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HICSA Special

Kaushik Kurkal

Founder & Managing Director, Monarch Group of Hotels

Hospitality BIZ

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IF.BE partners with Soulinaire to elevate cultural and culinary experiences in Mumbai

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Indian Hotels Company Limited's lifestyle catering arm Soulinaire has collaborated with IF.BE Ice Factory Ballard Estate, marking a significant step in integrating curated culinary experiences within one of Mumbai's most distinctive cultural spaces.

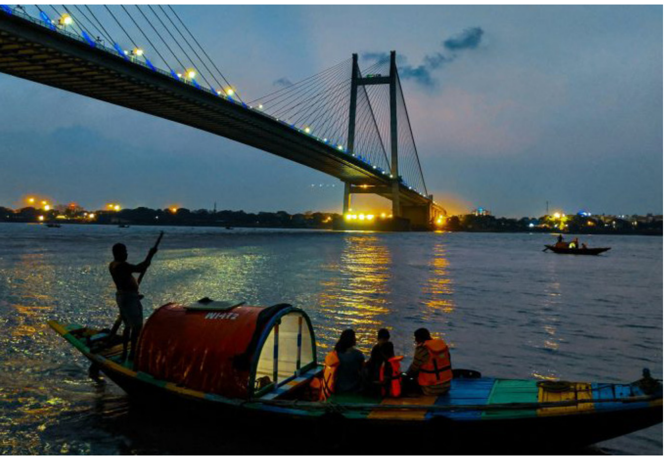
Housed in a restored 150-year-old industrial landmark in Ballard Estate, IF.BE has evolved into a multidisciplinary hub that brings together art, design, and dialogue. The partnership aims to further this vision by combining IF.BE's cultural programming with Soulinaire's expertise in high-quality, large-scale catering and personalised service.

According to the leadership at IF.BE, the collaboration enhances the overall experience within the space by adding a refined and cohesive food and beverage dimension. Soulinaire's systems-led approach is expected to support a wide range of events—from exhibitions and conferences to private gatherings and luxury showcases—ensuring consistency and elevated guest engagement.

The venue features multiple dining and social spaces, including Native Bombay, The Banyan Tree Café, and The Native Lounge, alongside versatile event areas such as The Ice Factory and The Cathedral. With this partnership, IF.BE strengthens its position as a leading cultural destination while introducing a seamless blend of heritage, creativity, and hospitality.

The collaboration reflects a shared commitment to craft, culture, and immersive experiences, redefining how culinary offerings can complement contemporary cultural spaces. ■

Minor Hotels signs Anantara luxury hotel at Kolkata's World Trade Centre



HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Global hospitality group Minor Hotels has announced the signing of a management contract to operate a luxury hotel under its flagship Anantara Hotels Resorts & Spas brand at the upcoming World Trade Centre (WTC) in Salt Lake, Kolkata.

The project, part of a ₹2,400-crore mixed-use development by Aryan Realty and Merlin Group, will mark the debut of Anantara's first urban property in India. Scheduled to open in 2032, the hotel will be developed at an estimated cost of ₹200 crore, with Minor Hotels operating the asset under a management contract without equity participation.

The proposed Anantara Kolkata Hotel will feature around 170 rooms and suites, along with multiple dining options including a rooftop speciality restaurant, as well as a ballroom, spa, gym, and swimming pool—positioning it as a premium hospitality offering within the business hub of Salt Lake's Sector V.

William Heinecke, Founder and Chairman of Minor International, highlighted the signing as a strategic milestone, noting that it reflects the brand's expansion across both resort and urban destinations in India.

The WTC development, spread across 11 acres, is Eastern India's first World Trade Centre and is expected to strengthen Kolkata's position as a key commercial and cultural hub. Industry leaders believe the integration of luxury hospitality within the project will redefine the convergence of business and lifestyle infrastructure in the region. Following the launch of its first Anantara property in Jaipur in 2025, Minor Hotels has outlined ambitious plans to scale up to 50 properties across India over the next decade. ■

'Amid volatility and uncertainty, HICSA emerges as a strategic forum driving real investment decisions'

As the Hotel Investment Conference South Asia (HICSA) steps into its third decade, it does so at a time when South Asia's hospitality sector is being reshaped by shifting capital flows, strong domestic demand, and a more discerning investment climate. Over the years, HICSA has evolved into a key industry platform, convening owners, investors, operators, and policymakers to drive conversations that influence real-world decisions and long-term strategy. For **Manav Thadani, Chairman of Hotelivate**, this phase marks a transition toward more disciplined, execution-led growth, where adaptability and market relevance are critical. As the sector navigates uncertainty alongside opportunity, HICSA continues to position itself as a forum that not only reflects industry trends but actively shapes the future direction of hospitality investment in the region. **Asmita Mukherjee** reports....

As the Hotel Investment Conference – South Asia (HICSA) enters its third decade, how do you see its role evolving in shaping hospitality investment conversations in South Asia?

In a world shaped by uncertainty, capital volatility, and shifting travel patterns, forums like HICSA matter because they create clarity. We also feel blessed that we are still able to host this event as many other events in the larger region has to be postponed. For that we are grateful. HICSA bring owners, operators, investors, brands, lawyers, architects, consultants and policymakers into one room and enable the kind of honest, high-quality dialogue that influences real decisions. As HICSA enters its third decade, its role is becoming even more strategic. Delegates can expect unparalleled networking opportunities and a curated agenda, focussing on real world problems.

What are the most significant investment trends currently shaping the hotel sector in South Asia that will likely be highlighted at this year's conference?

A few clear trends are shaping the conversation. First, strong domestic demand continues to be the biggest growth engine, whether through leisure travel, weddings, MICE, or religious tourism. Second, investors are becoming more focused on adaptability, operational resilience, and quality of execution rather than simply chasing headline growth. Third, there is greater interest in India and South Asia from both global capital and local investors, but each is looking at the market through a different lens — global funds seek governance, scale, and predictability, while domestic capital often moves faster with stronger local conviction. These themes are central to where hospitality investment is headed and are likely to be front and centre at HICSA.

In an increasingly competitive hospitality landscape, what opportunities do you believe still remain untapped for investors and developers in the region?

One of the biggest untapped opportunities remains in Tier 2 and Tier 3 markets. These are not speculative opportunities anymore, but they do require a more thoughtful approach. They are not plug-and-play markets; success depends on building the right product, at the right price point, with a clear understanding of local demand.

Beyond geography, there is also untapped value in designing assets around emerging domestic travel behaviours rather than relying only on traditional urban demand assumptions. India is an undersupplied market in terms of hotel rooms with a large majority being a part of the unorganised space. As brands continue to explore opportunities in nascent and emerging markets, the investors and developers who will stand out are the ones who identify relevance before scale.

How important is cross-border investment for the growth of the South Asian hospitality sector, and is HICSA seeing greater global investor interest?

Cross-border investment is extremely important because it brings not just capital, but also institutional discipline, global benchmarks and best practices, and long-term confidence to the sector. India, in particular, is increasingly attractive because of its strong domestic demand, infrastructure momentum, rising consumption, and expanding middle class. We are also witnessing Indian family offices invest abroad and Hotelivate thru its global offices is beginning to work with these family offices. Hotelivate is well positioned to facilitate these conversations through HICSA, and yes, there is clearly growing global investor interest, especially from large funds that are already active in the market.

Technology is rapidly transforming the hospitality landscape. Will the conference address emerging innovations such as AI-driven operations, digital guest experiences, or smart hotel infrastructure?

It absolutely will! We have curated sessions around AI and its larger role in hospitality, because technology is no longer a side conversation in this sector. AI is already beginning to reshape hotel feasibility, revenue strategy, and operational intelligence. The most important point, however, is that AI will not replace judgment; it will make judgment sharper and strategy more intelligent. The same applies to guest-facing technology and smart infrastructure. The real opportunity lies in using technology not as a gimmick, but as a way to improve decision-making, personalize experiences, and drive efficiency. That is exactly the kind of practical innovation conversation thatHICSA will facilitate. Listening to global thought leaders will also help get a perspective on how they are managing technology on a daily basis.

In your opinion, what are currently the biggest challenges facing hotel owners and developers in South Asia, and how can industry collaboration through platforms like HICSA help address them?

One of the biggest challenges today is navigating uncertainty while still making long-term investment decisions, the world IS on fire! Apart from that, the industry is facing a huge dearth in talent and human capital. Another major challenge is ensuring that growth is sustainable and not disconnected from market realities. Platforms like HICSA help because they create space for peer learning, open dialogue, and shared perspective. In a sector where timing, conviction, and execution all matter, collaboration can often reduce blind spots and improve decision-making.

What new formats or experiences can attendees expect this year that will enhance engagement and knowledge-sharing during the conference?

What is most exciting is the shift toward more focused, more actionable conversations. Formats such as the Owners' Only Session, the HOSI General Managers' Workshop have been curated as they go beyond presentation and move into practical insight-sharing. HICSA stands apart not just for the quality of content as well as the large percentage of owners at the conference. We have something else exiting this year as well – a mentalist session!

> In a world shaped by uncertainty, capital volatility, and shifting travel patterns, forums like HICSA matter because they create clarity. We also feel blessed that we are still able to host this event as many other events in the larger region has to be postponed. For that we are grateful. HICSA bring owners, operators, investors, brands, lawyers, architects, consultants and policymakers into one room and enable the kind of honest, high-quality dialogue that influences real decisions.

For first-time attendees, what aspects of the conference would you say make HICSA particularly valuable from a business and learning perspective?

For first-time attendees, HICSA offers two things that are hard to replicate elsewhere: access and relevance. It brings together the full ecosystem — owners, investors, operators, consultants, and market-makers — in one place. That creates opportunities not only for networking, but for hearing how strategic decisions are actually being made. From a learning standpoint, the value lies in the quality of dialogue.

How do you see the South Asian hospitality investment landscape evolving over the next five years, and what role will HICSA play in shaping that narrative?

Over the next five years, South Asia's hospitality investment landscape is likely to become deeper, more disciplined, and more diversified. While the world is literally on fire, we are hopeful that our growth will continue to be supported by domestic demand. Use of technology, the manpower dilemma, emphasis on sustainability as an operational priority, and continued interest from both institutional capital and local investors, will all be evolving conversations and HICSA will play an important role in shaping that narrative. ■

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Cooking Under Pressure

For India's hotels and restaurants, the kitchen has always been the heart of the business. With repeated hikes, unavailability of commercial LPG, and a rising fuel crisis, running a kitchen has become significantly more expensive. What was once a manageable overhead is now a daily concern. Add to that higher prices of edible oil, packaging, and logistics, and the strain on margins is hard to ignore.

For many hoteliers and restaurateurs, the situation is ugly. Every refill, every delivery, every dish now comes with a higher cost attached. The first response has been to design cautious menu price revisions. No one wants to pass on the burden to customers, but small increases such as around 8–10% are becoming unavoidable just to stay viable. Behind the scenes, however, the real adjustments are more thoughtful. Kitchens are being run more efficiently, with better planning, reduced wastage, and smarter use of fuel. Some operators are streamlining menus to prioritise high-demand, cost-efficient dishes, while others are exploring alternative cooking methods such as induction, firewood, and coal to manage rising fuel costs.

There's also a growing shift toward centralised kitchens and technology-driven operations, helping businesses control costs without compromising on quality.

What stands out is the industry's resilience. Even in a tough environment, the focus remains on delivering good food and warm experiences. Guests may notice a slight price increase.

In many ways, the hospitality sector is doing what it does best - adapting quietly, staying resourceful, and continuing to serve, no matter how high the heat gets.

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Housekeepers Synergy 4.0 showcases sustainable innovation

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Housekeepers Synergy – 4.0, organized by PRISTAL in collaboration with the Professional Housekeepers Association(PHA) Karnataka Chapter, was successfully hosted on March 21, 2026, at Country Inn & Suites by Radisson Bengaluru. The event brought together leading hospitality professionals for an engaging and insightful exchange of ideas, innovation, and best practices in the housekeeping domain.

Inauguration and Opening Ceremony

The program commenced with participant registration, followed by welcome remarks and an invocation, setting a positive and purposeful tone for the day. The ceremonial lamp lighting marked the formal inauguration and was graced by Kadambari Sabharwal Talwar, General Manager – Courtyard by Marriott Bengaluru Hebbal; Jayashree Nagaraj, Founder & Chairperson – PHA; Babita Butola, Vice President – Operations, PHA Karnataka Chapter; Alvin Kwah; and Naveen Midha, Co-founder – PRISTAL.

Smitha Mohan, Vice President – Learning & Development, PHA Karnataka Chapter, delivered the welcome address, followed by a PHA corporate presentation by Babita Butola. During her address, she also extended an invitation to the upcoming 8th National Housekeepers Convention and 11th PHA Anniversary, scheduled to be held on May 30, 2026, at EROS Hotel New Delhi.

Chief Guest Address

The Chief Guest, Kadambari Sabharwal Talwar, shared valuable perspectives and inspired the audience with her leadership insights, emphasizing the importance of innovation and continuous learning in the evolving hospitality landscape.

Panel Discussion: Sustainable Laundry Solutions

A key highlight of the event was the panel discussion on "Sustainable Laundry Solutions for the Future of Housekeeping," expertly moderated by the Chief Guest. The distinguished panel featured Srinivas Rao, Founder & CEO – Klen Laundryworks; Lakshmi Kondaswamy, Head of Housekeeping & Treasurer – PHA Karnataka Chapter; Naveen Midha, Co-Founder – Business Strategy & Market Execution, Pristal India Pvt Ltd; Yeow Min Kwah, Co-Founder – Product, Innovation & Sustainability, Pristal India Pvt Ltd; and Karthick Arumugam, Executive Housekeeper – The Oterra Bengaluru.

The discussion focused on sustainable practices, resource efficiency, and the role of innovation in transforming laundry operations for the future.

Insights on Linen Management and Sustainability

The discussion emphasized sustainable practices, resource efficiency, and innovation in laundry operations. Jayashree Nagaraj, Founder President and Chairperson, emphasized the critical importance of adopting structured linen management practices within the housekeeping domain. She highlighted the need for maintaining accurate linen inventories, conducting thorough pre-procurement testing, and actively involving laundry service partners in purchase decisions to ensure enhanced quality, operational efficiency, and long-term sustainability. She further advocated for the development and adoption of high-quality, environmentally friendly products tailored to the Indian market.

Stressing the importance of rigorous testing, research on environmental impact, quality assurance, user training, and periodic audits, her recommendations were well received by Naveen Midha, who acknowledged and appreciated the practical and forward-thinking approach.

Product Showcase and Industry Interaction

Bharat Pristal India Pvt Ltd showcased its range of advanced laundry products during the event, providing participants with an opportunity to interact, explore, and gain deeper insights into innovative solutions tailored for modern housekeeping requirements.

Engagement Activities and Felicitations

Adding an engaging element to the program, an interactive quiz was conducted, with three winners being felicitated. This was followed by a grand felicitation ceremony honoring the panelists, general managers, PRISTAL members, executive committee members, media representatives, and Karnataka Chapter board members for their valuable contributions to the industry.

Special Recognition

A special recognition was awarded to Dhirain, Secretary – PHA YUVA Board Karnataka and a student of the Army Institute of Hotel Management, for his dedication, positive attitude, and active involvement in the event. He was felicitated by Jayashree Nagaraj in the presence of Sandhya, Chief Mentor – PHA YUVA India & Communication Lead – PHA India; Smitha Mohan; and the Karnataka team.

Participation and Industry Impact

The event brought together approximately 56 industry experts from housekeeping and allied hospitality sectors, including healthcare and aviation, fostering an engaging and insightful exchange of ideas, innovations, and best practices.

Conclusion

Housekeepers Synergy – 4.0 stood as a celebration of insights, innovation, and inspiration—anchored by a powerful thought: "Success does not have a finishing line." ■

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HOSPITALITY BIZ EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

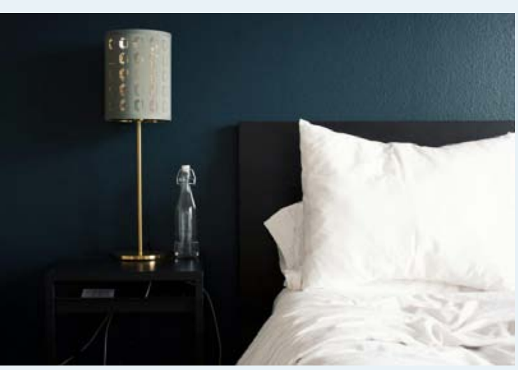
News Bulletin

Ventive Hospitality approves INR 89 cr strategic acquisitions

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Ventive Hospitality has approved strategic acquisitions worth ₹89.18 crore, marking a significant step in its expansion strategy across key leisure and urban markets.

The approvals were cleared by the company's Investment Committee on March 30, with investments spanning two entities through its subsidiaries.



Pune play

The larger transaction involves the acquisition of a 50.02% controlling stake in Narmada Estates Pvt Ltd for ₹88.68 crore via its subsidiary Panchshil Corporate Park Pvt Ltd.

The asset includes a land parcel located near The Ritz-Carlton Pune, positioning the company to potentially expand its presence in a premium hospitality micro-market. The move signals a strategic bet on high-value urban assets aligned with luxury and upscale development opportunities.

Goa expansion

In a parallel move, the company will acquire 100% ownership of Sun Leisure (India) Pvt Ltd, which operates the Sol De Goa hospitality asset, for ₹0.50 crore through Soham Leisure Ventures Pvt Ltd.

The acquisition is aimed at strengthening Ventive's leisure portfolio in Goa, a market that continues to see strong demand from both domestic and international travellers.

Structured growth

Both transactions are expected to be completed within three months and do not require additional regulatory approvals. The acquisitions have been disclosed under SEBI's listing regulations, reflecting a structured and compliant approach to expansion.

Industry observers note that the dual strategy—targeting land for future development in Pune and an operational hospitality asset in Goa—highlights a balanced approach between long-term value creation and immediate revenue-generating opportunities.

With hospitality demand rebounding and asset prices stabilising, companies are increasingly looking at strategic acquisitions to scale portfolios and strengthen market positioning.

Ventive's latest moves indicate a focused push to deepen its presence in high-growth hospitality destinations while aligning with evolving travel and investment trends. ■

Param Kannampilly, the pioneering force behind sustainable hospitality, passes away

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Param Kannampilly, one of the true gentlemen of the Indian hospitality industry and a pioneering force behind sustainable luxury in the country, passed away today, leaving behind a legacy that reshaped how hotels approach environmental responsibility.

As the Chairman and Managing Director of Concept Hospitality, Kannampilly was the driving force behind The Fern Hotels & Resorts, a brand that became synonymous with environmentally responsible hospitality. Over a distinguished career spanning more than five decades, he emerged as a visionary who not only anticipated the future of sustainable travel but actively built it.

Kannampilly is widely credited with introducing the concept of Ecotels in India, long before sustainability became a global priority. At a time when environmental considerations were often secondary in hotel development, he championed a model that integrated energy efficiency, water conservation, and waste management into the core of hotel operations. His approach demonstrated that luxury and sustainability could coexist without compromise, setting new benchmarks for the industry.

Under his leadership, TheFern Hotels & Resorts expanded its footprint across India, Nepal, and Seychelles, establishing itself as one of the leading eco-sensitive hotel chains in the region. Each property reflected his commitment to reducing environmental impact while maintaining high standards of guest comfort and service. His work helped position India as a serious player in the global conversation on sustainable hospitality.

Beyond business growth, Kannampilly's influence was deeply rooted in his philosophy. He believed that hospitality was not just about serving guests, but also about respecting the environment and the communities in which hotels operate. This belief translated into practices that emphasized responsible sourcing, community engagement, and long-term ecological balance.

Throughout his career, he earned widespread recognition for his contributions to sustainable development within the hospitality sector. Industry peers and environmental advocates alike acknowledged his role in transforming sustainability from a niche concept into a mainstream operational priority. His efforts inspired a new generation of hoteliers to adopt greener practices and rethink the impact of their businesses.

Colleagues and associates often described Kannampilly as a leader of quiet strength and integrity, a true gentleman whose humility matched his achievements. He was known for mentoring young professionals and encouraging innovation within his teams.

His passing marks the end of an era for the hospitality industry. Yet, his vision continues to live on through the institutions he built and the standards he set. The Fern Hotels & Resorts, along with the broader network of Concept Hospitality, stand as enduring testaments to his belief that sustainable practices are not just an option, but a necessity. ■

‘We are targeting markets on the cusp of growth that lack adequate hospitality infrastructure’

Asmita Mukherjee | Hyderabad

The Indian hospitality sector is broadening beyond established metros; Eastern India is beginning to draw sharper investor and developer attention, driven by rising domestic travel and a widening demand-supply gap. Emerging leisure and eco-tourism destinations are seeing increased traction, even as the region remains relatively underpenetrated compared to other parts of the country.

Soumya Sengupta, Founder of Wormwood Hotels, is building a regionally focused brand to capture early-mover advantage in these evolving markets. Launched in 2025, the company is positioning itself to tap into what it sees as a structural growth opportunity in the East.

“Eastern India today represents one of the most under-penetrated yet high-potential hospitality markets in the country with increasing destinations like Shantiniketan, Digha, Siliguri, and even eco-tourism hubs like the Sundarbans are witnessing a steady demand-supply gap,” Sengupta says.

He says the strategy is to combine professional management with affordability, while tailoring offerings to local demand patterns. “Wormwood Synergy Hotels is positioning itself as a professionally managed yet affordable brand, focused on delivering consistent quality in emerging destinations. Our strategy is to enter markets early, build strong local relevance and offer a balanced mix of comfort, service and curated experiences that appeal to the modern Indian traveller.”

Soumya Sengupta
Founder, Wormwood Hotels

Building for scale

As the brand expands, Sengupta emphasises that long-term scalability will hinge on operational discipline rather than rapid, unstructured growth.

“Scalability in hospitality is fundamentally driven by strong systems and processes. My focus will be on building robust SOPs, structured operational frameworks and measurable performance benchmarks across all properties,” he explains.

The aim is to create a standardised yet flexible model that can be replicated across geographies. “We aim to create a replicable and scalable operating model, where every new property aligns seamlessly with brand standards.”

Talent challenge

Like much of the hospitality industry, talent availability remains a key constraint, particularly in emerging markets. Sengupta points to structured training and academic partnerships as central to addressing this gap.

“Talent is the backbone of hospitality, leveraging my background in hospitality education. We will focus on creating a structured talent pipeline through partnerships with leading hotel management institutes,” he says.

Alongside this, the company is investing in internal capability-building. “Simultaneously we are working on developing in-house training modules and continuous learning platforms to upskill teams. The objective is to ensure our ethos of service translates through all locations.”

Targeting underserved markets

Wormwood’s expansion strategy is closely tied to identifying locations at an inflexion point of growth, where demand is emerging but supply remains limited.

“Location selection is based on tourism potential and long-term growth prospects. We are looking at areas that are at the cusp of growth but lack hospitality infrastructure,” Sengupta notes.

This approach aligns with a broader industry shift towards asset-light expansion and partnerships, particularly in non-metro markets where capital efficiency and local collaboration are critical.

Reviving investment momentum

Eastern India has historically lagged in attracting large-scale hospitality investments, but Sengupta believes the ingredients for a turnaround are falling into place—provided structural gaps are addressed.

“The region requires a combination of infrastructure development, policy support, and private sector participation,” he says. Such enablers, industry experts note, will be crucial in unlocking sustained investor confidence and accelerating project pipelines across the region.

Differentiation in a crowded segment

In the competitive midscale and boutique segment, Sengupta positions the brand on a value-driven proposition that balances quality and pricing.

“Wormwood Hotels differentiates itself through its upscale and accessible price points,” he says, indicating a focus on bridging the gap between affordability and consistent service standards.

The case for collaboration

As the hospitality ecosystem becomes more interconnected, Sengupta underscores the importance of partnerships in driving sustainable growth.

“Collaborative growth is absolutely critical. We must collaborate with our internal and external stakeholders,” he says.

With regional travel on the rise and newer destinations gaining visibility, Eastern India’s hospitality landscape appears poised for a gradual but meaningful transformation. For emerging brands like Wormwood Hotels, the challenge and opportunity both lie in executing disciplined expansion while building relevance in markets that are only just beginning to scale. ■

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Bengaluru Hotels plan price hikes after LPG surge

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Hotels in Bengaluru are preparing for another round of price hikes after a sharp increase in commercial LPG cylinder rates, intensifying cost pressures across the hospitality sector.

LPG costs spike

The latest hike of ₹202 per commercial cylinder—marking the second increase in under two months—has pushed prices to ₹2,161–₹2,183, up from ₹1,981. The earlier ₹150 bulk discount has also not been reinstated, further straining operators.

Menu prices set to rise

Hoteliers say the cumulative impact will likely lead to at least a 10% increase in menu prices, as businesses struggle to absorb rising input costs.

Input inflation widens

Beyond LPG, key inputs have surged significantly. Edible oil and charcoal prices have risen by nearly 30%, while packaging material costs are up around 25%. Even bottled water prices have increased, squeezing already thin margins.

Supply constraints

S.P. Krishnaraj of Nisarga Grand highlighted supply-side challenges, noting that LPG availability remains inconsistent, with black market prices reportedly far exceeding official rates.

Roopa Shastri, a hotel operator in Gandhinagar, said sustaining operations without price hikes is no longer viable, pointing to rising costs of essentials such as packaging and water.

Demand yet to stabilise

Hoteliers added that while costs are rising, business volumes have not fully recovered, limiting their ability to offset expenses. Many establishments continue to operate with reduced menus, even as the cost of basic ingredients such as vegetables and milk climbs.

Industry outlook

With cost pressures mounting across fuel, raw materials, and operations, the sector faces a challenging near-term outlook, with price revisions emerging as the only viable lever to maintain profitability. ■

Star Hotels adopt hybrid kitchens amid LPG shortage

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Star hotels across the city are adopting a hybrid cooking model as commercial LPG supply gradually resumes, balancing operational needs with limited fuel availability. While LPG availability has improved slightly, it currently meets only 30–40% of total demand, prompting hotels to rely on alternative cooking methods.

Shift to Hybrid Cooking Model

Hotels are increasingly combining electric appliances and LPG usage, using induction cooktops and other electric gadgets for most preparations, while reserving LPG for dishes requiring high flame. For specific items such as tandoor-based dishes, some establishments are also turning to charcoal ovens.

Operational Challenges for Star Hotels

Unlike standalone eateries, star hotels face the added responsibility of serving in-house guests, making uninterrupted kitchen operations critical. With approximately 7,500 rooms across four- and five-star categories and 157 banquet spaces with a capacity of 30,000, maintaining food service remains a priority.

Industry Response and Adaptation

Hotel and Restaurant Association of Eastern India President Sudesh Poddar noted that while LPG supply is easing, most hotels continue to operate in hybrid mode. Many properties have already installed electric kitchens, though staff training and adaptation to new equipment will take time.

K Mohanchandran, Senior Vice President – Operations at Taj Group, highlighted the operational stress caused by the shortage, adding that measures such as induction cooking and rationalisation of high-flame dishes are helping mitigate the impact.

Similarly, Kamal Raja from The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group stated that hotels are conserving LPG for high-heat cooking while relying on electric appliances for the rest. He added that charcoal ovens are being used for select preparations.

At Sonet Hotel, General Manager Rajesh Ishai said gas reserves remain low, with the property operating at 70–80% occupancy and prioritising service for in-house guests through a mix of induction cooking and alternative methods.

Gradual Normalisation Expected

While supply has resumed, industry stakeholders indicate that full normalisation will take time. The shift towards hybrid kitchens, however, reflects a broader move toward operational resilience and energy diversification in the hospitality sector. ■

Beyond Benchmarks: Uncovering the Hidden Crores in Hotel F&B Profitability

A 2026 Wake-Up Call for Hotel Owners and Operators

By Alouk H. Mishrra, CEO – Foodesign Systems Associates | Founder – AMInnovations Hospitality Pvt. Ltd.

In most hotel boardrooms, financial performance is reviewed through familiar lenses — revenue, GOP, EBITDA, occupancy, ARR, and departmental benchmarks. If the numbers appear aligned and within expected range, the business is considered to be performing well.

But in 2026, perhaps one of the most important questions hotel owners and operators need to ask is this:

Are we truly optimizing our hotel's F&B profitability — or are we simply accepting what has become "normal"?

Because when it comes to hotel economics, F&B is not just another department.

For many hotels, it remains one of the top two or three most commercially significant areas of the business — both in terms of revenue contribution and cost sensitivity. Which also means:

Even a small percentage of accepted inefficiency in F&B can quietly translate into lakhs every month and crores every year.

And in many cases, it does.

The Comfort of Accepted Benchmarks

One of the biggest reasons hidden profitability remains undiscovered in hotels is because F&B performance is often reviewed through accepted industry and brand benchmarks rather than the actual commercial potential of the property.

Statements like these are common in reviews:

- "Food cost at 25% is already ideal for this hotel format"
- "We are already within acceptable F&B cost range"
- "Reducing cost further will impact brand standards and guest experience"
- "This is the expected performance for this type of operation"
- "Our banquet and beverage numbers are already under control"

These are not always incorrect.

But they often become final answers instead of starting points for deeper commercial questioning.

And that is where the hidden crores begin.

When F&B Performance Stops Being Challenged

The issue is not always that the F&B division is underperforming in an obvious way.

In fact, many hotels appear to be operating "well enough."

The real issue is more subtle — and far more expensive.

It is when accepted performance starts getting mistaken for optimized performance.

Because once the team believes:

- "22%–25% is already very good"
- "this is how the property has always operated"
- "we are aligned with the brand's expected standards"

then improvement slows down, curiosity disappears, and commercial optimization quietly stops.

Not because the team lacks capability.

But because the system no longer demands deeper questioning.

The F&B Profit Gap No One Talks About Enough

In many hotels, F&B remains one of the largest controllable cost centers on the property.

That is exactly why it deserves sharper scrutiny than it usually gets.

Yet in many managed hotel environments, F&B performance is often discussed within the comfort of:

- internal reporting structures
- accepted benchmarks
- comparative property performance
- and established operating narratives

Which means a critical question often remains unasked:

How much more should this hotel's F&B operation actually be contributing to profitability?

That is a very different question from:

"Are we within benchmark?"

And the gap between those two questions is where many hotels unknowingly leave behind 3% to 10%+ of annual F&B topline value.

For a hotel with a meaningful F&B operation, that is not a minor gap.

That is serious owner ROI quietly slipping away.

Brand Standards Are Important — But They Are Not Profit Ceilings

This is also where an important distinction must be made.

Brand standards are essential.

They protect quality, consistency, and positioning.

But they are not always designed to maximize the commercial efficiency of each individual hotel's F&B operation.

And when "brand-aligned" becomes the same thing as "commercially optimized," hotels risk locking themselves into performance levels that are respectable — but not exceptional.

That is not a systems failure.

That is a profitability blind spot.

A Wake-Up Call for Hotel Owners and Operators

The biggest F&B losses in hotels are not always visible leakages.

They are often:

accepted performance levels that were never questioned deeply enough.

And that is why the next phase of hotel profitability will not come only from:

- stronger reporting
- tighter controls
- or better dashboards

It will come from:

challenging what is currently accepted as “good enough.”

For owners, that means moving from:

“Are we doing fine?”

to

“How much more should this asset actually be delivering?”

For operators, it means moving from:

“We are within benchmark”

to

“Can this hotel perform better without compromising standards?”

That is where the hidden crores get uncovered.

Uncovering What Standard Reviews Often Miss

At Foodesign Systems Associates (FSA) and AMInnovations Hospitality Pvt. Ltd., our work is centered around helping hotels uncover these unrealized opportunities within F&B operations.

Not by disrupting systems.

But by questioning accepted performance, diagnosing hidden gaps, and helping both owners and operators move toward stronger commercial outcomes.

Because in many hotels, the profit opportunity is already there.

It simply hasn’t been looked at deeply enough. ■

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

Burma Burma raises INR 38 crore, valued at INR 500 crore to fuel expansion

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Premium Burmese cuisine chain Burma Burma has raised over ₹38 crore in a private funding round, taking the company’s valuation to approximately ₹500 crore. The round saw participation from existing investor Negen Capital along with new investors Endurance Capital and Coheron Wealth.

Strong Growth Backed by Niche Positioning

Founded in 2012, Burma Burma has built a distinctive space in India’s premium casual dining segment with its focused Burmese cuisine offering. The brand currently operates 21 outlets across major cities including Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, and Chandigarh.

The company has reported annual recurring revenue exceeding ₹200 crore, with a strong growth trajectory of approximately 50% CAGR over the past three years. Its valuation has surged from ₹150 crore to ₹500 crore during this period, reflecting consistent expansion and improving unit economics.

Profitability and Operational Strength

Burma Burma’s financial performance highlights a disciplined approach to scaling. For FY25, the company reported outlet-level profitability of over 21% and an EBITDA margin of around 8%.

This balance of growth and profitability positions the brand as one of the more sustainable players in India’s competitive dining landscape, where many operators struggle to achieve consistent margins.

Expansion Plans and Capital Deployment

The newly raised capital will be deployed to expand into new cities while strengthening the brand’s presence in existing markets. The strategy focuses on calibrated growth, ensuring operational consistency and maintaining the brand’s premium positioning.

Co-founders Chirag Chhajer and Ankit Gupta emphasized that the funding will support expansion while preserving the brand’s core identity built on quality, consistency, and customer experience.

Investor Confidence and Differentiation

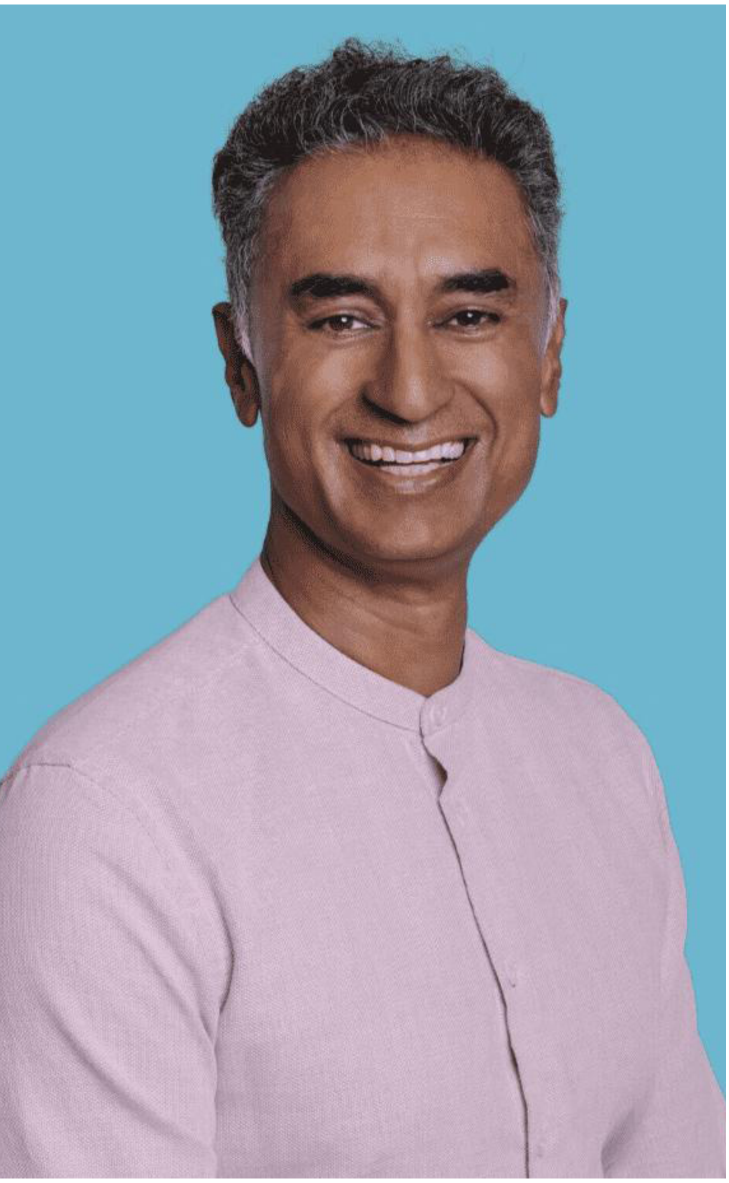
Investors highlighted Burma Burma’s differentiated positioning as a key driver of its success. Its pure vegetarian, alcohol-free concept and cuisine exclusivity have helped create a strong brand recall and customer loyalty.

Neil Bahal of Negen Capital noted that the brand’s commitment to fresh cooking and its unique menu offering create a strong competitive moat in a crowded dining market, making it an attractive long-term investment opportunity.

Advisory and Transaction Details

The transaction was advised by Niamh Ventures, which acted as the investment banker for the deal.

With rising consumer preference for premium and experience-led dining, Burma Burma is well positioned to scale further across India. The latest fundraise strengthens its expansion roadmap while reinforcing investor confidence in niche, cuisine-led restaurant concepts. ■



'Our long-term vision is to build a global network of communities that serve people across different geographies'

In a world where luxury hospitality often feels predictable and impersonal, Priya Living started in 2013 in Fremont and Santa Clara as a senior-focused living concept, is taking a different route, one rooted in human connection. What began in the US as a deeply personal idea to create a meaningful living space for ageing parents has evolved into a fast-growing hospitality brand with global ambitions. **Asmita Mukherjee** spoke with California-based hospitality entrepreneur and hotelier **Arun Paul, Founder and CEO of Priya Living** to understand the concept's idea and how they are challenging conventional hotel experiences, building multi-generational communities, and redefining what modern luxury truly means.

What inspired the vision behind Priya Living?

The vision was deeply personal. My parents had moved to the US, and as an only child, I always shared a strong bond with them. As they grew older, I wanted to create a place where they could feel at home and truly connected. At the same time, I had spent my career in ultra-luxury hospitality, helping build brands like Aman Resorts and Auberge Resorts. While that experience was valuable, I felt it lacked personal meaning. So I decided to bring everything I had learned into something that mattered to me personally. That led to the creation of our first community in San Francisco in 2013, where my parents also moved in. From the beginning, the idea was to create a hospitality experience centred on human connection.

What is the USP of Priya Living?

Our USP is human connection. While we deliver high-quality hospitality services such as dining, concierge, and wellness, those are simply the foundation. What truly differentiates us is how we create meaningful relationships, both between guests and between guests and staff. We focus on building a sense of community where people feel connected, rather than just providing a place to stay.

How is Priya Living different from other hotels in India?

The difference lies in both philosophy and execution. Most hospitality spaces focus on physical luxury, but we focus on emotional experience. Our properties are not designed in a generic, uniform way; each one reflects the local culture and environment. More importantly, our service approach is different. We encourage our staff to be confident, expressive, and engaging. Instead of transactional service, we create opportunities for genuine interaction. We also actively design experiences that bring guests together, a feature rarely seen in traditional hotels.

How important is training in your model?

Training is extremely important because it builds confidence and capability. We go beyond standard training by encouraging cross-functional learning. Our team members are trained across departments, which helps them understand the entire operation and work collaboratively. It also makes their roles more engaging. We believe no role is above or below another, and everyone contributes equally to the guest experience.

What kind of guest profiles do you see at Priya Living?

Initially, we thought we would cater primarily to older adults, inspired by my parents. However, once we opened, we saw a much wider audience. Today, we welcome guests across all age groups, including young professionals, families, and seniors. What we discovered is that people value a multi-generational environment. Older guests appreciate the energy of younger people, while younger guests value the wisdom and depth of older generations. Ultimately, what connects all our guests is their desire for meaningful human connection.

How important are design and aesthetics in your properties?

Design is very important because it directly influences how people feel in a space. However, we do not believe in standardisation. Each property is thoughtfully designed to reflect the culture and identity of its location. At the same time, we maintain a modern and creative approach. That said, design alone is not enough. It must be complemented by the experiences and connections we create within the space.

What are your expansion plans in India?

We currently have properties in Hyderabad and Gurgaon, with Ahmedabad and Baroda launching soon. Our goal is to expand steadily, reaching four cities this year and around nine cities next year. Over the next five years, we aim to establish a presence in more than twenty cities across India. India is our primary focus and growth market.

How do you define success in terms of business metrics?

While revenue is important, we do not focus heavily on traditional metrics like occupancy rates. Instead, we prioritise guest satisfaction, repeat visits, and the depth of the experience. If guests enjoy their stay and choose to return or stay longer, we consider that a measure of success.

What is the average length of stay?

In India, since we are still in the early stages, the length of stay varies widely. Some guests come for a short visit, while others stay longer. In the US, however, the average length of stay has evolved significantly and is now around eight years. This reflects the strong sense of community and belonging that develops over time.

Are there plans to launch other brands?

No, our focus is entirely on Priya Living. Our long-term vision is to build a global network of communities that serve people across different geographies while maintaining a consistent sense of home and connection.

What are your international expansion plans?

We are already exploring opportunities in cities such as Dubai, London, Toronto, and Singapore. These locations are important because of their strong Indian diaspora. However, our immediate focus remains on expanding within India.

Are there plans to expand into Kolkata?

Yes, Kolkata is definitely on our radar and is an important market in eastern India. However, it is currently one of the more challenging markets for us, and we are still working through those complexities before moving forward.

Any final thoughts you'd like to add?

Our mission is to redefine luxury by focusing on human connection. We believe the future of hospitality lies not just in comfort or design, but in creating spaces where people feel a genuine sense of belonging and connection. ■

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Punjab Detects INR 200 Cr Tax Evasion in Hospitality Sector

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

In a major enforcement drive, the Punjab Government has detected tax evasion of around ₹200 crore in the hospitality sector, with the figure likely to rise to nearly ₹500 crore as investigations expand.

Announcing the findings, Harpal Singh Cheema said the crackdown has brought 882 establishments—including dhabas, restaurants, bakeries, sweet shops and catering services—under scrutiny.

Widespread discrepancies

The investigation, based on data analytics and risk assessment, has so far examined 239 cases, uncovering turnover suppression of about ₹50 crore. This translates into a tax liability of ₹2.54 crore, of which ₹2.02 crore has already been recovered, with further proceedings underway.

The discrepancies span multiple categories, with suppression exceeding ₹2 crore in three cases and over ₹1 crore in six cases, indicating significant under-reporting across segments.

Segment-wise impact

According to the findings, dhabas account for around ₹10 crore in suppressed turnover, followed by small eateries and tea/coffee outlets at about ₹8 crore, and pizza and fast-food outlets at over ₹6 crore.

Officials noted that these segments often rely on cash and hybrid payment systems, making them more prone to under-reporting.

City hotspots

Urban centres have emerged as key hubs of tax evasion, with Mohali reporting the highest suppression at ₹8.16 crore, followed by Jalandhar (₹6.72 crore) and Ludhiana (₹5.48 crore). Patiala and Amritsar recorded relatively lower discrepancies.

Tech-led crackdown

Theminister highlighted that the drive leverages advanced data analytics, with inputs from the Tax Intelligence Unit and the State Investigation and Preventive Unit. Authorities are also analysing UPI and digital payment data to reconcile actual receipts with reported turnover.

Cheema added that the 'Bill Liyao, Inam Pao' scheme has played a role in identifying evasion by encouraging consumers to demand invoices.

"Based on risk parameters and comparison with GST returns, we identified possible suppression of turnover. The data obtained is now being used for on-ground verification and reconciliation," he said. ■

Journeys Through Uncertainty - The Middle East Crisis and Its Impact on India's Hospitality Sector

By **HVS ANAROCK**

Geopolitical tensions across the Middle East have once again brought uncertainty to global travel, disrupting aviation networks and influencing traveler sentiment. While such crises are not new, their impact today is amplified by the region's critical role as a global transit hub linking Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Globally, the immediate impact has been visible in-flight cancellations, rerouted air corridors, and rising fuel costs. Airlines are operating longer routes to avoid conflict zones, increasing travel time and cost, while higher crude oil prices are translating into elevated airfares. At a time when long-haul travel was steadily recovering, this added a new layer of friction to international mobility.

Since the escalation of hostilities in late February 2026, more than 40,000 flights to and from the Middle East have been cancelled or rerouted, according to aviation analytics provider Cirium. At major regional hubs such as Dubai, Doha, and Abu Dhabi, significant disruptions have been reported, with airlines rapidly adjusting schedules and capacity. In several cases, airlines have also suspended flights to key Gulf destinations entirely, while others have begun rerouting aircraft along longer paths that bypass closed airspace across Iran, Iraq, Israel, and parts of the Gulf. These adjustments increase fuel consumption, extend flight times, and raise operating costs for carriers, highlighting how quickly geopolitical developments can ripple through the global aviation network.

What is equally noteworthy is that despite the sector having endured an unprecedented disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequently committing to stronger crisis preparedness, the current situation has exposed clear gaps in execution. Even with significant investments in digital infrastructure, automation, and AI-led systems, airlines have struggled to manage large-scale operational disruptions smoothly. Reports of stranded passengers facing long wait times, limited communication, and challenges in rebooking highlight that the sector's response mechanisms remain under stress. This raises an important point of introspection for the industry, particularly given earlier assertions that it was better equipped to handle future disruptions.

Rising fuel costs add to travel friction

The disruption has been compounded by rising energy prices and aviation turbine fuel costs, forcing airlines around the world to adjust ticket prices and introduce additional surcharges. Brent crude prices have surged past USD 100 per barrel, raising concerns across the global aviation industry, where fuel can account for 30% to 40% of airline operating costs.

In India, multiple carriers have already implemented fuel surcharges across domestic and international routes to offset these rising costs. Airlines such as Air India and IndiGo have introduced additional charges ranging roughly between INR 199 and INR 1,300 per ticket, depending on distance and route, directly passing a portion of the higher fuel costs to passengers. For travelers, this translates into an immediate increase in airfare, particularly on long-haul routes where fuel constitutes a significant share of operating costs.

Global uncertainty, a strategic opportunity for India?

For India, the implications extend beyond aviation. Higher energy prices and supply-side uncertainties could impact sectors such as

logistics, petrochemicals, and trade-linked industries, which in turn influence corporate travel demand. As companies recalibrate costs and defer non-essential travel, business travel may see some moderation in the near term.

At the same time, shifting global travel patterns could redirect demand. As travelers reassess long-haul itineraries, some demand may shift toward destinations that remain operationally stable and accessible. This creates a potential opportunity for India, alongside Southeast Asian destinations such as Thailand and Vietnam, to capture incremental international demand. While India may not be a direct substitute for traditional Mediterranean or Gulf leisure circuits, the shift presents an opportunity that can be strategically leveraged. Additionally, the current environment also presents a clear opportunity for India to emerge as a stronger MICE destination. With world-class convention infrastructure now in place, India is well-positioned to capture demand that may shift away from established hubs such as Dubai.

India also holds a unique trifecta advantage in this context: geopolitical neutrality, unmatched cultural and geographic diversity, and a well-established luxury hospitality ecosystem that continues to expand across metros and leisure destinations. However, this shift in global demand will not happen organically. It requires deliberate national positioning and coordinated action. The country must now actively market itself internationally as a safe and stable travel destination more aggressively than ever before. A renewed "Incredible India 2.0" campaign, focused on safety, accessibility, and experiential diversity, deployed through targeted global outreach, can play a pivotal role in repositioning the country. The objective should be clear: to move from being an alternative destination to becoming a preferred default for long-haul travel into Asia.

Domestic travel to gain further momentum

In many ways, the current environment is reshaping how people choose to travel rather than suppressing demand altogether, with current circumstances already encouraging travelers to stay closer to home.

India's domestic tourism market remains a key strength and is likely to play an even more defining role in the current environment. While the country is presently in a relatively lean travel period, the approaching summer holiday season could amplify a clear behavioral shift. With ongoing uncertainty around international travel, a growing segment of Indian travelers is expected to pivot toward domestic destinations, reinforcing the sector's already strong demand base.

This shift is likely to be particularly pronounced among upper-middle and affluent travelers, who may substitute outbound holidays with domestic luxury leisure experiences. As a result, the summer season could see a meaningful rise in leisure market ARRs across established resort destinations, supported by stronger demand concentration and sustained pricing power.

Short-haul and road travel set to increase

Another clear trend is the growing appeal of short-haul and road-based travel. As airfares increase, travelers are likely to favor destinations within driving distance of major cities. India's national highway network has expanded significantly over the past decade, supporting stronger demand for regional leisure destinations, hill stations, pilgrimage circuits, and emerging boutique markets located within driving distance of major metropolitan centers. As long-haul travel becomes more expensive, these accessible destinations are

likely to see sustained demand.

For hotels, the impact will be mixed. While cost pressures, particularly on energy and logistics, may affect margins, demand fundamentals remain intact. Leisure destinations within driving distance of key metros could outperform, while business hotels may experience some moderation in corporate demand in the short term.

At a policy and industry level, this moment calls for coordinated and accelerated structural action. Industry bodies such as the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism and Hospitality (FAITH), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII),

Hotel Association of India (HAI), and state tourism boards must work in closer alignment with the government to fast-track long-pending reforms.

The broader takeaway is that tourism rarely disappears during periods of global uncertainty. Instead, it evolves. Destinations shift, travel durations change, transportation choices adapt to new economic realities, and cost considerations may play a more prominent role in decision-making.

For India, this moment is not just about navigating disruption, but about stepping into opportunity. As global travel demand recalibrates, there is a clear window to capture demand shifting away from the Middle East and towards Southeast Asia, strengthen its position as a credible MICE hub, and deepen its already robust domestic travel base. As echoed at the HOPE Conference in Goa earlier this year, the industry recognized that India stands at a critical inflection point and must proactively convert this moment into a structural shift in global tourism flows toward the country, not merely absorb displaced demand but fundamentally reposition itself within the global travel ecosystem. In an increasingly fragmented travel landscape, the destinations that move quickly and strategically will emerge stronger, and for India's hospitality sector, this is not just a phase to manage, but a moment to lead as global travel routes and preferences continue to evolve. ■

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

'Hospitality education is no longer just about hotels and restaurants'

With India's service sector expanding rapidly, how is it reshaping talent needs in hospitality and beyond?

India right now feels incredibly exciting. India's service sector is truly the engine of our economy today. According to NITI Aayog's 2025 report 'India's Services Sector: Insights from GVA Trends and State-Level Dynamics', services now contribute nearly 55% of Gross Value Added (GVA) in 2024–25, up from about 51% in 2013–14, meaning more than half of India's entire economy is service-driven. This shift is powering our journey towards Viksit Bharat and positioning India to cross significant economic milestones, including ambitions towards a $10 trillion economy where high-value services play a central role.

We're also at this incredible moment where the hospitality industry is scaling fast, with a huge pipeline of new hotels and tourism growing strongly. Revenue in the sector is expected to rise 9-12% in 2025-26, and we're seeing real momentum in both luxury and mid-scale segments.

The service landscape, where every business increasingly competes on experience is reshaping talent needs dramatically. It's no longer just about delivering a product; it's about creating meaningful human connections and experiences across sectors. Hospitality sits at the heart of this. At EHL Hospitality Business School, we see this as a tremendous opportunity for India. Our human-centric approach develops talent with strong technical mastery (the hands), genuine empathy and care (the heart), and strategic business thinking (the mind). These skills are highly transferable — whether in hotels, luxury retail, healthcare, or tech-enabled services. By blending India's natural warmth with Swiss precision, we're helping create professionals who can elevate service standards across the entire economy and support sustainable, inclusive growth

Our vision has always been to nurture excellence in human experiences, and India offers the perfect canvas for that. We're not just bringing Swiss know-how from our 132+ year legacy and our consistent #1 ranking in the QS World University Rankings for Hospitality & Leisure Management, we're blending it with India's natural warmth and 'Atithi Devo Bhava' spirit.

A lot of your graduates enter non-hospitality industries. Do elaborate on the trend.

Yes, this is one of the most exciting and consistent trends we observe at EHL Hospitality Business School, and it reflects the true power of hospitality education in today's service-driven world.

Globally, our graduates achieve an impressive 96% employability rate within six months of completing their Bachelor program. While many begin their journeys in hospitality, which provides an outstanding foundation in operations, guest experience, and team leadership — a significant and growing number move into other service-oriented sectors. In fact, nearly half of our alumni work outside

India's rapidly expanding service sector is transforming the way businesses define value, placing experiences, empathy, and human connection at the forefront. In this evolving landscape, hospitality is no longer confined to hotels and restaurants but is emerging as a core capability across industries. In an exclusive conversation with **Asmita Mukherjee**, **Kanav Mata, Director & Regional Head (India, South Asia & Middle East) EHL Hospitality Business School**, shares deep insights into how talent needs are being reshaped in an experience-driven economy.

traditional hospitality, tourism, and F&B. You'll find them thriving in luxury goods and fashion (with brands like LVMH, L'Oréal, and Hermès), finance and banking (such as UBS, JP Morgan, or American Express), consulting (PwC, Deloitte, EY), real estate, marketing, events, tech companies, and even entrepreneurship.

This trend has been strengthening over the years. Recent graduate outcome data shows roughly 44% starting in hospitality, while around 40% enter broader services, luxury, real estate, food industry, and related fields, with the rest in other industries. Companies like Apple, Nestlé, Procter & Gamble, and Tesla actively recruit EHL talent because of the unique blend of skills we develop, while the remaining students continue studying.

What are the biggest talent gaps emerging in India's hospitality industry as it scales toward a $28 billion market?

As India's hospitality market moves toward the $28 billion mark in the near term (with strong projections of 14-15%+ CAGR in the coming years), the biggest gaps I see are in mid-to-senior leadership, sales & marketing, revenue management, and consistent service delivery at scale. While entry-level roles in housekeeping or F&B can often be filled, finding people who combine operational excellence with strategic thinking and people leadership is much harder. Attrition remains high in many properties, and there's a clear need for talent that can maintain quality as we add tens of thousands of rooms.

EHL contributes to all levels of the service pyramid in relation to the hospitality industry. VET by EHL (apprenticeship program) in partnership with CII and run at ITC Hotels, IHCL (Taj), Hyatt across the country contributes to frontline job ready skilling. As we move up the pyramid our Executive Education Solutions rooted in human centric experiences and leadership contributes to mid and senior level leadership. And right at the top of the pyramid is where EHL Bachelor and Master alumni are eventually placed, steering large and complex hospitality organisations.

In an era driven by experience and personalisation, what skills will define the next generation of hospitality leaders?

The next generation will be defined by emotional intelligence, relationship building, adaptability, data-informed intuition, and a deep ability to personalise experiences at scale. Technical skills will remain important, but the real differentiators will be empathy, storytelling, cultural agility, and the ability to lead diverse teams with care.

At EHL, we nurture these through experiential learning and our core values of Excellence, Family, and Lifelong Learning. In India, where guests expect both warmth and world-class consistency, leaders who can blend technology with genuine human connection will thrive, whether in hotels, luxury retail, or wellness. Our alumni network of over 35,000 across 150 countries shows how these skills create lifelong career advantage.

With technology and automation rising, where does human experience still hold the strongest competitive advantage?

Technology and automation are fantastic for efficiency, handling reservations, personalising offers through data, or streamlining operations. But the strongest competitive advantage will always lie in the irreplaceable human touch: genuine empathy, emotional connection, spontaneous care, and the ability to turn moments into memories.

In India's warm hospitality culture, this advantage is even greater. At EHL, we teach that technology should enhance, not replace, human experiences. Leaders who master this balance, using AI to free up time for meaningful guest and team interactions, will create loyalty that no algorithm can match

How do you see India emerging as a competitive global talent market for the hospitality industry?

India has every ingredient to become a major global talent exporter in hospitality, our natural service mindset, young demographic, and massive growth story. With the right education and exposure, Indian professionals can lead not just here but across the world.

EHL is proud to contribute through its various programmes: apprenticeships via VET by EHLin India, Bachelor and Master in our Lausanne Switzerland campus, As more talent gains Swiss-standard training while staying rooted in Indian culture, I see India supplying empathetic, business-savvy leaders to global brands. Our growing alumni community is already proving this.

What are the key shifts you anticipate in hospitality talent and education over the next five years?

Over the next five years, I expect a big shift toward hybrid talent, people who are operationally strong yet digitally fluent, sustainability-aware, and experienced in multiple service sectors. Education will become more flexible, with more blended learning, apprenticeships, and lifelong upskilling. I also see a shift from the traditional degree preference to vocational programs that make you job ready.

In India, we'll see greater focus on tier-2/3 city talent development and leadership pipelines for rapid expansion. At EHL, we'll continue emphasising human-centric skills alongside business strategy, preparing leaders who can drive sustainable growth while creating inclusive workplaces. We will also see a shift from the traditional degree preference to vocational programs that make you job ready. This is why we have partnered with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) to run an 18-month apprenticeship diploma (VET by EHL) to train frontline workers.

How can the hospitality industry regain the trust of students and young professionals who are now hesitant to pursue careers in this sector?

To regain trust, the industry must be honest about the challenges, long hours, high pressure, while showcasing the incredible opportunities for growth, travel, creativity, and leadership that hospitality offers. It's also important to educate that hospitality education is no longer just about hotels and restaurants. It has evolved into a broader business education applicable to experience-driven industries such as luxury retail, banking, wellness, aviation, and healthcare.

We need to highlight clear career paths beyond the pure hospitality sector, better work-life practices, investment in training, and stories of successful young professionals. At EHL, our best in class programmes are recognised internally by ourSwiss and international accreditations (like HES-SO, NECHE, and AACSB) offering Bachelor's, Master's, and Executive programmes combining Swiss excellence in service with modern business skills, preparing graduates for leadership roles across the global hospitality and service industries.

We further demonstrate this by offering structured both academic and practical approaches with strong placement outcomes and a supportive environment. When young people see respected qualifications, faster progression, and genuine care for their development, they'll choose hospitality again, because at its best, it can offer amazing careers. ■

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In an industry defined by experience, consistency, and trust, Monarch Group of Hotels has emerged as one of India's fastest-growing hospitality brands. What began as a modest venture in 2018 has today evolved into a dynamic network of 25+properties, strategically located across key industrial and corporate hubs. Notably, over 60% of these properties are owned by the group—underscoring a strong focus on asset acquisition alongside operational excellence. With a clear vision to deliver unmatched guest experiences and a robust operational backbone, Monarch continues to redefine hospitality for the modern corporate traveler.

Monarch Group of Hotels

Redefining Modern Hospitality with Unmatched Excellence

The Journey: From a Single Property to a Growing Empire

Every success story begins with a bold vision—and for Monarch Group of Hotels, that vision was rooted in delivering quality without compromise. The journey commenced in 2018 with the launch of Monarch Guestline Hotel, a 20-key property. This marked the foundation of what would soon become a rapidly expanding hospitality chain.

The years that followed were defined by strategic growth and diversification. By 2019 and 2020, Monarch had already expanded its footprint with properties such as Monarch Centre Point, Serenity by Monarch, and Sky Suites, along with the introduction of its signature dining brand, Surbhi Malvani Kitchen & Bar. This early phase highlighted the group's ability to identify market needs and respond with tailored offerings.

Despite global challenges, Monarch demonstrated resilience and ambition. Between 2021 and 2024, the brand ventured into innovative concepts such as The Cabo C Cruise—a unique floating dining experience—and expanded into key industrial regions including Chakan, Turbhe, and Viman Nagar. The addition of wellness services through Riva Spa further showcased its commitment to holistic guest experiences.

In addition, the Monarch Group marked a significant phase of expansion with the launch of several strategically positionedproprietary properties in 2025. Strengthening its presence in South India, the group debuted Monarch Express in Tada, Sri City, Andhra Pradesh—catering to the growing industrial and corporate demand in the region. Simultaneously, with the introduction of Element by Monarch in MIDC Chakan, Monarch now commands one of the largest room inventories in one of India's most prominent automotive hubs. Expanding beyond business destinations, the group has also ventured deeper into the leisure segment under Monarch Stays, unveiling a stunning beach-facing villa in Mangalore—offering guests a serene coastal escape and reinforcing the brand's versatility across hospitality segments.

Projects & Expansion: Building for the Future

Growth at Monarch is not just rapid—it is deeply strategic and future-

focused. As the group charts its expansion for 2026–27, it is setting the foundation to emerge as a truly pan-India hospitality leader, with landmark developments that go beyond scale and reflect long-term vision.

A key highlight of this phase is Monarch's entry into owned assets in high-impact locations. The upcoming The Monarch, Pimpri-Chinchwad (PCMC) marks a significant milestone, strengthening the brand's presence in one of Maharashtra's most prominent industrial and corporate corridors. Equally pivotal is The Monarch, Mundra,strategically located near Port Mundra, one of India's largest commercial ports—positioning Monarch at the heart of a thriving logistics and trade ecosystem. These developments underline a decisive shift towards asset ownership in high-potential micro-markets.

Further expanding its footprint in business hubs, Monarch is set to launch The Monarch, Hinjewadi and Monarch Montvert, Gachibowli (Hyderabad)—both located in leading IT and corporate destinations, reinforcing its stronghold in the business travel segment.

Further expanding its Monarch Stays portfolio with the addition of two marquee resort projects into luxury leisure hospitality. The upcoming luxury resort at Kaas Plateau

Building Monarch: A New-Age Hospitality Vision

Within a sector traditionally dominated by established chains, Monarch Group of Hotels symbolises a fresh wave of entrepreneurial innovation in India's midscale hospitality industry. Established in 2018, the group has quickly grown to over 25 locations, emphasising operational discipline, identifying market gaps, and scalable expansion. **Kaushik Kurkal, Founder & Managing Director, Monarch Group of Hotels**, a first-generation entrepreneur without any legacy support, brings a sharp, execution-focused vision to the industry. By employing a hybrid expansion approach and creating flexible operational systems, Kurkal has guided Monarch's development into a swift, competitive entity. In an interview with **Hospitality Biz**, he shares insights on initial risks, strategic decisions, and long-term goals that are driving Monarch's growth amid an evolving hospitality environment.

As a young entrepreneur who entered hospitality without a legacy background, what early decisions or risks do you believe were most critical in shaping the growth trajectory of the Monarch Group of Hotels?

I strongly believe that no industry is out of reach for an entrepreneur driven by conviction and enthusiasm. When we evaluated the hospitality sector, we identified a clear gap—there was significant room for emerging brands to establish themselves, especially in the midscale segment. Entering a highly competitive industry without prior legacy or backing was certainly a risk, but it also gave us the flexibility to think differently and act decisively. Our willingness

near Mahabaleshwar, a UNESCO-recognized biodiversity hotspot, represents a defining moment for the brand—blending sustainability, exclusivity, and experiential travel. Complementing this is a beachfront luxury resort in Dahanu, designed to offer a premium coastal escape within close proximity to Mumbai.

Together, these projects are not just expansions—they are milestones that reflect Monarch's evolution from a fast-growing chain to a diversified hospitality powerhouse with a balanced portfolio of business and luxury destinations.

What sets Monarch apart is its ability to blend scalability with customization. Each project is designed keeping in mind the specific needs of its target audience—primarily corporate travelers—while maintaining consistent brand standards in quality, service, and aesthetics.

Property Highlights: A Portfolio Built on Experience

Monarch Group of Hotels offers a diverse range of properties under multiple sub-brands, each catering to distinct guest segments:

The Monarch (Flagship Brand)

Positioned as the group's flagship offering, The Monarchrepresents premium corporate hospitality at its finest. These hotels strategically located feature spacious rooms, contemporary amenities, and seamless service—driven by strong corporate partnerships and consistently high occupancy.

Serenity by Monarch

Serenity by Monarch is designed to offer a शांत, serene environment, typically located in quieter pockets within the city—away from the noise and rush, ideal for guests seeking peace alongside comfort.

Monarch Montvert

Monarch Montvert features boutique-style interiors that strike the perfect balance between aesthetics and functionality, making them well-suited for long-stay guests and business travelers.

Monarch Guestline, Express & Centrepoint

This segment focuses on affordability without compromising on experience known for their value-driven stays and in-house restaurants that serve authentic local flavours.

Experiential & Lifestyle Offerings

- PierONE: A signature dining destination known for its ambiance and curated menus.
- Surbhi Malvani Kitchen & Bar: Celebrating authentic regional

flavors with a modern twist.

- The Cabo C Cruise: A unique floating restaurant experience.
- Riva Spa: Wellness services designed to complement business travel with relaxation.
- Monarch Stays: Leisure stay offering private, comfort-focused experiences.

The Business Model: Understanding What the Market Needs

At the core of Monarch's success lies a sharp understanding of its target market. By focusing on corporate hubs and industrial areas, the group has created a niche where demand is consistent and predictable.

Their business model revolves around:

- Strategic location selection in MIDC areas;
- Strong corporate tie-ups ensuring repeat business
- Operational efficiency and centralized management
- Continuous property upgrades to enhance revenue potential

This approach not only minimizes risk but also ensures long-term sustainability. Even during economic fluctuations, the demand for business travel and accommodation remains steady—providing Monarch with a reliable revenue stream.

Looking Ahead: A Vision for Excellence

With a clear mission to achieve operational excellence and deliver unique guest experiences, Monarch Group of Hotels is on a trajectory of sustained growth. Its emphasis on transparency, innovation, and customer-centricity continues to drive its success.

As the hospitality industry in India evolves, Monarch is well-positioned to capitalize on emerging opportunities. Its strong brand presence, diversified portfolio, and forward-thinking leadership ensure that it remains not just relevant—but ahead of the curve.

Conclusion

From a single property to a multi-faceted hospitality brand, Monarch Group of Hotels exemplifies what can be achieved through vision, dedication, and strategic execution. With its unwavering commitment to quality and a deep understanding of market dynamics, the group is not just building hotels—it is building experiences.

And as it continues to expand its footprint across India, one thing remains constant:

At Monarch, hospitality isn't just a service—it's a promise. ■

to take that leap early on, combined with a sharp focus on execution, played a critical role in shaping the growth trajectory of the Monarch Group.

With the Monarch Group of Hotels scaling to 25+ properties since 2018, what has been your core expansion strategy—asset-light, ownership, or hybrid—and how has that evolved?

At the outset, an ownership-driven model was not feasible due to the high capital requirements associated with hospitality assets. As a result, we began with a more asset-light approach. However, as we gained confidence in our operational capabilities and market understanding, we gradually moved towards ownership. Today, nearly 50% of our inventory is owned—a significant milestone achieved within a short span of six years. Going forward, we intend to maintain this balanced, hybrid approach. Our comfort with ownership, combined with strategic partnerships, is something that distinctly sets us apart from many other brands in this segment.

Coming from a non-hospitality background, how did you identify operational inefficiencies during your first refurbishment project, and what scalable systems have you since institutionalised across the portfolio?

One of the earliest and most important observations we made was the lack of structured Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), particularly among smaller hotel chains. At the same time, larger brands often had rigid systems that lacked flexibility for customization. This gap became our opportunity. We focused on building and implementing strong, practical SOPs that were both structured and adaptable. Over time, these SOPs have become the backbone of our operations, enabling consistency, efficiency, and scalability across all our properties.

In an increasingly competitive midscale and budget segment, how do you differentiate Monarch's brand positioning while maintaining strong unit-level profitability?

Our approach is rooted in consistency and long-term vision. While we stay aligned with market trends and evolving customer expectations, we avoid reactive decision-making. Instead, we focus on steady, day-by-day growth, guided by clearly defined internal goals. This disciplined approach allows us to maintain a distinct brand identity while ensuring operational efficiency and strong unit-level profitability across our portfolio.

What role do technology, distribution channels, and revenue management play in your growth model, particularly in driving occupancy and RevPAR across multiple markets?

Technology, distribution, and revenue management are integral to our growth strategy—they are no longer optional but essential. In a rapidly evolving hospitality landscape, these elements play a crucial role in optimizing occupancy and maximizing RevPAR. We continuously explore new tools, platforms, and innovations that can enhance our efficiency and market reach. Our focus remains on staying agile and leveraging emerging technologies to maintain a competitive edge.

What are your priorities in terms of geographic expansion, investor partnerships, and portfolio diversification within India's evolving hospitality landscape?

Our primary focus continues to be on strengthening our presence in corporate-driven markets, which remain our core segment. At the same time, we are actively working on diversifying our portfolio. We are currently in the planning phase of launching a dedicated leisure brand, which will mark an important step in our expansion journey. This move will allow us to tap into new customer segments while maintaining our stronghold in the business hospitality space.

A Vision Rooted in Simplicity and Scale

At its heart, the Monarch story is one of clarity—identifying opportunities, building strong systems, and scaling with purpose. For Kaushik Kurkal, the journey is far from complete.

With a balanced growth strategy, a strong operational foundation, and an eye on emerging opportunities, Monarch Group of Hotels is steadily positioning itself as a formidable player in India's hospitality sector—one property, and one decision, at a time. ■

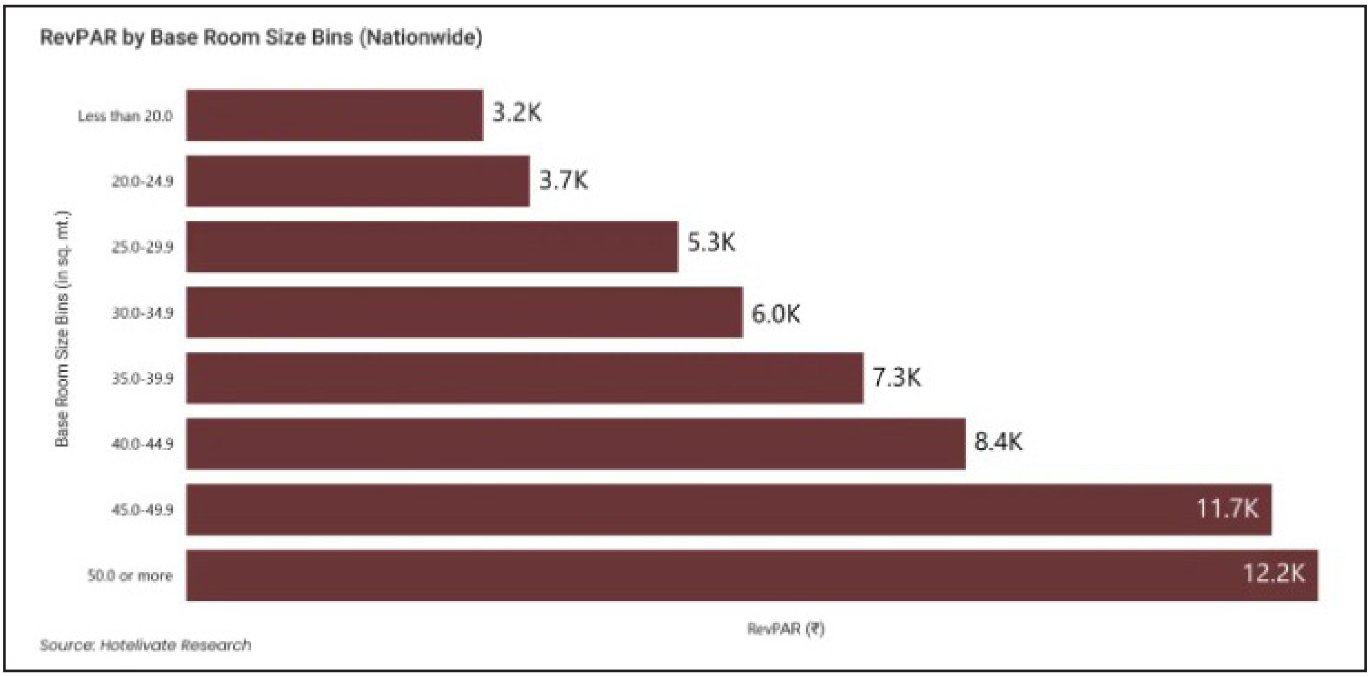
Right-sizing wins: Hotel data challenges bigger room trend

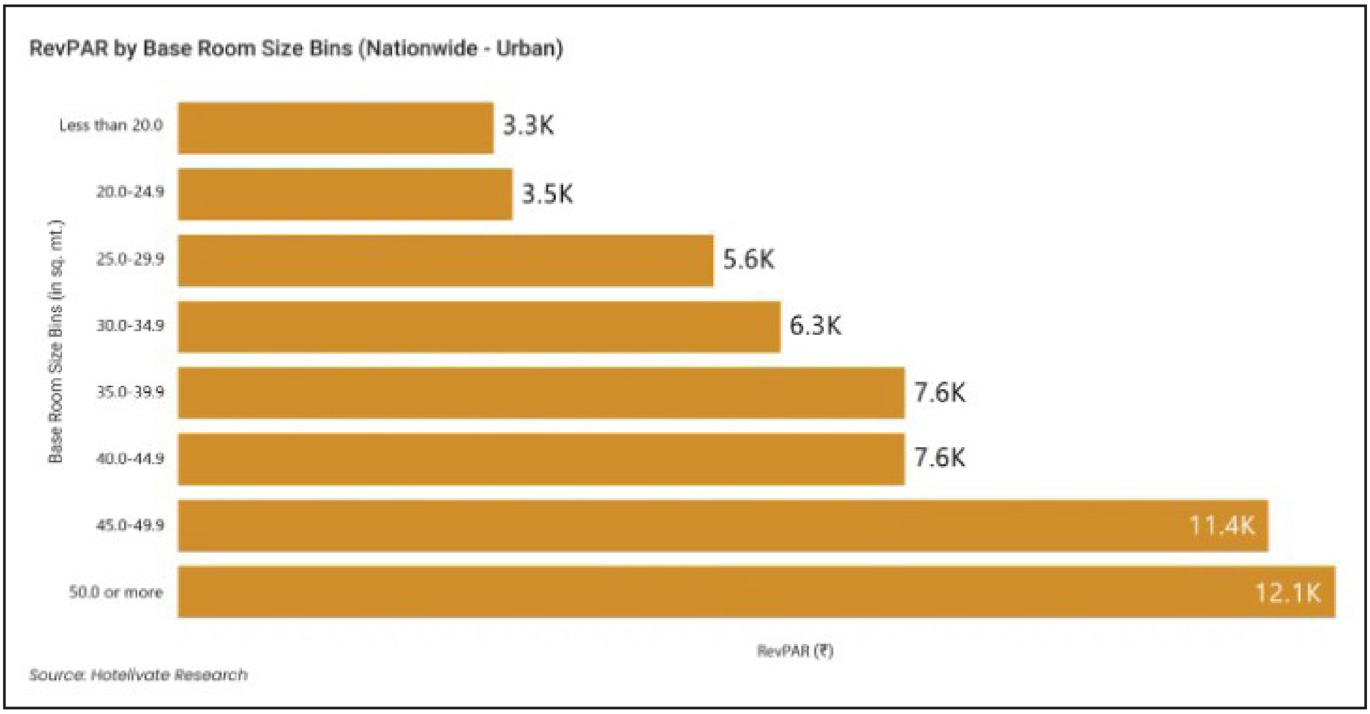
HBI Staff | Hyderabad

India's long-standing belief that larger hotel rooms drive higher returns is being decisively challenged. New analysis by Hotelivate reveals that increasing room size has little correlation with RevPAR, raising concerns over capital efficiency in hotel development.

With construction costs averaging INR 11,300 per sq. ft., oversized rooms are emerging as a costly misstep. While aggregated national data may suggest a positive link between size and revenue, deeper analysis across segments and geographies shows that this relationship largely disappears.

In urban markets, hotels with room sizes between 35 m² and 45 m² deliver nearly identical RevPAR, despite up to a 30% size variation. The leisure segment presents an even sharper insight—properties with 45–50 m² rooms outperform those with larger formats, indicating that excess space may actually dilute returns. This trend holds across regions and hotel sizes,





~₹11,300

avg. development cost per sq. ft. in India

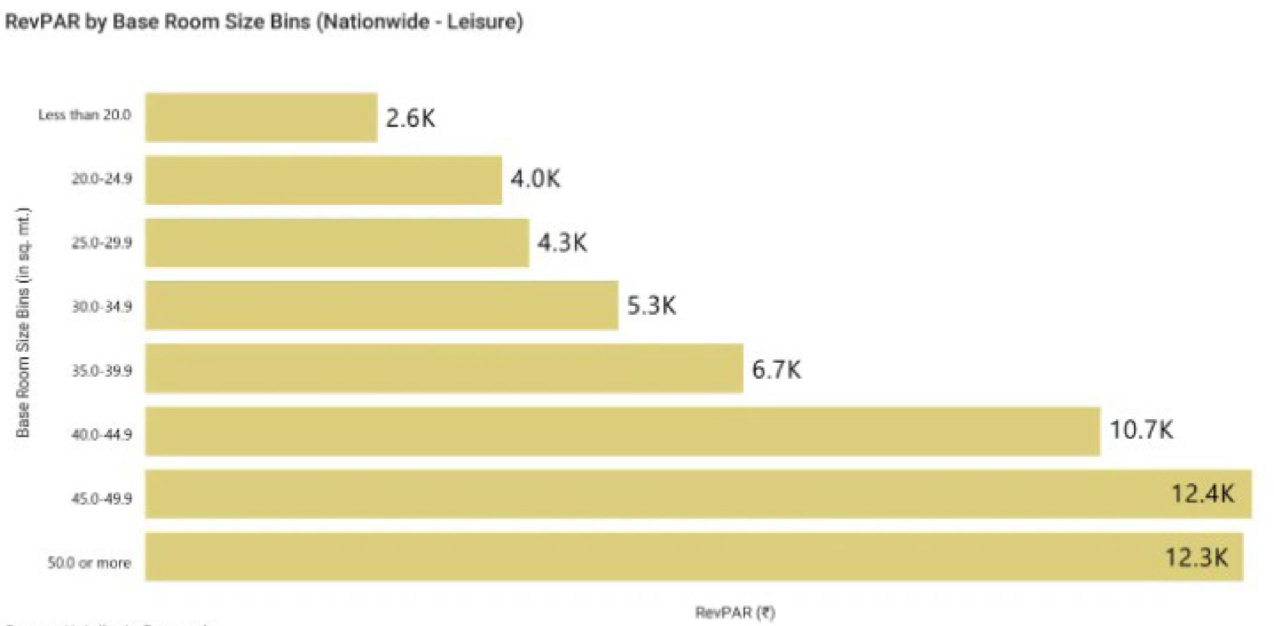
50–80%

of total built-up area consumed by guestrooms

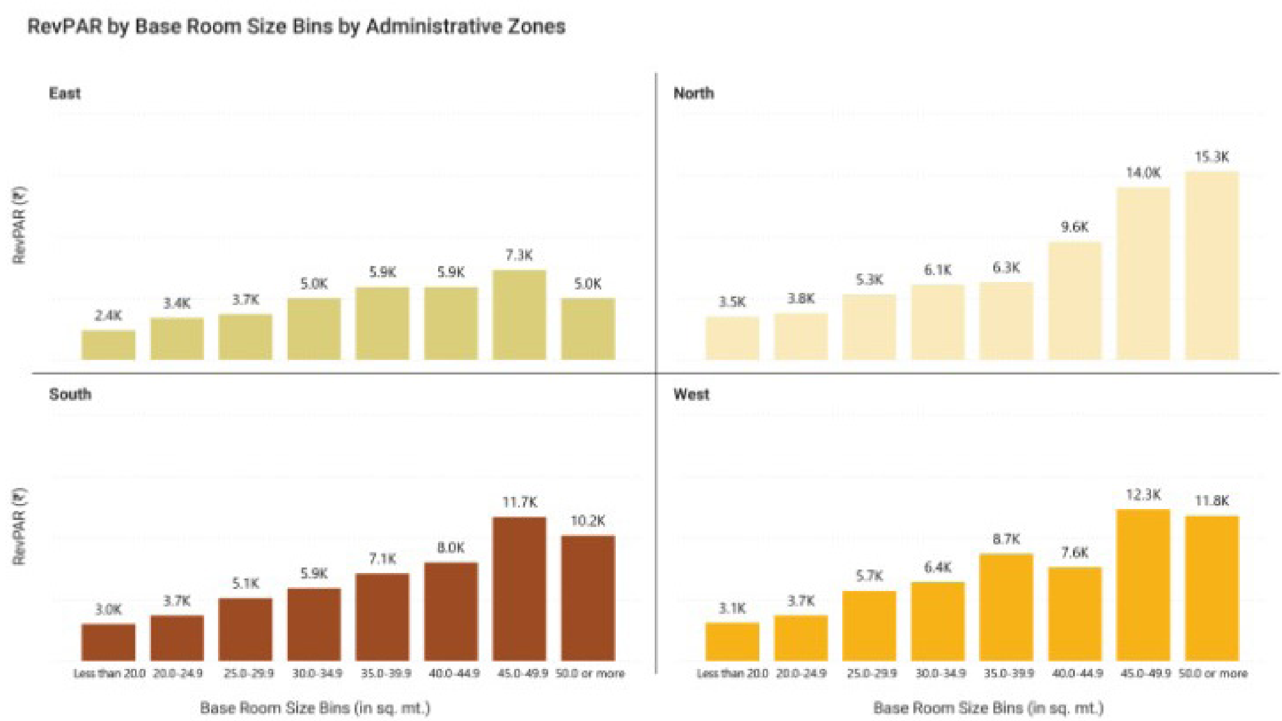
with minimal or no financial advantage seen in larger rooms. In Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, the risks are even higher, where overbuilding can significantly impact project viability.

The findings reinforce that performance is driven less by room size and more by fundamentals such as location, brand strength and product-market fit. As India's hotel pipeline continues to expand rapidly, developers are being urged to rethink design priorities.

The takeaway is clear: building bigger is no longer a guarantee of better returns. Instead, right-sizing rooms to align with market demand is emerging as a more sustainable and financially sound approach to hotel development. ■



Source: Hotelivate Research



Source: Hotelivate Research

Hospitality sector finds AI falls short as luxury concierge services continue to define high-end travel

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

In an age where artificial intelligence is reshaping industries at an unprecedented pace, the travel and hospitality sector has been no exception. From automated booking platforms to AI-generated itineraries, technology has made planning a trip faster and more efficient than ever before. Yet, when it comes to luxury hospitality and travel, according to a report a recent comparison between AI-generated recommendations and human concierge services across four global cities such as, London, Paris, Istanbul, and Toronto reveals a striking conclusion: artificial intelligence still falls short of delivering the essence of true luxury hospitality.

The findings highlight a fundamental gap. While AI tools like ChatGPT can process vast amounts of data and generate quick recommendations, they lack three defining elements that elevate a travel experience from good to exceptional deep local knowledge, insider access, and emotional connection. These are the very qualities that luxury hotel concierge teams bring to their guests every day.

Anthony Schmitt
Chief Concierge
Shangri-La Paris

Arnoldas Petruskevicius
Chief Concierge
Shangri-La The Shard, London

Personal Knowledge of a Destination

At the heart of luxury travel lies a sense of authenticity an experience that goes beyond ticking landmarks off a checklist. Concierge professionals, often deeply rooted in their cities, offer something that AI cannot replicate: lived experience.

Across London, Paris, Istanbul, and Toronto, the comparison shows that AI-generated suggestions tend to rely heavily on mainstream, search engine-optimised options. These include widely recognised restaurant chains and popular attractions that dominate online rankings. While these recommendations are not necessarily incorrect, they often lack originality and depth.

By contrast, concierge teams deliver insights shaped by years—sometimes decades—of personal immersion in their local culture. In London, Arnoldas Petruskevicius, Chief Concierge at Shangri-La The Shard, London, offers a vivid, human perspective of neighbourhoods like Chelsea. Rather than simply listing places to visit, he brings the area to life with stories and unique details, even sharing a secret password required to enter the hidden bar Cahoots.

In Toronto, Dean Voon, Chief Concierge at Shangri-La Toronto, introduces guests to a concealed speakeasy experience within Coffee, Oysters, and Champagne. By requesting the "champagne tour," visitors trigger a hidden mechanism where a wall opens to reveal an entirely different space—an experience that is both theatrical and memorable.

Ercan Soner Genç
Chief Concierge, Shangri-La Bosphorus, Istanbul

Dean Voon
Chief Concierge, Shangri-La Toronto

Similarly, in Istanbul, Ercan Soner Genç, Chief Concierge at Shangri-La Bosphorus, Istanbul, provides historical context that transforms a simple visit into a cultural journey. While AI-generated suggestions include generic restaurant lists and even advise travellers to skip Sultanahmet, Ercan presents a contrasting narrative. He describes the district as a fascinating meeting point during the 1960s for hippies travelling to Kathmandu, highlighting the iconic Lale Pudding Shop, which still displays letters and photographs from that era.

This level of storytelling illustrates a key limitation of AI: it aggregates information but does not experience it. A concierge, on the other hand, interprets a destination through personal memory, cultural understanding, and human connection.

It is also worth noting that AI recommendations are not immune to inaccuracies. In London, for instance, ChatGPT suggests avoiding areas such as Camden, East London, and Elephant & Castle due to ongoing construction information that is outdated. It also references art exhibitions at the Tate Modern and Hayward Gallery that are not yet open to the public at the time of the recommendation. These errors, while seemingly minor, can disrupt carefully planned itineraries and diminish the travel experience.

Access and Connections

Beyond knowledge lies another defining feature of luxury hospitality: access. The ability to unlock experiences that are not readily available to the general public is what sets high-end travel apart.

Concierge teams operate within extensive networks built on trust, relationships, and years of professional collaboration. They can secure last-minute reservations at fully booked restaurants, arrange private tours of exclusive venues, and gain entry to sold-out events. These are not services that can be replicated by algorithms.

At Shangri-La Bosphorus, Chief Concierge Ercan Soner Genç explains that his team can organise highly personalised experiences such as private baklava-making workshops with local artisans or luxury yacht pick-ups directly from the hotel. Every detail is managed seamlessly, creating a bespoke journey tailored to the guest's preferences.

While AI might suggest taking a ferry to Kadıköy, it cannot orchestrate a fully customised Bosphorus sailing experience with curated stops, onboard dining, and personalised service. The distinction is clear: AI provides ideas, while concierges deliver execution.

In Paris, Anthony Schmitt, Chief Concierge at Shangri-La Paris, highlights the importance of professional networks. Many members of his team belong to Les Clefs d'Or, a prestigious global association of concierges. This membership grants access to a worldwide network of trusted professionals, enabling them to arrange experiences that remain inaccessible to the general public.

Through these connections, guests can enjoy private visits to the historic Guerlain boutique or gain exclusive access to the archives of Mellerio, the world's oldest jewellery house. These are experiences aligned with the expectations of luxury travellers—far removed from the generic workshops and mass-market options typically suggested by AI platforms.

Back in London, Arnoldas Petruskevicius leverages long-standing relationships to recommend hands-on activities such as glassblowing on Bermondsey Street or bespoke jewellery-making sessions with renowned designers. These experiences are not just activities; they are carefully curated moments made possible through human trust and collaboration.

Emotional Connection and Investment

Perhaps the most significant difference between AI and concierge services lies in emotional intelligence. Luxury travel is not just about where you go—it is about how you feel.

Concierge teams excel in building relationships with their guests. They remember preferences, anticipate needs, and adapt their recommendations based on past experiences. This level of personalisation creates a sense of care and attention that cannot be automated.

Dean Voon articulates this distinction clearly: "Guests can find a good list of Italian restaurants by searching online, as a concierge, I would be able to get a gauge of their personal style, and say if they were young, chic and contemporary, suggest Italian restaurants that match their desires."

This attentiveness extends far beyond dining. At Shangri-La Toronto, the concierge team introduced the Nobus Concierge Coat Program after noticing that many international guests arrived unprepared for the city's harsh winter climate. Today, guests can choose from a curated selection of coats delivered directly to their rooms in a boutique-style experience.

Where AI might simply advise travellers to "pack warm clothing," a concierge identifies the problem before it arises and provides a thoughtful solution. This is the essence of luxury—turning potential inconvenience into seamless comfort.

Another key difference lies in how information is presented. AI tends to overwhelm users with extensive lists of options, often lacking clear prioritisation. Concierge teams, by contrast, refine their recommendations based on the guest's profile, offering a carefully curated selection rather than an exhaustive catalogue.

In Paris, both AI and concierge recommendations include Montmartre. However, the approach differs significantly. AI describes it in broad terms as "villagey" and "romantic," while Anthony Schmitt provides a detailed walking route, suggests the best time to visit to avoid crowds, and recommends a perfectly timed stop at Café Renoir. He even offers unique transportation options such as sidecar rides or horse-drawn carriages, adding an element of charm and exclusivity.

Concluding Comments

The comparison between AI and concierge services underscores a broader truth about the future of luxury travel. Technology can enhance efficiency, streamline planning, and provide valuable information. However, it cannot replicate the human touch that defines exceptional hospitality.

As Arnoldas Petruskevicius summarises: "While online research is helpful, it can't refine plans in real time. Many guests arrive with an itinerary, and we help reshape it, adjusting timings, suggesting smarter routes, and adding thoughtful touches that elevate the experience… We listen, observe, and understand our guests, their personalities, their mood…and arrange experiences from start to finish, secure access to sold-out or exclusive events through personal connections and add thoughtful human touches, like an in-room gesture inspired by a casual conversation."

His words capture the essence of what AI currently lacks. It cannot listen in the same way, cannot interpret subtle cues, and cannot build genuine relationships. It processes data, but it does not feel. For now, at least, the role of the luxury concierge remains secure. In a world increasingly driven by automation, it is the human element knowledge, connection, and care that continues to define the highest standard of travel. ■

Vivanta Vrindavan

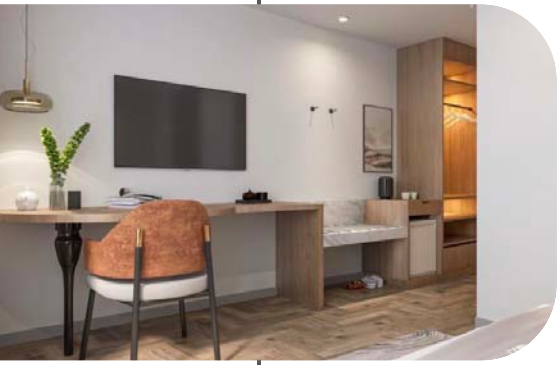
The 135-key hotel is located in the heart of the city, close to major temples and spiritual landmarks. Designed to reflect calm and mindfulness, the property blends contemporary hospitality with the cultural ethos of Vrindavan, offering guests a serene and immersive stay experience. Vivanta Vrindavan features multiple dining venues tailored to different guest experiences. Mynt serves as the all-day vegetarian restaurant offering global cuisine with regional influences, while Swirl functions as a lobby café with teas, coffees, and artisanal treats. Wink and Tease provide relaxed poolside settings with beverages and light bites, creating vibrant social spaces within the hotel.
The hotel offers a range of wellness and leisure facilities including a spa, fitness centre, and an open-to-sky infinity pool. It also features versatile banqueting halls and meeting rooms, catering to weddings, social gatherings, corporate events, and conferences.

ClubMahindra Amba Ghat and Bandhavgarh

Together adding 159 keys, these developments reflect a design-forward approach rooted in landscape integration, experiential living and evolving traveller preferences for immersive stays. Positioned across Western and Central India, the resorts reinforce the brand's expansion strategy while aligning with its long-term vision of scaling to 12,000 keys by FY30.

Amba Ghat Resort Design Anchored in Landscape Integration

Set within the lush Sahyadri ranges, the Amba Ghat resort introduces 96 keys designed around a strong connection to natural topography.
The architectural planning foregrounds the Kadvi River, which flows through the property, creating a central visual and experiential axis. River-facing apartments are designed to maximise views, natural ventilation and daylight, reinforcing a sense of retreat within a biodiverse setting. This approach reflects a broader shift in resort design—where the landscape is not a backdrop but a primary design driver shaping spatial planning, orientation and guest experience.



Minimalist Hotels, Varanasi

The 22-key boutique hotel is designed as a contemporary retreat that blends modern minimalism with the city's rich cultural heritage, catering to new-age travellers seeking curated experiences and community-driven hospitality. This marks Minimalist Hotels' third property in Varanasi, highlighting the city's growing tourism appeal.
Inspired by the contrasts that define Varanasi—spiritual yet vibrant—the hotel incorporates clean architectural lines, neutral colour palettes, and locally inspired textures.
These design elements create spaces that are intentional, immersive, and reflective of the city's timeless character, while maintaining the brand's signature minimalist aesthetic.
The property is tailored for digital nomads, culture enthusiasts, business travellers, and weekend explorers.

Country Inn Jalandhar

The newly opened Country Inn Jalandhar features 48 thoughtfully designed rooms, each crafted to deliver a refined and relaxing stay. The interiors reflect contemporary aesthetics, combining elegant décor with functional amenities that cater to the needs of modern travellers.
Every room is equipped with essential comforts designed to ensure convenience for guests visiting the city for business meetings, social events, or leisure exploration. Spacious layouts, calming interiors, and modern facilities create a welcoming environment that encourages guests to unwind after a busy day.
The hotel's design philosophy focuses on blending practicality with style. From comfortable bedding to efficient workspaces, every element has been curated to ensure guests experience both relaxation and productivity during their stay.

India's hospitality map is being redrawn, with Nashik emerging as a fast-growing lifestyle and wine tourism destination. As demand diversifies across leisure, weddings and MICE, **Jatish Ghai, General Manager at Radisson Blu Hotel & Spa, Nashik**, shares how the property is leveraging this momentum through curated experiences, strong non-room revenue streams and operational efficiency. **Asmita Mukherjee** excerpts...

'Nashik is transitioning from a secondary market into a primary short-haul destination'

How do you assess the current demand dynamics in the Nashik market, particularly across leisure, weddings and MICE segments?

Nashik has firmly emerged as a high-potential, multi-segment destination, driven by its strategic accessibility and evolving positioning. The city benefits significantly from being a key drivable market from Mumbai, Pune and Surat, complemented by direct air connectivity to major metros such as Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad. Leisure demand is witnessing consistent growth, fuelled by weekend travel, wine tourism and a rising preference for experiential stays. At the same time, the weddings segment has seen a sharp uptick, with Nashik increasingly becoming a preferred alternative to traditional destinations like Udaipur and Goa, supported by its scenic vineyards, cost advantage and strong venue infrastructure. MICE demand is also expanding steadily, particularly for corporate offsites, leadership meets and incentive travel, given its proximity to Mumbai's corporate base. Overall, Nashik is transitioning from a secondary market into a primary short-haul destination, with balanced demand across key segments.

Nashik is increasingly positioning itself as a lifestyle and wine tourism destination. How do you see this impacting RevPAR and occupancy trends over the next 2–3 years?

Nashik's evolution into a lifestyle and wine tourism hub is expected to significantly strengthen both occupancy and rate performance over the next few years. Improved infrastructure, particularly reduced travel time, approximately three hours from Mumbai and four hours from Pune, will act as a major growth catalyst. As a result, occupancy levels are expected to stabilise at higher base levels, supported by strong weekend demand and a gradual increase in midweek corporate travel. RevPAR is also projected to witness double-digit growth, particularly driven by the leisure segment, as the destination continues to attract more premium travellers seeking curated experiences.

What specific strategies will you deploy to drive occupancy and improve rate realisation in a market that is still evolving in terms of premium hospitality demand?

In an evolving premium market like Nashik, product differentiation and experience curation remain critical to driving both occupancy and rate realisation. The property is positioned as a leading upper-upscale lifestyle hotel in the city, commanding the highest ADR in the market, supported by strong guest validation through high ratings on booking platforms and consistent delivery of quality and service. A key focus has been on developing destination-led packages that leverage the local landscape. Recently launched offerings include "India Wine Trails," a curated experiential package that showcases Nashik's vineyards across luxury and boutique formats, complemented by vinotherapy at the Atman Spa and wine-paired dining at the Indian Wine Studio. In addition, a family-centric staycation package has been introduced, catering to multi-generational travellers with experiences ranging from vineyard visits and pilgrimages to boat club outings, alongside premium in-hotel amenities such as a temperature-controlled pool, squash court and a wide range of indoor and outdoor activities. These flexible packages are designed to cater to diverse guest preferences while enhancing overall value perception.

Ancillary revenue is becoming critical for profitability. How do you plan to maximise non-room revenue streams such as F&B, wellness and events at the property?

> This is supported by a robust portfolio of offerings, including Atman Spa, an award-winning wellness destination that attracts both in-house guests and local clientele, and The Smoked Vine, a leading all-day dining restaurant with strong rankings on TripAdvisor. The hotel also features "Governor Sahab," a modern Indian dining concept with strong brand recall and recognition among the best non-metro restaurants. A diverse culinary approach, including live kitchens, sushi bars, dim sum stations and themed dining experiences during events and weddings, has become a key differentiator.

Ancillary revenue has become a cornerstone of profitability, and the property has built a strong ecosystem to drive non-room revenues, which currently contribute nearly 52 percent of total revenue. This is supported by a robust portfolio of offerings, including Atman Spa, an award-winning wellness destination that attracts both in-house guests and local clientele, and The Smoked Vine, a leading all-day dining restaurant with strong rankings on TripAdvisor. The hotel also features "Governor Sahab," a modern Indian dining concept with strong brand recall and recognition among the best non-metro restaurants. A diverse culinary approach, including live kitchens, sushi bars, dim sum stations and themed dining experiences during events and weddings, has become a key differentiator. This is further complemented by expansive outdoor lawns spanning 20,000 square feet overlooking the historic Pandav Leni Caves, along with the largest banquet facilities in the city, positioning the property as a preferred destination for weddings, MICE and social events.

Given your background with brands like Radisson Hotel Group and Marriott International, what best practices are you bringing to Nashik in terms of revenue management and operational efficiency?

Drawing from experience with global hospitality brands, the focus has been on driving differentiation through a combination of innovative F&B concepts and elevated guest experiences. The property offers an all-live kitchen international buffet, a curated French bistro lounge and dynamic dining formats that evolve regularly, including themed buffet experiences and live pizza counters even at banquet events. Premium offerings are further strengthened by the Radisson Club, which provides exclusive facilities such as dining, fitness, spa and salon services. A standout highlight remains "Governor Sahab," a distinctive restaurant concept that blends nostalgia with modern Indian dining. Backed by warm and efficient service, these elements collectively create a strong competitive edge, enabling higher rate realisation and maximising revenue across segments.

With ongoing global uncertainties impacting supply chains and fuel availability, how is the hotel preparing to manage operational disruptions and cost pressures?

Current global uncertainties are being approached as an opportunity to enhance operational efficiency, with many learnings drawn from the Covid period. The hotel has achieved a 30 percent reduction in PNG consumption through optimisation measures and is transitioning towards electric kitchen solutions, particularly for large-scale banquet operations. Additionally, the introduction of EV and hybrid fleet solutions is helping reduce dependency on fossil fuels. These initiatives not only mitigate cost pressures but also align closely with the property's broader sustainability goals.

As a leader, how would you define your management style, and how do you plan to build high-performing teams in a competitive talent environment?

The leadership approach is both participative and performance-driven, with a strong emphasis on team engagement and accountability. Teams are encouraged to contribute ideas across revenue generation, cost optimisation and guest experience, with structured forums held quarterly to capture and implement innovative suggestions. Performance is closely monitored through monthly KPIs and regular reviews, while continuous focus is placed on training, engagement and empowerment. This balanced approach helps build high-performing teams capable of adapting to a competitive and evolving hospitality landscape.

What is your long-term vision for positioning Radisson Blu Hotel & Spa, Nashik within India's growing luxury and experiential hospitality landscape?

The long-term vision is to position the hotel as the most preferred destination for leisure, MICE and weddings in Nashik, while also setting a benchmark for lifestyle-led luxury hospitality in emerging markets. The property aims to establish itself as a hub for experiential travel, particularly in the areas of wine tourism and curated stays, aligning with the broader evolution of Nashik as a lifestyle destination.

What immediate operational adjustments can hotels implement to remain agile in the face of supply chain disruptions or resource shortages?

Agility in the current environment requires a clear shift towards electric solutions and local integration. The future lies in adopting all-electric kitchens, expanding EV fleets and reducing reliance on traditional fuel sources. At the same time, hiring local talent and investing in skill development can create a more resilient workforce. Ultimately, the way forward for hotels is to become leaner, more sustainable and deeply integrated with local ecosystems, ensuring both operational stability and long-term growth. ■

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India's hospitality growth enters 'confident phase': HVS ANAROCK HOPE 2026 report

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

India's hospitality sector has moved beyond recovery and is entering a more stable, growth-driven phase, according to insights from the latest 'hopeful' publication released at the HVS ANAROCK HOPE 2026 conference.

The annual report highlights a broader shift in India's economic narrative, noting that the country's growth story is now being driven by sustained investment, improved stability, and long-term strategic planning rather than short-term recovery trends.

Titled "Unstoppable India: Power of Possibility", the report states that hospitality is witnessing expansion into previously underpenetrated markets, alongside evolving travel patterns. Hotels are increasingly being developed in emerging destinations, while travellers are opting for more frequent and longer stays, reflecting changing consumer behaviour.

Industry focus has also shifted toward long-term value creation. Stakeholders are prioritising sustainable growth, operational efficiency, and strategic decision-making as the sector adapts to a more mature demand environment.

A key highlight of the report is the Women in Hospitality in India Survey, which underscores both progress and persistent challenges in workforce diversity. While women's participation across

Indian Hotels Raised Over $1 Billion in 2024-25

(Approx. Issue Size – USD Mn)

Schloss Bangalore (Leela)	$410 Mn
Juniper Hotels	$220 Mn
Ventive Hospitality	$190 Mn
Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels	$110 Mn
Brigade Hotel Ventures	$90 Mn
Others	$20+ Mn
Total Raised	$1,045 Mn

Source: Web sources, Anarock Capital

operational roles has improved, leadership representation remains uneven, with issues around career continuity and advancement still evident.

The publication also features Leadership Chronicles, capturing perspectives from industry leaders on market evolution, investment trends, and future opportunities. In addition, HVS Insights provides research-backed analysis based on market data, on-ground observations, and sectoral trends.

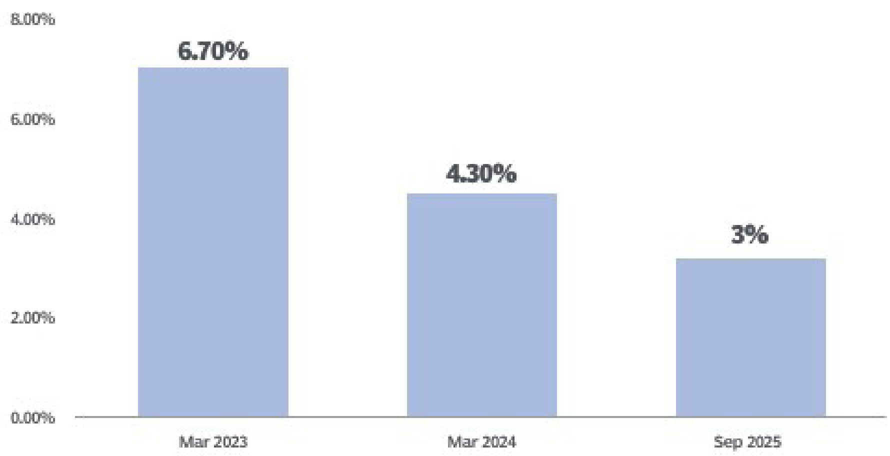
According to the report, India's hospitality landscape is being shaped by a combination of rising domestic travel, infrastructure development, and increasing investor confidence. The sector is no longer operating in a recovery mode but is instead aligning itself for the next phase of expansion.

The findings suggest that while challenges such as talent gaps and operational pressures remain, the overall direction of the industry is clearer and more assured than in previous years. ■

Banks' Outstanding to Indian Hospitality Sector

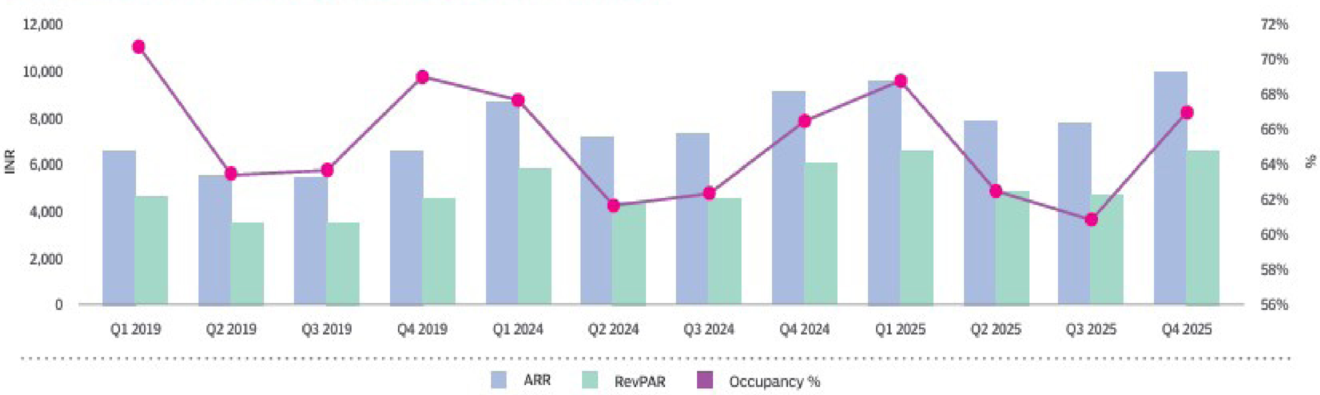
Source: RBI, Anarock Capital

GNPAs in the Hospitality Sector has Declined



Source: RBI, Anarock Capital

India Hotel Sector Quarterly Performance



Shivaprakash Mogali
Founder, Digitory

'AI matters only when it solves real operational problems'

Asmita Mukherjee | Hyderabad

India's restaurant industry is at an inflection point. Rising input costs, tighter margins and the pressure to scale are forcing operators to rethink how they run their businesses. What was once a largely intuition-led sector is steadily moving toward data-backed decision-making, where visibility and control can make the difference between profit and leakage.

For Shivaprakash Mogali, Founder of Digitory, the shift is both urgent and overdue. "At Digitory, we've seen that most restaurants are still operating reactively, identifying issues only after they've already impacted margins. We're helping operators shift to predictive decision-making by connecting data across sales, inventory, and recipes. Instead of just showing what happened, we focus on what is about to happen," he said.

From reactive to predictive

He noted, that gap between hindsight and foresight is where many restaurant businesses continue to struggle, adding that month-end reconciliations often reveal problems that could have been avoided earlier. "For example, operators can identify fast-moving versus slow-moving SKUs in real time, predict stock-outs or overstock situations, and highlight variance between ideal and actual consumption. This allows restaurant owners to act early, whether it is optimising procurement, adjusting pricing, or controlling wastage, rather than firefighting at the end of the month," he added.

Beyond standalone POS

The need for such visibility is also driving a broader shift away from standalone systems. For years, POS terminals formed the backbone of restaurant tech, but their role was largely limited. Today, that is no longer enough. "Standalone POS systems solved billing, but restaurants today need control, visibility, and scalability. What's driving this shift is the need for a single source of truth, real-time insights across outlets, and reduced manual dependencies," Mogali said.

Integrated platforms are beginning to knit together different parts of the operation such as, orders, kitchens, inventory and customer data into a single flow. "With an integrated platform – orders flow seamlessly from QR to POS to Kitchen Display Systems, while inventory updates automatically with every sale. CRM and loyalty systems are directly tied to transactions. This eliminates silos and significantly improves speed, accuracy, and guest experience. As a result, day-to-day operations become more connected and predictable rather than fragmented," he explained.

Tackling inventory leakages

Yet, even as technology adoption increases, one persistent pain point remains: inventory leakage. For many operators, controlling wastage without complicating day-to-day workflows is a delicate balance. Mogali pointed out that the solution lies in simplifying execution while strengthening backend controls. "This is one of the biggest challenges in the industry. The mistake many systems make is adding complexity at the outlet level. Our approach is to simplify execution while automating control in the backend," he said.

"This is achieved through recipe-level consumption mapping, real-time stock deduction based on sales, variance alerts for abnormal consumption, and simple stock-closing apps for staff. For the outlet team, the process remains easy, while for owners, visibility becomes extremely sharp. That's where technology creates impact without increasing operational burden," he added.

Scaling with consistency

According to Mogali, the challenges multiply when brands expand across multiple locations. Inconsistent processes, delayed reporting and lack of real-time oversight often lead to uneven customer experiences and margin erosion. "In multi-outlet brands, the biggest inefficiencies we see are lack of standardised processes, delayed or inaccurate reporting, and no real-time visibility across outlets. This leads to inconsistent guest experiences and margin leakages," Mogali said.

Centralised systems, he noted, can bring much-needed discipline and scalability. "With centralized control through Digitory, owners can monitor all outlets in real time, standardize recipes, pricing, and processes, and optimize inventory and procurement centrally. This improves consistency and enables faster, more confident decision-making, which is critical when scaling," he added.

Cutting through the AI hype

While automation and artificial intelligence are widely discussed across the hospitality sector, Mogali cautioned against overhyping their role without clear use cases. "There is definitely a lot of hype around AI right now. From what we see on the ground, the real impact is coming from automation first, along with selective use of AI," he said.

He further explained, "Measurable results are seen in automated inventory tracking and reconciliation, smart alerts for anomalies, demand pattern analysis, and assisted decision-making for operators. AI becomes valuable when it is solving a clear operational problem, not when it's used as a buzzword. The focus should always be ROI-driven adoption, not technology for the sake of it."

Data-driven menus

Beyond cost control, data is also reshaping how menus are designed and priced. Restaurants are increasingly looking at what sells, what earns, and what can be optimised. "Leading brands are now using data not just to control costs, but to drive revenue and profitability. They are identifying high-margin versus high-volume items, understanding contribution margins at a dish level, optimizing menus based on performance, and implementing dynamic pricing and bundling strategies," Mogali said.

"With Digitory, since sales, recipes, and inventory are connected, brands get a true picture of item-level profitability, not just topline sales. This shifts decision-making from intuition to data-backed menu strategy," he added.

The road ahead

Mogali indicated that the industry will become more structured and technology-led. "We believe the next phase of growth will be driven by integrated technology ecosystems replacing fragmented tools, data-driven operations becoming the norm rather than an advantage, and automation at scale reducing dependency on manual processes," he said.

He also pointed to evolving consumer behaviour and expansion strategies. "Self-service experiences like QR ordering are becoming standard, and multi-outlet scalability is gaining importance as brands expand across cities and geographies. India's F&B ecosystem is evolving rapidly, and operators who adopt structured, tech-enabled operations early will have a significant advantage," he added.

In an industry where margins remain under pressure, the move toward predictive, data-led operations is no longer optional, rather it is becoming essential. ■

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News Bulletin

HRAWI signs MoU to boost regional hospitality collaboration

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Tie-up with Indore and Lonavala-Khandala bodies to strengthen industry voice

In a move to enhance industry collaboration and representation, the Hotel And Restaurant Association Western India(HRAWI) has signed a strategic MoU with the Indore Hoteliers Association and the Lonavala Khandala Hotel and Restaurant Association.

Structured partnership

Under the agreement, HRAWI will act as the Principal Partner, while IHA and LKHRA will serve as Regional Partners, creating a coordinated framework to address sectoral challenges and strengthen representation across regions.

Unified industry voice

The collaboration aims to expand membership, improve advocacy, and enable a more unified industry voice at both regional and national levels through the Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India.

Jimmy Shaw, President, HRAWI, said the MoU marks a pivotal step toward building a stronger and more cohesive hospitality ecosystem through shared advocacy and collaborative problem-solving.

Regional impact

For regional associations, the partnership is expected to enhance access to broader platforms and improve the ability to address local challenges. Sumit Suri, President, IHA, noted that the alliance would strengthen representation and enable more effective engagement on industry issues.

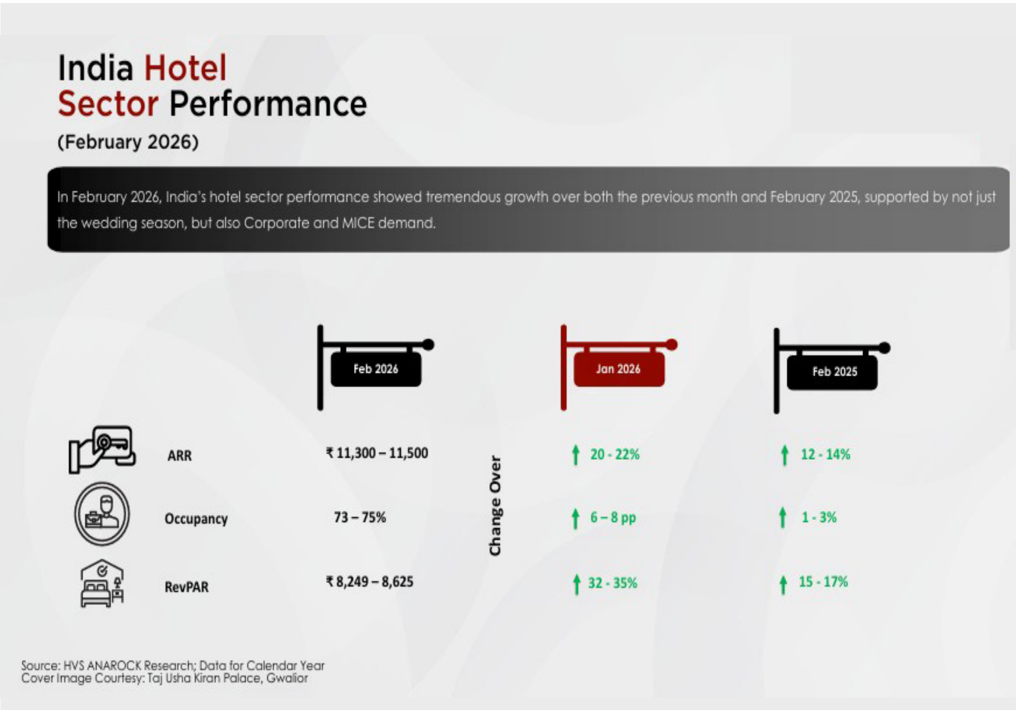
Growing micro-markets

Highlighting the importance of regional markets, Madhav Todi of LKHRA said destinations like Lonavala Khandala are emerging as key hospitality hubs driven by leisure and MICE demand, necessitating stronger alignment and policy engagement.

Industry outlook

The MoU is expected to drive membership growth, improve policy advocacy, and foster greater cohesion across the hospitality sector, particularly in emerging and high-growth micro-markets. ■

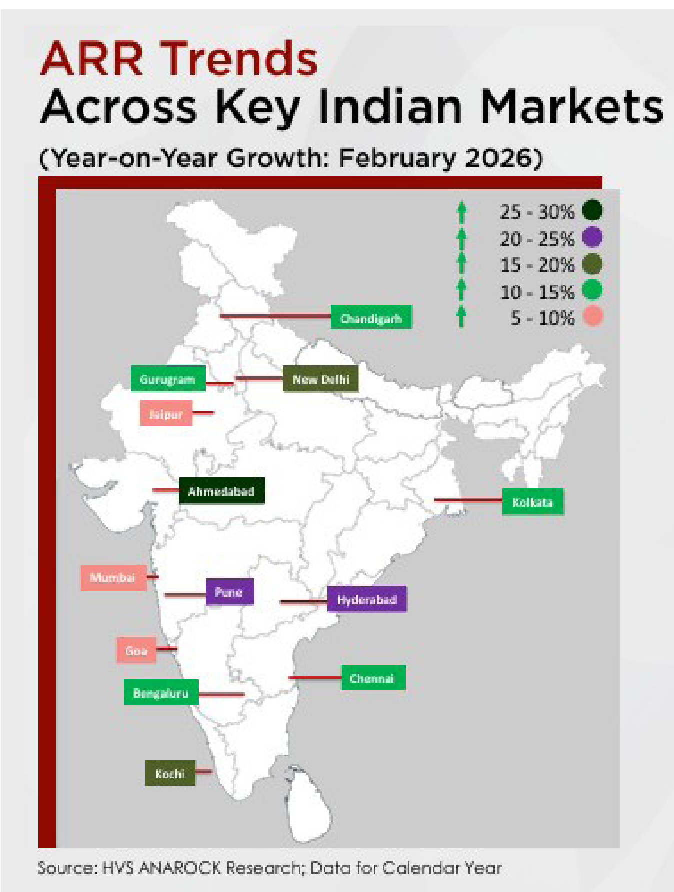
India hotel sector sees strong occupancy, ARR surge in Feb: Report

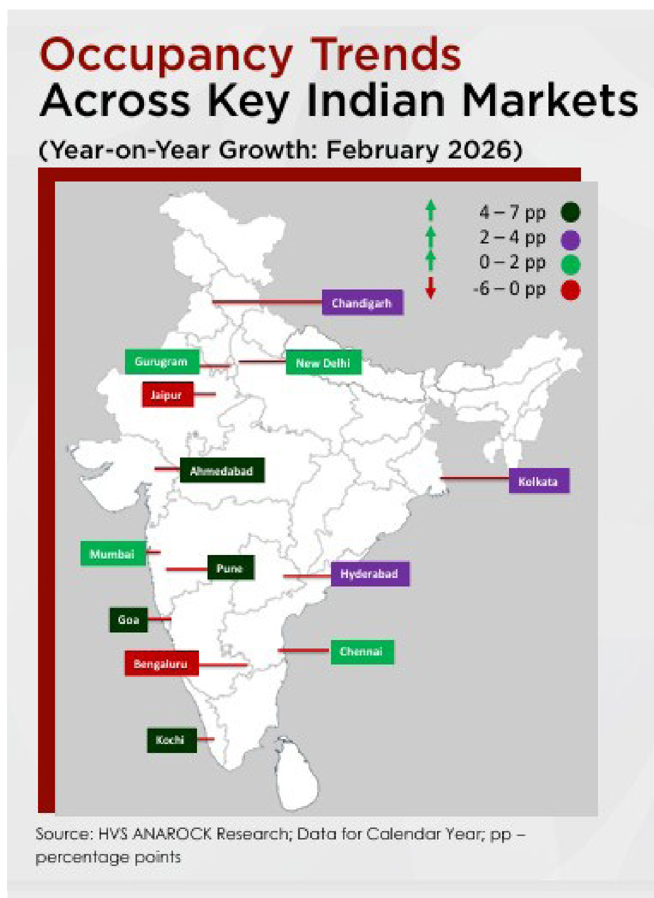


HBI Staff | Hyderabad

India's hotel sector continued its strong upward trajectory in February 2026, with the latest HVS ANAROCK Monitor highlighting robust gains across occupancy and room rates, supported by a surge in corporate, MICE, and wedding demand.

Occupancy levels remained elevated, with most key markets reporting over 75 per cent. Mumbai led with

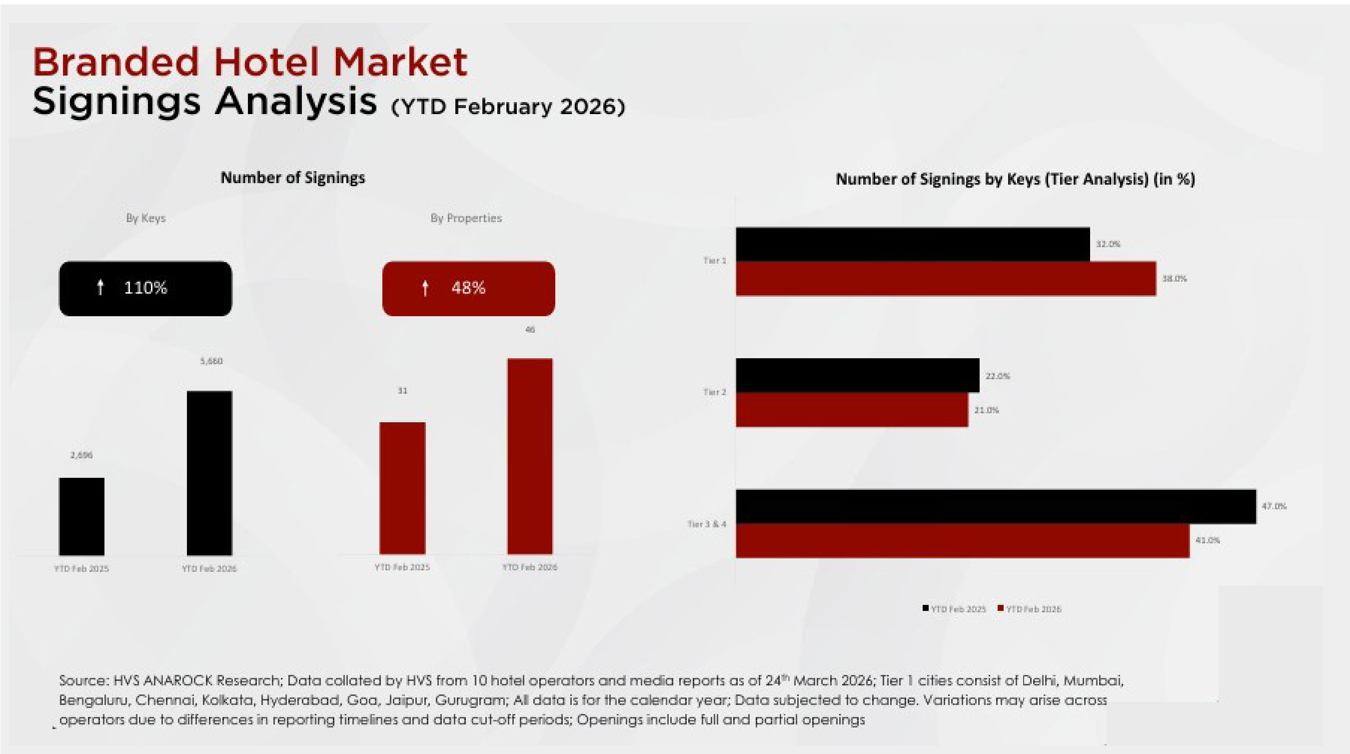


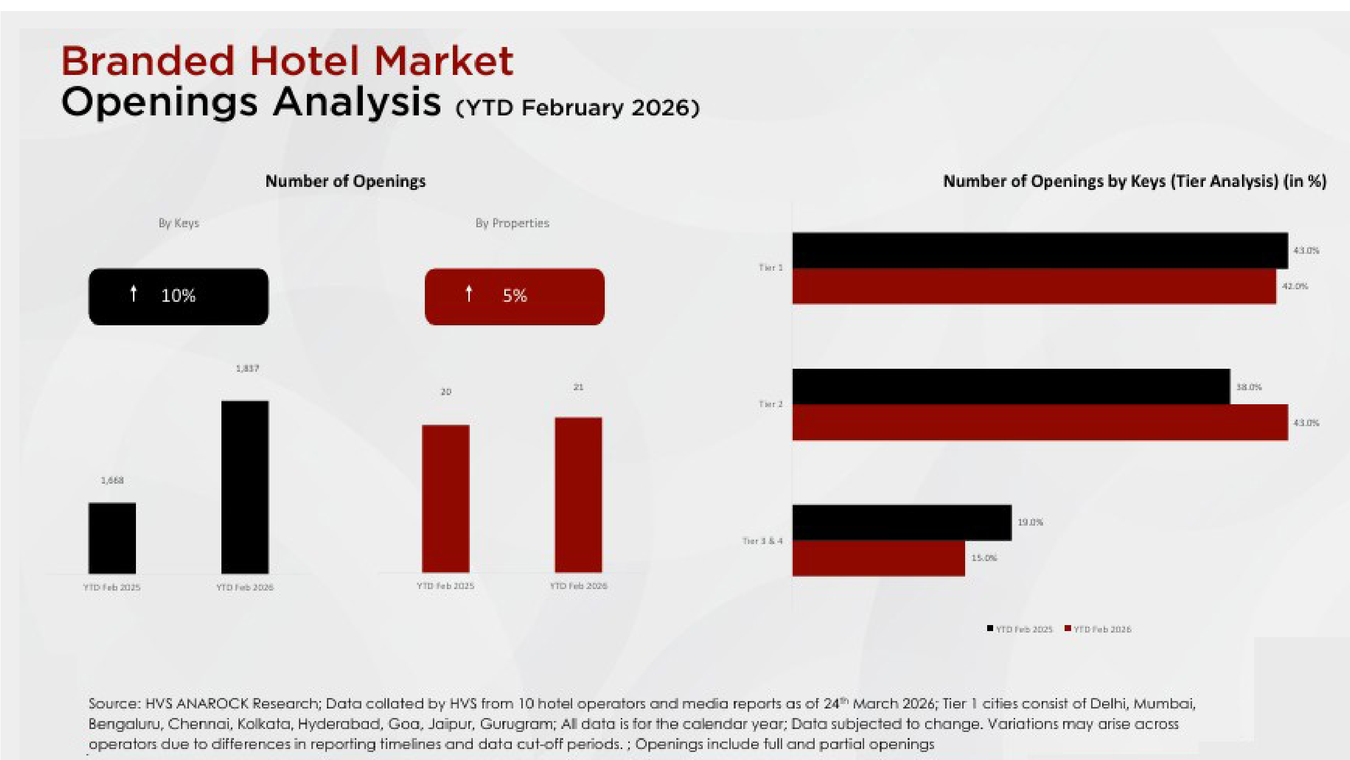


86–88 per cent occupancy, followed by New Delhi, Ahmedabad, and Chennai in the 85–87 per cent range. Delhi's strong performance was further supported by large-format events, including an AI summit, alongside sustained business and MICE demand. Goa also showed signs of recovery with consecutive growth.

On the pricing front, February saw some of the highest Average Room Rates (ARRs) across the country, with most markets posting double-digit year-on-year growth. New Delhi recorded the highest ARR, crossing INR 18,500, driven by events at Bharat Mandapam, while Mumbai followed closely. Jaipur and Gurugram also reported strong rate performance.

Overall, the sector recorded ARR in the range of INR 11,300–11,500 and occupancy at 73–75 per cent, resulting in RevPAR growth of 32–35 per cent month-on-month, underscoring sustained momentum in India's hospitality market. ■





Tramontina launches 'BESTOW' in India for professional kitchens

Tramontina has expanded its India portfolio with the launch of 'BESTOW', a premium enameled cast iron cookware range aimed at both professional kitchens and discerning home chefs. Designed for performance-led environments, the range offers superior heat retention and uniform cooking, making it suitable for slow braising, roasting and baking. The toxin-free enamel coating eliminates the need for seasoning while ensuring durability, ease of maintenance, and resistance to stains and rust—key considerations for high-usage hospitality settings.

Commenting on the launch, Aruni Mishra said, "With BESTOW, we are bringing globally loved enameled cast iron cookware to India, combining superior functionality with design-led aesthetics. This launch is a natural extension of our commitment to offering Indian homes as well as professional kitchens premium cookware that is built to last for generations."

Panasonic expands smart HVAC and cold chain portfolio for commercial applications

Panasonic Life Solutions India is strengthening its HVAC and cold chain portfolio with a focus on smart, energy-efficient and connected climate control solutions tailored for commercial and hospitality environments.

The company's latest offerings include a Smart 1 Way Cassette air conditioner featuring nanoe X technology and occupancy-based energy optimisation, aimed at improving indoor air quality while reducing energy consumption. Its expanded smart residential and light commercial range is designed to integrate seamlessly with connected building ecosystems through the MirAIe platform, enabling remote monitoring and control. Panasonic also highlighted innovations such as DustBuster, an outdoor unit auto-cleaning concept that enhances cooling efficiency and extends equipment life—key for high-usage hospitality operations.

Earthling expands ingredient portfolio with clean-label solutions for professional kitchens

Earthling Consumer Products has expanded its ingredient solutions portfolio with the launch of Royal Grove Peeled Tomatoes and Wonderfills Oats, targeting the evolving needs of professional kitchens. The Royal Grove peeled tomatoes are designed as a dependable base ingredient for high-volume operations, offering consistent flavour and texture across sauces, soups and global cuisine formats. Processed without artificial additives or preservatives, the product focuses on maintaining natural taste while simplifying prep for chefs operating at scale.Complementing this, Wonderfills Oats taps into the growing demand for nutrition-led menus. Naturally high in dietary fibre and free from additives, the product is positioned as a versatile ingredient for breakfast formats such as porridges, bowls and baked dishes, enabling operators to deliver healthier offerings without compromising on efficiency.

Indri unveils Rudhira with rare Pineau Cask maturation

Indri Single Malt Whisky has introduced a new chapter in India's premium spirits landscape with the launch of Indri Rudhira — the country's first single malt matured in Pineau des Charentes casks. Created in an exclusive collaboration with The Dram Club, the release marks a significant milestone in experimental cask maturation within the Indian whisky segment.

Limited to just 252 individually numbered bottles, the expression positions itself as a rare, collector-focused release within the growing domestic single malt category.

Available in Bengaluru at INR 12,500, the release caters to a discerning audience, further cementing India's position in the global conversation around premium single malts.

ITC HOTELS

Chef Sandeep Kapoor, Executive Chef, ITC Gardenia

In his new role, Chef Kapoor will be responsible for overseeing the hotel's overall kitchen operations, strategic planning, and culinary execution.

A seasoned culinary professional and an ITC Hotels veteran, Chef Kapoor brings over 17 years of extensive experience, including a distinguished tenure at the landmark ITC Grand Chola. His journey with the brand comes full circle, having begun his career at ITC Gardenia as a young chef, where he steadily progressed through the ranks through perseverance, craftsmanship, and operational excellence. An alumnus of the IHM Kolkata, Chef Kapoor brings strong technical expertise, along with a nuanced understanding of ITC Hotels celebrated culinary philosophy, branded cuisines, and service excellence standards.

JUNA MAHAL

Soumik Roy, General Manager, Juna Mahal, Ranthambore

With nearly two decades of extensive experience in the hospitality industry, Roy brings a strong background in luxury hotel operations, pre-opening leadership, and food and beverage strategy.

Over the course of his career, he has been associated with renowned properties and hospitality groups including The Beatle Hotel Powai, Azaya Beach Resort Goa, ONYX Hospitality Group, The Lalit Mumbai, Marriott Suites Pune, Hard Rock Hotel Goa, Swissôtel Kolkata, Park Hyatt Chennai, Holiday Inn Resort Goa, The Park Bangalore, and Grand Hyatt Mumbai. Prior to joining Juna Mahal, Roy served as Pre-Opening General Manager and Corporate F&B Director at Planet Hotels & Resorts India, where he played a pivotal role in shaping operational strategies, overseeing pre-opening developments, and strengthening food and beverage concepts across the group.

MRG GROUP

Sujata Gowda, Group General Manager Marketing & Communications , MRG Group

With over 19 years of distinguished experience in leading marketing and communications across Airlines, Hospitality, Real Estate & Media Sujata has worked with Sahara Airlines, Kingfisher Airlines, Taj hotels, IHG & Marriott to name a few.

Throughout her illustrious career, Sujata has excelled in various roles beyond the hospitality industry, bringing a wealth of diverse experience to her new position. Notably, she has held challenging and impactful roles with large pre-opening hotels across Mumbai, Hyderabad & now settled in Bengaluru.

Sujata's expertise spans a broad-spectrum including Sales, Marketing, Operations, Brand building, strategies innovations,media planning, budget management, corporate communication, website management and people management. Her outstanding rapport with print, electronic, and online media will continue to be an asset to strengthen brand presence and market reach.

HYATT HOTELS

Srinath Ravindranath, Director of Sales, Park Hyatt Chennai

In his new role, Srinath will lead the Sales function, working closely with teams to drive strategic growth, deepen client partnerships, and enhance the hotel's market presence across key segments. With over 13 years of experience in sales and marketing within the hospitality industry, including a significant tenure of 12 years with IHCL, Srinath brings a strong understanding of both market dynamics and customer engagement. Most recently, he served as Director of Sales at Vivanta Bengaluru, Whitefield, where he led commercial initiatives and contributed to strengthening the hotel's positioning in a competitive market.

IHCL

Mayank Mittal, General Manager, Pilibhit House - IHCL SeleQtions, Haridwar

With a rich experience of over 15 years with IHCL, Mittal is an influential hotelier bringing his extensive operational expertise and leadership to the role.

A seasoned hospitality professional, Mittal is known for his strategic approach, operational expertise and people-centric leadership style. In his new role, he will lead the overall operations of Pilibhit House, Haridwar – IHCL SeleQtions and will also oversee operations at Hari Ganga Niwas, Haridwar – IHCL SeleQtions. He will focus on strengthening operational excellence, enhancing guest experiences and reinforcing the signature warmth and hospitality associated with IHCL, while continuing to build on the property's legacy as an oasis of calm in the spiritual city of Haridwar. In his role as General Manager, Pilibhit House, Haridwar – IHCL SeleQtions, Mittal will report to the Cluster General Manager, Operations and will be responsible for further strengthening the hotel's positioning as a distinguished hospitality address for travellers visiting the spiritual city of Haridwar.

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