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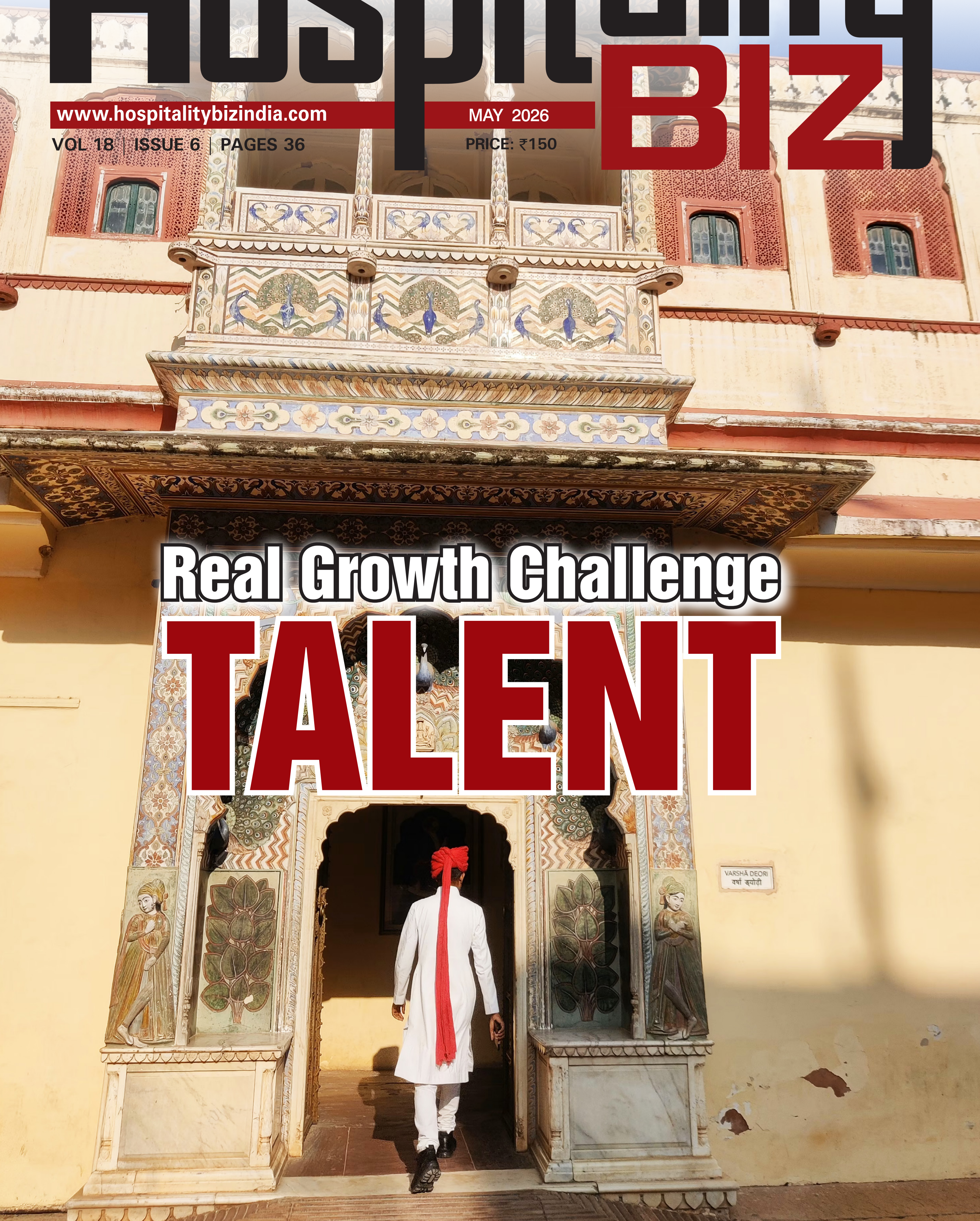

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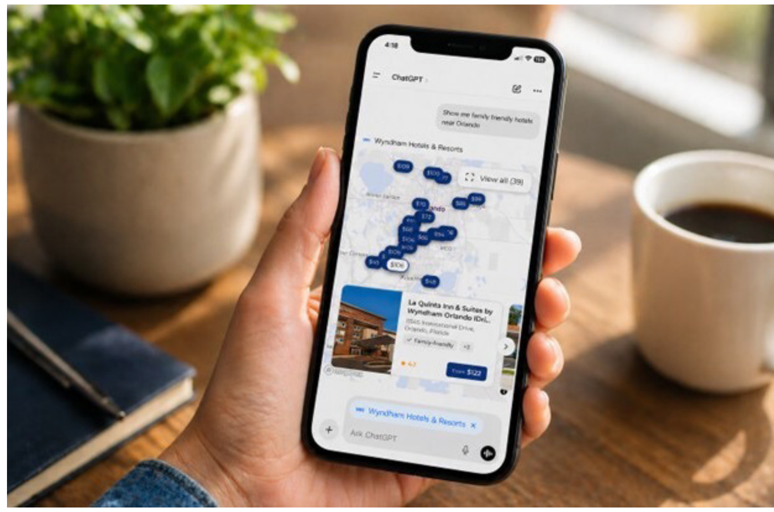
Wyndham launches ChatGPT app to boost hotel bookings



HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Wyndham Hotels & Resorts has launched a native app within ChatGPT, marking the first such integration by a major economy and midscale hotel franchisor in the US, as the company deepens its push into AI-led travel discovery and booking.

The app enables travellers to explore nearly 8,400 properties globally using conversational prompts, combining map-based navigation, amenity filters and interactive listings within a single interface. Users can then transition seamlessly to Wyndham's booking platform, creating a more direct path from search to transaction.

The move builds on Wyndham's broader AI strategy, underpinned by over $450 million in technology investments and a fully cloud-based infrastructure established in 2020. The company has been steadily embedding AI across operations—from call centres to guest engagement platforms—aimed at improving efficiency and unlocking new revenue streams for franchisees.

Early results indicate tangible gains. AI tools have reduced call handling times and improved conversion rates, while platforms like Wyndham Connect are driving incremental revenue through automated upselling and guest interaction. High-performing hotels within the network have reported significant additional revenue through these systems.

The ChatGPT integration also expands Wyndham's distribution ecosystem, following earlier collaborations with large language model platforms. As travel planning increasingly shifts toward conversational interfaces, the company is positioning itself to capture demand at the discovery stage itself.

For hotel owners, the strategy is clear: lower operating costs, higher direct bookings and improved customer engagement. For travellers, it signals a shift toward more intuitive, personalised and visually driven booking journeys—reshaping how hospitality is accessed in an AI-first environment. ■

IHCL expands amã Stays & Trails portfolio with bungalow cluster signing in Port Blair

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Indian Hotels Company (IHCL) has announced the signing of a cluster of amã Stays & Trails bungalows in Port Blair, marking the brand's entry into the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and strengthening its presence in emerging leisure destinations.

The upcoming development will comprise ten bungalows set within landscaped surroundings, located within walking distance of Manjery Beach. The property is designed to offer an experience-led stay, integrating wellness and recreation amenities including a spa, gym, swimming pool, and dedicated yoga and meditation decks, alongside a restaurant offering curated dining experiences.

This expansion aligns with IHCL's strategy to scale its homestay portfolio in response to growing demand for personalised and immersive travel. The amã Stays & Trails brand, which currently operates over 370 bungalows across India, focuses on delivering culturally rooted hospitality experiences across diverse leisure locations.

Port Blair, serving as the gateway to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, continues to gain traction as a tourism hub, driven by its blend of natural landscapes, marine experiences, and heritage assets such as Cellular Jail and nearby coastal destinations. The project is expected to further strengthen the region's premium accommodation offerings while catering to evolving traveller preferences centred around privacy, wellness, and experiential stays.

With this signing, IHCL continues to diversify its leisure portfolio, leveraging destination-led growth and expanding into high-potential island and resort markets. ■

Brigade Hotel Ventures & Marriott launch Courtyard By Marriott Kochi Infopark

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Brigade Hotel Ventures, in partnership with Marriott International, has launched Courtyard by Marriott Kochi Infopark, marking the rebranding and upgrade of the former Four Points by Sheraton Kochi Infopark.

Located in Kakkanad adjacent to Infopark Kochi, the 218-room property is positioned to cater to business, MICE and leisure travellers visiting key commercial hubs including Infopark and SmartCity. The hotel is situated approximately 45 minutes from Cochin International Airport. The upgraded property features contemporary guestrooms and suites equipped with dedicated workspaces, smart televisions and high-speed WiFi connectivity. It also houses over 8,000 square feet of meeting and event space spread across four venues.

The hotel offers four dining outlets alongside leisure facilities including a rooftop infinity pool, fitness centre and spa, aligning with the growing demand for integrated business and lifestyle hospitality experiences. The property will also be integrated into Marriott Bonvoy, Marriott International's global travel programme.

The opening further strengthens Brigade Hotel Ventures' hospitality footprint across South India. The company currently operates nine hotels with over 1,600 keys across Bengaluru, Chennai, Kochi, Mysuru and GIFT City through partnerships with global hospitality brands including Marriott, Accor and InterContinental Hotels Group. ■

Accor bets big on India's luxury hospitality growth driven by domestic demand

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Accor is sharpening its India expansion strategy as rising domestic demand continues to reshape the country's luxury hospitality landscape. The French hospitality major believes India's premium travel market is still in its early growth phase, with affluent Indian travellers increasingly driving demand for luxury hotels, experiential stays and lifestyle-led hospitality offerings.

Gaurav Bhushan
Chairman, Accor India

Speaking on the evolving market dynamics, Gaurav Bhushan highlighted that the growth momentum is now being led largely by domestic travellers rather than international tourists. According to him, Indian consumers are increasingly willing to spend on curated travel experiences, boutique stays and premium hospitality experiences within the country.

The company sees significant long-term potential in India's luxury and lifestyle hospitality segment as rising disposable incomes, improving infrastructure and evolving travel preferences continue to fuel demand across metros, leisure destinations and emerging tourism markets. Accor has been steadily expanding its India footprint across segments ranging from luxury and lifestyle hotels to premium business properties. The group currently operates multiple brands in the country including Fairmont, Sofitel, Pullman, Novotel, ibis and Raffles, while also strengthening the presence of lifestyle-focused brands under Ennismore. As part of its long-term growth strategy, Accor plans to significantly scale its India portfolio and is targeting nearly 300 hotels in the country by 2030. The company is particularly focusing on destinations witnessing strong domestic tourism demand, blended travel patterns and increasing appetite for experiential hospitality.

The development reflects a broader shift within India's hospitality industry, where domestic travellers are increasingly emerging as the primary growth engine for luxury hotels, premium resorts and destination-led travel experiences. ■

‘Marriott has significantly strengthened Noor Mahal’s positioning in the luxury hospitality space’

Mahesh Singh Jasrotia
GM, NoorMahal Delhi NCR Karnal

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

What benefits does the association with Marriott bring to Noor Mahal?

Our association with Marriott has significantly strengthened Noor Mahal’s positioning in the luxury hospitality space. Being part of Marriott Bonvoy, which today has over 29 crore members globally, gives us access to a vast international distribution network, a strong loyalty base, and enhanced brand visibility across domestic and global markets. It has also helped us elevate service benchmarks, operational excellence, and guest experiences while attracting discerning travellers who trust Marriott’s hospitality standards.

Which segments of travellers are you targeting beyond weddings ow with Marriott Bonvoy? What plans to tap MICE and leisure verticals?

While Noor Mahal continues to be a preferred destination for luxury weddings, we are now actively focusing on expanding our footprint in the MICE and leisure segments. With Marriott Bonvoy’s extensive member base and corporate outreach, we are targeting corporate retreats, conferences, incentive groups, and experiential leisure travellers seeking heritage luxury experiences. We are curating bespoke stay packages, wellness-led getaways, culinary experiences, and cultural immersions to position Noor Mahal as a preferred short-haul luxury destination.

What is your travel trade outreach plan?

Our travel trade outreach strategy includes strengthening partnerships with leading travel agents, tour operators, wedding planners, and MICE specialists across key markets. We are participating in trade shows, roadshows, and industry networking platforms while leveraging Marriott’s global sales ecosystem to increase visibility. Additionally, we are focusing on collaborative promotions, familiarisation trips, and targeted digital campaigns to drive awareness and bookings.

Which cities are your target markets?

Our primary target markets include Delhi NCR, Chandigarh, Ludhiana, Amritsar, Jaipur, Mumbai, and Bengaluru, given the strong demand for luxury weddings, corporate events, and leisure travel from these regions. We are also seeing growing interest from international markets through Marriott Bonvoy’s global network, particularly among travellers looking for authentic heritage hospitality experiences in India. ■

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Global Warning

Dubai's hospitality slowdown may seem like a regional crisis driven by geopolitics and falling tourist arrivals, but it also carries an important lesson for India's booming hotel industry.

For years, Dubai was the face of global luxury tourism. Massive hotels, continuous expansion, strong air connectivity, and record tourist inflows established it as a hospitality powerhouse. But recent closures and refurbishments of marquee properties like Radisson Blu Dubai Media City and Armani Hotel Dubai show how quickly the business can slow when global travel sentiment weakens.

And India India should pay attention here.

At one level, this could benefit Indian hospitality. A slowdown in Gulf tourism may push Indian travellers to spend more on domestic destinations like Goa, Kerala, Jaipur, and the Northeast. Luxury leisure, weddings, and family travel that once flowed to Dubai could increasingly stay at home.

But the larger message is more serious.

India is currently adding hotels at an unprecedented pace, with over 70,000 new rooms expected by 2030. The Investments are strong and demand remains healthy. Yet Dubai's experience is a reminder that hospitality is highly vulnerable to global uncertainty, aviation disruptions, and sudden shifts in consumer confidence.

There is also a human side to this slowdown. Thousands of Indians work in Dubai's hospitality sector. Hotel closures, salary cuts, and reduced operations directly affect jobs and remittances for many families back home.

Dubai will certainly recover. It always has. But its current slowdown underlines one truth every hospitality market must remember. Growth is easy during a boom, but surviving volatility is the real test.

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Managing Food Service Operations | Navigating Energy Crises 2026

By **Prof. Satish Jayaram,** PhD – Co-Creator | Cornell Certified CHRO Leader | Principal WGSHA

Navigating the energy crisis needs to be seen from a larger perspective than just the availability of cooking fuel. The answer lies in the pro-active re-programming of menu engineering options as decision choices. Knee-jerk price increases or passing on of incremental costs to loyal customers is short term thinking. This crisis offers an opportunity to reconsider the entire gamut of operational decisions. From menu optimization, vendor management and even skill expansion, quintessential hoteliers need to brace for another reset. Line expansion of food production cycles or value chains do not only lie in resourcing alternatives creatively. The real test lies in the consistency of bespoke service responsiveness even as ingredient or resource crises strike the entire industry. The pandemic did place restrictions and forced many hoteliers to put on their thinking caps. This time the solution demands a higher level of innovation. Aligning seasonality, resource allocation and talent deployment is the only profitable option left to incubate a series of medium-term approaches, alternated till needs are met.

1. Geopolitical Vs Sustainability Systems: Geo-political uncertainty remains an uncontrollable factor, a realignment towards changing production infrastructure and gearing for a sustainable future is mandated today. Chefs and service teams need to operate with their 'ear' to the ground offering customized yet flexible solutions to discerning guests. Consider recipes that meet exacting summer requirements and palates, leverage seasonality to change the menu. Work with ingredients needing lesser levels of transformation. Stay fresh, clean and enhance the consumption of local produce. The breakdown of supply chains that force-fit menus to meet reality checks, could really be a blessing in disguise. A focus on curating simpler daily menus rather than labouring over voluminous menu items would bode well. Fire-up sustainability systems, gain autonomy over menu cycles, rather than fretting over margins.
2. External Vs Internal Stakeholders: If high value solutions are suggested, external stakeholders will accept alternatives that are not positioned for rip-off profitability. A high degree of customization is possible by leveraging internal resources, talents and skill sets that are hitherto not fully used. Consider co-creating table level engagements, like providing a wide range of ingredient options for bespoke food assembly to meet varying taste palates. Portions need to be made flexible, aside pricing for one/two or even half portions. Training teams to deliver a higher quality of service with sharper resources is quite the answer. If the choice is to expand ranges, train to accommodate challenging requests with showcasing skills, rather than menu items alone. Meeting external stakeholder demands is the purpose of remaining in service. The ability to deploy internal stakeholder talent effectively, is the key to survival.
3. Cost Optimization Vs Revenue Strategy: Of top three cost heads, energy drags hands down after people costs. It is time to change productivity standards by seeking alternative recipes, techniques and optimizing raw material costs to design a new portfolio of offerings. This is the time to choose your revenue strategy effectively depending on positioning, to meet time of day choices by both volume and quality expectations. Over exposure to multiple complex menu items will only exacerbate costs, if not appropriately designed to extract contribution margins by plate and presentation. Keep it simple, most diners appreciate that special times need unique approaches to navigate the crises. Remove complex items and replace them with high value solutions needing lesser handling. Focusing on popular, easily replicable and signature offerings to drive revenues up, is the only way to accommodate cost fluctuations.

Developing a new perspective on energy/prana is a philosophical reset to provide more life-enhancing foods, a definite value addition. Much of the dissonance is now experienced by a high volume, bulk production approach to sequence heating, re-heating and re-serving imbroglios. The solution is to extend the concept of breathable operations, with ease rather than designing new complexities to offset emerging complications. Gas (pun intended) need not necessarily be the tunnel visioned moderator to keep food production operations going. At least until monsoon strikes, use this opportunity to shake your system out of its summer blues right away. Use time freed-up to curate new food trials that will deliver a new soup to the table to get out of this one! ■

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

News Bulletin

Eight Continents expands UK footprint with Cookstown deal

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Eight Continents Hotels & Resorts has strengthened its UK presence by adding The Royal Hotel Cookstown to its growing international portfolio.

The property will remain under the ownership of the Thom family, while operational control shifts to Eight Continents—highlighting a management-led expansion strategy rather than asset ownership.

The group plans to introduce structured frameworks, global service benchmarks, and staff training programs to improve efficiency, consistency, and guest satisfaction.

Efforts will include refining the hotel's identity across regional and international markets, aligning it with a more design-led and experience-driven brand approach.

Advanced revenue management techniques and process optimisation are expected to enhance commercial performance and occupancy yield.

For the hospitality ecosystem, this move reflects a growing trend of management contracts, where global operators scale through partnerships—bringing operational expertise, brand systems, and distribution strength to locally owned assets.

The addition aligns with Eight Continents' broader strategy of building a curated global portfolio focused on efficiency, service excellence, and experiential hospitality. ■

Light Bites, Easy Vibes at Le Café

Asmita Mukherjee | Hyderabad

In the middle of this scorching summer, finding a place that feels light, easy, and refreshing isn't always simple. And while cafés seem to be popping up everywhere, all trying to stand out, a few places don't really need to try that hard, just because it gets the basics right.

Nestled at Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre, Kondapur, Le Café is a European sidewalk-themed deli that serves baked delights and desserts. It has built a steady following over time, not just out of nostalgia, but because of the clean and fussfree food.

Le Café has recently introduced a new menu that brings together influences from French, English, and Indian cuisines. The mix is fairly easygoing familiar dishes with a slight twist, informed Prince Kumar, Pastry Chef.

We started our tasting session with the Croissant Omelette- a dish that sums up the fusion quite nicely. A flaky, buttery croissant is paired with a masala omelette, served with fries and garlic butter. The dish is comforting without being too much, making it ideal for a leisurely brunch or a light meal.

Next, the pizzas deliver on their promises. The Pork Pepperoni Pizza is classic and reliable, featuring savoury slices of pork sausage, a tangy tomato base, and well-melted mozzarella. It's simple, yet done right. In contrast, the Guntur Chicken Pizza adds a local twist. The spice from the Guntur-style chicken provides just the right amount of kick, balanced by the creaminess of the cheese, making it flavorful without being too much.

For something more indulgent, the Charcoal Storm burger leaves a lasting impression. With braised pulled lamb patty, smoked cheese, and a charcoal bun, offers a smokier flavour, it is indeed a irrestiable creation.

The cream roll takes you straight back to childhood, but with a more refined touch. Chef Kumar's version pairs a crisp, flaky outer layer with a light hazelnut-infused cream that doesn't feel overly sweet. The filling is soft and airy, almost melting as you bite into it, making it feel both familiar and a little more elevated.

On the other hand, the quinoa salad keeps things clean and nourishing. Made with black sprouted quinoa, pickled beetroot, and grilled vegetables with lemon dressing it leans into a high-protein, wholesome profile without feeling too heavy. The textures are well balanced, slightly nutty, fresh, and light making the dish an easy, no-fuss option, especially if you are looking for something healthier in this scorching weather.

Le Café's desserts are light on the stomach yet refreshing. The Khubani Ka Semifreddo shines with its delicate apricot flavours and airy texture. It's mildly sweet and gentle on the palate, making it a perfect way to end a meal in this weather.

The drinks hold their own character and fit seamlessly into the overall experience. The cappuccino is smooth and comforting – a well-balanced bitterness with creamy, airy notes, while the Callebaut Madagascar hot chocolate leans richer, with deep cocoa layered with a gentle hint of fruitiness.

The mocktails, on the other hand, are easy, refreshing companions, indeed perfect for lingering conversations. The Herbal Delight is light and clean, with orange juice, honey, and a touch of basil; the Sunset Splash brings in a mellow tropical sweetness with pineapple, honey, and lemongrass; and the Berry Basil Bliss rounds things off with soft strawberry notes, finished with a cherry on top.

A meal for two here would roughly come up to around INR 2,000, making it a fairly easy, no-fuss option for a laid-back outing. ■

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'Our strategy is focused on strengthening both domestic and international channels'

Over the past few years, Ranthambore has quietly evolved into a hub for experiential travel, it's no longer just about safaris. Today, the destination is attracting not only wildlife enthusiasts, but also luxury travellers, wedding planners, and corporate groups seeking something beyond the conventional. **Soumik Roy** has recently taken over as **General Manager of Juna Mahal Ranthambore**, bringing a renewed focus to the property's positioning and guest experience. In a conversation with **Asmita Mukherjee**, Roy shares his immediate priorities, his perspective on Ranthambore's evolving market, and how Juna Mahal aims to stand out in an increasingly competitive landscape.

What are your immediate priorities as you take over as General Manager at Juna Mahal Ranthambore?

My immediate focus is on strengthening the overall guest experience while aligning the property's identity as a distinctive luxury lifestyle destination. This includes refining service standards, enhancing F&B offerings, and building a strong, motivated team culture. Simultaneously, I am working towards establishing a clear brand narrative for Juna Mahal that resonates across all guest touchpoints and platforms.

How do you plan to position the property in an increasingly competitive luxury wildlife hospitality market?

Juna Mahal is positioned as a luxury lifestyle property rather than being defined by conventional star classifications. Our focus is on delivering immersive, design-led experiences that combine comfort, character, and individuality. In a competitive wildlife hospitality market, we differentiate ourselves through our unique architecture, curated experiences, and a strong emphasis on personalised stays.

What opportunities do you see in Ranthambore as a destination for high-value leisure and experiential travel?

Ranthambore has evolved significantly in recent years, especially post-COVID. While it was traditionally perceived as a wildlife and tranquillity-driven destination, it is now emerging as a hub for experiential travel, destination weddings, and MICE. This shift presents strong opportunities to attract high-value leisure travellers seeking curated, experience-rich stays beyond safaris.

How will you balance heritage, luxury, and modern guest expectations at the property?

At Juna Mahal, we have thoughtfully designed the property to reflect a balance between heritage and modernity. The heritage wing showcases traditional materials such as choona, mitti, wood, copper, and peetal, inspired by old fort architecture. In contrast, the new wing introduces contemporary textures and artistic elements, creating a distinct yet complementary contrast. This duality allows us to offer guests both authenticity and modern comfort within the same space.

What role will F&B innovation play in enhancing the overall guest experience?

F&B plays a pivotal role in enhancing the overall guest journey at Juna Mahal. We are introducing curated experiences such as floating breakfasts for pool villas, private dining under the stars, balcony and terrace dining, and food sampling for select guests. The bar is being completely reimagined with a focus on speakeasy-style cocktails and refined small plates. Additionally, we are revamping our breakfast presentation, crockery, and poolside dining with a seamless QR-based ordering system, ensuring both convenience and elevated aesthetics.

How do you plan to drive occupancy and RevPAR in a seasonal wildlife destination?

Ranthambore operates as a largely seasonal destination, with approximately six months of peak business. Our strategy focuses on maintaining a strong ADR aligned with or above market benchmarks while optimising occupancy through a mix of OTA-driven business and direct sales. We are also strengthening our presence in the group and agency segment through our sales team, alongside expanding international reach via GDS platforms. For the leaner monsoon period, targeted marketing initiatives are being planned to sustain consistent business flow.

What is your approach to building and retaining high-performing teams in remote leisure locations?

Building a strong team in a remote location requires a hands-on and people-centric approach. At Juna Mahal, we prioritise continuous engagement, regular performance evaluation, and recognition of even small achievements. A motivated team directly translates into better guest experiences. We strongly believe that external guest satisfaction is a reflection of how valued and empowered our internal team feels.

How do you see demand evolving for wildlife and nature-led destinations in India?

The demand for wildlife and nature destinations in India has always existed, but its nature has evolved. Earlier, it was largely driven by photography enthusiasts and individual travellers. Today, it has expanded into a broader experiential segment that includes destination weddings, social celebrations, and MICE. This shift reflects a growing preference for unique, immersive destinations that offer both exclusivity and memorable experiences.

What strategies will you adopt to attract both domestic and international travellers?

Our strategy is focused on strengthening both domestic and international channels through a structured distribution and sales approach. Currently, a significant share of our business comes through OTAs, and we will continue to optimise this channel for domestic travellers. At the same time, our sales team is actively working on increasing group and agency bookings.

For international travellers, we are in the process of expanding our presence through GDS (Global Distribution System) platforms to improve global accessibility and visibility. Additionally, with the growing demand for weddings and MICE in Ranthambore, we aim to tap into these segments to attract a wider mix of both domestic and international guests. ■

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News Bulletin

Franchise partnerships to reshape India's hotel growth story

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

India's hospitality sector is witnessing a fresh wave of expansion as hotel advisory and brand partnership firms like Franchise 100 continue to facilitate strategic tie-ups between property owners and domestic as well as international hotel brands. The trend reflects the growing appetite for branded hospitality assets across emerging leisure and business destinations in the country.

From midscale hotels to luxury resorts and serviced apartments, developers are increasingly opting for franchise and management partnerships to improve visibility, distribution and long-term operational efficiency. Industry experts believe this model is becoming particularly attractive for independent hotel owners looking to align with established hospitality brands without fully relinquishing ownership control.

Franchise 100 has been actively involved in facilitating operator searches and hospitality structuring for projects across Hyderabad, Delhi NCR, Mumbai Metropolitan Region, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Uttarakhand. The consultancy has worked with brands including Marriott, Radisson, ITC Hotels, Wyndham, The Clarks and Cygnett.

The momentum also comes at a time when global hotel operators are rapidly expanding their India footprint. Companies like IHG, Accor, Hilton and Hyatt continue to identify India as one of their key growth markets, driven by rising domestic travel demand, infrastructure development and increasing investor confidence in hospitality real estate. The growing shift towards franchise-led and asset-light hotel models is helping accelerate expansion into tier II and tier III cities, while also opening opportunities for mixed-use hospitality developments, branded residences and experiential resorts across the country. ■

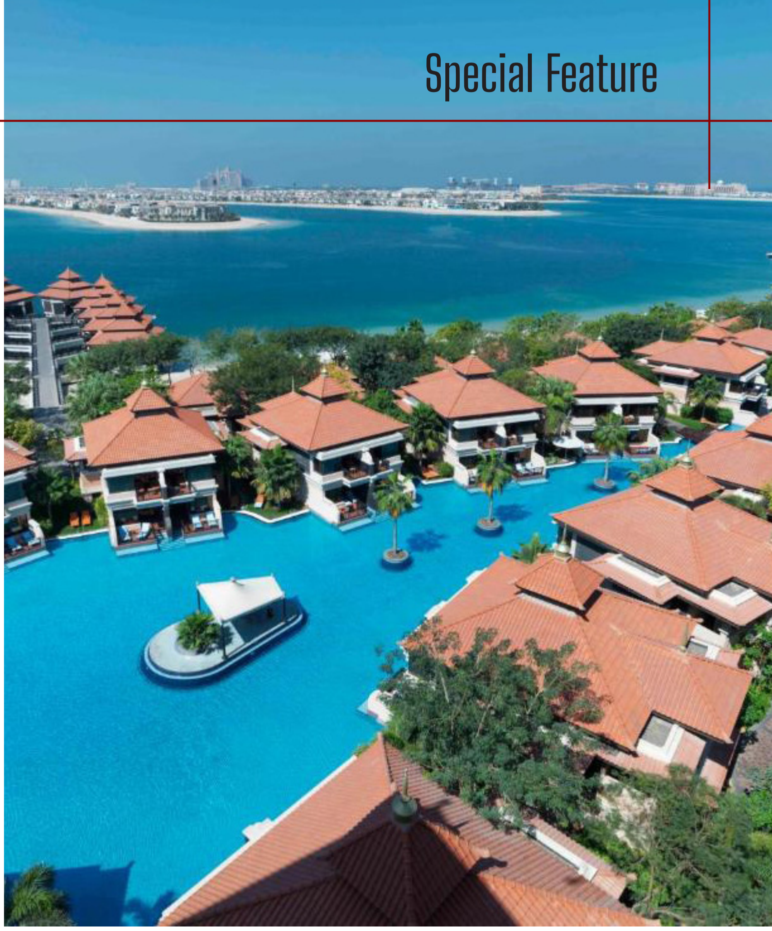
Dubai hospitality faces a reset

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Dubai's hospitality sector, long defined by scale, spectacle and relentless growth, is entering a far more complex phase where resilience is being tested in real time.

A series of high-profile hotel closures across the emirate is beginning to signal a shift in market dynamics. Properties such as the Radisson Blu Dubai Media City have shut their doors permanently, marking the exit of a once prominent business hotel in a key commercial district. At the ultra-luxury end, the Armani Hotel Dubai has closed temporarily for an extensive refurbishment, while the iconic Burj Al Arab is set to undergo an 18-month renovation, with reopening expected in 2027.

Other properties reflect similar patterns. Anantara World Islands Dubai Resort confirmed a permanent closure in April 2026 following a joint decision with owners, pointing to external pressures that have reshaped demand at the very top end of the resort market. St. Regis Dubai, The Palm has also partially shut operations for refurbishment, aligning with a broader industry trend toward asset enhancement.



Individually, these developments may reflect asset repositioning cycles, but taken together, at a time when Dubai's tourism engine is under visible strain.

The ongoing geopolitical conflict in the region has sharply disrupted travel flows, reversing the strong momentum the city built in recent years. After welcoming nearly 20 million international visitors last year, Dubai is now witnessing a steep decline in tourist arrivals. Hotel occupancy levels, which typically remain robust through the season, have dropped dramatically, in some cases falling to as low as 15 to 20 percent.

The impact is being felt across the ecosystem. According to the reports, restaurants that once thrived on a steady mix of tourists and residents are now operating at a fraction of their usual capacity.

Hotels, too, are recalibrating. Discounting strategies have intensified, particularly across luxury resorts, where room rates have been slashed in an attempt to stimulate domestic demand. At the same time, some operators are choosing to temporarily suspend operations or bring forward renovation plans, using the downturn as an opportunity to reset assets for the next demand cycle.

Flight disruptions and airspace uncertainty have compounded the challenge. As one of the world's busiest aviation hubs, Dubai's connectivity has been central to its tourism success. Reduced flight schedules and cancellations have not only impacted arrivals but also created uncertainty for future bookings, particularly in the meetings and events segment, which is a key demand driver for the city.

The ripple effects extend beyond balance sheets. Dubai's hospitality workforce, much of it made up of migrant employees, is facing renewed pressure as companies adjust to lower demand. Reduced hours, unpaid leave and job uncertainty are becoming part of the operating reality, echoing disruptions last seen during the pandemic.

Yet, even amid this slowdown, the current phase is not simply about decline. It is also revealing how the market is evolving. The closure of older assets, combined with the refurbishment of flagship properties, points to a broader cycle of reinvestment and repositioning. Dubai has historically demonstrated an ability to respond quickly to external shocks, often emerging with upgraded infrastructure and sharper positioning.

What is unfolding now is a recalibration of both supply and strategy. Operators are being forced to rethink cost structures, demand segmentation and asset utilisation in a more volatile environment. The city's dependence on international travel is being tested, while the importance of domestic and regional demand is becoming more pronounced.

Dubai's hospitality story has always been built on ambition and adaptability. The current disruption, while severe, is unlikely to alter that long-term trajectory. Instead, it is accelerating a transition from rapid expansion to more disciplined growth, where performance, efficiency and asset quality will matter more than ever.

For a market that has rarely slowed down, this moment is less about pause and more about reset. ■

India's hospitality sector is entering a more durable growth phase, supported by strong demand fundamentals, rising institutional participation, and a clear shift toward premiumisation and disciplined expansion. According to **Anshuman Magazine, Chairman & CEO – India, South-East Asia, Middle East & Africa at CBRE**, the current momentum reflects a structural re-rating rather than a cyclical rebound. In an exclusive interaction with **Asmita Mukherjee**, Anshuman Magazine outlines the key indicators underpinning this upcycle.

'Scale without discipline is a risk'

India's hospitality sector is moving from recovery to structural growth. What are the strongest indicators that this is a sustained upcycle rather than a cyclical rebound?

The sector has maintained a strong growth momentum throughout 2025 despite year-end headwinds such as geopolitical tensions and operational disruptions in the aviation sector. Occupancy levels reached approximately 64%, while RevPAR rose 11% year-on-year, surpassing the 9% growth recorded in 2024, and ADR increased by 8.7%. What is particularly compelling is the demand composition underpinning these numbers. The sector is transitioning from post-pandemic recovery into a phase of structural maturity, marked by disciplined expansion and stable pricing strategies. Domestic tourism posted a 40% year-on-year rise in visits to 4.1 billion in 2025, and CBRE estimates the hospitality market will grow from approximately USD 24.6 billion in 2024 to roughly USD 31 billion by 2029. It is not a rebound but a re-rating.

With over 70,000 new keys expected by 2030, how should developers and operators approach supply expansion to avoid the risk of overbuilding?

Scale without discipline is a risk, and our data makes this clear. The sector is witnessing a realignment, with operators increasingly adopting asset-light expansion models such as management contracts and franchise partnerships to strengthen balance sheets and pursue more disciplined growth strategies. Geography matters as much as format. Major hospitality players are evaluating opportunities across tier-II and tier-III cities, supported by improving connectivity and expanding tourism infrastructure, where the country's extensive base of independent and unbranded hotels presents opportunities for asset aggregation and brand conversions. A phased, demand-anchored approach, calibrated to infrastructure timelines and the clear consumer shift toward premium and experience-led formats, will be the defining discipline of this expansion cycle.

Hotel deal activity has surged significantly. What is driving this renewed institutional interest, and how are investment strategies evolving?

The numbers reflect a genuine shift in conviction. The sector witnessed a significant surge in investment activity in 2025, with total hotel deal value reaching approximately USD 456 million, a 2.5-fold year-on-year increase from USD 184 million in 2024. As CBRE notes, this momentum is structural rather than opportunistic. Investment activity in the hospitality sector is likely to remain active through 2026, supported by sustained travel demand and continued investor interest in scalable hospitality platforms. The strategic playbook has also evolved, consolidation activity is expected to gain momentum in 2026, with operators increasingly exploring acquisition-led growth strategies to scale portfolios and broaden market presence. Major players have also turned to public markets, using high-profile IPOs to raise capital, reduce debt, and accelerate regional expansion, a sign of the sector's growing institutional confidence.

There is a clear shift toward upper-midscale and upscale developments. Is this purely demand-driven, or are developers also influencing this premiumisation trend?

It is both simultaneously. The supply pipeline in 2025 shifted decisively towards premiumisation, addressing the heightened consumer appetite for luxury experiences, with the upper midscale, upper upscale, and upscale categories cumulatively accounting for 60% of new openings. Developers are not simply responding to demand signals, they are actively steering inventory toward higher-yield segments as a margin strategy. Developers and operators are transitioning towards higher-yield, experience-driven assets, increasingly focusing on integrated mixed-use hubs and residential-style luxury offerings to cater to high-net-worth individuals seeking a "hotel-at-home" lifestyle. Premiumisation is therefore as much a supply-side conviction as it is a demand-side response.

Tier-II, Tier-III, and spiritual destinations are gaining traction. What makes these markets investment-ready today?

The investment case for these markets has been fundamentally strengthened by infrastructure. The spiritual and heritage landscape is evolving into a year-round institutional demand segment, supported by government investments and the overhaul of national transit networks. Infrastructure developments such as proposed high-speed rail corridors and the ongoing expansion of the national aviation sector are enhancing accessibility and enabling premium operators to enter emerging markets. Institutional players are increasingly diversifying into leisure destinations, pilgrimage hubs, and emerging commercial cities where branded room supply remains constrained, opening space for conversion, greenfield, and brownfield opportunities. Lower land costs, limited branded competition, and a diversified demand mix spanning leisure, spiritual, and decentralisedcorporate travel further strengthen the investment thesis. Brands entering these markets must anchor offerings in local cultural context, wellness retreats, heritage conversions, and immersive formats that resonate with the character of the destination.

Beyond room revenue, how are hotels rethinking asset utilisation to maximise returns?

The most forward-looking operators have already repositioned themselves. Developers and operators are transitioning towards higher-yield, experience-driven assets, with an increasing focus on integrated mixed-use hubs and residential-style luxury offerings catering to high-net-worth individuals. Beyond rooms, destination-led F&B, MICE infrastructure, branded residences, and curated wellness experiences are becoming core revenue levers. We expect investment activity to remain active through 2026, driven by sustained travel demand and growing investor interest in scalable hospitality platforms, with institutional investors increasingly exploring opportunities in both operational assets and development projects. This multi-revenue model enhances guest engagement, drives higher spend per customer, and creates more resilient, diversified income streams that reduce dependence on occupancy-driven room revenue alone.

What are the key risks that could disrupt this growth trajectory, and how should stakeholders prepare?

Resilience has already been tested, and the sector has held. The sector maintained strong growth momentum throughout 2025 despite geopolitical headwinds and operational disruptions in the aviation sector. But this resilience should not breed complacency. Macroeconomic volatility, demand disruptions, and cost inflation remain live risks. The strategic response, as CBRE's data reinforces, lies in structural preparedness, asset-light models that strengthen balance sheets, diversification across geographies and demand segments, and acquisition-led growth strategies that build scale without concentrating risk. Stakeholders who treat resilience as a design principle rather than a reactive response will be best placed to navigate future volatility.

Which segments within hospitality are currently attracting the most investor interest, and why?

Investor interest is broad-based but increasingly purposeful. Investor interest is shifting towards leisure destinations, pilgrimage centres, and emerging commercial cities with constrained branded supply, markets where entry barriers are lower and yield potential is higher. Within segments, both ends of the quality spectrum are drawing capital: midscale for its scalability and strong domestic demand base, and premium, upscale, upper upscale, and luxury, for superior yield and alignment with India's premiumisation trend. Developers and operators are also transitioning towards higher-yield, experience-driven assets, increasingly focusing on integrated mixed-use hubs and residential-style luxury offerings.

Alternative formats such as wellness retreats and experiential stays are emerging as attractive investment avenues given their differentiated positioning and ability to capture premium demand.

Which micro-markets or regions are emerging as the most attractive for hospitality development, and what is driving this shift?

Metro cities continue to anchor institutional portfolios with stable, year-round demand. But the growth frontier has decisively moved. The rise in domestic travel has led to a broader distribution of demand beyond traditional metro cities, with increased activity in tier-II and tier-III locations, encouraging hotel operators to expand their footprint in emerging markets where branded supply remains limited. Spiritual and heritage tourism is emerging as a year-round demand driver, supported by infrastructure upgrades such as aviation expansion and high-speed rail projects. Destinations such as Varanasi, Shirdi, Puri, Ujjain, and Rishikesh exemplify this shift. The convergence of infrastructure improvement, undersupply of branded inventory, and diversifying demand makes these among the most compelling micro-markets in the current cycle.

How do you see India positioning itself within the global hospitality landscape over the next decade?

The combination of a large and fast-growing domestic travel base, accelerating premiumisation, deepening institutional participation, and a maturing asset-light operating model positions India as one of the most structurally attractive hospitality investment destinations globally. With strong travel demand, improving connectivity, and sustained investor interest, we expect continued deal activity, consolidation, and long-term expansion across India's hospitality sector through 2026 and beyond. Policy tailwinds, from GST rationalisation to hospitality skills development, will further consolidate India's standing as a high-growth, long-cycle market with significant and sustained upside. ■

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India's hotel sector eyes 70,000 new keys by 2030 on strong growth momentum: Report

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

India's hospitality sector is entering a new phase of structured growth, with listed hotel operators expected to add over 70,000 keys by 2030, according to CBRE's India Alternate Sectors Outlook 2026. The industry is moving beyond post-pandemic recovery into a more mature cycle marked by disciplined expansion and stable pricing.

The market size is projected to grow from about USD 24.6 billion in 2024 to nearly USD 31 billion by 2029, driven largely by domestic tourism. Travel demand remains strong, with domestic visits rising sharply in 2025, supporting occupancy levels of around 64%. Financial performance has also improved, with RevPAR growing 11% year-on-year and average room rates rising by nearly 9%.

Supply trends indicate a clear shift towards premium segments, with upper midscale to upscale categories accounting for a majority of new hotel openings. At the same time, investment activity has picked up significantly. Hotel deal values reached approximately USD 456 million in 2025, marking a sharp increase from the previous year, as institutional investors continue to expand their presence in the sector.

Operators are increasingly adopting asset-light models such as management contracts and franchise agreements to scale efficiently while maintaining stronger balance sheets. There is also growing interest in acquisitions and portfolio expansion, particularly across tier-II and tier-III cities where improving infrastructure and rising demand are opening new opportunities.

The sector is also seeing a shift towards experience-led offerings, including integrated developments and lifestyle-driven hospitality formats. With supportive policy measures, improved connectivity, and sustained investor interest, India's hospitality industry is expected to maintain steady momentum through the next few years. ■

Figure 2.10: ADR, RevPAR, and occupancy trends in India's hotel sector (2021-2025)

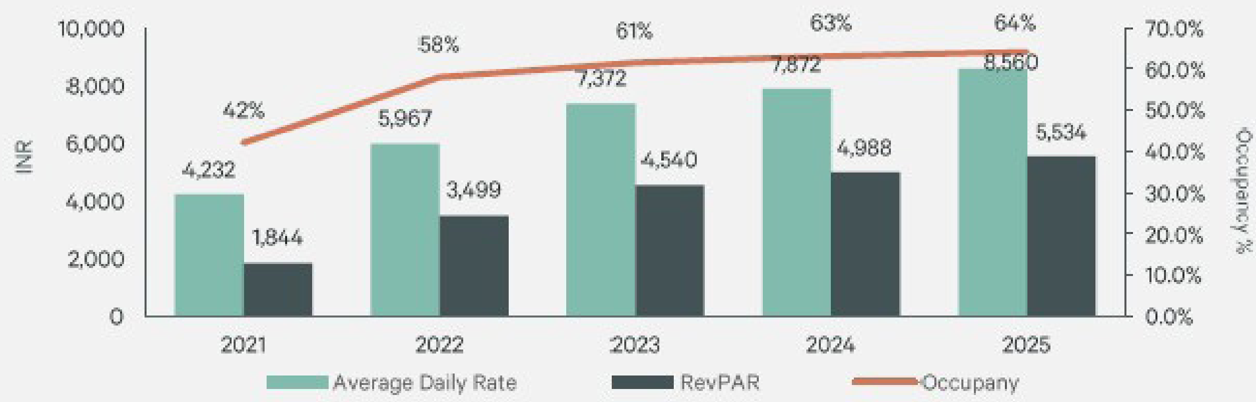
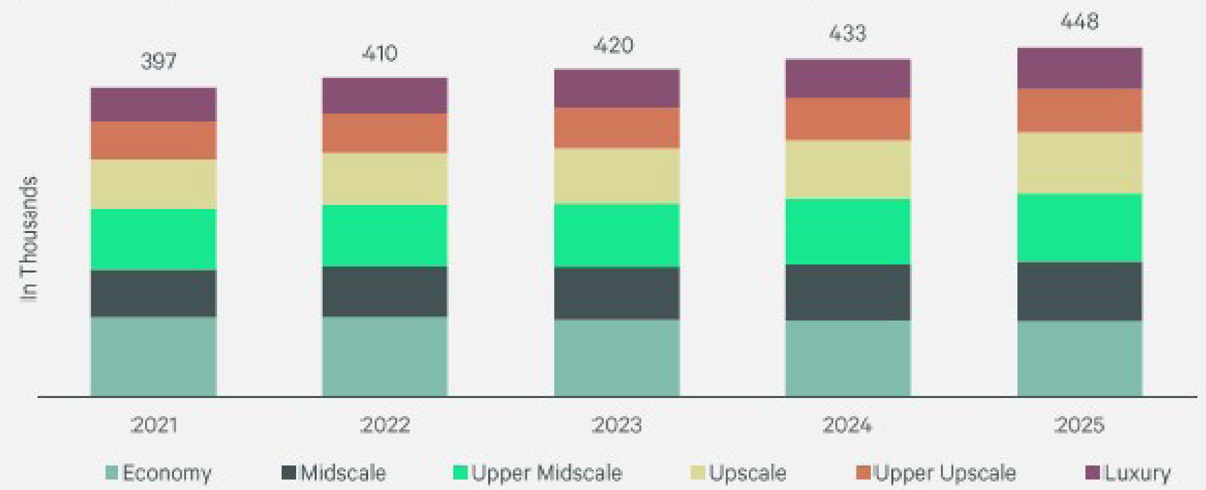


Figure 2.11: Segment-wise share of India's total hotel inventory (2021-2025)



Source: Co-Star, CBRE Research, Q1 2026

Table 2.1: Select institutional activity across India's hospitality sector

Institutional Investor	Operator	Deal value (in USD million)
GIC	35% stake in SAMHI Hotels Ltd.	~88
Warburg Pincus	41% stake in Lemon Tree's subsidiary Fleur Hotels	~105
Blackstone	~55% stake in Nitesh Land, owner of Ritz Carlton, Bengaluru	~65

Source: Co-Star, publicly available information, CBRE Research, Q1 2026 | Note: Data is indicative and reflects key expansion announcements only

Top Trends Expected to Shape India's Hospitality Sector in 2026

The Indian hospitality sector is positioned for steady growth in 2026, transitioning from a phase of post-pandemic recovery to structural maturity characterised by disciplined expansion and pricing stability. The industry market size, valued at ~USD 24.6 billion in 2024, is projected to reach ~USD 31 billion by 2029 (at a CAGR of 4.7%)1. This trajectory is underpinned by rising disposable incomes and improving accessibility facilitated by large-scale infrastructure development. Sectoral momentum is further supported by a resilient macroeconomic environment and the expansion of premium commercial spaces. In 2025, domestic tourism recorded a sharp jump, with domestic tourist visits (DTVs) rising to 4.1 billion from 2.9 billion in 2024, marking a ~40% Y-o-Y increase2. To capitalise on this underlying growth potential, listed hotel operators in India are projected to add ~70,000 to 80,000 keys by 20303. This points towards four structural themes that are likely to influence the sector's trajectory in 2026: connectivity-led demand expansion, experience-driven asset evolution, consolidation-oriented investment strategies, and enabling policy support.

01 Connectivity-led demand expansion set to strengthen spiritual and heritage hubs

India's spiritual and heritage landscape is evolving as a year-round institutional demand segment, supported by government investment and an overhaul of national transit networks. The foundation of this shift is a substantial commitment to connectivity, evidenced by the near-doubling of the PRASHAD scheme outlay to INR 245 crore for FY2026-274.

Infrastructure milestones, including proposed high-speed rail corridors and the ongoing expansion of the national aviation sector, are enhancing accessibility and enabling premium operators to enter emerging markets with greater logistical confidence. Recent portfolio expansions, such as Lemon Tree's entry into Varanasi, Radisson's scaling in Shirdi, Puri, and Ujjain, and the presence of Taj, ITC, and Westin in Rishikesh underscore a strategic pivot towards capturing institutionalised demand across spiritual and cultural centres.

02 Experience-led positioning: Shift towards "feel-good" hospitality formats set to accelerate

In 2026, the sector is expected to accelerate its transition from conventional inventory towards higher-yield, experience-driven assets. Developers and operators are increasingly focusing on integrated mixed-use hubs and residential-style luxury offerings to cater to HNIs seeking a "hotel-at-home" lifestyle. This approach prioritises emotional comfort, professional management, and globally aligned design standards.

The 2026 landscape is also likely to be shaped by the rise of specialised formats, including wellness-led retreats, experiential villas, and heritage conversions. This reflects a shift among discerning consumers towards unique, high-touch environments, with a demonstrated willingness to pay a premium for curated services and 'feel-good' aesthetics.

03 Strategic consolidation, asset-light expansion poised to shape investment activity

The hospitality sector is witnessing a gradual strategic realignment, with operators increasingly adopting asset-light expansion models such as management contracts and franchise partnerships. This shift away from capital-intensive ownership structures has enabled hotel companies to strengthen balance sheets and pursue more disciplined growth strategies, enhancing the sector's institutional appeal.

As the industry expands, consolidation activity is expected to gain momentum in 2026. With India's branded hotel inventory estimated at ~450,000 keys5 and room-to-traveller ratios indicating headroom for further capacity expansion, operators are increasingly exploring acquisition-led growth strategies to scale portfolios and broaden market presence. Major hospitality players including IHCL, Marriott, and Accor are evaluating opportunities across tier-II and tier-III cities, supported by improving connectivity and expanding tourism infrastructure.

For several listed players, acquisitions and strategic partnerships are also emerging as an efficient route for portfolio expansion, supported by their recently expanded capital base. At the same time, India's extensive base of independent and unbranded hotels presents opportunities for asset aggregation and brand conversions. Against this backdrop, investment activity in the hospitality sector is likely to remain active through 2026, supported by sustained travel demand and continued investor interest in scalable hospitality platforms.

India's hospitality sector is expanding rapidly on the back of strong demand and rising investments. But industry leaders believe the real test now lies in building skilled talent that can sustain service quality at scale. **Asmita Mukherjee** writes...

Real Growth Challenge TALENT

Demand Surge

India's hospitality industry is entering what many believe could be its most defining growth cycle yet. With more than 70,000 new hotel keys projected to enter the market by 2030, the conversation is no longer centred only on expansion. The sharper debate now is whether the sector can sustain service quality, pricing power, and profitability while scaling at this unprecedented speed.

But behind the optimism lies a more important question. Can the industry sustain service quality, pricing power, and profitability while expanding at this pace?

For hospitality leaders, the answer lies less in demand and more in execution. Amitesh Osta, CHRO, MRG Group, believes India's hospitality growth story remains firmly rooted in real consumer demand rather than speculative expansion. "The Indian hospitality

growth story is fundamentally demand-led rather than speculative. Domestic travel forms the backbone of this demand, contributing nearly 85 - 90% of the total," Osta said.

The numbers support the confidence. Before the pandemic, hospitality contributed over 5% to India's GDP. That figure collapsed during Covid, but the rebound has been swift as revenge travel, rising disposable incomes, infrastructure upgrades, and experiential tourism reshaped consumption patterns.

"Post pandemic, the recovery was initially slow but quickly gained momentum, driven by pent-up demand for travel and experiences," Osta noted. "Today, the sector has rebounded strongly."

Across the industry, there is broad agreement that India possesses the demand depth needed to absorb incoming supply. Yet executives are equally clear that expansion alone will not guarantee returns.

Supply Discipline

For operators, the real challenge is not whether rooms will fill, but whether supply is entering the right markets and is backed by the right strategy. Mugdha Mahambrey, Head of People and Culture, Chalet Hotels Limited, said the industry is entering a more mature phase where the quality of growth matters more than sheer expansion. "India is clearly in a strong demand phase for hospitality right now, with pricing holding up well across most key markets," Mahambrey said. "But the real question is not demand. It is how and where this supply comes in."

She explained the industry is gradually shifting from occupancy-driven growth to focused performance, where asset quality, location strength, and demand mix matter far more than simply selling rooms.

She added that hotels in strong commercial hubs and established leisure destinations are expected to remain resilient. But weaker micro markets could face pricing pressure if supply grows faster than local demand.

Osta echoed that view sharply. "India does not have a demand problem. It has an execution, talent, and micro market selection challenge. Success will not depend on who builds the most rooms, but on who builds in the right locations, with the right talent, and delivers meaningful guest experiences," he remarked.

Amitesh Osta
CHRO
MRG Group

Mugdha Mahambrey
Head of People and Culture
Chalet Hotels Limited

Anshuman Magazine
Chairman and CEO, India, South East Asia, Middle East and Africa, CBRE

That distinction is becoming increasingly critical as institutional capital flows deeper into hospitality.

Capital Momentum

According to Anshuman Magazine, Chairman and CEO, India, South East Asia, Middle East and Africa at CBRE, India's hotel industry has entered a "hyper growth cycle" driven by a sharp increase in investment activity.

"The sector is entering a hyper-growth cycle, fuelled by a massive influx of institutional capital," Magazine said, pointing to a 2.5-fold year-on-year surge in hotel investments.

Large operators are aggressively scaling through asset-light management and franchise models, especially across tier - II and tier - III cities where branded hotel penetration still remains relatively low.

At the same time, ownership structures are evolving. Private equity firms, family offices, and institutional investors are increasingly viewing hospitality as a long-term asset class. That shift is raising expectations around operational consistency, profitability, and asset performance.

"In these premium formats, sustaining historic highs in ADRs is strictly tethered to exceptional, high-touch guest experiences," Magazine observed. And that is precisely where the industry's biggest challenge begins.

Talent Pressure

The hospitality industry is built on infrastructure, but it survives on people.

As hotel companies race to add inventory, the pressure on talent pipelines is intensifying across operational and managerial levels. The pandemic left deep scars on the workforce, with many professionals moving to aviation, retail, technology-enabled services, and overseas markets. "Attrition and talent retention have always been challenges in the hospitality sector, and these issues intensified post pandemic," Osta said. "Annual attrition rates in hospitality continue to range between 40 - 50%, and there is a steady outflow of talent to international markets, particularly in GCC countries," he added.

According to industry leaders, the challenge is no longer just hiring people, but rather It is preparing talent that can deliver consistent guest experiences from day one. "From a human capital standpoint, the challenge is not just availability. It is readiness at scale," Mahambrey explained. "The real gap is having people who can step in and deliver immediately."

This is becoming especially important because the nature of hotel supply itself is changing. Nearly half of recent openings are concentrated in upper midscale and upscale segments where guests expect highly personalised, experience-driven service. "Continuous skilling and robust retention strategies are now critical financial imperatives, not just HR metrics," Magazine said. In other words, talent is no longer an HR conversation alone, it has become a business survival issue.

Learning Culture

To address the gap, hospitality companies are redesigning how they build and retain talent. Traditional classroom-led training is giving way to continuous learning ecosystems focused on practical exposure, leadership development, and long-term career progression. At Chalet Hotels, Mahambrey said the company has built structured interventions across every stage of the employee lifecycle. "At Chalet, we are addressing this through a structured, end-to-end talent ecosystem," she said. Programmes such as Neev, Lakshya, Udaan, and Shikhar are aimed at building foundational capability, accelerating leadership readiness, and creating internal growth pathways. "These interventions ensure people see both purpose and growth within the organisation," she added.

The larger industry is also investing more aggressively in campus partnerships, in-house academies, and technology-enabled learning models. Osta believes the sector now needs to shift from reactive hiring to long-term "talent farming." "Going forward, the industry must focus more on talent development rather than relying solely on external hiring," he said.

There is also a growing realisation that employee experience must evolve alongside guest experience. Hospitality companies that fail to create meaningful careers may struggle to retain talent in an increasingly competitive market. "Hospitality has always been a people-first business. Building a strong service culture takes time," Osta noted.

Future Skills

As hospitality evolves, so will the workforce driving it. Technology, AI-powered systems, digital guest interfaces, and data-driven operations are steadily becoming part of mainstream hotel operations. Yet industry leaders insist technology will support hospitality, not replace its human core. "The future workforce will need to seamlessly blend high-touch human empathy with deep technological proficiency," Magazine said. Future hospitality professionals will need to understand not only guest servicing but also analytics, operational efficiency, and asset performance management, he added.

Mahambrey believes tomorrow's hospitality employee will need to move fluidly across multiple guest touchpoints while balancing operational agility with emotional intelligence. "Employees will need to operate seamlessly across multiple touchpoints while consistently delivering personalised, experience-led service," she said.

Osta sees behavioural adaptability becoming just as important as technical capability. "Hiring for mindset and behaviour will become as important as hiring for experience and qualifications," he observed.

Despite the industry's growing dependence on automation and digital systems, leaders remain convinced that hospitality will always remain deeply human.

"Technology will enable efficiency, consistency, and scale, but the true differentiator will continue to be the ability of teams to create authentic, memorable guest experiences," Mahambrey said.

Defining Decade

For India's hospitality sector, the next decade will not simply be measured by the number of hotels opening across the country. It will be defined by whether operators can scale without diluting service standards.

According to the experts Indian hospitality industry's long-term success may ultimately depend on a far less visible metric, its ability to build resilient talent ecosystems.

As Osta correctly summed up, "The Indian hospitality sector is at an inflexion point. Demand will continue to drive growth, but talent will determine the quality and sustainability of that growth."

In a business built on experiences, the companies investing in people with the same seriousness as they invest in properties may ultimately emerge as the sector's biggest winners.. ■

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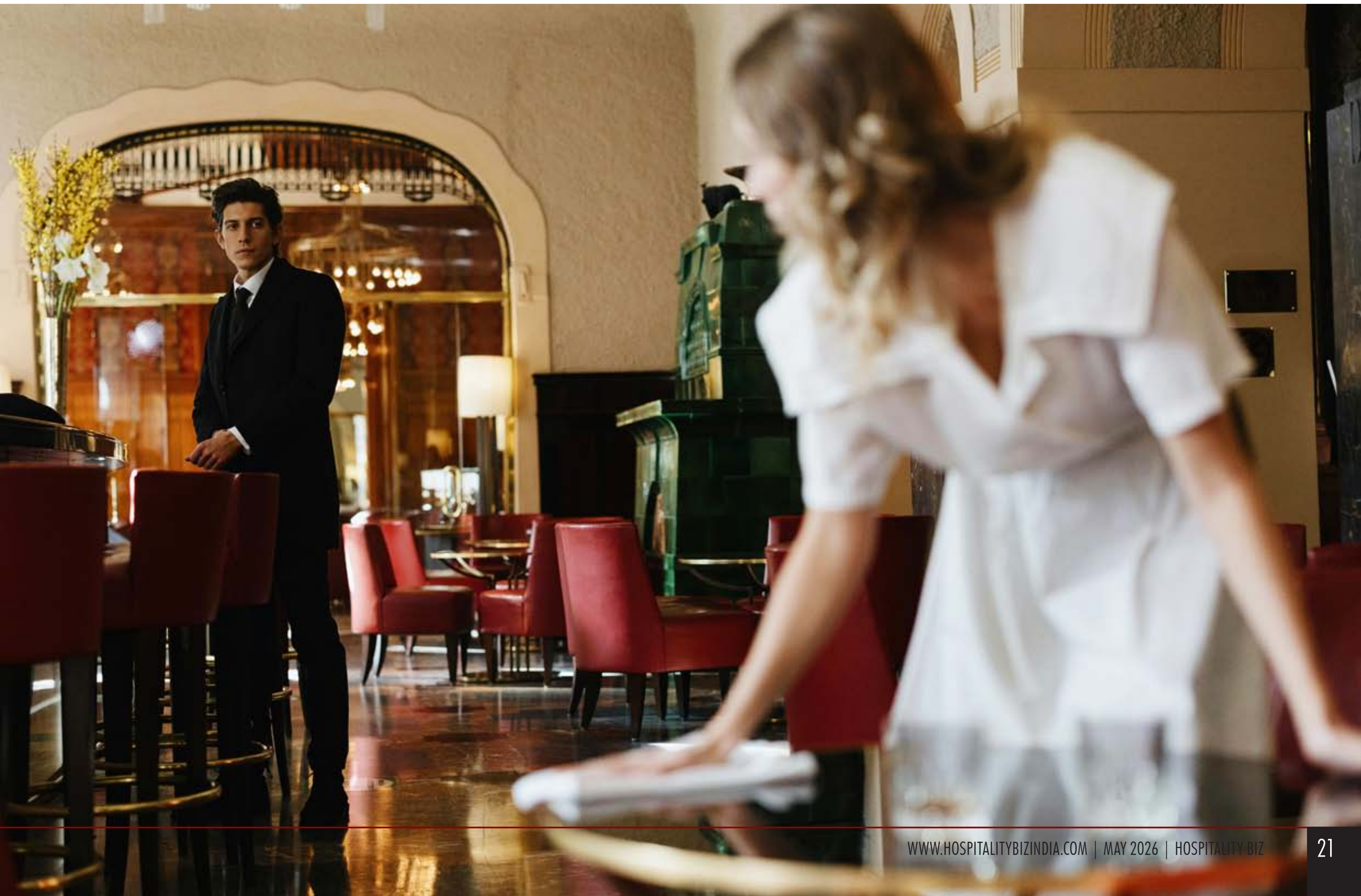

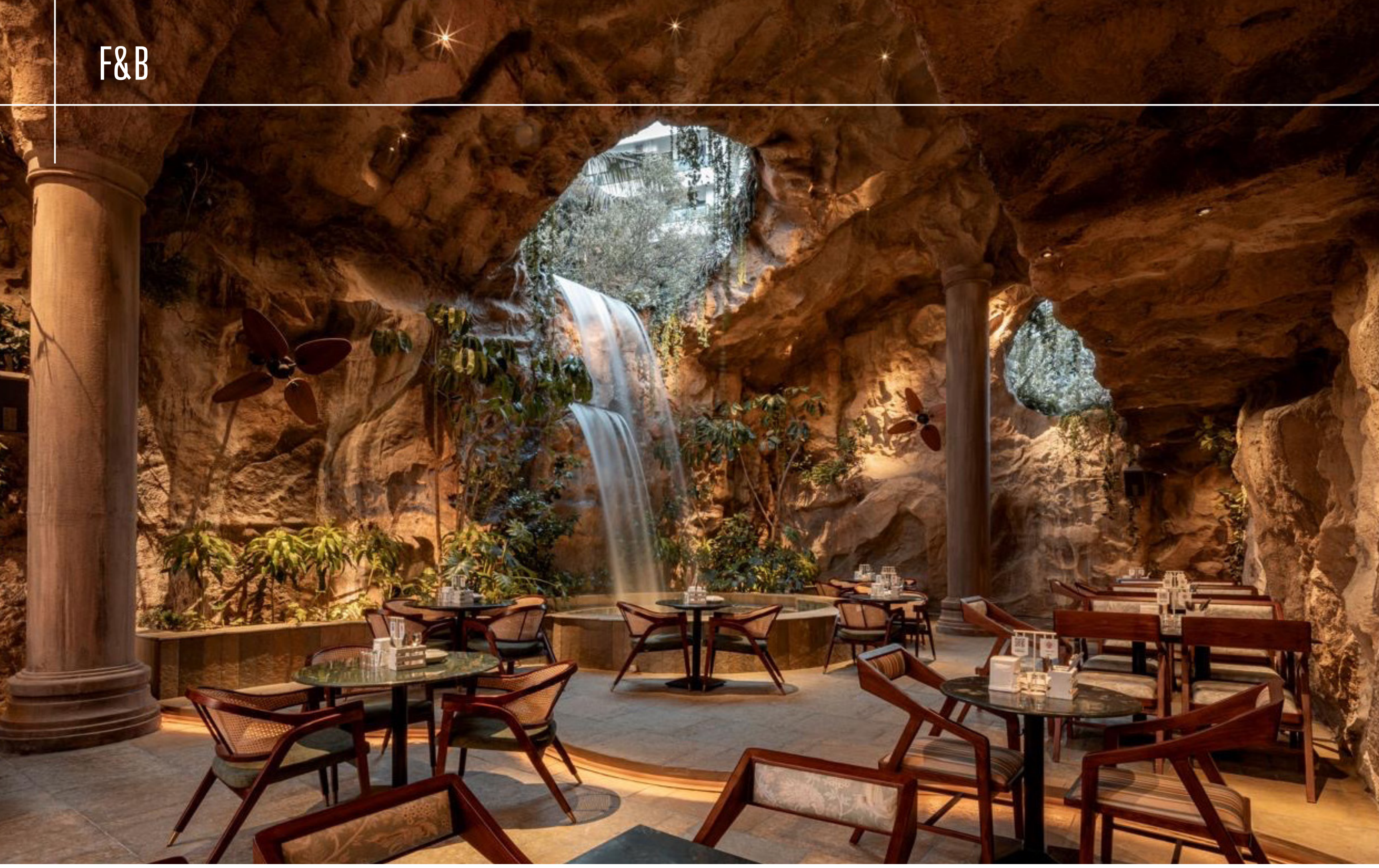

'Experience-heavy formats require sharper discipline behind the scenes'

In India's evolving restaurant landscape, where experience and brand identity are increasingly driving consumer choice, **Pravesh Pandey** has emerged as a key voice shaping this transition. As **Founder and CEO of PP Ventures**, which operates concepts such as Roxie, Roxie & Barry, and Helen's Place, Pandey represents a new-generation operator focused on building differentiated, narrative-led dining formats. In a conversation with **Asmita Mukherjee**, Pandey discusses how experience-led positioning translates into measurable outcomes

You position your restaurants as "cultural characters" rather than conventional formats. How does this differentiation translate into measurable business outcomes such as footfall, repeat rate, and revenue per cover?

When you build a restaurant as a format, you compete on utility- that's location, pricing, cuisine. When you build it as a cultural character, you compete on memory.

That shift directly impacts metrics. Footfall becomes less seasonal and more intent-driven, people don't just walk in, they seek you out. Repeat rates improve because the experience evolves; programming, music, menu drops and collaborations keep giving people a reason to return.

Revenue per cover also behaves differently. Guests stay longer, spend across categories- food, beverages, experiences, and are less price-sensitive because they're buying into a feeling, not just a meal.

In simple terms, culture builds stickiness. And stickiness builds stronger numbers.

Experience-led dining typically requires higher capital investment. How do you evaluate ROI across design, ambience, and programming compared to traditional F&B cost structures?

You can't evaluate experience using traditional F&B math alone, it's not as straight-forward as capex versus table turnover. Design and ambience are not sunk costs; they're demand generators. A well-built space reduces your dependency on discounting, lowers customer acquisition cost over time, and extends brand life.

Programming including music, events, collaborations…is what keeps the asset alive. Without it, even the best-designed space plateaus quickly.

The space needs to hold cultural relevance for years instead of months and if that is happening, then the ROI is already outperforming a conventional model.

India's restaurant industry is transitioning toward a more organised, brand-led ecosystem. Where do you see the most scalable opportunities emerging within this shift?

The most scalable opportunities will come from brands that are clear about who they are, not just what they serve. The market is moving away from generic formats toward sharply positioned concepts that can be systemised. Scalability will be driven by strong brand systems, consistent design language, and repeatable operational frameworks that still allow flexibility and agility at the front end.

There is also a clear whitespace in the mid-premium experiential segment, where consumers want depth without entering luxury pricing. The brands that will scale are the ones that can travel across cities without losing their identity.

Given your experience across global brands and large-scale platforms, how do you approach the challenge of scaling narrative-driven, high-concept restaurants without diluting brand identity?

You do not scale the story, you scale the system behind the story. The narrative remains intact, but you define what is non-negotiable and what is adaptable. Elements like design intent, service philosophy, and emotional tone remain consistent, while aspects like menu details or local collaborations can evolve with context. Most brands dilute because they try to replicate everything exactly. Instead, we focus on protecting the core and allowing the expression to adapt. Consistency does not come from copying, it comes from clarity.

What key operational levers, menu engineering, pricing strategy, or space utilisation do you prioritise to sustain margins in experience-heavy formats?

Experience-heavy formats require sharper discipline behind the scenes. Menu engineering becomes more intentional, with tighter selections and strong margin anchors. The beverage program plays a central role because it drives both profitability and storytelling.

Pricing needs to be dynamic, reflecting time, occasion and experience rather than remaining static. Space utilisation is designed across dayparts so the same asset performs differently through the day. Programming itself becomes a commercial lever, because a well-curated evening can outperform multiple days of standard service.

Margins are not protected by reducing experience, but by designing it intelligently.

Consumer behaviour in dining has evolved significantly, particularly post-pandemic. What are the most notable shifts you're seeing in guest expectations, and how are they influencing concept development?

Consumers are going out less frequently, but with far higher intent. There is a clear shift toward experience over excess and personalisation over standardisation. Guests today are more aware and more observant, they engage with ingredients, music, design, and narrative in a much deeper way. Dining is no longer passive consumption, it is active participation. This is influencing concept development toward creating layered experiences.

With Indian consumers increasingly experimenting with global cuisines, how do you balance localisation with international inspiration to ensure long-term relevance?

Authenticity today is not about replication, it is about interpretation. We do not try to recreate a concept exactly as it exists globally, we translate its essence for where we are. Localisation happens through ingredients, palate calibration and cultural context, while the inspiration remains global. The goal is to feel familiar yet new.

If a concept feels imported, it will not sustain. If it feels rooted while carrying global influence, it has the ability to evolve and stay relevant over time.

From an investment perspective, do you see greater long-term value in scalable multi-unit formats or in differentiated, destination-led concepts and why?

Both models create value, but in different ways. Scalable formats build stability and growth, while destination-led concepts build brand equity and cultural relevance.

In the long term, it is brand equity that enables meaningful scale. A strong destination concept becomes the foundation for expansion, collaborations, and new formats.

You do not choose one over the other, you start with a differentiated idea and then build systems to scale it. In hospitality, what endures is not how many outlets you have, but how strongly people remember you.. ■

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HICSA 2026

Industry adapts to a new normal of volatility

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

At Hotel Investment Conference South Asia 2026, one sentiment quietly ran through every conversation, the industry is no longer bracing for disruption; it has learned to live and work within it. Hosted at Grand Hyatt Mumbai Hotel & Residences, the conference brought together over 800 industry leaders for two days of sharp insight, candid dialogue, and grounded realism about where the sector stands today.

Opening the conference, Manav Thadani set the tone with a stark observation: volatility is no longer cyclical, it is constant. Drawing from a study of over 100 leaders, the message was simple—there is no universal leadership playbook anymore. Decision-making today demands speed, clarity, and the ability to adapt in real time.

That theme carried into the closed-door Owners' Meet, where conversations moved beyond theory into the complexities of ownership. Rising costs, design ambitions, sustainability pressures, and evolving operator relationships dominated discussions. The room reflected a more disciplined ownership mindset - one that is increasingly cautious about capital deployment while still chasing differentiation.

Parallelly, general managers were confronting their own evolution. No longer confined to operational roles, today's GMs are business leaders navigating profitability metrics, technology integration, and shifting guest expectations. Discussions highlighted a move beyond RevPAR to sharper metrics like GOPPAR and flow-through, alongside a renewed focus on unlocking F&B as a core revenue driver.

From the corner office, leadership narratives brought both perspective and pragmatism. Puneet Chhatwal reflected on an industry that continues to absorb shocks - from geopolitical tensions to aviation disruptions, yet rebounds faster each time. William Heinecke traced his journey of building a global hospitality empire, underlining India as a critical growth market. For Arjun Oberoi, the conversation returned to fundamentals, product integrity and people remain at the core of enduring luxury.

Strategy discussions revealed an industry recalibrating its growth approach. Asset-light expansion, conversions, and flexible development models are increasingly shaping pipelines. Global brands, including Marriott International and Hilton, emphasised that scale today is not just about expansion, but about efficiency and intent.

At the same time, new asset classes are gaining traction. Branded residences, once niche, are now emerging as a key intersection of real estate and hospitality, driven by demand for lifestyle-led living. The focus has shifted from aspirational luxury to functional value - services, security, and long-term returns.

Yet, amid all the strategy and capital flows, one challenge remained constant — talent. Across panels, leaders acknowledged that while technology, including AI, is reshaping operations, it cannot

replace the human element that defines hospitality. If anything, the talent gap is becoming more pronounced as the industry scales.

The conference's most unfiltered moments came during the closing Hotseat session, where leaders spoke candidly about failures, tough decisions, and the realities of leading in uncertain times. It was less about polished narratives and more about lived experience, offering a rare, honest look at leadership beyond titles.

Recognition remained an integral part of the event. Amitabh Kant was honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award, a nod to his role in shaping India's tourism narrative, including the globally recognised Incredible India campaign. His message reinforced the scale of opportunity ahead, India's tourism sector, while growing, remains significantly underpenetrated.

The HICSA Hotels of the Year Awards celebrated properties across segments: from luxury to budget, highlighting excellence in design, operations, and guest experience. Complementing this, the MakeMyTrip General Manager of the Year Awards recognised individuals driving performance and culture at the property level.

Beyond boardroom discussions, the event leaned into experience—an essential reminder of hospitality's core. Evenings transitioned into curated culinary showcases and networking spaces, while an unexpected session by mentalist Suhani Shah brought a different kind of engagement, blurring the line between logic and intuition.

As the conference drew to a close, one thing stood out - hospitality is not just adapting; it is redefining itself. Growth is becoming more structured, leadership more agile, and experiences more intentional. The challenges are real, but so is the opportunity.

HICSA 2026 did not offer easy answers. Instead, it reflected an industry learning to operate in complexity with resilience. ■

'Our development approach in India spans greenfield & conversion projects'

With a target of reaching 1,000 rooms in India as part of its entry strategy, Ireland-headquartered Kerten Hospitality is keen to explore variety of hotel projects in India. In a conversation with **Disha Shah Ghosh**, **Antony Doucet, CxO, Kerten Hospitality**, spills the beans on their focus cities and scaling choices.

How is Kerten Hospitality structuring its India entry from a development and operating model perspective, and what formats are you prioritising?

Kerten Hospitality's India entry is built on a partnership-led, owner-centric model that is both globally consistent and locally smart. Rather than applying a standardised template, we take a bespoke approach, bringing our operational systems, brand direction, and global expertise, while working closely with asset partners to shape destinations that are authentic to their market.

We operate exclusively through management contracts and partnerships, enabling Indian developers and owners to benefit from our global platform while retaining flexibility at the asset level. To support this, we have already established a dedicated India office, led by senior Country Partners and a Development Director. This on-ground presence allows us to move quickly, build meaningful relationships, and respond with agility to opportunities in the market.

Our development approach in India spans both greenfield projects and the conversion or upgradation of existing assets. We are actively engaging with property owners and investors across cities and urban getaway destinations, including discussions around integrated, mixed-use developments that bring together hospitality and retail. In a short period, we have initiated multiple conversations, including advanced discussions with an industrial family looking to enter the hospitality sector, with identified opportunities across key markets.

In terms of brands, we are prioritising three distinct concepts that together address the full lifestyle spectrum. The House Hotel offers bespoke luxury rooted in local culture and heritage; Cloud7 Hotels is a design-led brand for the experience-driven traveller; and 'hosme' caters to a socially engaged, value-conscious younger audience—making it particularly relevant for the Indian market.

Overall, our approach is structured yet flexible—allowing us to scale thoughtfully across metros, leisure destinations, and emerging markets, while ensuring each project remains context-driven, culturally relevant, and aligned with evolving lifestyle demand in India.

Beyond the initial 1,000 keys, what does your medium-term pipeline for India look like over the next 3–5 years?

The initial 1,000 keys represent a strategic entry point for us in India. The market is witnessing strong growth, with a clear gap between demand and the availability of branded hotel rooms, particularly when compared to the large unorganised segment. As we establish our first properties and demonstrate the strength of our brands, we are confident this will unlock significant momentum with both owners and travellers.

Beyond this first phase, we are committed to India for the long term. We see substantial opportunities to scale across all our brand formats, and the conversations we are already having with developers span a wide mix of cities and destinations. As these discussions progress, we expect our pipeline to grow meaningfully over the next 3–5 years.

What is particularly exciting for us is not just the potential scale, but the diversity of opportunities across metros, emerging urban centres, and leisure destinations, allowing us to build a well-balanced and future-ready portfolio in India.

How do you evaluate destinations in India from a feasibility and demand standpoint, especially across metro, leisure, and emerging markets?

Our evaluation framework in India is both data-driven and context-led. It begins with a fundamental question: is there a community that a hotel can serve, connect, and elevate? While we assess core fundamentals such as demand depth, supply gaps, average room rates, and connectivity, we equally prioritise a destination's cultural relevance and its potential to evolve into a vibrant lifestyle ecosystem.

India offers a multi-layered opportunity. Gateway cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru and Chennai provide scale, strong corporate demand, and a growing appetite for design-led, experience-driven hospitality. Leisure markets such as Goa, Rajasthan and Kerala continue to see sustained demand for immersive, culturally rooted stays, supported by strong cultural and natural assets. At the same time, emerging destinations, including spiritual circuits like Varanasi and Ayodhya, as well as fast-growing Tier-II cities are witnessing a structural shift in travel patterns, driven by improved highway and airport connectivity, rising domestic mobility, and trends such as destination weddings and religious tourism.

For Kerten Hospitality, feasibility is not just about entering established markets, but about identifying locations where our model can create something new and meaningful. This means looking beyond immediate returns and focusing on destinations where lifestyle demand is beginning to take shape, allowing us to co-create differentiated, future-ready assets that are deeply rooted in their local context.

What role do mixed-use developments and community-led destinations play in your overall India strategy?

Mixed-use development sits at the core of Kerten Hospitality's model globally, and is especially relevant in a market like India. We see hospitality not as a standalone asset, but as part of a broader ecosystem that brings together living, working, dining, retail, and social experiences, creating destinations where locals and travellers come together. Our approach is rooted in building community-led spaces.

In India, where social and cultural interaction is integral to how people engage with environments, the idea of a hotel as a living hub resonates strongly. Our mixed-use model—spanning hotels, branded residences, co-working through Ouspace, F&B, and retail is designed to reflect this, while also offering a stronger value proposition for developer partners.

We have delivered similar integrated developments globally, including Ayla in Aqaba, and bring these learnings into India while ensuring strong local integration. This includes hiring from the local community, collaborating with regional artists and artisans, prioritising local retailers, and curating experiences that connect guests with the surrounding ecosystem.

Through our owner-centric, 'bespoke-at-scale' approach, we work closely with partners to create destinations that are globally benchmarked yet deeply rooted in local context, ensuring long-term relevance, strong performance, and meaningful community engagement.

How do you see demand evolving between domestic travel and international inbound, and how will this influence your brand mix in India?

India's travel landscape is being shaped by strong momentum across both domestic and inbound segments, each playing a distinct role in the market's evolution.

Domestic travel is currently the most powerful driver. As per a recent report on Travel and Tourism Industry Growth in India 2026, domestic tourism accounts for nearly 80% of India's total tourism activity in 2026, with over 2 billion domestic trips annually. This growth is being fuelled by a rising middle class, a young, aspirational population, and rapidly improving connectivity. Indian travellers today have experienced global hospitality standards and are increasingly seeking similar quality and experiences within the country. At the same time, segments such as religious tourism, destination weddings, and urban getaways are driving demand in both established and emerging destinations—often led entirely by domestic travellers.

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Inbound travel is also on an upward trajectory. According to the latest report by World Tourism Barometer published by UN Tourism, India is among the fastest-growing tourism markets globally in 2026, driven by increasing global interest in cultural and experiential travel, alongside improving accessibility. With an established presence across the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, we are well positioned to drive international travellers into our India portfolio as it scales.

This dual demand dynamic shapes our brand strategy in India. The House Hotel is designed to resonate with international travellers seeking an authentic connection to India, while also appealing to domestic guests looking for culturally rooted luxury. Cloud7 Hotels speaks to both the urban Indian traveller and the global visitor through a design-led, experience-driven approach. 'hosme', on the other hand, is positioned to capture the fast-growing domestic youth segment, which is emerging as one of the most dynamic travel cohorts.

Ultimately, we remain market-agnostic, focusing instead on understanding location-specific demand, preferences, and potential. Our multi-brand approach allows us to serve a wide spectrum of travellers across destinations, while delivering experiences that are relevant, flexible, and aligned with how people increasingly want to travel today. ■

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The Rise of Smarter Hospitality Businesses

Why the Next Industry Leaders Will Think Very Differently About Profitability

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

A silent shift is beginning to take shape across the hospitality industry.

The next generation of successful hotels, restaurants, QSR chains, and hospitality businesses may not necessarily be the biggest, oldest, or most luxurious. In fact, many future industry leaders will quietly pull ahead for a very different reason:

They will simply think smarter about profitability.

For years, hospitality growth was largely driven by expansion, branding, scale, and topline revenue. More rooms, more outlets, more covers, more footfalls — growth itself became the primary indicator of success.

But the industry entering 2026 is evolving rapidly.

Rising operating costs, tighter margins, changing guest expectations, increased competition, and more complex business structures are forcing hospitality businesses to rethink a critical question:

Is growth alone still enough?

Increasingly, the answer is no.

The Shift from Expansion-Led Thinking to Precision-Led Thinking

Some of the smartest hospitality businesses today are beginning to operate very differently.

Instead of focusing only on expansion, they are building:

- commercially intelligent systems
- leaner operations
- sharper decision-making structures
- real-time visibility into profitability
- stronger alignment between operations and commercial performance

This is creating a new competitive edge.

Because in the future, profitability will not belong only to businesses that work harder.

It will belong to businesses that operate with greater precision.

The Old Model Is Quietly Becoming Less Effective

Traditional hospitality structures were built around:

- monthly reviews
- static benchmarks
- layered reporting
- reactive operational corrections

For many years, that model worked.

But in today's environment, where costs fluctuate rapidly and guest behavior changes faster than ever, delayed visibility is becoming expensive.

The smarter operators are no longer waiting for month-end surprises.

They are:

- identifying patterns earlier
- questioning accepted assumptions faster
- correcting inefficiencies in real time
- continuously optimizing commercial performance

Not dramatically.

But consistently.

And over time, that consistency compounds into a significant advantage.

F&B Is No Longer Just an Operational Department

This shift is especially visible in Food & Beverage operations.

Traditionally, F&B was often viewed primarily as:

- a guest experience function
- a service-driven department
- or simply a revenue contributor

But smarter hospitality businesses are beginning to see it differently.

They now recognize F&B as one of the most commercially sensitive and strategically important areas of the business.

In many hotels and hospitality formats, F&B remains among the largest controllable operational cost centers.

Which means even small improvements in:

- cost visibility
- purchasing efficiency
- menu engineering
- operational discipline
- decision-making speed

can create disproportionate impact on profitability.

The smartest operators understand this.

And that is exactly why they are moving beyond accepted norms and continuously re-evaluating performance potential.

The New Competitive Advantage Is Commercial Intelligence

For years, competitive advantage in hospitality was largely associated with:

- location
- interiors
- branding
- size
- market positioning

Those factors still matter.

But increasingly, a quieter and more powerful advantage is emerging:

Commercial intelligence.

The ability to:

- interpret operational data correctly
- make faster commercial decisions
- identify unrealized profitability
- optimize without compromising guest experience
- continuously adapt systems to changing business realities

This is what will separate future industry leaders from traditional operators.

The Gap Between Smart Operators and Traditional Operators Will Widen

Perhaps the most important reality of the next five years is this:

The gap between smart hospitality businesses and traditional hospitality businesses is likely to widen very quickly.

Because smarter operators are no longer treating profitability as an after-effect of operations.

They are designing operations around profitability itself.

And while many businesses may still continue operating within "acceptable" performance ranges, the next industry leaders will continuously challenge what is considered acceptable.

That mindset shift alone will create extraordinary commercial advantage.

The Future Belongs to Businesses That Think Differently

At Foodesign Systems Associates (FSA) and AMInnovations Hospitality Pvt. Ltd., we believe the future of hospitality profitability will belong to businesses that combine:

- operational discipline
- commercial visibility
- smarter systems
- continuous performance optimization

Not through aggressive cost-cutting.

But through sharper thinking, better visibility, and smarter operational intelligence.

Because the next era of hospitality success may not belong to those who simply expand faster.

It may belong to those who learn to operate smarter. ■

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

News Bulletin

Mahindra Holidays to acquire Aditatva Estates for INR 37.5 crore, eyes resort development in Chikmagalur

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Strategic acquisition to expand resort portfolio

Mahindra Holidays & Resorts India Ltd has announced plans to acquire a 100 per cent stake in Aditatva Estates Pvt Ltd for ₹37.5 crore, as part of its strategy to expand its leisure resorts business.

Asset acquisition in key leisure destination

The acquisition will give Mahindra Holidays ownership of a 50-acre coffee plantation located in Chikmagalur, a prominent hill destination known for its scenic landscapes and growing tourism appeal.

Timeline and transaction details

The company has executed a share purchase agreement for the acquisition, which is expected to be completed by July 31, 2026. Post-acquisition, Aditatva Estates will become a wholly owned subsidiary of Mahindra Holidays.

Planned resort development

The acquired land parcel is proposed to be developed into a new leisure resort, aligning with the company's focus on strengthening its footprint in experiential travel destinations and expanding its inventory of managed holiday properties.

Focus on experiential travel growth

The move reflects Mahindra Holidays' continued push into high-potential leisure markets, leveraging unique land assets to create destination-led hospitality offerings in line with evolving consumer preferences for nature-driven and experience-based stays. ■

Digital discovery reshapes hotel demand, says Noesis report

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

The traditional hotel booking journey is undergoing a structural shift, with digital content now playing a decisive role in shaping demand well before travellers begin searching, according to a new industry report by Noesis Consulting.

The report highlights that hospitality demand in India is no longer driven primarily by destination or price comparison. Instead, it is increasingly influenced by visual exposure on social platforms, where travellers encounter hotels passively and build preferences over time.

Earlier, the booking process followed a linear path—search, compare, evaluate, and book. This has now evolved into a "content-first" model, where discovery precedes intent. Travellers often decide on a property after repeated digital exposure, with booking becoming a final confirmation step rather than the starting point.

The shift is being driven by the rise of short-form video, higher screen time, and growing fatigue from excessive choices on booking platforms. Consumers now rely on memory and recall of visually appealing properties instead of browsing extensively at the time of booking.

This behavioural change is also reshaping demand patterns across segments. Booking windows are shrinking, particularly for leisure travel, while demand is becoming more experience-led. Features such as infinity pools, wellness offerings, scenic views, and design aesthetics are emerging as primary decision drivers, often outweighing location itself.

The report notes that properties with strong digital visibility are seeing higher occupancy and pricing power, even in non-prime locations. Demand spikes are increasingly linked to content virality, requiring hotels to adopt dynamic pricing and faster response strategies.

For operators, the implications are significant. Hotels must integrate design, operations, and marketing to

Stage	Earlier Journey	Current Journey
Trigger	Planned travel	Visual exposure
Discovery	Search engines	Social platforms and video
Evaluation	Reviews and pricing	Experience and recall
Decision	Comparison-based	Memory-driven
Booking	Final step	Confirmation step

Travel Plan → Search → Compare → Book

CURRENT MODEL

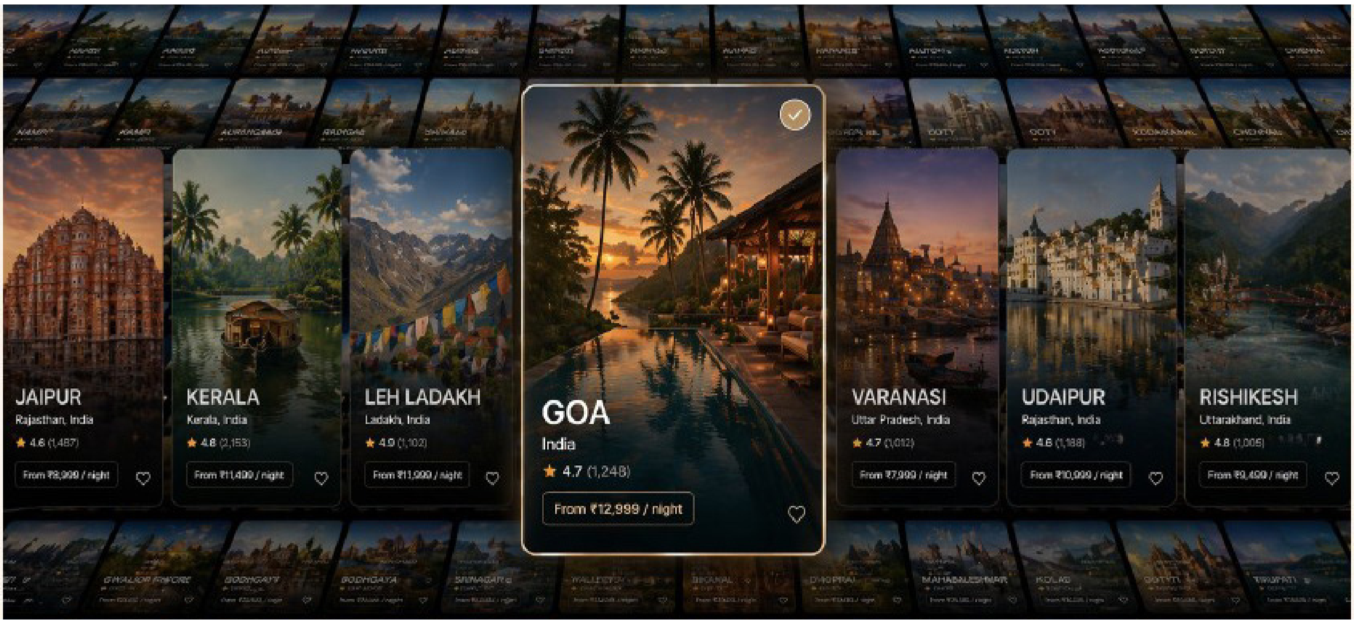
Content → Curiosity → Recall → Search → Book

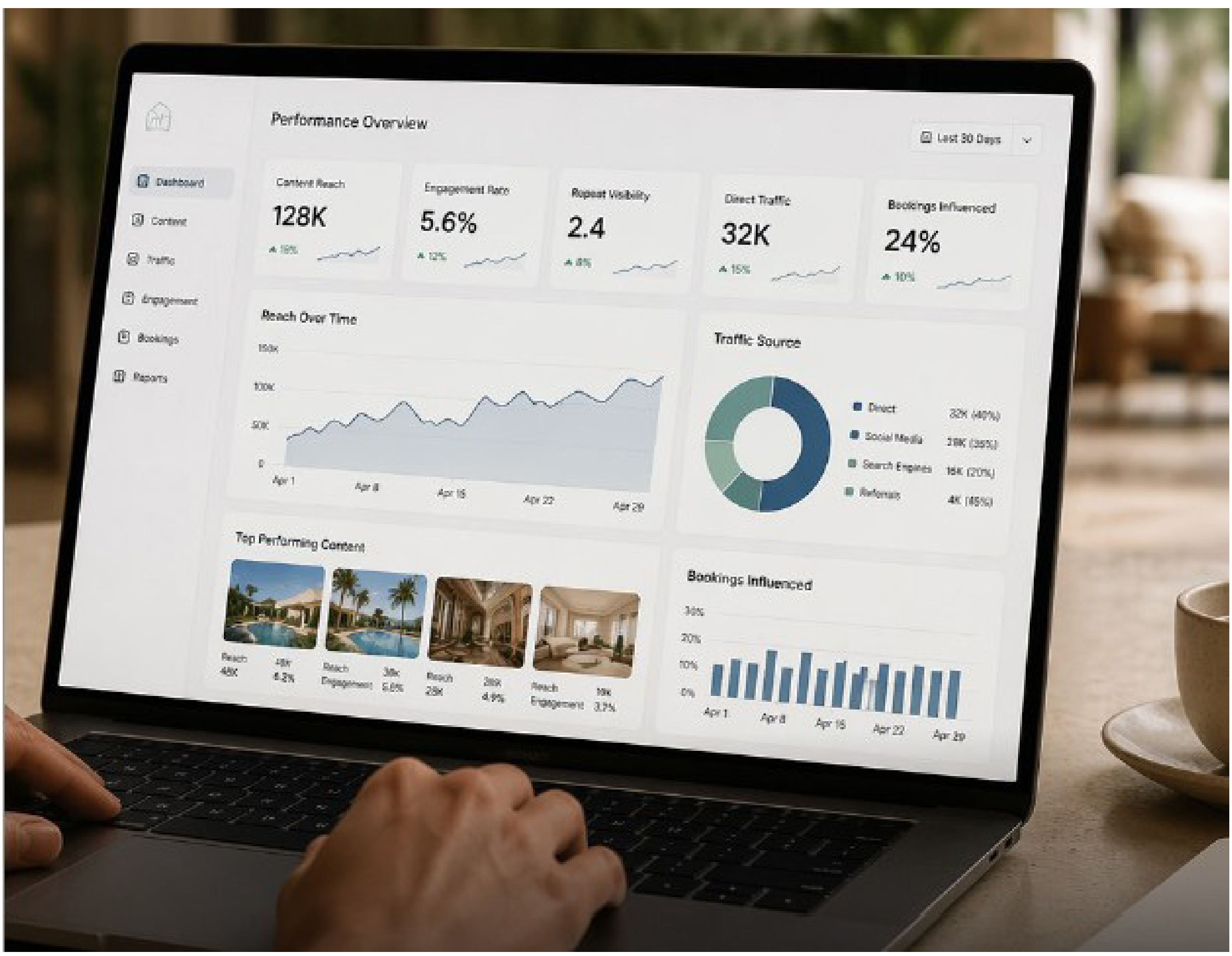
The shift is not about where bookings happen. It is about when the decision is made.

The decision now forms before the search begins.

create "capture points" that encourage content creation, while maintaining consistent on-ground delivery. Continuous digital engagement, rather than campaign-led marketing, is emerging as a key demand driver.

The report concludes that visibility has become a core determinant of demand, marking a fundamental shift in how hospitality businesses attract and convert customers in a digital-first environment. ■





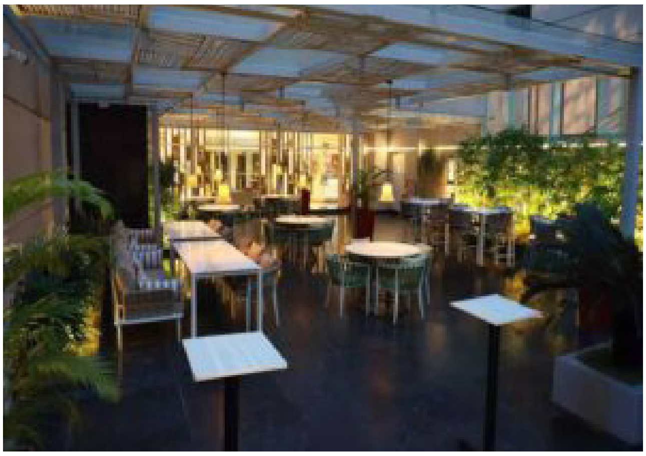
The Groove Hub: Comfort meets flavour

Asmita Mukherjee | Hyderabad

At ibis Hyderabad HITEC City, The Groove Hub arrives as a refreshing addition to Hyderabad's casual dining scene, bringing together relaxed alfresco vibes, comforting food and warm hospitality. Designed as an open-air dining space that reflects ibis' youthful and social energy, the restaurant creates the kind of atmosphere where guests can slow down, unwind and simply enjoy the evening.

The first thing that stands out at The Groove Hub is the warmth of the experience. We have noticed that, Manoj Kumar Pulle, Assistant Manager Restaurant and Bar is constantly present on the floor, engaging with diners with genuine attentiveness, while the Executive Chef , Prakash Arekatla personally interacts with guests and walks them through the menu with enthusiasm. That personal touch gives the restaurant an easy charm that instantly makes guests feel comfortable.

The menu of Groove Hub is playful and flavour-forward, balancing regional favourites with global comfort dishes. Among the highlights is the Nalla Karam Paneer Vepudu, where soft paneer cubes are tossed with curry leaves, coriander and garlic powder, and the showstopper Nalla Karam Podi, which is a traditional, spicy Andhra condiment made by grinding roasted red chilies, garlic, lentils (chana/urad dal), coriander seeds, and tamarind, creating a spicy and earthy dish packed with Andhra flavours. The Karevepaku Chicken Tikka brings smoky flavours with aromatic curry leaves coating juicy pieces of chicken, while the Thotakura Tawa Chicken delivers a more comforting, homestyle flavour profile with the richness of amaranth leaves.



The Hummus Bush adds a refreshing Middle Eastern touch to the menu, with smooth, creamy hummus paired beautifully with warm breads and tangy mango slices, making it a light yet satisfying starter for the table.

The Royyala Vepudu captures Hyderabad's bold spice palate perfectly, with prawns coated in fiery masala that keeps you going back for another bite. On the global side, the Pav Bhaji Fondue adds a fun twist to the iconic street food favourite, served with buttery toasted skewered pav for sharing. The Tangra Style Chilli Chicken brings Kolkata's iconic Indo-Chinese flavours alive with addictive smoky wok-tossed chicken, bold spices.

The Egg Shin Ramen Bowl combines spicy broth, noodles, vegetables and soft-boiled egg into a comforting dish that works especially well after a long day.

The beverage menu complements the food beautifully. The Mango Musheerabad Mojito is tropical, refreshing and full of fresh mango and mint flavours, while the Raw Mango Cooler in aam panna style delivers nostalgic summer flavours. The Watermelon Juice keeps things light and refreshing, and the Sangria Mocktail adds a fruity balance to the meal.

Dessert ends the experience on a comforting note with the Golden Nectar Rasgulla Custard with Saffron. Soft rasgullas soaked in creamy saffron custard create a rich and indulgent finish without feeling too heavy.

Beyond the food, it is the ambience that truly ties everything together. With warm lighting, lively music and an easygoing atmosphere, The Groove Hub feels like the perfect place to catch up with friends over drinks after a hectic day. The relaxed energy, combined with thoughtful hospitality and flavour-packed food, makes it the kind of place you leave feeling lighter, happier and already planning your next visit. ■

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Ginger Hyderabad Airport

Lean-luxe offering in midscale segment

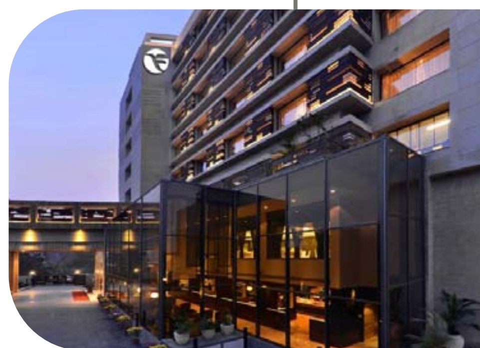
The 118-key Ginger Hyderabad Airport Road features rooms overlooking landscaped lawns and is designed around Ginger's lean-luxe philosophy. The property includes the brand's signature Qmin all-day dining restaurant, a fitness centre and banquet facilities catering to meetings, conferences and social events. The hotel has been developed in partnership with Nimantran Catering, further strengthening IHCL's asset-light expansion approach while tapping into local market expertise.

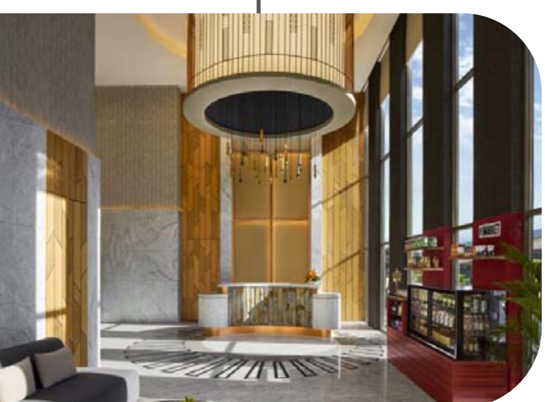
The launch reflects IHCL's focus on strengthening its presence in high-growth urban centres. Hyderabad continues to attract demand across sectors such as IT, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing and medical tourism, making it a key market for midscale hospitality offerings.

Fortune Vrindavan

ITC Hotels Limited has announced the signing of a 100-key hotel under its Fortune Hotels brand in Vrindavan, marking a strategic move to expand its presence in one of India's key spiritual tourism hubs. With this addition, ITC Hotels' portfolio in Uttar Pradesh will grow to 17 properties, including operational and upcoming hotels across brands such as Welcomhotel Prayagraj, WelcomHeritage Badi Kothi and Fortune Select Ayodhya.

Scheduled to open in April 2030, the hotel will feature well-appointed rooms, an all-day dining restaurant, banquet facilities and modern amenities designed to cater to both leisure and spiritual travellers. The development aims to address the growing demand for premium hospitality options in a market traditionally dominated by budget accommodations and dharmshalas.





Hyatt Place Bhopal

Strategically located near the city's commercial hub, the 99-room hotel underscores Hyatt'sgrowing focus on high-potential secondary cities, where business activity and infrastructure development are driving demand for branded hospitality. With proximity to Rani Kamalapati Railway Station and key commercial centres, the hotel is positioned to cater to both corporate and leisure travellers.

A defining feature of the property is its strong focus on the meetings and events (MICE) segment. With approximately 15,000 sq. ft. of event space, including a Grand Ballroom and multiple meeting rooms, Hyatt Place Bhopal is designed to tap into rising demand for conferences, weddings, and social gatherings in the region.

This aligns with a broader hospitality trend where tier-2 cities are increasingly becoming MICE hubs, supported by improved connectivity and growing corporate presence.

Terrea Bengaluru by Wonderla

Terrea by Wonderla represents a complete reimagination of the former Wonderla Resort, which was earlier positioned as a functional accommodation for amusement park visitors. Backed by an investment of approximately INR 18 crore and executed over a period of eight months, the property has now been repositioned as a premium upscale resort catering to Bengaluru's growing demand for high-quality staycation experiences.

Strategically located adjacent to Wonderla Bengaluru, the resort offers seamless integration between leisure and accommodation, enabling a combined park-and-stay experience.

The resort has been conceptualised by Muse n Aura Designs and is built around an 'Earthen Luxe' design philosophy. This approach blends natural materials, terrain-inspired textures, and warm tonal elements to create immersive and contemporary spaces. Rather than replicating nature literally, the design interprets it through light, materiality, and spatial flow, offering a refined yet organic guest experience.

Mews launches AI-powered BI tool for faster hotel decisions

Mews has introduced Mews Business Intelligence (Mews BI), an embedded analytics solution designed to deliver real-time, AI-powered insights for hotel operators. Built within the Mews operating system, the platform provides a single source of truth, enabling teams to track revenue, occupancy, and bookings without switching systems.

The tool features customizable dashboards, automated reporting, and AI-generated performance summaries, allowing hotels to analyse data and act quickly. It also integrates external sources such as OTAs and digital marketing platforms for a unified performance view. Already adopted by over 1,000 properties, early users report improved revenue optimisation and operational efficiency. The solution is now available globally to existing Mews users, reflecting growing demand for data-driven decision-making in hospitality.

roomangel launches risk-free marketing model for hotels

roomangel has introduced hive RaaS (Results as a Service), an AI-led marketing model that shifts financial risk away from hotels by charging only on delivered bookings. Built on its hive intelligence platform, the solution integrates data from PMS, RMS, and BI systems to create a unified performance layer. It then autonomously identifies and captures demand, particularly "long-tail" opportunities often missed by traditional marketing approaches. Under the model, roomangel funds 100% of advertising spend, while hotels define commission thresholds and pay only for confirmed results. Campaigns run in isolated environments to avoid interference with existing marketing efforts, with transparent attribution built into hotel analytics systems. The launch addresses longstanding inefficiencies in hospitality marketing, where budgets are often spent without guaranteed returns. By moving to a results-only structure, hive RaaS signals a shift toward performance-driven, risk-mitigated demand generation in the sector.

The House of Suntory launches Toki Black whisky in India

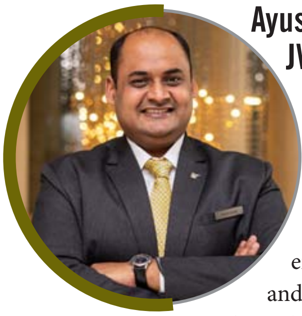
The House of Suntory has launched Toki Suntory Whisky Black in India, expanding its Toki portfolio with a new expression that blends tradition and innovation to reflect modern Japan. The launch follows its earlier debut in global travel retail across key Indian airports, including Mumbai and Delhi Duty Free.

Crafted using Hakushu heavily peated malt and Hakushu grain, the whisky delivers a refined, gently smoky profile that builds on the smooth character of the original Toki. The name "Toki," meaning time in Japanese, reflects the balance between heritage and innovation, with this variant adding greater depth while remaining true to the brand's identity.

Cristal Azul expands India presence with Delhi debut

Globally acclaimed premium tequila brand Cristal Azul has entered the Delhi market, strengthening its presence across key metro cities following earlier launches in Mumbai and Goa. The move signals the brand's continued focus on India's fast-growing premium spirits and hospitality segments. Produced in Mexico and refined in New York, Cristal Azul is crafted from 100% Blue Weber agave sourced from Jalisco, combining traditional distillation techniques with modern craftsmanship. The result is a smooth, versatile tequila suited for both sipping and mixology-driven experiences in premium bars and restaurants. The brand's portfolio spans multiple expressions—including Blanco, Reposado, Añejo, Extra Añejo, Gold, and Silver—each offering distinct flavour profiles shaped by ageing and production methods, aligning with evolving consumer preferences in upscale hospitality settings.

MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL



Ayush Saraf, Training Manager, JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru

With over a decade of experience in hospitality learning and development, Ayush brings a thoughtful approach to training, with a strong focus on associate engagement, capability building, and cultivating service-led cultures. Throughout his journey with Marriott International and other leading hospitality brands, he has contributed to designing impactful learning initiatives, mentoring talent, and enabling teams to deliver intuitive and memorable guest experiences.

In his role, Ayush will lead the hotel's learning and development function, with a focus on building leadership capability, enhancing service culture, and empowering associates to consistently deliver refined and intuitive guest experiences.

Subhajit Chakraborty, Director of Catering Sales, JW Marriott Bengaluru Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa

With over 13 years of rich experience in luxury hospitality, Subhajit brings deep expertise across MICE, large-scale event planning, revenue management, and luxury resort sales. In his new role, he will be responsible for driving catering sales strategy, expanding the hotel's MICE footprint, and enhancing its positioning as a preferred venue for high-profile social and corporate events. Subhajit's career includes significant tenures with renowned hospitality brands such as The Leela Palace Bengaluru and JW Marriott Jaipur Resort & Spa, where he successfully managed large revenue portfolios, led multi-city sales teams, and contributed to pre-opening and positioning strategies for landmark properties. His experience spans managing extensive banquet operations, handling key corporate accounts, and delivering high-impact events across diverse markets.

IHG HOTELS

Rishabh Jain, General Manager, Holiday Inn Gurugram Sector 90

With over 21 years of extensive experience in the hospitality industry, he brings a strong blend of operational expertise, sales leadership and strategic insight to his new role.

Prior to this appointment, Rishabh served as Hotel Manager at Fairfield by Marriott Jaipur where he played a pivotal role during the hotel's pre-opening phase followed by successfully steering its growth over the past three years.

In his new capacity at Holiday Inn Gurugram Sector 90, he will be responsible for overseeing all aspects of hotel operations, driving financial performance, building high-performing teams, enhancing the hotel's market positioning and delivering exceptional guest experiences.

ITC HOTELS

Rajib Ghosh, Loss Prevention Manager, ITC Windsor

With over two decades of experience in security management and risk mitigation across hospitality and corporate environments, Rajib brings deep expertise in safety operations, crisis preparedness, and loss prevention. His core strengths include surveillance management, fire and life safety systems, emergency response planning, and the implementation of structured security frameworks. Rajib has built a distinguished career working with renowned organizations such as Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces, Lemon Tree Premier and Red Fox Hotel, Wyndham Grand Agra, DLF Power and Services Limited, and the United States Embassy in New Delhi. He has successfully led large security teams, managed high-profile events, and implemented advanced safety systems in complex and high-footfall environments. His strong leadership and operational acumen have consistently contributed to creating secure, well-managed, and compliant properties. In his new role at ITC Windsor, Rajib will be responsible for strengthening the hotel's loss prevention strategy, enhancing safety protocols, and ensuring seamless coordination with internal departments and external agencies. He will oversee overall security operations, risk evaluation, emergency response planning, and compliance management to uphold the highest standards of safety and vigilance.

Shangri-La Hotels

Nikhil Kotha, Director of Sales, Shangri-La Bengaluru

Bringing over 12 years of experience in hospitality sales, Nikhil joins the leadership team with a proven track record of driving revenue growth, cultivating strategic partnerships, and leading high-performing teams across competitive markets.

In his new role, Nikhil will spearhead the hotel's sales strategy, focusing on strengthening market share, enhancing commercial performance, and unlocking new business opportunities across key segments.Most recently, Nikhil led sales strategy and revenue performance at a luxury golf resort, where he played a key role in driving sustained growth and strengthening the property's market positioning. Known for his ability to secure high-value business and build long-term client relationships, he has consistently delivered impactful results throughout his career.

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