary from one state to another but the overall ease of doing business in the country needs to improve.
- Accessibility to funding in the form of bank loans is increasingly becoming difficult as the perception is that hotel developments do not generate returns as high as other industries.
- The hospitality industry needs to leverage the use of technology much better. There is a lot to be learnt from the e-commerce and airline industry in terms of use of tech, and revenue management.

Awards & Recognition:

One of the highlights of the event was the HICSA Hotels of the Year Awards - 2023 presented by Make My Trip, which acknowledged and celebrated the most outstanding hotel developments in South Asia in the previous year.

Best Hotel in Conversion Hotel category	Devi Ratn, Jaipur – IHCL SeleQtions
Best Hotel in Budget and Mid-Market category	Fairfield by Marriott, Dehradun
Best Hotel in Upper Mid-Market category	Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park
Best Hotel in Upscale Urban Locations category	Hyatt Regency Jaipur Mansarovar
Best Hotel in Upscale Leisure Locations category	Welcomhotel by ITC Hotels, Jim Corbett
Best Hotel in Boutique Hotel category	Storii by ITC Hotels Shanti Maroda, Goa
Best Hotel in Upper Upscale & Luxury category	JW Marriott Resort Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa
Critics Choice Award	Hyatt Regency Dehradun

HICSA 2023 Concludes with Resounding Success, Sets Stage for HICSA 2024 again in Bengaluru

Asmita Mukherjee | Hyderabad

HICSA 2023, the esteemed Hospitality Investment Conference South Asia, recently concluded with resounding success, leaving attendees impressed and brimming with optimism. The event garnered an impressive turnout, boasting a historic number of participants, including hotel owners from both institutional and small-scale backgrounds. HICSA 2023 not only delivered exceptional content and a line-up of esteemed speakers but also exuded an infectious energy that left a lasting impact.

While speaking on the success of the event Manav Thadani, Founder & Chairman, Hotelivate (organisers of HICSA event) elaborated, “HICSA 2023 was quite amazing both for its content, quality of speakers and most amazingly the large number of hotel owners both institutional and small owners that attended this event. We had a near historic number of participants and I think most delegates found the event to be of high energy and full of optimism.”

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HICSA has been organised since the last 17 years either at Delhi or at Mumbai. However, the 18th edition of HICSA saw a big change as this was the first time HICSA was organised at Bengaluru. “We took a punt on Bengaluru and it paid off. Back in 2022 at the HICSA event at Grand Hyatt, Mumbai we did a live audience poll and Bengaluru came out ahead. While some sceptics tried to convince us otherwise we stuck to our guns and focused on delivering an event which was more innovative and interesting than before.” Thadani added.

Concluding the event with a massive success Thadani has already



Manav Thadani
Founder & Chairman,
Hotelivate

set the plans for the 19th edition of HICSA in motion. In an exclusive reveal, he confirmed that Bengaluru will again be the destination of choice for hosting HICSA 2024, promising yet another amazing edition. Expressing his excitement while speaking with Hospitality Biz about HICSA 2024, Thadani said, “At this stage HICSA 2024 will also take place in Bengaluru, although we have not formally announced it, you are the first media publication to know. We are yet to finalise the venue and we have some amazing choices in Bengaluru.”

The organisers are yet to give specific details about HICSA 2024, but the subtle hints point at a strong focus on the Food and Beverage (F&B) segment. While plans are still being finalised, attendees can expect thought-provoking sessions and engaging speakers who will delve into the latest trends and developments in the F&B sector.

HICSA is popular for providing more than just traditional meetings and sessions; it offers a truly immersive experience. The Hotelivate team is committed to curate a unique and unforgettable experience for the 19th edition of HICSA in 2024. Building on the success of this year’s experiences, such as the popular Golf Round and lunch session, the team plans to reintroduce some of the fun experiences while also introducing fresh and innovative concepts to keep attendees engaged and excited throughout the conference.

“HICSA experiences this year were clearly a winner. We will repeat some of them (Golf) and have some new fresh ideas for more innovative stuff. We have realised that if you have to be successful and create excitement at a conference you need to keep innovating and we will do just that in 2024,” Thadani concluded. ■

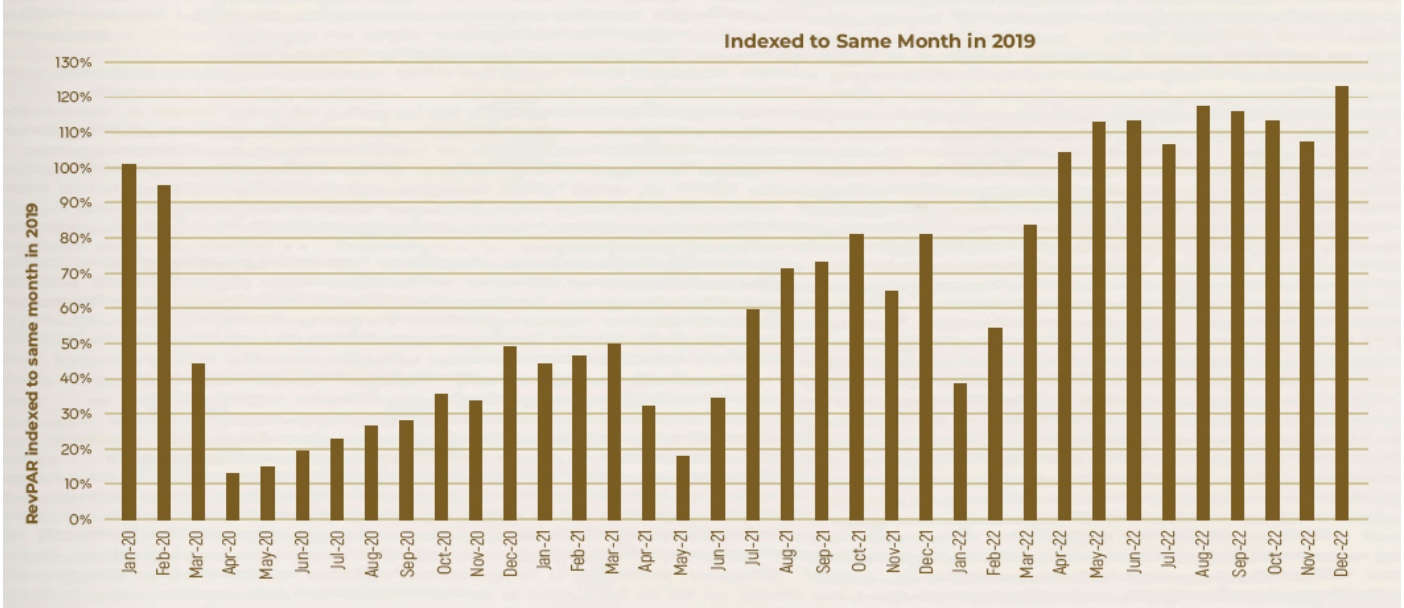
asmita.mukherjee@saffronsynergies.in

India's Hospitality Sector Makes Remarkable Recovery, Occupancy and Rates on the Rise, says India Hospitality Industry Overview 2022

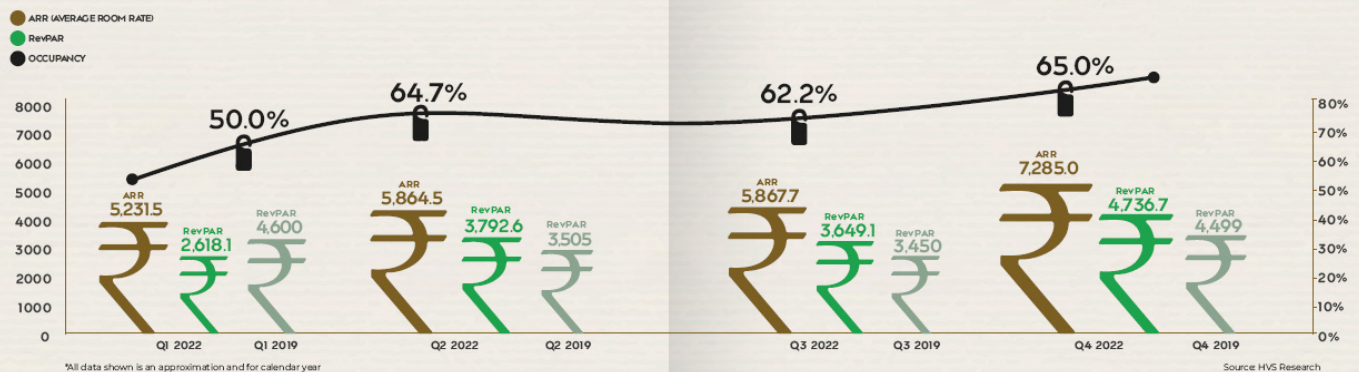
HBI Staff | Hyderabad

India's hospitality sector is bouncing back from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, as revealed in the 'India Hospitality Industry Overview 2022' report by HVS ANAROCK. The report highlights a significant improvement in occupancy rates, with the industry ending 2022 at 59-61%, a 15-17 percentage point increase from the previous year and only 5-7 percentage points lower than pre-pandemic levels in

India: Month on Month RevPAR Recovery Through the Pandemic



Indian Hotel Sector: Quarterly Performance

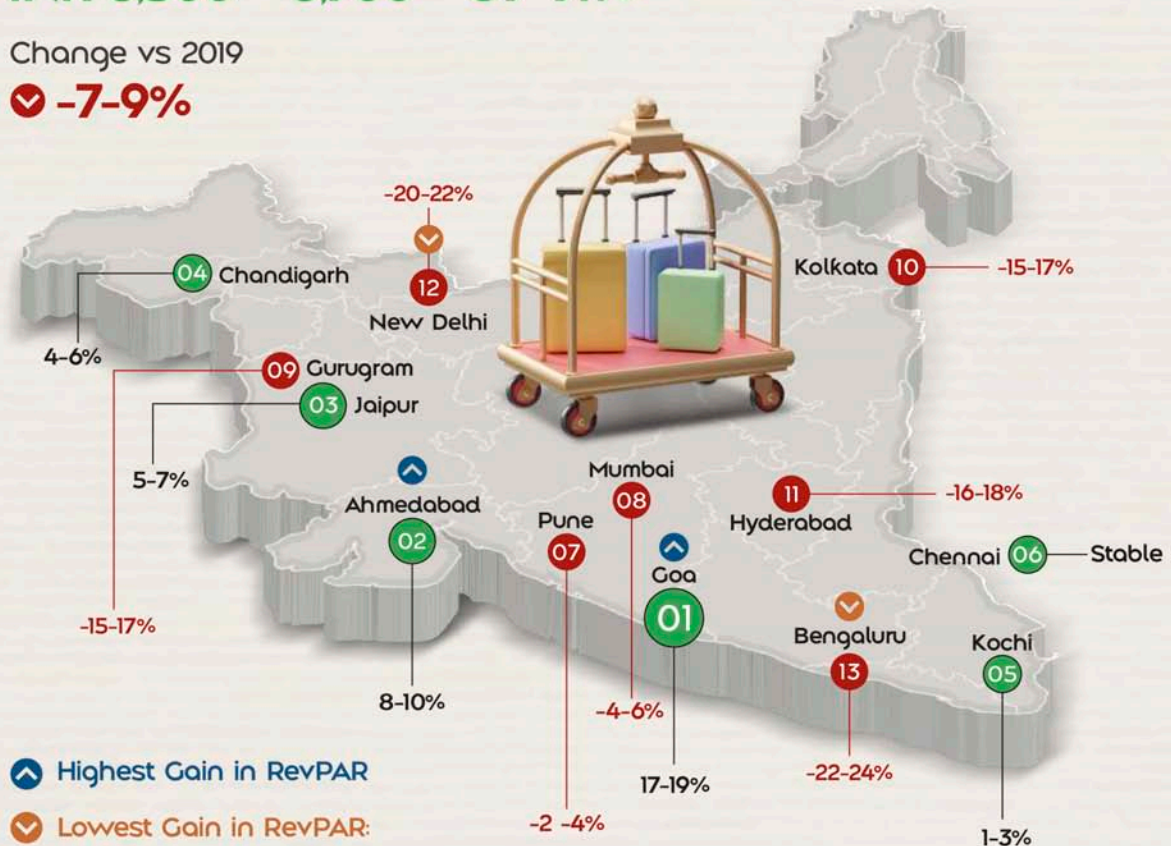


2019. Average rates (ARR) also showed a complete recovery in 2022, surpassing 2019 levels by approximately 1-3%, marking a 37-39% increase compared to 2021. The report further outlines the expansion of hotel portfolios in leisure destinations and Tier-3 and -4 cities, reflecting the industry's recognition of untapped potential in these areas.

RevPAR increase across India's key markets (2022 vs 2019)

India RevPAR - 2022 **INR 3,500 – 3,700** Y-o-Y change **89-91%**

Change vs 2019 **📉 -7-9%**



	City	RevPAR Growth (2022 vs 2019)	Ranking [#]
India	Goa	17-19%	1
RevPAR	Ahmedabad	8-10%	2
	Jaipur	5-7%	3
2022	Chandigarh	4-6%	4
INR3,500 – 3,700	Kochi	1-3%	5
Y-o-Y change	Chennai	<-Stable->	6
89-91%	Pune	-2-4%	7
Change vs 2019	Mumbai	-4-6%	8
-7-9%	Gurugram	-15-17%	9
	Kolkata	-15-17%	10
	Hyderabad	-16-18%	11
	New Delhi	-20-22%	12
	Bengaluru	-22-24%	13

Ranking as per RevPAR Growth

* All data shown is in approximation and for calendar year. Map not to scale, for representative purpose only

Manage Stakeholder Expectations | Facilitate Hospitality Careers

By Prof. Satish Jayaram, PhD – Ideator | Innovator | Incubator



It is that time of the year when career choice conversations flourish. Multiple chat forums are buzzing with information on sourcing talent as the hospitality industry rebounds. Even as demand side developments renew hope for hospitality talents, the reality of a luke-warm career choice response remains. The key question on stakeholder mapping, managing expectations and leveraging their participation, to secure high potential careers raises questions. A fulfilling, holistic growth trajectory for future talents requires academic leaders, to map career building initiatives with all stakeholders. A simple yet multi-pronged approach to get these stakeholders to contribute is elucidated below.

The complex web of primary, secondary and tertiary stakeholders representing the entire hospitality ecosystem needs interpretation. Whether government or policy makers, academics or researchers, influencers or community, vendors or participants, the value delivery network for hospitality talents, definitely needs alignment. The pressing talent needs of industry, structured or unstructured, corporate or entrepreneurial, needs a transparent interface with parents, sponsors and mentors. Veterans, experts and workforce partners need to guide this change, by uncovering emerging, new creative choices. This pattern that interlocks stakeholder interest with stakeholder influence matters.

Stakeholder interest may be either active or passive, while its integration with stakeholder influence may be partial or total. Since stakeholder groups are diverse with multi-variate expectations, a singular approach does not meet all requirements. The idea is to classify multiple stakeholder groups, for their unique abilities, while leveraging their strengths. The purpose is to create an engaging, coaching environment where prospects, youth and talents can make informed choices. While there are attractive options in technology and related domains, the sheer validity of cuisine, hospitality and tourism studies cannot be undermined. Their inherent, tacit attractiveness must be celebrated today.

But active participation of stakeholder groups needs facilitation. This outcome will enhance the corroboration of our unique skill sets, in a plethora of emerging business applications for incubation.

While this is not a panacea to fulfil all stakeholder expectations, it is an indicative order by which, efforts can be channelized to meet the expectations of their relatively active and passive interests.

1. Maintain Participative Network:

Passive interests and partial influences by tertiary stakeholders, not directly within the value chain is a key step. Securing already busy workforce talents, experts and veterans to share unique learnings and experiences through chat-forums and blogs is a good start. Other tertiary influencers and beneficiaries from the value delivery network like guests, impacted communities and social partners can easily contribute to this.

Other tertiary influencers and beneficiaries from the value delivery network like guests, impacted communities and social partners can easily contribute to this.

2. Anticipate Deliverable Needs:

While new enterprises, businesses and industry experts may not be actively involved in the career counselling process, their vendor and actor network is an active beneficiary recruiting high quality talent. Academic leaders can proactively engage with this base, to anticipate deliverable needs like conjoint skill-sets, integrated job-roles and multi-tasking abilities. Talents must be contributing to our renewed operational models today.

3. Gain Complete Engagement:

Active interest groups like policy-makers, thought leaders, researchers can be a great source of inspiration. While their influence on career choices may be only partial, a transparent exposition of strategic priorities, future scenarios as well as latent opportunities, can be made apparent to prospects. Creating forums for holistic engagement, will reduce blind-spots and misconceptions as knowledge flows from credibility.

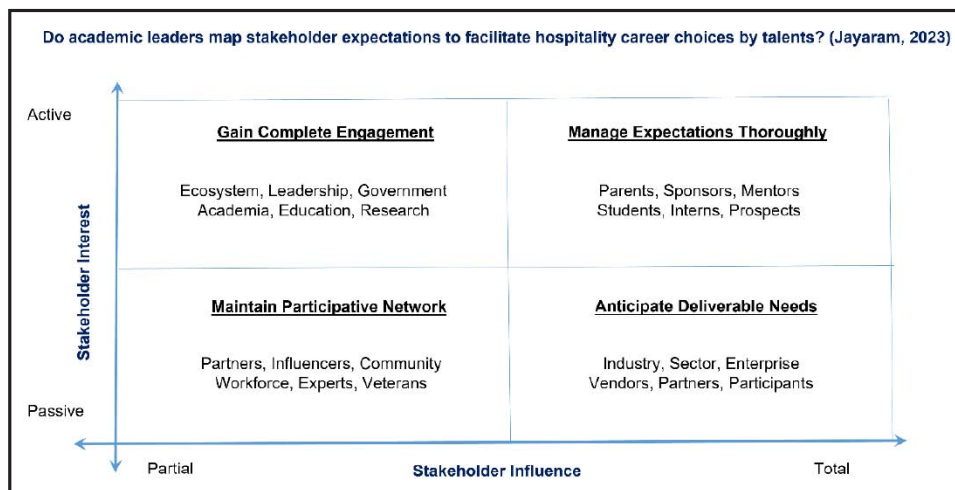
4. Manage Expectations Thoroughly:

The most valid group of stakeholders is our students, interns and prospects whose participation is active and influence to the process, total. Closely aligned are their parents, sponsors and mentors, who are a key influence in career choices. This predominant group has real expectations, but they need to be managed thoroughly, transparently and interactively. A loss of communication here is what initiates the breakdown.

In conclusion, academic leaders have the onerous responsibility to activate these stakeholder networks, in their own respective geographies. Best practice models and case studies of engagement have to be shared, unequivocally across the ecosystem to replicate results. Initiate a model of stakeholder classification and engagement, as

mapped in my accompanying model. The collective sum of these efforts, will play a huge role in re-establishing the uniqueness of hospitality careers. The strength of the stakeholder network can be assimilated to achieve a rational outcome. If we are all on the same page - staid opinions, bad experiences and age-old stories can be replaced with hope. The solution lies hidden in the stakeholder labyrinth, while we have to start the hunt for this treasure now! ■

The views expressed within this column are the opinion of the author, and may not necessarily be endorsed by the publication.





Golden Tulip, Tirupati

Strategically located at the foothills of Tirumala hills, the hotel is within a kilometre from the bypass road near Alipiri Toll Plaza, nearly 04 km from Tirupati Railway station and enjoys proximity and seamless connectivity to the bus terminal, prominent commercial & corporate hubs and leading hospitals. Contemporary in design and style with touches of traditional elements akin to the holy city, the hotel features discerning and spacious accommodation facilities including 88 rooms and suites facing the holy hills of Tirumala, an all-day dining restaurant, Tulipe; an exclusive vegetarian restaurant, Adyar Ananda Bhavan; a modern and well- equipped fitness centre and over 5000 sq. ft. of banqueting space.

Country Inn Maple Resort, Chail

The resort is conveniently located on Kandaghat-Chail road, in one of the most scenic hill stations, known for the spectacular settings, sightseeing and adventure. The resort sits timelessly amidst snow-clad mountains and picturesque landscapes to become your perfect home in the hills. One would choose to stay at Country Inn Maple Resort, Chail to experience the quiet nature, chirping birds, and a perfect ambience to unwind and connect with self or strengthen bonds with your family.

With 30 spacious rooms, tranquil views, lush green lawns, recreational activities, kids play area and excellent cuisine at 'Sky High', the all-day dining restaurant and destination dining options, the resort is a tasteful amalgamation of sublime nature and modern aesthetic. A contemporary take to immerse travellers in the local beauty and distinct character of the destination.



Ramada Encore by Wyndham in Indore, Madhya Pradesh

Ramada Encore by Wyndham Indore, Nipania provides great connectivity and accessibility for guests arriving by car, train or air. The hotel will have easy access from the Ring Road and the main commercial area of Vijay Nagar.

The hotel has a modern design and features 100 contemporary rooms, a lobby lounge, an all-day dining restaurant and bar, meetings and event spaces, a business centre, refreshing wellness areas and an outdoor rooftop swimming pool.

Country Inn Premier – Pacific, Mussoorie

Nestled amidst the picturesque hills, Country Inn Premier– Pacific, Mussoorie is an oasis for those on a constant quest for peace and calm. It is conveniently located at a walking distance from the heart of the town Mall Road and close to the attractions like Gun Hill and Kempty Falls, offering an ease to explore the destination. The mountain resort boasts of 48 well-appointed rooms, awe-inspiring views eliciting a restful state of mind and delightful experiences, promising guests a rejuvenating and soul-filling stay.

The multi-cuisine restaurant 'Mélange' is a perfect destination to indulge in the culinary delights from around the world. Be it a corporate getaway or celebration events, the outdoor lawn and the indoor event spaces, along with the heartfelt hospitality will make them inspiring.



Chef Sarah Todd launches sauce brand in India - Hot Toddy

Celebrity Chef Sarah Todd launched her “Hot Toddy” sauce brand in India, made from fresh ingredients, of which over 70% are locally sourced from Australia, and manufactured in Queensland.

Hot Toddy offers a collection of five sauces that draw inspiration from spices and chilies around the world. These sauces range from mild to extremely spicy, offering a diverse range of tastes and includes Kashmiri Tomato and Birdseye Chilli, which are inspired by Indian cuisine, Sweet Chilli from Thailand, 7-Spice Sriracha from Japan, and Birdseye Chilli from Australia.



Saint-Gobain introduces High-Performance Air Filtration system

Saint-Gobain has introduced a Three-stage air filtration system aiming to offer innovative solutions to our customers & reinforce Saint-Gobain's purpose of “Making The World A Better Home” as well. The new range of Saint-Gobain filters contains prefilters, fine filters, and different types of HEPA filters such as deep pleats, mini pleats, V-bank, etc., offering a comprehensive solution to meet specific filtration needs and requirements.

Nao Spirits unveils The Broken Bat Gin

After successfully launching 2 limited release gins (Juniper bomb and No Sleep) over the last 2 years, the brand recently launched their third Limited release - The Broken Bat Gin.

Broken Bat is best enjoyed all by itself on ice or topped up with Soda or Cola. Rather than use tonic, the distillers recommend drinking this in the way one would drink their favorite Whisky.

The product is now available in Goa (INR 1450), Maharashtra (INR 2400), and Karnataka (INR 2450).



HYATT HOTELS



Neha Kapoor, General Manager, Hyatt Place Vadodara

Having started her career as part of the Front Office Team, she has risen through the ranks steadily and brings in over 19 years of versatile hospitality experience. Kapoor has spent over 13 years with Hyatt and has worked for various brands under the Hyatt India umbrella.

Her strong operational and leadership instincts, contribution to revenue growth, ability to foster a deeper sense of teamwork, empathizing and problem-solving skills to enhance guest experience will be instrumental in furthering Hyatt Place Vadodara's objective of capturing a larger market share and enhancing service standards in the city.

MAYFAIR HOTELS



Tarun Sharma, Resort Manager, MAYFAIR Spring Valley Resort, Guwahati

With industry exposure across leading hotel chains in India, Sharma has worked with Oberoi Hotels & Resorts, The Indian Hotel Company Limited, Zuri Hotels & Resorts, Raviz Hotels & Resorts and The Leela Palaces, Hotels & Resorts at various Luxury Destinations.

He has been associated with hotel & resort operations and has accomplished operational excellence in all spheres. Before joining MAYFAIR Hotels & Resorts, he was with The Leela Kovalam A Raviz Hotel as an Executive Assistant Manager.

MARRIOTT HOTELS



Sharad Datta, General Manager, JW Marriott New Delhi Aerocity

Sharad Datta has been a strong pillar and a key resource for Marriott hotels in India since his first stint in 2013. Prior to joining JW Marriott New Delhi, he served as the General Manager of Westin Mumbai Garden City where he played a pivotal role in the overall success of the hotel.

With a keen eye for detail and an unparalleled commitment to excellence, Datta worked tirelessly to ensure that all aspects of the hotel's operations were executed flawlessly.

ACCOR HOTELS



Lakshmi Sridhar, General Manager, Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach and The Bheemili Resort

Sridhar brings an abundance of experience spanning 28 years and has been associated with Accor for over 11 years, serving as Operations Manager from June 2020 at the Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach. Her remarkable journey started with a position.

In her new inspiring role as the General Manager, Lakshmi Sridhar will be responsible for overseeing the overall operations of the hotel and resort experience. Her vast knowledge and experience in the hospitality industry will certainly contribute to the growth and success of the properties. She will be responsible for providing leadership, strategic oversight, and direction to the organization in the areas of financial performance, operations, human resources, customer relationships, risk management, and marketing and sales strategies. Her position plays a crucial role in ensuring efficient and effective processes that align with organizational goals.

John Surendranath, General Manager, Grand Mercure Mysore



As the new General Manager of Grand Mercure Mysore, John will be responsible for overseeing all aspects of the hotel's operations, leading a talented team of professionals, developing and implementing strategies to drive revenue, enhance guest satisfaction, and increase brand recognition.

He has demonstrated exceptional leadership skills and a deep understanding of the hospitality sector throughout his career, revamping operations to achieve outstanding results.

Nikhil Tomar, Marketing and Communications Manager, Novotel Pune

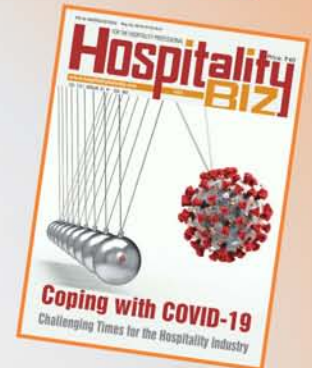


In his previous roles, Tomar was a marketing manager at InDesign Element where he played a pivotal role in enhancing the brand visibility of his clients and driving business growth through innovative marketing strategies. As a Marketing and Communications Manager at Novotel Pune, Tomar

will be responsible for developing and implementing effective Marketing plans to support the hotel's business goals and enhance brand positioning.

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Contact Us

Ajay Wadode: +91 8087 27814 | ajay.wadode@saffronsynergies.in

For Subscription

Gauri Sawant: +91 8369080796 | gauri.sawant@saffronsynergies.in