R.N.I. No. MAHENG/2007/22934 Reg. No: MCS/181/2019-21

FOR THE HOSPITALITY PROFESSIONAL

Hospitality BIZ

www.hospitalitybizindia.com
JUNE 2026
VOL 18 | ISSUE 7 | PAGES 36
PRICE: ₹150

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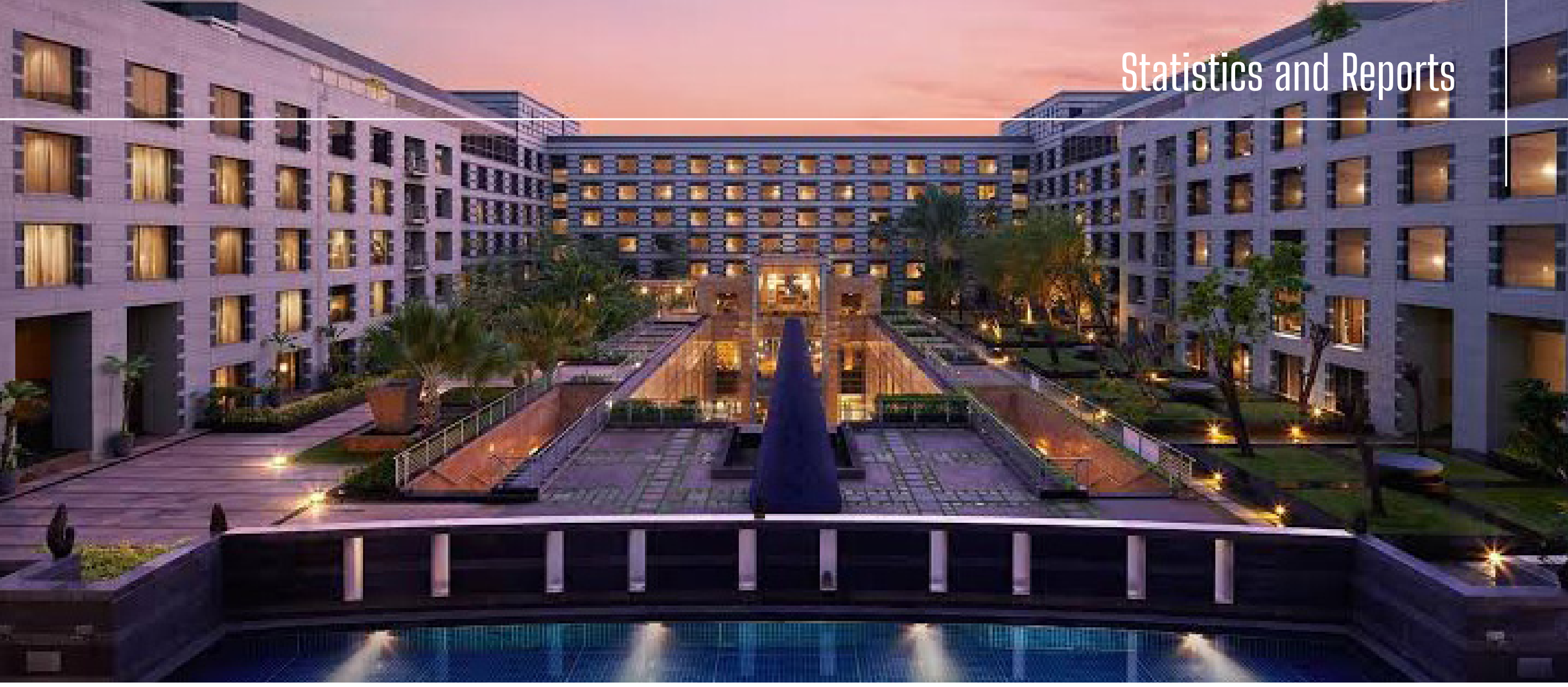

ICRA projects 7-9% growth for hospitality sector in FY27

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

India's hospitality industry is expected to maintain its growth momentum in FY2027, driven by strong domestic leisure travel, weddings, MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions), and business travel demand, according to the latest report by ICRA.

The ratings agency projects the industry's revenues to grow by 7-9% year-on-year in FY2027, even as global geopolitical tensions and inflationary pressures remain key factors to watch.

ICRA estimates premium hotel occupancy across India to remain robust at 72-74% in FY2027, broadly in line with FY2026 levels. Average Room Rates (ARRs) are expected to increase further to ₹8,600-8,800 from ₹8,200-8,500 recorded in FY2026, reflecting sustained demand and favourable market dynamics.

The report noted that the impact of the ongoing West Asia conflict has remained moderate so far, as the Indian hospitality sector continues to be largely driven by domestic travellers. While business travel expenditure could face some pressure if geopolitical uncertainties persist, the industry's dependence on domestic tourism has helped cushion major disruptions.

In the first two months of FY2027, hotel occupancy is estimated at 66-68%, compared to 62-64% during the same period last year. ARR during the period is expected to range between ₹7,800 and ₹8,000, supported partly by a favourable base effect.

ICRA highlighted that operational efficiencies and cost rationalisation measures adopted over the past few years have significantly strengthened hotel profitability. Operating margins for a sample of 13 large hotel companies are projected to remain healthy at 34-36% in FY2027, a substantial improvement from the pre-pandemic levels of 20-22%.

The report also pointed to a continuing demand-supply imbalance that is benefiting hotel operators. Premium hotel room inventory across 12 key cities is expected to grow at a CAGR of 5-6% between FY2025 and FY2028. However, demand growth is projected to outpace supply additions at 8-9%, creating favourable pricing conditions for the sector over the next two to three years.

Despite concerns around inflation and potential moderation in discretionary spending, ICRA believes domestic tourism could receive an additional boost if travellers shift spending from international trips to domestic destinations.

Looking ahead, the agency cautioned that any prolonged escalation of geopolitical tensions or deterioration in travel sentiment could pose risks to growth projections. Nevertheless, the overall outlook for India's hospitality industry remains positive, supported by strong domestic demand, healthy profitability, and a favourable demand-supply environment. ■

‘Technology will reshape roles and workflows faster than organisations can adapt’

India’s hospitality sector is in the midst of a defining phase, one marked not by short-term cycles, but by deep structural transformation. Domestic travel demand, evolving consumer aspirations, and rapid infrastructure development are collectively reshaping the industry’s growth trajectory, while new asset classes and investment models are redefining how hospitality is conceived, built, and operated.

In this exclusive conversation, **Manav Thadani, Founder Chairman of Hotelivate**, offers a nuanced perspective on the forces powering this momentum and the long-term implications for India’s tourism and hospitality ecosystem.

Asmita Mukherjee | Hyderabad

India’s hospitality sector is witnessing unprecedented growth. What are the key forces driving this momentum, and how do you see the market evolving over the next few years?

The growth we are seeing in India’s hospitality sector does not seem like a cyclical spike. It reflects structural shifts that have been building for years. Domestic travel has emerged as the single most powerful demand driver, fuelled by a rising middle class, increasing aspirational consumption, and a genuine cultural shift in how Indians spend on experiences. Add to that the infrastructure momentum with new airports, improved connectivity, expressways which are helping in opening up destinations that were previously inaccessible or underserved. Sports circuits, concerts, Religious and wellness tourism are also contributing meaningfully, as are weddings and MICE, which continue to scale in both volume and value. Over the next few years, I expect the market to become more segmented and sophisticated. Investors and operators who understand the nuances of each demand driver will be the ones who build lasting value.

Hotel performance across segments has remained strong despite global uncertainties. What gives you confidence about the long-term outlook for India’s hospitality industry?

Confidence comes from the fundamentals. India remains one of the most undersupplied hotel markets in the world relative to its population, economic trajectory, and travel appetite. A large majority of available room inventory still sits within the unorganised sector, which means that there is great potential branded hotels. What also gives me confidence is the resilience we have witnessed. Even as global headwinds created volatility, domestic demand held firm. That kind of insulation is not accidental as it reflects the depth of India’s consumption story. The long-term outlook remains compelling precisely because the growth is being driven from within, not solely dependent on foreign arrivals or global economic cycles.

Asset-light models, branded residences, and mixed-use developments are gaining traction. Which of these business models do you believe will have the most significant impact on the sector’s future growth?

Each of these models has merit, but if I had to identify the one with the most transformative potential, it is mixed-use development. When hospitality is integrated thoughtfully into a larger ecosystem which has retail, residences, offices, wellness and so on, creates a consumer base that standalone hotels simply cannot replicate. It also improves asset economics and reduces dependence on any single revenue stream. Branded residences are growing rapidly and the appetite is clearly there, particularly at the luxury end. But their success is still tied to the strength of the brand and the quality of execution. Asset-light models will continue to gain favour with operators and investors seeking scale and capital efficiency. Larger brands are also exploring consolidation opportunities through M&A (Marriott with Concept Hospitality, IHCL with Clarks Hotels etc.)

Investor interest in hospitality assets is at an all-time high. What trends are you currently seeing in hotel investments, transactions, and development activity across India?

There are a few distinct trends worth noting. First, the profile of investors has broadened significantly. We are seeing institutional capital, family offices, REITs, and high-net-worth individuals all active in the same market. What is interesting is that each of these investors have different return expectations and time horizons, but all are beginning to recognise hospitality as a credible asset class. Second, Tier 2 and Tier 3 markets are attracting serious attention, not just as aspirational bets but as genuine investment opportunities. Third, there is growing interest in conversion and rebranding wherein they are taking underperforming or independent assets and repositioning them under a brand. This is often faster and more capital-efficient than greenfield development. Development activity overall remains strong, and the pipeline across segments, ranging from budget to luxury, continue to expand.

> "Confidence comes from the fundamentals. India remains one of the most undersupplied hotel markets in the world relative to its population, economic trajectory, and travel appetite. A large majority of available room inventory still sits within the unorganised sector, which means that there is great potential branded hotels. What also gives me confidence is the resilience we have witnessed. Even as global headwinds created volatility, domestic demand held firm. That kind of insulation is not accidental as it reflects the depth of India's consumption story."

How are evolving guest expectations influencing hotel development and operational strategies?

Today's guests, particularly domestic travellers, are more informed, more discerning, and more experience-driven than any previous generation. They are not simply looking for a room; they are looking for a story, a feeling, a memory. That shift is fundamentally changing how hotels are designed, programmed, and operated. Experience-led design means operators must think about the entire guest journey, not just the physical product. From an operational standpoint, this raises the bar for staff capability, personalisation, and consistency. The hotels that will command premium rates and loyalty are the ones that deliver experiences that feel both distinctive and deeply considered. Looking specifically at wellness, it is no longer an amenity. It is becoming a pillar of the value proposition, especially in leisure destinations. These offerings are expanding from a spa and a salon into a larger eco-system focused on healing, rejuvenation, and longevity. We are already seeing brands (especially luxury brands) adopt and expand their wellness offering considerably. While it remains a niche offering today, it is likely to expand considerably over the coming years.

HICSA has grown into one of the most influential hospitality investment conferences in the region. What does its success say about the maturity and attractiveness of India's hospitality sector today?

HICSA's growth is, in many ways, a mirror of the sector itself. When we started, the conversations were largely aspirational. Today, they are substantive, data-driven, and increasingly global in perspective. The fact that owners, institutional investors, global brands, and policymakers all want to be in the same room (and that room keeps getting harder to get into!), tells you everything about where India's hospitality sector stands. It reflects a market that has earned its credibility. India is no longer a frontier market that global capital is cautiously exploring. It is a priority destination that serious investors are actively allocating to. HICSA has both reflected and contributed to that shift, and that is something we are genuinely proud of.

The Savills–Hotelivate partnership is a significant development for the industry. How will this collaboration enhance hospitality advisory and investment opportunities in India and beyond?

The Savills–Hotelivate partnership brings together two organisations with complementary strengths and a shared commitment to delivering exceptional advisory outcomes. Hotelivate brings deep hospitality-specific expertise with its market intelligence, feasibility, asset management and operator selection expertise, built over years of dedicated focus on South Asia and beyond. Hotelivate has done assignments in more than 30 countries. Savills brings global reach, a world-class real estate platform, and institutional relationships that span every major capital market. Being part of Savills gives us access to a global network, deeper research capabilities and capital markets connectivity. The mandates we can pursue, the markets we can serve and the impact we can create, all expand meaningfully from here. Together, we are able to serve clients more completely. Whether they are entering the Indian market for the first time, managing an existing portfolio, or exploring cross-border opportunities, we are able to help them. For Indian family offices and developers looking to invest internationally, this partnership opens doors in a way that neither organisation could do as effectively alone. It is a genuinely value-additive combination, and we are excited about what it will unlock.

As someone who has closely tracked the industry's evolution for decades, what are the biggest opportunities and challenges that hospitality leaders should prepare for in the next five to ten years?

The opportunity is immense! India's hospitality sector is on the cusp of a generational transformation, and those who position themselves thoughtfully today will reap disproportionate rewards. The continued formalisation of the market, the emergence of new destinations, the growing sophistication of domestic travellers, and the integration of technology into every layer of operations, create significant upside for leaders who are willing to invest in quality and relevance.

The challenges, however, are real and deserve honest acknowledgement. Talent remains the industry's most pressing crisis. We are not producing hospitality professionals at the pace the sector requires, and retention is as difficult as recruitment. Technology will reshape roles and workflows faster than many organisations are prepared for. The leaders who will define the next decade are those who build organisations that are adaptive, people-first, and genuinely committed to delivering value to guests as well as to investors. ■

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Beyond Branded Hotel Expansion

India is projected to add 70,000 branded hotel rooms by the end of this decade. This raises an important question: do the tourism and hospitality sectors have the skilled workforce required to efficiently manage such inventory and service guest expectations over the next five years? The answer, clearly, is no. What is urgently needed is a deeper industry-wide conversation around standardisation of brand experience across regions and hotel formats.

During a recent visit to a property on the outskirts of the national capital, where a leading chain had extended its brand to a palace hotel, I observed a visible lack of consistency in both service standards and infrastructure. Merely rebranding a property without meaningful on-ground transformation defeats the purpose — not only for the brand, but also from the guest's standpoint. Failing to reflect the ethos of the parent brand cannot qualify as true branded hospitality. While localisation remains essential, matching evolving service expectations is equally critical.

Over the years, we have witnessed the steady evolution of the Indian traveller, further accelerated by AI and personalisation. Today's guests can no longer be satisfied with a one-size-fits-all approach. Whether in hospitality or travel, brands must move faster to appeal to the increasingly discerning traveller. Despite premium hotel tariffs in India, guests continue to face the paradox of plenty, making it imperative for the industry to invest in training, infrastructure upgrades and technology-led solutions to enhance efficiency and address operational challenges.

India's hospitality growth must prioritise quality, consistency and future-ready talent.

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Printed and Published by Sheldon Eric Santwan On Behalf Of Saffron Synergies Pvt. Ltd, Printed At Indigo Press (India) Private Limited, 1c/716, 21 Bharat Crown Compound, A.G. Pawar Marg, Dadoji Konddeo X Road, Ghodapdev, Byculla (East), Mumbai 400 027 And Published From Saffron Synergies Pvt. Ltd. 902, Cozy Apartments Chs Ltd. Yari Road, Versova, Andheri (West), Mumbai 400 061. **Editor : Sheldon Eric Santwan**

Making Mixed Use Development ROI Palpable | Sharing Is Caring 2026

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

A premium apartment complex with a humongous terrace, a studio kitchen with 1400 sft to play! This is where I live today, basement car parking, complex ground floor a full-fledged hotel, super-charged with outsourced restaurants. A premium pub, a stylish salon, support services like laundry and a medical store to boot. And this is the mixed-use self-propelled convenience that many modern residences with a commercial leeway offer. The space is easily accessible, never really shuts down except in the wee hours, where law applies. Provides exceptional privacy with a view of a green valley and sea in the distance. Now why wouldn't an investment like this purely functional, pragmatic, highly urban in a mofussil setting work? Because for the realtor, sharing is caring, no space remains vacant. Each one serves a different purpose at a varying price point. Above all provides access and convenience. Sometimes at a premium, but that is where the revenue model kicks in, right realtor?

1. **Urban Logistics and Transportation Solutions:** Growing traffic snarls and nightmares of being stuck on a never-ending highway. Even on the way back home or simply walk to work! The Customer Value Proposition is clear for preferred independent spaces as time passes and options emerge. Congestion, transportation hurdles, an urban logistics nightmare of navigating local transport (better than being stuck in your own car with parking woes) to a metro station? Whoa that is just the first part of the battle! What happens when you get off on the other side - is contend with either office-going or home-coming traffic! Now why wouldn't a complex that saves you this ordeal cost less? It provides greater convenience and respects the most valuable-asset, time. That is our revenue strategy premium variable! With rising demand for such developments in urban metros, this resultant model of convenience is quickly being capitalized and replicated in growing Tier-2, 3 or even T4 cities. Because with space constraints becoming a reality everywhere: sooner or later, it is a solution to invest in.
2. **Mofussil Settings and Modern Benefits:** Affordable, if the exit barriers are not too high, this model has greater value equivalence than a country home. They grow less and are tough to sell. The quality of clean air, natural settings, organic ingredients, affordable healthcare and a support system that responds are a perfect recipe. More communities in suburban quiet living, yet complete in every respect, are becoming destinations that attract investment today. A support system whether maintenance of common spaces, garbage disposal or simply connectivity with the local municipality or power station has greater demand than a stand-alone bungalow in the wilderness. Though each of these has their own life-style advantage, the pure functionality and practicality of living or investing in a mixed-use development defrags and deploys your capital, which can be deployed effectively - because of its many commercial applications. And one has the proportional investment choice, whether residential or commercial to conveniently gain on ROI as the external market grows in time.
3. **Market Development and Lifestyle Optimization:** Most markets that develop early will go through this stage of investment linked to development. The ROI grows on account of the application of funds to meet multiple commercial, residential and lifestyle applications. Consider the fact that with growing consumer expectations, the consolidated product/service opportunity only grows. And if there is strategic space allocation, scope to grow new business models, adds layers of exclusivity with maturity, representing a unique new mode of expansion. Serviced apartments, health/spa facilities, natural remedy centres and a place to simply reach without bothering about having to hare about, is comforting enough. Reaching a lifestyle service, unless it is incubated in your home surroundings/ neighbourhood easily is premium enough. And if space is used as a moderating variable to generate that experience, it is obviously available only at a premium. Accessing the next desirable experience without making it a chore, is a thought that is enough to reach for your wallet, if the price-point clicks!

The bottom line is clear, mixed-use developments at varying levels are here to stay. Repurposing them requires the bare bones to be developed for multiple applications and creative service standards. Does it bode well for our traditional format to make way for this approach? Absolutely! ■

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

News Bulletin

JW Marriott names Aishwarya Rai Bachchan ambassador

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

JW Marriott has appointed Aishwarya Rai Bachchan as its Global Brand Ambassador, strengthening the luxury hospitality brand's focus on wellness, mindful travel, and experiential luxury while reinforcing its long-term commitment to the rapidly growing Indian travel market.

The collaboration will see Aishwarya Rai Bachchan play a central role in advancing JW Marriott's global "Stay in the Moment" platform, a brand philosophy rooted in holistic well-being, purposeful travel, and meaningful guest experiences.

The appointment comes at a time when India is emerging as one of the world's most influential luxury travel markets. According to Marriott International, Indian travellers are among the fastest-growing outbound luxury travel segments globally, while demand for premium domestic travel continues to rise, driven by increasing affluence, multigenerational travel, and a preference for experience-led hospitality.

JW Marriott currently operates more than 130 hotels worldwide, with India representing one of the brand's most significant growth markets and development pipelines.

Commenting on the partnership, Bruce Rohr, Vice President and Global Brand Leader, JW Marriott, said, "Aishwarya's global stature, warmth, and authenticity make her a natural embodiment of JW Marriott and an ideal partner for the brand. She brings a thoughtful, grounded presence that reflects the way our guests seek to travel – with intention and a sense of connection."

Speaking about the association, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan said, "Travel has always been an important part of my life, both personally and professionally. The most meaningful experiences are often the quietest ones, when you are fully aware of where you are and who you are with. JW Marriott's philosophy of being present and in the moment speaks to that awareness."

The partnership also reflects Marriott International's broader strategy to deepen engagement with Indian consumers and strengthen brand relevance across key international markets influenced by Indian travel demand. ■

Fusion & Familiarity, Chef Payal Thakkar's Evolving F&B Outlets

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

For an IHM Aurangabad Graduate, opening a restaurant was a natural transition. What started as a passion, progressing to home kitchen, and finally opening her first restaurant in Mumbai - Munchbox, the story of Chief Payal Thakkar is full of surprises and constant learning.

This has been supplemented with India's evolving F&B landscape, with exposure to global cuisines and experimentation for varied cuisines. Thakkar today is busy shuttling between renovating her Munchbox, managing Fir Milenge and introducing guests to her latest Gujarati thali restaurant, Munchbox Thali in the western suburbs of Mumbai.

A meeting with her and one is sure to strike an engaging conversation regarding the food business, lifestyle dining and experimentation with regional cuisine that remains easy on the pocket.

"Fusion works best when it is palatable and recognisable. We don't go into extreme combinations—guests should still understand what they are eating," Thakkar said.

Experimentation

Thakkar highlighted a significant shift in consumer behaviour, with Indian diners increasingly embracing regional cuisines and local ingredients—something that was less prevalent earlier, due to under exposure.

"Earlier, western cuisine dominated preferences, but today people are open to experimenting with local flavours. They are more aware and informed about what they eat. Moreover, social media has amplified the reach of regional tastes and that makes it easier to offer aunthentic tastes," she noted.

This shift has encouraged Thakkar to incorporate familiar regional elements into her thalis while maintaining a contemporary edge. Presentation is a key, she asserted.

Fusion Concepts Rooted in Indian Flavours

The brand's menu reflects a blend of traditional recipes with modern twists. From kachori-infused *dal & dhokli* to innovative formats of dhokla, the focus remains on reinventing classics without losing their essence.

"We mix and match concepts—like creating *paneer chilli makhani*. Even Maharashtrian *thecha* is infused with cheese to create something new yet relatable," Thakkar explained.

However, she emphasised that in formats like thalis, innovation is applied cautiously. "With thalis, guests come for authenticity, so we maintain the basics but add occasional elements of surprise through chaat or accompaniments. Thali is a representation of our culture, and there is little scope to improvise, but ample opportunity to infuse it with ingredients to maintain authenticity."

Despite strong brand recall, Thakkar said Munchbox is not currently looking at partnerships with luxury hotels, as it could dilute its core positioning.

"Our strength lies in offering variety and quality at an affordable price point. Entering five-star properties may shift our customer base, so it's not a focus right now," she stated.

Family Dining Focus Shapes Offering

A conscious decision to avoid alcohol across outlets has helped Munchbox position itself as a family-friendly dining destination.

"We want guests across all age groups—from toddlers to senior citizens—to dine comfortably. While this limits corporate and MICE dinners, we see strong lunch demand from such groups," she said.

Recognising a gap in the suburban Mumbai market, Munchbox expanded into the thali segment with a Gujarati-Marwadi offering.

"There were very few standalone thali restaurants in locations like Borivali. Instead of entering an already crowded multi-cuisine space, we chose a format that allows us to stand out," Thakkar explained. The thali menu blends Gujarati and Rajasthani elements, featuring dishes such as *dal baati*, Rajasthani *kadhi*, and regional *chaat* variations.

"We want to create a 'wow factor' in every outlet—something unique that enhances the dining experience," she said, while enumerating on flagship Munchbox's current renovation.

Competitive Yet Growing Market

While acknowledging competition in the thali segment, Thakkar believes differentiation lies in pricing, quality, and service.

"Thali is less about presentation and more about clean flavours and good ingredients. If you get that right, along with service, there is space for everyone in a market like Mumbai," she noted. ■

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'Hyderabad's diversified demand base makes it one of India's strongest hospitality markets'

At a time when Hyderabad's hospitality sector is witnessing rapid growth, strong leadership and a clear vision have become more important than ever. **John Surendranath, General Manager of Ibis Hyderabad HITEC City**, is known for his practical approach to hospitality, focus on guest satisfaction and ability to build high-performing teams. Under his leadership, the hotel has continued to deliver strong business performance while staying committed to service excellence and sustainable practices. In an exclusive conversation with **Asmita Mukherjee**, Surendranath discusses Hyderabad's evolving hospitality landscape and the key factors driving growth at Ibis Hyderabad Hitech City.

Tell us about your professional journey and your association with Accor.

I have been with Accor for close to 15 years and have had the opportunity to grow across multiple brands and segments within the group. After completing my education at Christ Collge, Bengaluru, and Sheffield Hallam University in the UK, I returned to India and joined Accor as a Duty Manager at Ibis and Novotel Bengaluru Techpark.

Over the years, I have held leadership positions across key properties including Novotel & Ibis Bengaluru Outer Ring Road, Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre, Novotel Chennai SIPCOT and Grand Mercure Mysore before taking over as General Manager of Ibis Hyderabad HITEC City.

A significant part of my development has come through Accor's leadership programmes, including the Indian Executive Learning Programme, GM Pass Asia Pacific and the Global Executive Leadership Programme. These programmes are performance-driven and focus on business results, guest satisfaction, profitability and leadership capabilities.

Working across the economy, midscale and premium segments has given me a comprehensive understanding of operations, commercial strategy, guest experience and revenue management.

What differentiates Ibis Hyderabad HITEC City in a competitive market like Hyderabad?

The biggest advantage is our location. We are situated in the heart of Hyderabad's IT corridor, which places us close to major corporate offices and business hubs.

However, location alone does not guarantee success. What differentiates us is consistency. The hotel has built a strong reputation for service quality, guest satisfaction and operational reliability over the years. We are backed by the strength of the Ibis brand and the Accor network, which operates more than 5,000 hotels globally.

The hotel has also grown alongside Hyderabad's transformation into a major technology, consulting and pharmaceutical hub, allowing us to benefit from a diversified demand base.

How has business performance been over the past year?

The hotel continues to perform strongly despite market fluctuations. We consistently operate at occupancy levels between 80% and 85%, which remains among the strongest performance indicators within the segment.

For FY 2025-26, we expect occupancy to remain stable within that range while focusing on improving rate performance.

We are targeting ADR growth of approximately 8% to 14%, which should support healthy RevPAR growth as well. The objective is to maintain the right balance between occupancy, pricing and profitability while continuing to enhance guest satisfaction.

What does your guest mix look like today?

Corporate travellers remain the backbone of our business and contribute approximately 50% to 60% of total room demand. Hyderabad's IT ecosystem is a major demand generator, but the city's strength lies in its diversification. In addition to technology companies, we see significant demand from consulting firms, Global Capability Centres, research organisations and pharmaceutical companies.

The pharmaceutical and healthcare segment alone contributes close to 20% of our business mix. This includes pharmaceutical executives, healthcare conferences, visiting doctors and medical travellers. The diversity of Hyderabad's economy provides greater resilience compared to markets that rely heavily on a single industry.

How important are meetings, conferences and MICE business to the hotel?

MICE remains an important contributor, particularly in the small and mid-sized corporate events segment. Our focus is not on large conventions or wedding business. Instead, we cater to day conferences, leadership meetings, training sessions, interview drives and strategy workshops with attendance ranging between 45 and 50 participants.

We regularly host programmes for technology companies, healthcare organisations, life sciences firms and banking institutions. The demand for smaller, focused business meetings has increased significantly in recent years.

Our two meeting rooms can accommodate up to 50 participants in a combined setup and are equipped with interactive presentation facilities. The convenience of having meeting spaces, dining facilities and guest services located on the same level makes the experience efficient and productive for corporate clients.

Ancillary revenue has become increasingly important for hotels. How are you leveraging it?

Ancillary revenue today contributes approximately 10% to 15% of the hotel's overall revenue and has become an increasingly important profitability driver.

Food and beverage, meeting spaces, laundry services, early check-ins, late check-outs and corporate dining programmes are key contributors. We are also creating curated experiences and thematic events that drive engagement while generating additional revenue streams. These initiatives strengthen guest loyalty while improving commercial performance.

Corporate dining remains a particularly important opportunity because it allows us to leverage existing corporate relationships beyond room business.

Food and beverage remain highly competitive in Hyderabad. How do you position your offering?

Our approach is centred around authenticity and consistency. Hyderabad has no shortage of dining options, so differentiation comes from delivering quality experiences rather than simply expanding the menu.

At Spice It and Groove Hub, our focus is on serving freshly prepared food, authentic flavours and a warm, personalised dining experience, sip on refreshing mocktails, and unwind after a busy day in our vibrant metropolis. We have found that guests increasingly appreciate authentic hospitality and attention to detail.

Sustainability is becoming a key focus area for hospitality businesses. What initiatives have been implemented at the hotel?

Sustainability has become a business priority rather than a compliance requirement. Ibis Hyderabad HITEC City was among the first Ibis hotels in India to receive Green Key certification and is currently in its third year of certification.

The hotel has invested in multiple sustainability initiatives, including an in-house water bottling plant, which significantly reduces plastic bottle consumption by 10500 per month, 30 solar panels for energy conservation by 100 units per day,500 aerated sensor taps to reduce around 10% water usage per day, 90% lightings are LED emitting lesser greenhouse gases, rain water harvesting and bio-composting systems for waste management.

These initiatives are environmentally responsible, but they also align with the expectations of corporate clients who increasingly evaluate sustainability practices when selecting hospitality partners. Hotels are significant consumers of water, energy and natural resources. As an industry, we have a responsibility to reduce our environmental footprint while maintaining operational efficiency.

What are your key priorities for the next financial year?

Our primary focus remains on operational excellence and maintaining the quality of the product. Continuous investment in guest-facing areas and public spaces ensuring that the hotel remains competitive.

The second priority is sustainability. We intend to further expand our environmental initiatives and improve resource efficiency across operations. The third focus area is enhancing ancillary revenue streams through curated guest experiences, entertainment-led programming and stronger engagement initiatives.

At the same time, we continue to invest in safety and security infrastructure, including fire-life safety systems, surveillance technology and emergency preparedness measures. Guest confidence is built not only through service but also through safety and reliability.

How do you view Hyderabad's hospitality market over the next few years?

Hyderabad remains one of India's most promising hospitality markets. The city continues to benefit from sustained growth in technology, pharmaceuticals, consulting, Global Capability Centres and infrastructure development.

What makes Hyderabad particularly attractive is its balanced demand profile. The market is supported by corporate travel, pharmaceutical business, MICE demand, healthcare-related travel and an emerging leisure segment.

Unlike many cities that depend heavily on one sector, Hyderabad benefits from multiple demand drivers. That creates resilience and long-term growth potential.

The city has consistently delivered strong hospitality performance and continues to attract significant domestic and international investment. ■

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AI, data analytics reshaping hospitality finance, but human insight remains critical: HFTP

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

Technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI) and advanced data analytics—is rapidly transforming hospitality finance, enabling hotels to unlock new revenue streams, optimise operations, and improve profitability across departments. However, Frank Wolfe, CEO of the Hospitality Financial and Technology Professionals (HFTP), cautions that without proper data governance and human oversight, these tools could also create risks.

Speaking to **Hospitality Biz**, Wolfe highlighted how AI is streamlining hotel operations—from revenue management to guest engagement—while redefining traditional financial metrics.

AI Driving Profitability and Operational Efficiency

AI-powered tools are increasingly being deployed across hotel ecosystems, including property management systems (PMS), point-of-sale (POS) platforms, and guest-facing interfaces such as chatbots. These technologies are enabling hotels to go beyond simple transactions to drive ancillary revenue.

"Today's AI-enabled chatbots are not just handling reservations—they are upselling experiences such as spa services, tours, and dining options, significantly enhancing total guest value," said Wolfe.

AI is also helping hotels extract deeper insights from operational data. Traditionally, hotels relied on a limited set of reports such as Average Daily Rate (ADR), but modern analytics tools can evaluate the complete value of a guest, including spend across F&B, wellness, and events.

Shift from Traditional Metrics to Total Guest Value

Wolfe stressed the need for hotels to move beyond conventional KPIs like ADR and occupancy. For instance, a lower room rate guest segment could generate significantly higher overall revenue through additional services.

"AI allows hotels to analyse not just room revenue, but the full revenue potential of each customer—whether through weddings, dining, or spa usage," he explained. This shift is expected to play a crucial role in refining revenue strategies and improving profitability.

Data Integrity Emerges as a Key Challenge

While AI presents significant opportunities, Wolfe warned that its effectiveness is heavily dependent on data accuracy.

"AI can only learn from the data it is fed. If systems are down, data is missing, or inputs are inaccurate, the output will be skewed—and there is no human instinct within AI to correct that," he said.

This underscores the importance of robust data management practices and continuous system monitoring.

F&B Optimisation Through AI

Beyond rooms, AI is also enabling smarter decision-making in food and beverage operations. Chefs and procurement teams can leverage AI to design menus based on ingredient availability, pricing trends, and local sourcing. During periods of rising logistics costs or supply chain disruptions, AI can recommend cost-effective menu alternatives without compromising quality.

Frank Wolfe, CEO,
Hospitality Financial and Technology Professionals (HFTP)

"This allows hotels to dynamically adjust menus based on market conditions, reducing costs and improving margins," Wolfe noted.

Workforce Transformation and Skill Development

The growing adoption of AI is also reshaping workforce requirements in the hospitality sector. HFTP has established a global AI Council to address key industry challenges, including skill gaps and the need for a common AI vocabulary. The council is also focusing on future workforce readiness through initiatives such as "Workforce 20X," which explores the skills required in an AI-driven environment.

"Understanding AI is no longer optional. The industry needs a common language and better training to fully leverage its potential," Wolfe emphasised.

Financial and Operational Alignment Critical

Wolfe highlighted that the role of finance departments is evolving from being a cost centre to a strategic enabler of revenue growth. By collaborating closely with operations and technology teams, finance professionals can provide actionable insights that influence pricing, demand forecasting, and cost control.

"A strong finance function, supported by the right technology, can directly contribute to profitability by guiding better business decisions," he said.

Persistent Industry Challenges

Despite technological advancements, hotels continue to face core financial challenges, including rising utility costs, staffing shortages, and training requirements. The post-pandemic talent gap has further intensified the need for structured training programmes.

Wolfe pointed out that deploying experienced staff for training can temporarily impact service delivery, creating a balance between operational efficiency and workforce development.

The Road Ahead

While AI adoption is accelerating, Wolfe believes the industry may witness a period of recalibration as stakeholders address concerns around data accuracy, ethical use, and over-reliance on automation.

There will likely be a surge in AI adoption followed by a phase where the industry reassesses its approach to ensure sustainability and reliability," he concluded. ■

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The Game-Changing Insight Hospitality F&B Leaders Can't Afford to Ignore

What if the next ₹1 crore, ₹5 crore or even ₹10 crore isn't coming from growth at all?

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

Most hospitality businesses focus on increasing revenue, occupancy, covers, footfalls, ADR, ARR and RevPAR. Yet some of the largest profitability opportunities are often hiding within existing operations.

Over the past three decades, we have worked with hotels, resorts, restaurants, cafés, bakery chains, QSR operators and catering businesses across India. One pattern continues to surprise us. Almost every business believed it was already operating efficiently. Most had experienced management teams, established reporting systems, regular financial reviews and operating results that appeared healthy and acceptable.

Yet after independent profitability reviews and operational optimization initiatives, the outcomes were often significant—not because quality was reduced, menu prices were increased, guest experience was compromised, or portion sizes were reduced. The results came from challenging long-accepted assumptions.

ACTUAL HOSPITALITY BUSINESS OUTCOMES

Segment	Annual Turnover	Gross Consumption F&B & Liquor (Before)	Gross Consumption F&B & Liquor (After)	Improvement /Optimisation	Additional Profitability Generated
Premium Dining / Restaurants	₹15 Cr	31%	23%	8%	₹1.20 Cr.
Bakery Confectionery Chain	₹55 Cr	36%	26%	10%	₹5.50 Cr.
Chain of Restaurant	₹100 Cr	32%	24%	8%	₹8.00 Cr.
5-Star Hotel / Resort (F&B Revenue)	₹100 Cr	28%	22.5%	5.5%	₹5.50 Cr.
Catering / Banqueting Business	₹60 Cr	28%	20%	8%	₹4.80 Cr.

Combined additional profitability generated across these five businesses exceeded ₹25 crore annually.

- No increase in menu prices.
- No reduction in quality.
- No reduction in quantity.
- No compromise in guest experience.

What surprises us is not the size of these improvements.

What surprises us is how often hospitality businesses fail to challenge accepted performance.

We frequently hear:

- "Our food cost is already under control."
- "We are within benchmark."
- "We are already doing well."
- "Reducing costs further will impact quality."

In many cases, these statements are not wrong. They are simply untested.

Owners rigorously review occupancy, ARR, RevPAR, payroll costs, marketing spends and capital investments, yet F&B—often one of the largest controllable expense categories and among the most commercially significant departments—rarely receives the same level of strategic challenge.

Across hotels, resorts, restaurants and catering businesses, acceptable performance often becomes the benchmark for future performance. The danger is not poor performance. The danger is assuming current performance represents full potential.

The businesses highlighted above were not struggling businesses. Most were considered successful businesses. The difference was that someone challenged the assumption that current performance represented full potential.

If a premium dining restaurant can generate ₹1.2 crore annually, a bakery chain can generate ₹5.5 crore, a restaurant group can generate ₹8 crore, and a hotel or resort can generate over ₹5 crore, then perhaps the most important question is not:

"How are we performing?"

But rather:

"How do we know we are operating at our full potential?"

Because the next crore may not come from a new outlet, a new menu, or higher prices.

It may come from extracting more value from what already exists. ■

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

Tribe Stays bets big on India's managed living boom

Asmita Mukherjee | Hyderabad

As India's urban workforce becomes increasingly mobile and students continue to migrate to education and employment hubs, the managed living sector is undergoing a significant transformation. What was once viewed as an alternative accommodation option is now evolving into a lifestyle-driven category where convenience, community and experience play an equally important role. At the forefront of this shift is Tribe Stays, a managed living platform that is building a hospitality-led ecosystem for students, young professionals and corporate travellers.

Shantam Mehra
Co-Founder, Tribe Stays

For Shantam Mehra, Co-Founder of Tribe Stays, the future of managed living extends far beyond providing a bed and a room. "Long-stay living is very different from shorter stays like hotels," says Mehra. "Guests expect consistency when they're staying for longer periods. Food, housekeeping, maintenance, security and community all need to operate at a consistently high standard to create a great overall experience."

He believes that as consumers become more discerning, expectations around transparency and flexibility are also rising. "The unorganised market has normalised hidden charges and opaque systems. We are looking to change that by bringing a premium, transparent and reliable experience across every customer segment we serve," he explains.

Building communities

One of the biggest differentiators for Tribe Stays is its focus on creating meaningful resident communities. While most operators concentrate on infrastructure and occupancy, the company has invested in a dedicated community team tasked with driving engagement and fostering a sense of belonging among residents. "We are one of the few brands that has built a dedicated community team specifically to nurture togetherness," Mehra notes.

The approach goes beyond routine social gatherings. Community experiences are carefully curated around resident profiles, seasonal interests and lifestyle preferences. "Depending on the residents and the time of year, we organise networking events, sports activities, workshops, expert talks and even excursions," he says. "The objective is to create a strong community experience that cannot easily be replicated elsewhere."

As loneliness and social isolation become growing concerns in urban centres, Mehra sees community-building as a critical pillar of the managed living model. "People don't just want a place to stay anymore. They want to feel connected. They want to belong," he adds.

Technology as the backbone

Technology is another area where Tribe Stays is investing heavily to create operational efficiency and build consumer confidence. "Transparency is the foundation of trust," says Mehra. "Our technology platform keeps transactions and operations transparent and fluid. It makes us accountable while simplifying communication for residents."

Through the company's digital ecosystem, residents can manage payments, service requests, event registrations, bookings and maintenance tickets seamlessly.

"Reports, tickets, transactions, bookings and community engagement all become easier to manage at scale through technology," he explains.

Safety, meanwhile, remains a top priority, particularly for students and young professionals relocating to new cities.

"We have implemented a three-tier security framework that combines biometric access, manned security and CCTV monitoring," says Mehra. "Technology allows us to monitor these systems efficiently while ensuring residents enjoy a safe and hassle-free living environment."

According to him, convenience and security work hand-in-hand in driving long-term resident retention."When residents feel safe, supported and informed, trust naturally follows," he says.

Expansion plans

Tribe Stays recently secured seed funding to accelerate its growth ambitions, with expansion already underway across multiple high-potential markets.

The company currently operates through three distinct verticals, student accommodation, co-living and managed suites, and plans to scale each category strategically."For co-living and managed suites, our immediate focus is on Gurgaon, Hyderabad, Pune, Mumbai and Bengaluru," Mehra reveals.

Student housing, meanwhile, remains concentrated around major education hubs.

"Mumbai, Pune, Indore and Dehradun are among the markets we are actively targeting because of their strong student ecosystems," he says. The company's market selection strategy is driven by demographics and infrastructure trends.

"We are focusing on locations with high concentrations of IT professionals, university populations, airport-led developments, educational clusters and expatriate communities," Mehra explains.

The long-term ambition is equally aggressive.

"We expect to have 25,000 operational beds within the next five years," he says. "Our recent institutional funding will help us scale to 5,000 beds in the first phase, after which we will evaluate the next stage of capital raising."

Strong alternative

As urban consumers increasingly prioritise convenience and flexibility, Mehra believes managed living is rapidly emerging as a viable alternative to conventional rental housing.

"Absolutely," he says when asked whether co-living can challenge traditional rentals.

"The hassles associated with apartment hunting, furnishing homes, managing utilities, arranging domestic help and dealing with long-term commitments have created strong demand for professionally managed living solutions." For younger consumers, flexibility has become a non-negotiable requirement.

"People move cities for education and work more frequently than ever before. They want a better living experience without being tied down by traditional rental structures," Mehra says. He is confident that the category is only at the beginning of its growth cycle."We believe co-living will become the default choice for students and professionals relocating to new cities," he adds.

Lifestyle-led brand

While infrastructure remains important, Mehra believes the next phase of growth in managed living will be driven by brand perception, trust and experience. "We are positioning Tribe Stays as much more than a co-living operator," he says. "Our focus is on community and trust."

The company is deliberately targeting aspirational consumers who are willing to pay for quality, safety and a premium living environment."Because we invest heavily in quality and community-building, our resident base naturally attracts like-minded individuals. That creates a powerful network effect," Mehra explains.At the core of the company's philosophy is a relentless focus on improving the resident experience.

"We are obsessed with solving problems, pushing boundaries and continuously improving every aspect of community living," he says. "Whether it is safety, convenience, hospitality standards or resident engagement, our goal is to raise the benchmark for managed living in India."

As India's managed living sector matures, companies that successfully combine hospitality, technology and community-building are likely to emerge as category leaders. Tribe Stays is betting that the future of urban living will not simply be defined by accommodation, but by experiences, relationships and trust. ■

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News Bulletin

Centre ends 47-Year liquor prohibition in Lakshadweep, introduces regulated alcohol sales

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

The Centre has officially repealed the 47-year-old prohibition law in Lakshadweep and introduced a new regulatory framework permitting the sale of alcoholic beverages through licensed outlets across the Union Territory.

The change comes through the implementation of the Lakshadweep Excise Regulation, 2026, which was notified in the official gazette on June 5. The new regulation replaces the Lakshadweep Prohibition Regulation, 1979, ending nearly five decades of alcohol prohibition in the island territory.

Under the revised framework, the production, import, export, transportation, sale, and consumption of alcoholic beverages will be governed through a licensing system. Government-owned corporations and agencies will also be eligible to obtain licences for retail liquor sales.

Officials stated that while the new policy allows regulated alcohol sales, it includes strict safeguards to monitor and control consumption. The regulation prohibits the sale of liquor to individuals below 21 years of age and empowers the Lakshadweep Administration to impose purchase limits, regulate consumption patterns, and reintroduce prohibition in specific areas if necessary.

The administration has also introduced a high excise duty structure on alcoholic beverages. Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) and foreign liquor will attract a 400% excise duty, beer 200%, and wine 80%.

Lakshadweep had maintained prohibition since 1979, primarily due to religious and cultural considerations. However, limited alcohol consumption had already been permitted for government officials and foreign tourists at select government-operated resorts and bars on islands such as Kavaratti and Bangaram.

According to officials, the policy shift is part of a broader strategy to strengthen Lakshadweep's tourism sector and enhance its competitiveness with international destinations. The administration has argued that the previous prohibition regime placed the islands at a disadvantage compared to tourism-driven destinations such as the Maldives, where alcohol is available at designated tourist resorts. ■

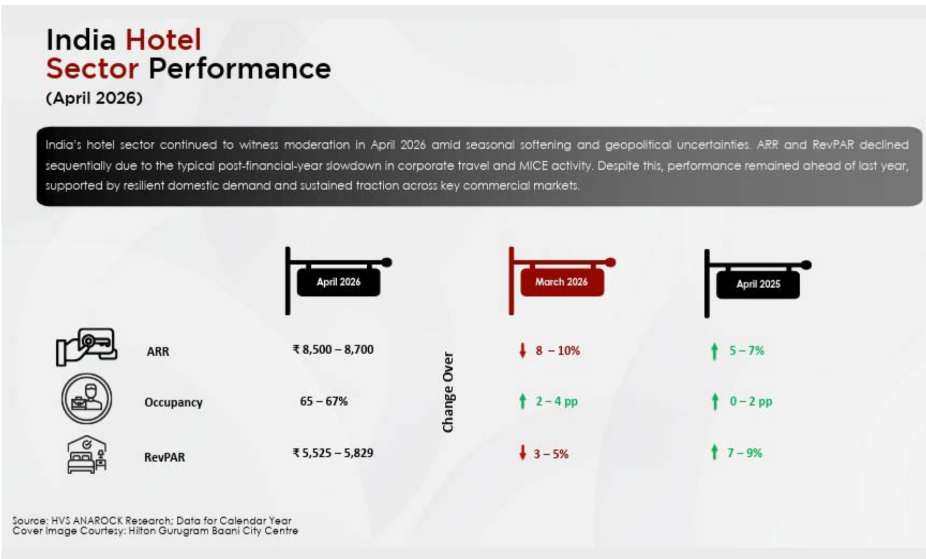
Indian hotel sector holds ground despite April slowdown

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

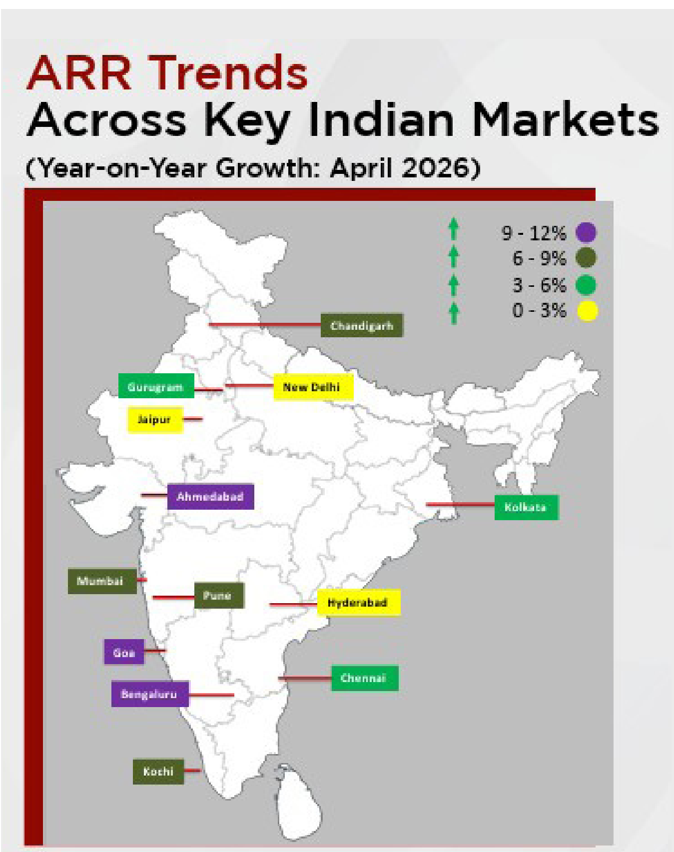
India's hotel industry witnessed a moderate slowdown in April 2026 as seasonal demand softening and geopolitical uncertainties weighed on performance. However, the sector continued to outperform last year's levels, supported by resilient domestic travel demand and sustained activity across key commercial markets, according to the latest HVS ANAROCK Hospitality Monitor.

Average Room Rates (ARR) during April stood between ₹8,500 and ₹8,700, while occupancy levels ranged from 65-67%. Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR) was estimated at ₹5,525-₹5,829. Although ARR and RevPAR declined sequentially compared to March due to the typical post-financial-year slowdown in corporate travel and MICE activity, the industry recorded year-on-year growth across key performance indicators.

Among major markets, Bengaluru emerged as the strongest performer, registering ARR growth of 15-17 per cent year-on-year, driven by robust corporate and commercial demand.



Source: HVS ANAROCK Research; Data for Calendar Year
Cover Image Courtesy: Hilton Gurugram Baani City Centre



Source: HVS ANAROCK Research; Data for Calendar Year

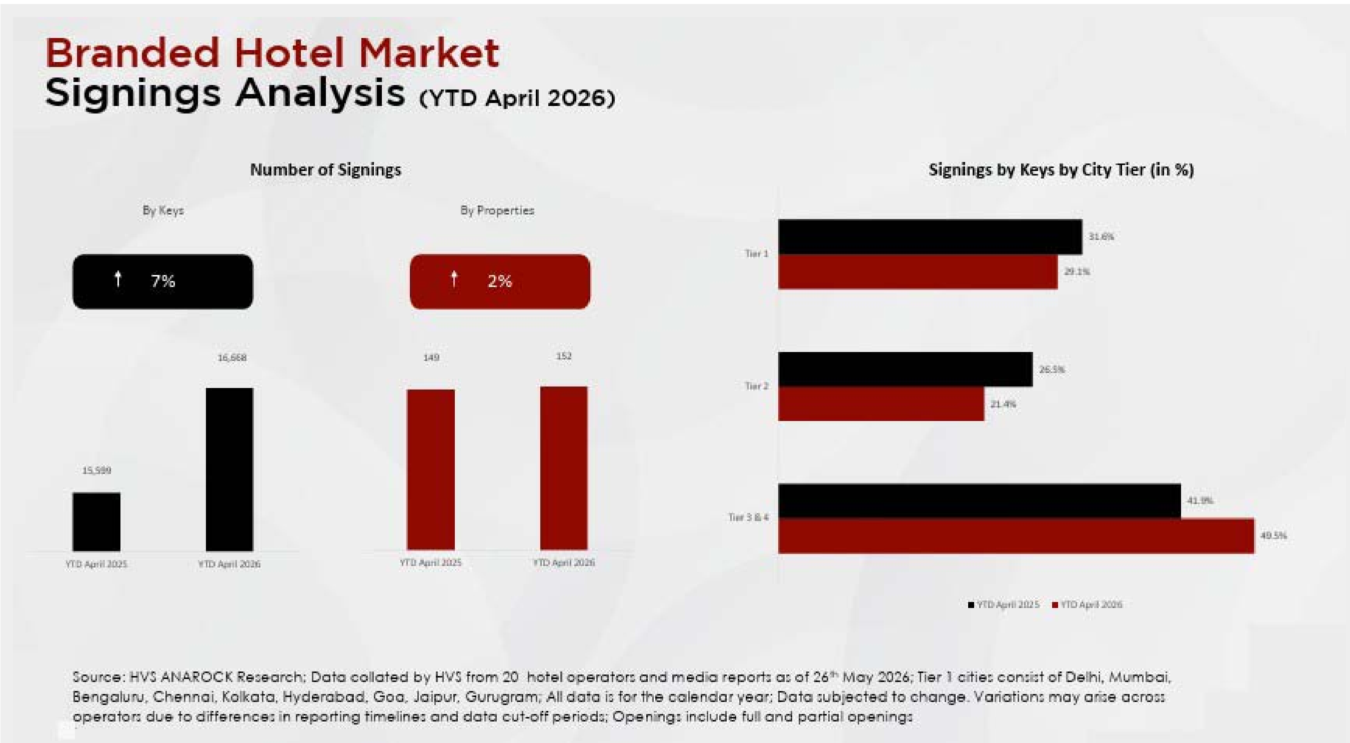
Source: HVS ANAROCK Research; Data for Calendar Year; pp – percentage points

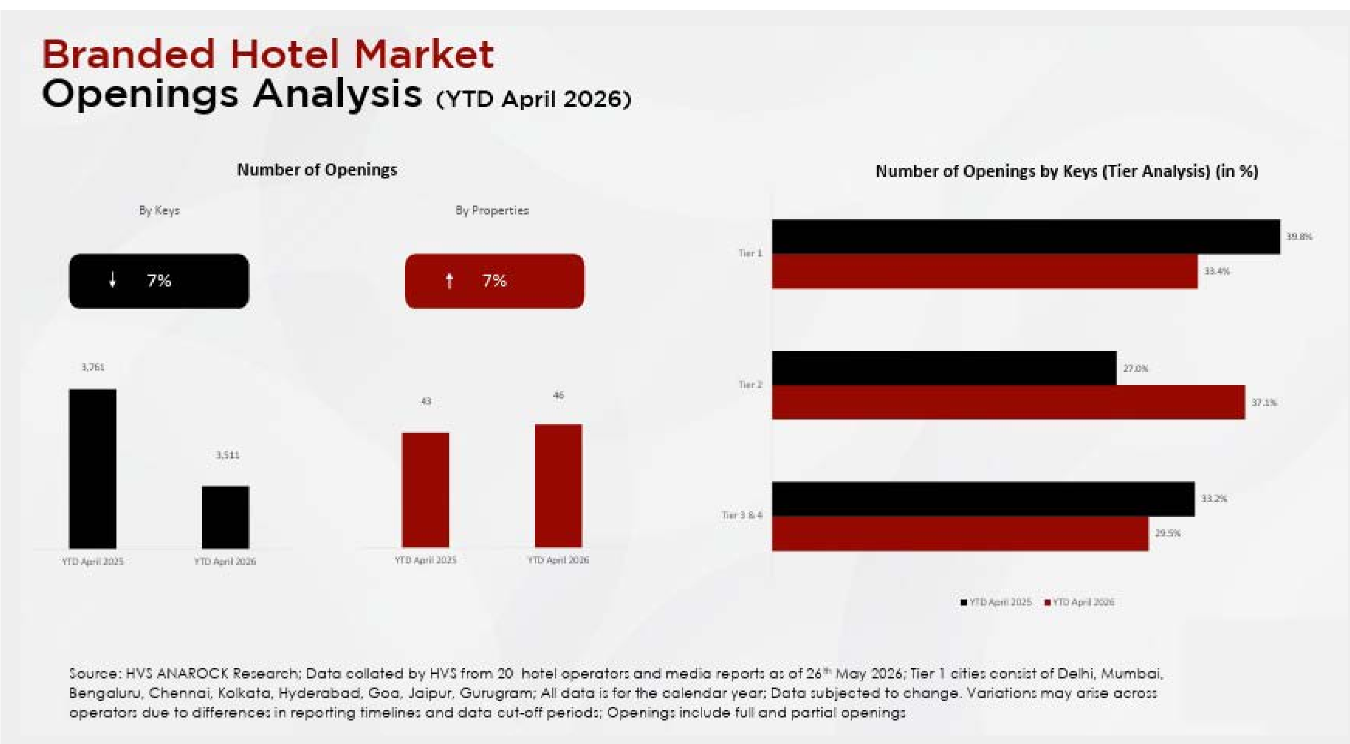
Pune followed with growth of 11-13 per cent, highlighting the continued strength of South Indian hospitality markets. In contrast, Mumbai reported a decline in room rates, while Ahmedabad and Jaipur witnessed marginal softening.

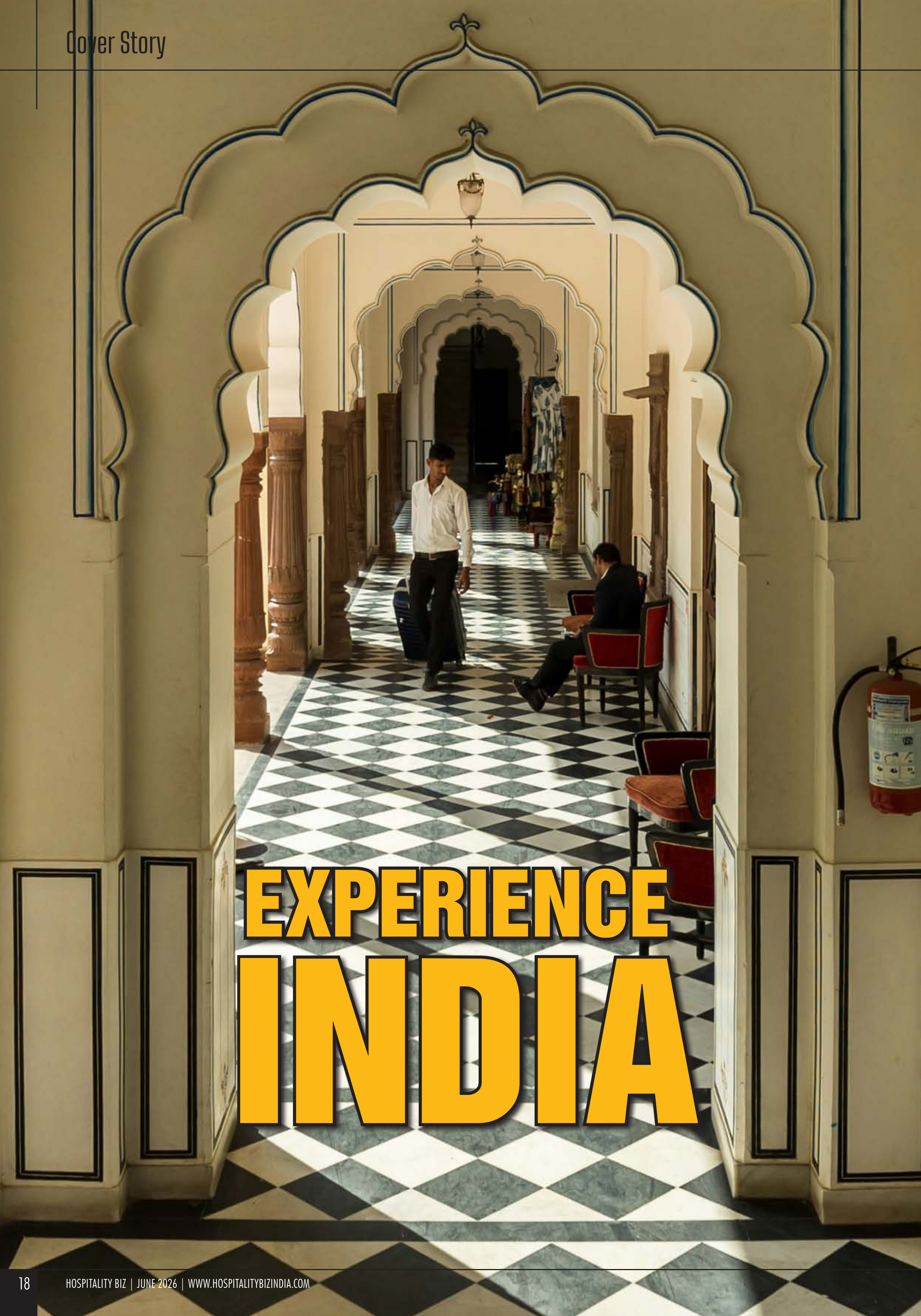
On the occupancy front, Ahmedabad recorded the sharpest growth, with occupancy rising by 10-12 percentage points year-on-year, supported by strong commercial activity and event-led demand. Chandigarh also posted healthy gains, while Mumbai, Gurugram and Jaipur experienced occupancy declines. Despite this, Mumbai and New Delhi remained the country's highest occupancy markets, operating at 77-81 per cent occupancy levels.

Hotel development activity remained strong. The branded hotel sector recorded 152 property signings comprising 16,668 keys during the first four months of 2026, marginally higher than the previous year. Openings also increased to 46 properties with 3,511 keys. Notably, Tier II, III and IV cities continued to attract a larger share of new signings and openings, reflecting growing investor confidence in emerging hospitality destinations.

Despite short-term demand moderation, the industry's fundamentals remain robust, underpinned by domestic travel, business mobility and an expanding hotel development pipeline. ■







EXPERIENCE INDIA

Asmita Mukherjee | Hyderabad

As geopolitical uncertainty, rising international travel costs, and the Prime Minister's appeal to avoid non-essential foreign travel begin to reshape travel decisions, India's hospitality industry finds itself at a defining inflection point. What may have once been read as a short term behavioural shift is now increasingly being seen by industry leaders as the trigger for a deeper structural change, the rise of a more diversified and resilient domestic tourism economy.

Even before this shift gained momentum, the sector was already demonstrating steady underlying strength. According to the HVS ANAROCK Hospitality Monitor, April 2026 saw average room rates holding between INR 8,500 and INR 8,700, occupancy levels stable at 65% to 67%, and RevPAR above INR 5,500, with performance still ahead of last year despite a typical post-financial-year moderation. Branded hotel signings and openings also remained robust, with tier - II to tier - IV cities steadily expanding their share of new development activity, signalling growing confidence in emerging destinations. Against this backdrop of resilient fundamentals, the renewed focus on domestic travel has added fresh momentum to an already evolving story. Within the industry, domestic tourism is no longer viewed merely as a buffer to international demand, but increasingly as the backbone of India's hospitality economy.

If even a part of outbound travel spending is retained within the country, the impact is expected to extend well beyond hotel revenues into employment generation, investment flows, and destination development across a wider and more inclusive tourism map.

Demand Shift

Industry leaders believe the opportunity extends far beyond a temporary spike in bookings and for many hospitality operators, the first signs are already visible.

According to Sumit Mitruka, Founder and CEO of Summit Hotels & Resorts, the impact may be most profound not in established tourism hotspots but in destinations that are still emerging on India's travel map. "The biggest impact may not be on established tourism destinations, but on emerging destinations that are still building awareness," he says. "We have already seen a noticeable surge in enquiries since the Prime Minister's announcement, and this summer season has been the strongest we have experienced so far across our portfolio."

Mitruka believes India's domestic travel base is already substantial, but the shift could encourage travellers to venture beyond familiar circuits. "Many Indian travellers have visited international destinations before visiting places such as Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, or parts of Sikkim. If travel spending remains within the country, we could see stronger demand distributed across a wider tourism map rather than concentrated in a handful of destinations."

For operators in the Northeast and Eastern Himalayas, this could be a watershed moment. Destinations that have long remained on the fringes of mainstream tourism conversations may finally receive the attention they deserve.

A similar sentiment is echoed by Anshul Bhargava, Founder and Managing Director of BlackRock Hotels & Resorts. He

Sumit Mitruka
Founder and CEO,
Summit Hotels & Resorts

Anshul Bhargava
Founder and Managing Director, BlackRock
Hotels & Resorts

Vineet Arora
Chief Operating Officer,
Antara Cruises

points out that India today offers a hospitality ecosystem that is far stronger and more diversified than it was just a few years ago. "The appeal comes at a time when India's domestic tourism ecosystem is far stronger and more diverse," he says. "We expect a section of leisure travellers who may have been considering short-haul international holidays to increasingly evaluate premium domestic destinations instead."

Bhargava believes destinations such as Ranthambore, Pushkar and Jaipur stand to gain as travellers increasingly seek experiences rather than mere locations. "Travellers are placing greater emphasis on unique experiences, nature-led stays and destination-focused travel rather than simply choosing a location."

Experience Economy

If there is one theme that consistently emerges across conversations with hospitality leaders, it is that domestic tourism's future will be shaped not by affordability alone but by experiences.

International travel has become more expensive due to currency fluctuations, rising airfares and increasing travel costs. Yet industry leaders caution against viewing domestic tourism simply as a lower-cost substitute.

"Indian travellers today are far more informed and destination aware than they were a decade ago," says Mitruka. "The larger opportunity lies in improving the discoverability of domestic destinations."

He argues that the hospitality sector must collaborate more actively with tourism boards, local communities and travel partners to tell richer destination stories. "If we can improve accessibility, visibility and destination storytelling, domestic tourism will benefit not only from cost advantages but from a genuinely broader and richer range of travel experiences."

Bhargava agrees that the modern traveller is driven by value, convenience and experience. "When international travel becomes more expensive, many travellers begin reassessing whether they can achieve a similar quality of experience within India."

His answer is clear. "India's hospitality sector today is fully aligned with global standards, offering world-class accommodation, service, wellness, dining and leisure experiences that are highly competitive with international destinations."

For BlackRock Hotels & Resorts, the focus has increasingly shifted toward experiential hospitality. "Properties that successfully combine accommodation with memorable experiences are likely to capture a larger share of discretionary travel spending," Bhargava says.

River Revival

While hotels and resorts continue to dominate the domestic tourism landscape, niche segments are also sensing unprecedented opportunity.

Vineet Arora, Chief Operating Officer of Antara Cruises, believes India is witnessing a growing appetite for meaningful and immersive domestic travel experiences.

"We believe the Prime Minister's appeal can accelerate a shift that was already emerging among Indian travellers, a stronger appetite for meaningful, high-quality experiences within the country," he says.

Arora believes domestic tourism must stop positioning itself as an alternative to international travel and instead celebrate its own strengths. "At Antara Cruises, we see this as an opportunity to showcase India not as a fallback, but as a world-class travel

destination in its own right."

He points to India's extraordinary cultural and natural wealth. "India offers extraordinary rivers, heritage, wildlife, cuisine, spirituality and culture. The key will be execution. Domestic demand will grow only where the experience is seamless, safe, premium and emotionally compelling."

For Antara Cruises, this moment presents an opportunity to introduce shorter domestic cruise experiences that appeal to Indian travellers seeking convenience and immersion. "We are looking to introduce three-night and four-night domestic cruises on the Ganges throughout the year aboard our historic cruise ship Bengal Ganga," says Arora. "This will allow Indian travellers to experience the country's river heritage, culture, cuisine and spiritual landscape in a shorter, more convenient format."

Growth Opportunity

Industry stakeholders increasingly view this period as a potential turning point for Indian tourism.

"This could become a turning point if it encourages more balanced tourism growth across the country," says Mitruka. For decades, tourism demand has remained concentrated around a relatively small number of destinations. A stronger domestic travel movement could finally spread economic activity more evenly.

"The opportunity is not simply to increase visitor numbers, but to broaden the tourism economy and ensure more regions participate in its growth," he says.

Bhargava views the current environment as an accelerator of trends that were already underway. "Over the last few years, Indian travellers have become more willing to explore domestic destinations that were previously overlooked."

He believes the next phase requires destinations to strengthen tourism infrastructure while hospitality companies invest in differentiated products. "We are seeing growing demand for experiential resorts, destination weddings, wellness retreats and nature-led hospitality."

Arora also sees opportunities extending beyond hospitality operators. "The opportunity is to create connected domestic circuits around rivers, heritage towns, local communities and regional experiences that can compete meaningfully with international holidays."

Community Impact

Perhaps the most compelling argument for strengthening domestic tourism lies in its economic multiplier effect. "One of the most valuable aspects of tourism is that its benefits are distributed," says Mitruka. "Unlike many industries, hospitality creates economic activity across multiple layers of the local economy."

He highlights how tourism spending supports transport providers, farmers, artisans, guides, performers and small businesses across the Northeast and Eastern Himalayan region.

Bhargava echoes the same belief. "The multiplier effect of tourism is substantial because spending does not remain confined to hotels alone." According to him, every increase in visitor activity supports transportation providers, event planners, decorators, performers, photographers, restaurants and local entrepreneurs.

Arora notes that tourism's impact reaches deep into local communities. "Every journey depends on regional culture, cuisine, craft, river communities and destination infrastructure. Higher domestic demand can support more employment, better training, new investments and stronger opportunities for small businesses."

Future Vision

As India looks ahead, hospitality leaders agree that sustaining momentum will require long term commitment rather than short term gains.

"The most important long-term outcome could be a more geographically diversified tourism industry," says Mitruka. "Growth should be accompanied by infrastructure improvements, community participation, environmental sensitivity and stronger destination management practices."

Bhargava believes the future belongs to experience-led hospitality. "Travellers increasingly seek meaningful experiences, personalised service, wellness offerings, authentic cultural engagement and destinations that provide a sense of escape."

For Arora, the future lies in creating experiences that consistently meet global expectations. "Indian travellers are sophisticated. They will not remain loyal to domestic options out of sentiment alone."

His conclusion perhaps captures the industry's collective aspiration most effectively. "To sustain this momentum, the industry must protect natural and cultural assets, invest in people and build experiences that make travellers proud to explore India."

As the hospitality sector navigates this pivotal period, one thing is becoming increasingly clear. The conversation is no longer about convincing Indians to travel within the country. It is about ensuring that every journey across India is memorable enough to inspire the next one. If the industry succeeds, this moment could mark the beginning of a domestic tourism renaissance that reshapes the country's hospitality landscape for years to come. ■

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'Hospitality industry must focus on mentorship'

Having spent nearly two decades across luxury hotels, airline catering and destination hospitality, **Chef Shiiv Parvesh** believes a chef's journey should be "like a flowing river" – constantly evolving through travel, cultures and experiences. From starting his career at The Oberoi, New Delhi, to handling large-scale culinary operations across India and overseas, Parvesh today leads the kitchens as the **Director of Culinary at Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre and Hyderabad International Convention Centre**, where he oversees one of Asia's largest convention hospitality setups. In an exclusive interaction with **Asmita Mukherjee**, Chef Parvesh speaks about Hyderabad's evolving food culture, post-pandemic dining trends, and talent challenges in hospitality.

Tell us about your journey in the hospitality industry and how it all began.

My journey in hospitality has been close to two decades now, and it has been an incredibly enriching experience across luxury hotels, airline catering and large-scale convention hospitality. I started my career after completing a hotel management program in Delhi and joined The Oberoi New Delhi, one of the most respected luxury hotels in the country.

I was fortunate to be part of the pre-opening team of the iconic 360° restaurant, which at the time completely changed Delhi's fine-dining landscape. That exposure gave me an early understanding of global cuisine, restaurant operations and guest expectations at the highest level.

Over the years, I worked extensively across speciality restaurants, Italian cuisine and luxury dining concepts. A major turning point came when I got the opportunity to represent India at an international food festival in Berlin alongside corporate chefs from leading hotel groups. That experience widened my culinary perspective and helped me understand international hospitality standards.

I later became part of an advanced management training programme within the Oberoi Group, where I trained across multiple luxury properties and restaurants. I worked at The Oberoi Vanyavilas Wildlife Resort, which was among the world's leading luxury wildlife resorts, and later at The Oberoi Rajvilas, where I handled regional Indian cuisine and destination dining experiences.

Each phase of my career taught me something unique, from luxury dining and regional cuisine to operational discipline and large-scale hospitality management.

You moved from hotels to airline catering and then returned to hospitality operations. How multidimensional was that transition?

The transition was extremely multidimensional and probably one of the most important learning phases of my career. After spending nearly a decade with the Oberoi Group, I wanted to explore hospitality beyond traditional hotel kitchens, which is when I joined Jet Airways as head chef.

Airline catering is a completely different ecosystem. In hotels, food is served fresh and immediately consumed, whereas in aviation catering, you need to focus heavily on logistics, consistency, food safety, shelf life, packaging and operational precision.

I worked across several airline kitchens in India including Goa, Kochi, Calicut and Mangaluru, apart from international exposure in Singapore, Hong Kong, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Norway. Working with global airline catering companies exposed me to large-scale food production where kitchens cater to lakhs of meals while maintaining global hygiene and quality standards.

That experience fundamentally changed my understanding of culinary operations. It improved my planning ability, operational discipline and adaptability. I often say a chef's journey should be like a flowing river – constantly moving, learning and absorbing new experiences instead of remaining stagnant.

Hyderabad has emerged as a major culinary destination. How do you see the city's food culture evolving?

Hyderabad today is one of the most dynamic and cosmopolitan food cities in India. Traditionally, the city has always been associated with Nizami cuisine, biryani and rich culinary heritage, but over the last decade, the dining ecosystem has evolved tremendously.

What makes Hyderabad unique is that it beautifully balances heritage and modernity. You can begin your day with traditional Irani chai and bun maska, enjoy authentic local street food during the afternoon, and still experience some of the finest international dining concepts by evening.

The city today attracts professionals and residents from across the country because of the IT sector, multinational companies and startup ecosystem. Naturally, this diversity is reflected in the food culture as well. Hyderabad has become a melting pot of cuisines, cultures and dining preferences.

At the same time, people here remain deeply connected to flavour and authenticity. Guests appreciate innovation, but they also expect strong local relevance in menus and ingredients.

What major hospitality and dining trends are you witnessing after COVID?

One of the biggest behavioural changes after COVID is the increased desire for experiential dining and social interaction. During the pandemic, people were restricted to their homes for long periods and relied heavily on food delivery platforms. Once restrictions eased, consumers actively wanted to step out, travel and experience restaurants again.

Today, dining out is no longer just about eating food, it has become a lifestyle and experience-driven activity. Families, young professionals and travellers want ambience, engagement, unique concepts and personalised hospitality.

We are also seeing greater focus on wellness, sustainability, ingredient transparency and regional cuisine. Guests are more conscious about what they consume, where ingredients come from and how food is prepared.

At the same time, there is growing demand for premium experiences, curated menus and immersive dining formats across hotels and standalone restaurants.

Talent shortage continues to be a major concern in hospitality. What is your perspective on this issue?

The talent challenge in hospitality is real, but I believe the industry also needs to rethink its approach towards nurturing professionals. We often hear that trained talent is unavailable, but the reality is that the industry must invest more time in mentorship, skill-building and long-term grooming.

Young professionals today require guidance, encouragement and practical exposure. Hospitality leaders cannot only function as operational heads anymore, but they also need to become trainers, mentors and educators.

If senior professionals spend even a small percentage of their time mentoring teams, the industry can create extremely capable talent pools. The hospitality sector is expanding rapidly, with hotel chains aggressively growing across India, so there is a tremendous opportunity for young professionals. The industry also needs to position hospitality as an aspirational and financially rewarding career option to attract better talent at the grassroots level.

Sustainability and local sourcing are becoming central to hospitality operations. How is your property approaching this?

Sustainability today is not optional but it has become an operational responsibility. At our property, we are consciously working towards reducing carbon footprints and increasing the use of local ingredients and regional produce.

We strongly believe in the philosophy that "local is global."

> I worked across several airline kitchens in India including Goa, Kochi, Calicut and Mangaluru, apart from international exposure in Singapore, Hong Kong, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Norway. Working with global airline catering companies exposed me to large-scale food production where kitchens cater to lakhs of meals while maintaining global hygiene and quality standards.

Ingredients like gongura, jamun, regional mangoes and local herbs may be local to Hyderabad today, but when presented thoughtfully, they become globally appealing culinary elements.

We are also focusing on responsible sourcing practices, reducing unnecessary transportation of ingredients and adopting environmentally conscious menu planning. The company has implemented sustainability frameworks where recipes and menus are evaluated from a carbon footprint perspective as well.

Additionally, we have developed small kitchen gardens within the property to promote fresh herb and produce usage. Sustainability is increasingly becoming an important factor for both hotels and guests.

Are there any new restaurant concepts or culinary plans in the pipeline?

Yes, we are currently working on introducing a new high-end international restaurant concept at the hotel. The discussions and preliminary planning are already underway, and we expect the project to move into execution soon.

The idea is to create a differentiated culinary experience that is still relatively unexplored in Hyderabad's hospitality market. Guests today are looking for novelty, authenticity and immersive dining, and we want to bring something that aligns with global trends while remaining relevant to the city's evolving food culture.

We have also worked extensively on concepts like Under the Mango Tree and other dining formats within the property, where the focus has been on combining ambience, local inspiration and guest experience.

Managing culinary operations at a large convention centre must be very different from a regular hotel. How challenging is it?

Convention hospitality operates at an entirely different scale compared to standalone hotel restaurants. At HICC, we regularly handle large-format events, corporate gatherings, weddings and conventions where catering can range from a few hundred to several thousand guests.

Managing food operations for 5,000 to 10,000 guests requires extremely detailed planning, coordination and execution. It is not only about culinary skill, but it also involves logistics, procurement, manpower management, timing, consistency and guest experience.

Every event is different. One day you may be handling a luxury wedding, the next day a corporate convention, and another day an international conference. That diversity keeps the work exciting and constantly pushes teams to perform at a very high operational standard.

In my opinion, large convention hospitality teaches discipline, adaptability and the importance of teamwork more than anything else. ■

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'Beverage margins are becoming more essential for hospitality businesses'

With extensive experience in India's alco-bev industry, **Arundeep Singla, Chairman & Managing Director of Alcostar Group of Companies**, has been instrumental in building premium brands and driving innovation in the sector. In an exclusive interview with **Asmita Mukherjee,** he shares his insights on evolving consumer preferences, premiumisation trends, hospitality partnerships, and the future growth of the alco-bev market in India.

How is the alco-bev segment evolving from being an add-on revenue stream to becoming a key profitability driver for hotels and restaurants?

The alco-bev segment is no longer seen as a secondary support category for hospitality businesses. In hotels, restaurants, lounges, and experiential dining formats, it has developed into one of the most potent profitability generators. Consumers today are prepared to pay more for personalised beverage experiences, premium pours, and social consumption situations, which naturally boosts margins for hospitality businesses. The intent of consumers has changed dramatically. People no longer just order a drink; they invest in an experience, a mood, and a way of life. This change has made it possible for hospitality companies to develop unique beverage-led layouts that increase revenue per table and enhance customer retention. Beverage innovation and premiumisation will remain key components of India's Hospitality profitability structure in the future.

What major consumption trends are you currently seeing across India's hospitality sector, especially in premium and experiential drinking formats?

India's alco-bev consumer is transforming rapidly, particularly in urban and rising aspirational markets. We are witnessing a significant movement toward premium and experience-based consumption. Consumers are growing increasingly conscious of quality, brand identity, ingredients, presentation, and the whole social experience associated with drinking events. Premium whiskies, cleaner vodkas, inventive cocktails, and lifestyle-focused beverage forms are in high demand. Brands that can emotionally connect with consumers through aspiration, authenticity, and modern positioning are gaining ground. At Alcostar Group, we are observing that younger consumers particularly prefer brands that offer both quality and identity. This is one of the reasons premium portfolios such as Sherry Platinum Whisky and KIEV Vodka are aligning well with evolving market preferences. Another prominent trend is the emergence of experiential hospitality, where music, ambience, mixology, and storytelling are valued equally along with the product itself.

Licensing regulations and pricing controls continue to be major industry concerns. How do you see policy challenges impacting growth for alco-bev brands and hospitality businesses alike?

The alcohol and beverage industry in India works in one of the most challenging regulatory regimes, and policy variation across states continues to be a key concern for both brands and hospitality firms. Taxation structures, licensing frameworks, pricing stipulations, and route-to-market rules are frequently changed, which has a direct impact on long-term planning, investments, and market expansion strategies. However, India is also one of the world's fastest-growing consumer marketplaces, and the future prospects are incredibly promising. More stable and growth-orientated policies that foster responsible corporate expansion, investment, innovation, and organised sector growth would be highly beneficial to the industry. A progressive regulatory framework will support not only alcoholic beverage industries, but also tourism, hospitality, employment opportunities, and state revenue.

How is Alcostar Group collaborating with hotels, restaurants, and bars to create stronger beverage-led experiences and sustainable revenue opportunities?

At Alcostar Group, we consider brand building much more than just shelf presence or

menu placement. We believe that creating experiences that people truly connect with and remember is the key to long-term growth. Consumers today seek businesses that seamlessly integrate into their lifestyle, social interactions, and entire hospitality experience.

To create more captivating and immersive brand experiences, we are collaborating alongside hotels, pubs, restaurants, and other hospitality partners. The focus is on developing meaningful customer relationships rather than merely presenting products. As the hospitality industry evolves, these collaborations will become increasingly more crucial in developing aspirational alco-bev brands in India. Authenticity, experiences, and cultural relevance are valued by consumers today, and we think hospitality-led partnerships will be crucial in fostering long-term brand loyalty in the years to come.

With rising operational costs across the hospitality sector, how significantly are beverage margins contributing towards overall F&B profitability today?

Beverage margins are becoming more essential for hospitality businesses, particularly as operational expenditures, rentals, staffing expenses, and food input costs continue to rise. In comparison to other food categories, beverage programmes generally offer greater margin flexibility and upselling potential. Additionally, premium beverage formats raise average consumer spending without proportionately raising operational complexity. In order to boost overall F&B profitability and improve client satisfaction at the same time, many hospitality operators today are strategically utilising beverage innovation and premiumisation. This is one of the reasons why alco-bev partnerships are becoming more paramount than ever in hospitality strategy.

How do you see tier 2 and tier 3 markets shaping the future growth of premium alco-bev consumption in India's hospitality landscape?

Tier 2 and tier 3 markets will be one of the most prominent growth drivers for India's premium alcohol business over the coming decade. Aspiration levels in these markets have soared considerably. Consumers are more exposed, digitally connected, brand-conscious, and willing to experiment premium lifestyle experiences. Hospitality infrastructure in growing cities is also rapidly upgrading, driving up demand for high-quality beverage products. What's particularly fascinating is that premium consumption is no longer confined to metropolitan regions. Premium whisky and vodka categories are experiencing tremendous popularity in emerging markets, as consumers increasingly link premium brands with lifestyle advancement and social prestige.

From a business perspective, what strategies should hotels and restaurants adopt to build stronger beverage-led revenue models while maintaining guest experience and profitability?

Beverage programs in hospitality must be approached strategically rather than merely operationally. When there is a clear focus on consumer experience, premium positioning, and innovation, beverage-led revenue models improve. Hotels and restaurants should invest in curated beverage menus, employee training, mixology-led experiences, premium pairings, and brand collaborations to promote consumer engagement. Understanding customer behaviour through data and occasion-based buying patterns is just as crucial. The next stage of growth will be defined by personalisation and experience-based hospitality. Businesses that offer destinations and experiences, rather than just outlets, will thrive in the future. Innovation in the beverage industry will be fundamental to this evolutionary change. ■

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News Bulletin

Andhra Pradesh to set up beach shacks

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet has approved a draft excise policy that proposes the setting up of beach shacks along the state's coastline, where beer and low-alcohol ready-to-drink beverages will be sold as part of a tourism promotion strategy.

The decision, taken at a Cabinet meeting on Thursday, is aimed at boosting tourism by developing coastal leisure facilities similar to those in Goa. The proposed beach shacks are expected to be temporary structures set up along selected beaches.

As part of the initial rollout, the government plans to establish two beach shacks each at Suryalanka Beach in Bapatla district and in Visakhapatnam on a pilot basis. Officials said the model will be expanded to other coastal locations depending on tourist response.

A group of ministers, including Excise Minister Kollu Ravindra, had earlier studied beach shack models in Goa, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh. District collectors from coastal regions also visited similar sites to understand operational practices. According to officials, private agencies may be selected by the Andhra Pradesh Tourism Authority to operate these shacks under a public-private partnership (PPP) model. The facilities will be permitted to sell beer and low-alcohol beverages, but will not function like regular liquor outlets.

The government is expected to finalise licensing rules and fee structures in the coming weeks. Authorities said the initiative is focused on promoting tourism and enhancing visitor experience along the state's coastline. ■

Stuff Foods bets on robotics to drive QSR expansion

Asmita Mukherjee | Hyderabad

As Hyderabad's food and beverage landscape becomes increasingly crowded, restaurant operators are being forced to think beyond menus and locations. For Stuff Foods LLP, the strategy revolves around identifying untapped consumer segments, creating differentiated concepts and building a scalable backend that can support rapid expansion. Founded by Sandeep Kintali, Co-Founder, Stuff Foods LLP, and Ankit Patel, Founder & Managing Partner, Stuff Foods LLP, the company has built a multi-brand portfolio comprising Yolk Theory, Stuff Idli, and Kulchas, each catering to a distinct consumer need while operating within a common ecosystem of operational efficiency and innovation.

"Kulchas has been part of our journey for over five years and has already established itself successfully in Gujarat. Bringing that model to Hyderabad was a natural progression after witnessing strong customer acceptance," says Kintali.

The company's newer concepts, however, were born in Hyderabad. "Stuff Idli and Yolk Theory were conceptualised here. Our vision is to expand Stuff Idli aggressively across North India while strengthening Yolk Theory and Kulchas across South India, particularly Hyderabad," he adds.

Creating a Category Around Eggs

Among the portfolio brands, Yolk Theory addresses what the founders identified as a significant gap in the market. "We realised Hyderabad lacked a dedicated egg-focused QSR brand offering extensive variety. Today, Yolk Theory serves more than 90 egg-based dishes inspired by concepts we explored across Gujarat and other markets, while adapting them to local preferences," explains Kintali. The concept emerged from a combination of market observation and entrepreneurial collaboration.

"Ankit comes from Ahmedabad and I am from Hyderabad. During our travels, we noticed cities like Surat have a vibrant egg-food culture with tremendous variety, something largely absent in South India. At the same time, eggs remain one of the most affordable and natural sources of protein and healthy fats. We saw an opportunity to combine nutrition, affordability and great taste within one brand," he says.

Ankit Patel
Founder, Managing Partner,
Stuff Foods LLP

Sandeep Kintali
Co-Founder,
Stuff Foods LLP

As consumer demand for protein-rich food continues to rise, the founders believe Yolk Theory is uniquely positioned within the evolving QSR landscape.

Building Beverage-Led Experiences

Beyond food, Stuff Foods is investing in beverage innovation as a future growth pillar.

"We are developing South Indian-inspired beverages such as Hibiscus Rasam Cooler and traditional temple-inspired drinks. The idea is to create products that are refreshing, rooted in regional flavours and aligned with wellness trends," says Patel.

According to him, these products have the potential to evolve beyond restaurant consumption and eventually become standalone retail offerings.

Freshness as a Business Philosophy

Across all three brands, freshness remains a central operational principle.

"Whether it's egg dishes at Yolk Theory, South Indian offerings at Stuff Idli or products served at Kulchas, freshness is non-negotiable. Consumers today expect consistency and reliability, and that's what drives repeat business," says Kintali.

To support this commitment, the company has invested significantly in backend infrastructure.

"We already operate a centralised kitchen and are planning another facility in Hyderabad. This allows us to standardise gravies, masalas and critical ingredients while ensuring the same taste and quality across every outlet," he explains.

The Role of Robotics in QSR Operations

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the company's growth strategy is its focus on automation.

"We are actively working with a Hyderabad-based robotics company on research and development. The goal is not to replace people but to improve efficiency, standardisation and scalability," says Patel.

Food businesses often struggle to maintain consistency across multiple locations, he notes. "Robotics can help replicate recipes accurately and reduce operational dependency on individual kitchen staff. Technology will play a significant role in the future of QSR operations."

The initiative also addresses one of hospitality's most pressing concerns.

"Post-pandemic, manpower management has become increasingly challenging. Automation can improve efficiency behind the scenes, while human interaction will always remain essential for guest service and hospitality," he adds.

Moving Towards Induction-Based Kitchens

The company has also embraced commercial induction technology across most of its operations.

"Rising LPG costs and supply disruptions encouraged us to explore alternative cooking technologies. Today, the majority of our kitchens operate on commercial induction systems, which provide efficiency while reducing dependence on traditional fuel sources," says Kintali.

A Roadmap to 100 Outlets

Stuff Foods LLP has outlined ambitious plans to scale its footprint significantly over the next few years.

"Our goal is to reach 100 outlets within the next two to three years through a mix of company-owned and franchise-operated formats," says Patel.

Interest from potential franchise partners has already begun to materialise, but the founders insist that expansion will remain disciplined.

"We are not chasing numbers for the sake of growth. The focus is on creating a scalable and sustainable business model that protects quality and customer experience," he says.

To ensure consistency, franchise locations will remain closely integrated with the company's supply chain.

"Key ingredients, masalas and critical supplies will be sourced through our centralised ecosystem. Whether an outlet is in Hyderabad, Delhi, Chennai or any other city, customers should experience the same taste and quality," says Kintali.

Competing in Hyderabad's Dynamic F&B Market

With areas such as Kondapur and Manikonda witnessing an influx of new restaurants and cafés, competition continues to intensify. Yet the founders see opportunity rather than threat.

"Hyderabad is one of India's most exciting food markets. Consumers are constantly looking to try something new. However, long-term success ultimately comes down to consistency, service and product quality," says Patel.

For Stuff Foods LLP, the differentiator lies in balancing creativity with operational discipline.

"Whether it's Yolk Theory's extensive egg-based menu, Stuff Idli's contemporary take on South Indian cuisine or Kulchas' proven appeal, each brand offers something unique. What unites them is our focus on freshness, consistency, technology and customer experience," he concludes. As India's organised QSR sector evolves, Stuff Foods LLP is betting that innovation backed by strong systems will define the next phase of growth. ■

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India hotel investments surge 67% to USD 567 million in 2025: JLL

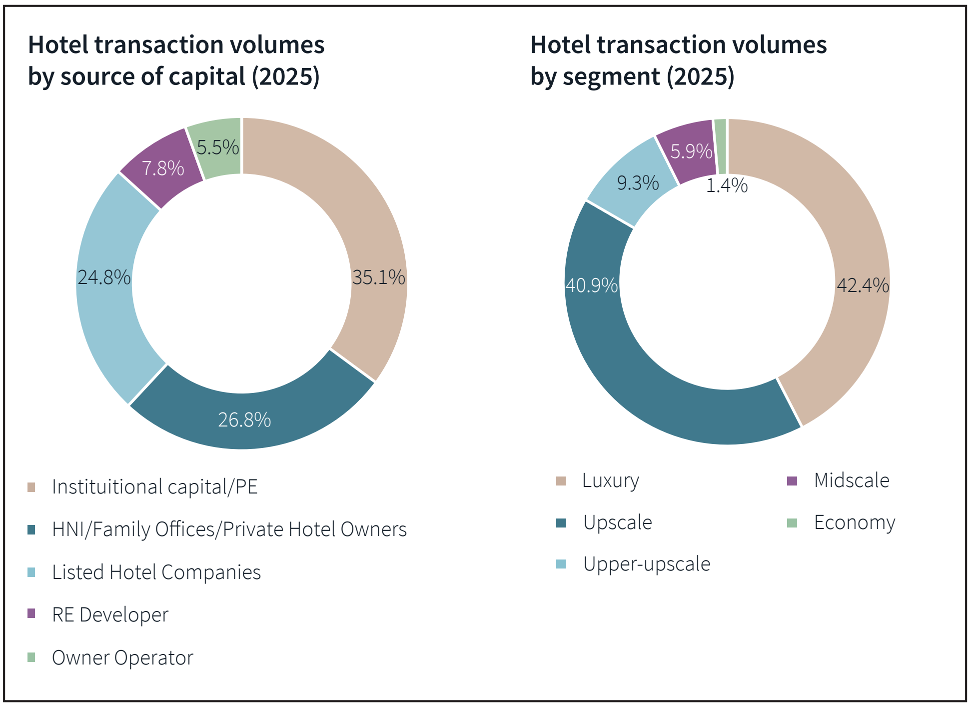
HBI Staff | Hyderabad

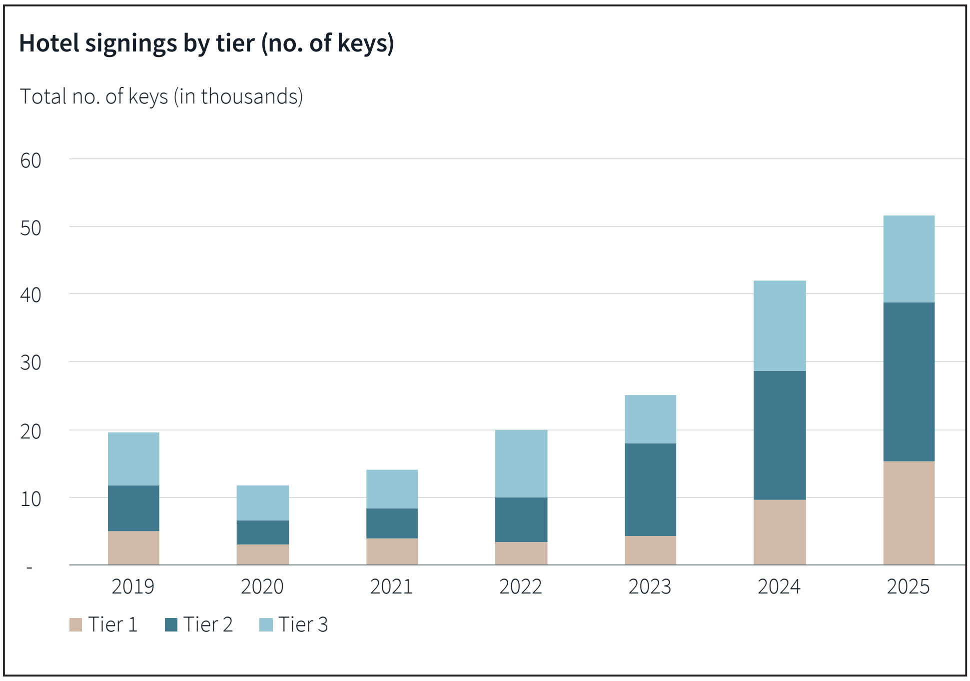
India's hotel investment market witnessed a significant upswing in 2025, with transaction volumes rising 67 per cent year-on-year to approximately USD 567 million across 28 deals, according to JLL's Hotel Investment Trends in India: 2025report.

The report highlights growing investor confidence in the hospitality sector, driven by strong operating performance, expanding travel demand, and increasing interest from institutional investors and listed hotel companies.

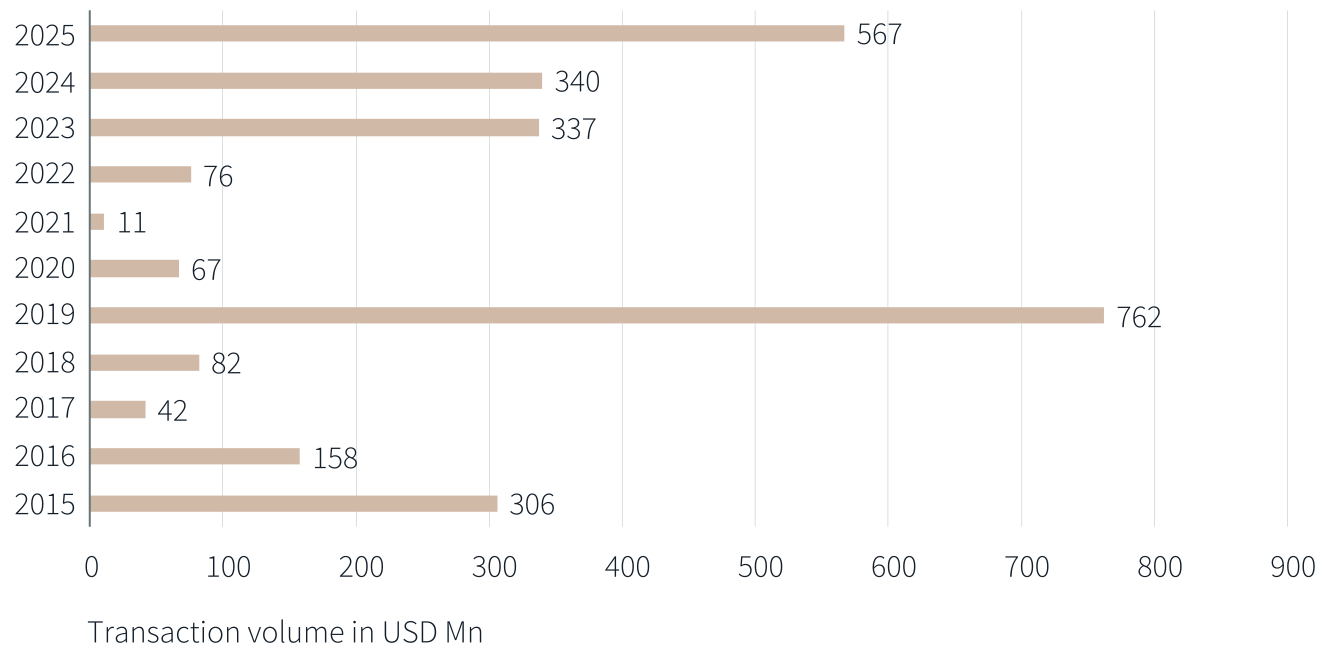
Institutional capital and private equity investors emerged as the largest contributors, accounting for 35 per cent of total transaction volumes. High-net-worth individuals (HNIs), family offices, and private hotel owners followed with a 27 per cent share, while listed hotel companies contributed 25 per cent.

Luxury and upscale assets continued to dominate investment activity, accounting for 42 per cent and 41 per cent of total transaction volumes respectively. Around 69 per cent of all deals involved operational hotels, reflecting investors' preference for income-generating assets.

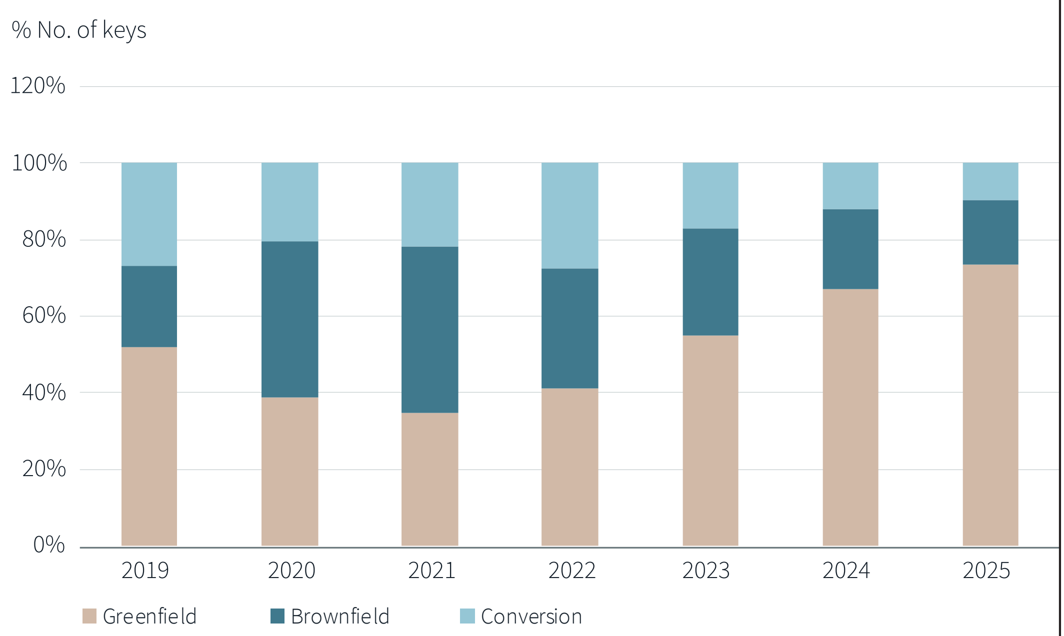




Hotel investment sales



Type of development



While Tier I cities retained their dominance with nearly 60 per cent of total transaction volumes, Tier II and Tier III destinations accounted for the remaining 40 per cent, underlining the growing attractiveness of emerging hospitality markets. Key transactions included resort and hotel assets in destinations such as Rishikesh, Goa, Udaipur, Ludhiana, Nashik, Vadodara and Lonavala.

Beyond direct hotel acquisitions, 2025 also saw around USD 125 million deployed through strategic partnerships and platform investments. Notable deals included GIC and SAMHI Hotels' joint venture, Marriott International's investment in Concept Hospitality, and IHCL's acquisition of majority stakes in ANK Hotels and Pride Hospitality.

The momentum has continued into 2026, with hotel transaction volumes reaching approximately USD 185 million in the first quarter alone, marking a 58 per cent increase over Q1 2025.

According to JLL, strong liquidity, growing institutional interest, airport-led development opportunities, and tourism-focused government initiatives are expected to sustain investment activity. However, the limited availability of high-quality hotel assets could create supply constraints, leading to increased competition and premium valuations for marquee hospitality properties. ■

Beyond Marble and Chandeliers

By Harish Chandra, Hospitality & Travel Transformation Leader; Strategic Advisor & Mentor; Founder, GHTP

Luxury today is no longer measured in marble, chandeliers, or imported furniture. It is measured in the invisible details — the switch that is labelled, the Wi-Fi that simply connects, the room that is dark enough to sleep in. The most expensive interiors cannot compensate for a guest experience that quietly fails at the basics.

The global luxury hospitality industry has invested billions in architecture, interior design, branded residences, wellness concepts, and curated guest experiences. Yet despite this enormous investment, one critical area consistently disappoints guests: the guest room's functional intelligence.

While hotel brands proudly market "ultra-luxury," "smart hospitality," and "next-generation guest experiences," many guestrooms still suffer from basic operational oversights, poor technology integration, and inadequate attention to actual guest convenience.

The problem is not the absence of technology. The problem is the absence of thoughtful implementation.

—— IN-ROOM ESSENTIALS ——

The Quiet Failures Hiding in Plain Sight

The most instructive view of luxury is not the lobby — it is the moment a tired guest opens a minibar, reaches for a switch in the dark, or fumbles for a phone beside the bed. These are the points where design meets reality, and where many otherwise exceptional hotels fall short.

MINIBAR DESIGN

The Cabinet That Cannot Breathe

Premium minibars are often enclosed in elegant wooden cabinets with almost no ventilation. Without grilles or perforations, compressor heat is trapped inside the cabinet — cooling efficiency drops and equipment life shortens. Combined with weak defrosting SOPs, this leaves beverages barely cold enough to be called chilled.

SWITCHBOARDS

An Unlabelled Panel of Identical Switches

Guests entering a room after a long day frequently face a confusing wall of identical switches with no indication of what controls what. A clearly labelled, intuitive electrical panel is one of the simplest and most overlooked upgrades in modern luxury room design.

BEDSIDE TELEPHONE

Why Guests Should Not Walk to Answer the Phone

In one international chain, I observed guestrooms with only one telephone — positioned on the work desk instead of beside the bed. Guests should not have to cross a dark room half-asleep to answer an urgent call from family, colleagues, or convention organisers. A bedside extension is a basic luxury, not an upgrade.

PROMOTIONAL CLUTTER

When Tent Cards Take Over the Room

Bedside tables, writing desks, and counters are often crowded with spa promotions, laundry offers, restaurant adverts, sustainability campaigns, and QR-code marketing materials. The guest's own belongings are left without space. The best hotels curate this clutter ruthlessly — one tasteful digital directory does the work of fifteen tent cards.

—— THE COMMUNICATION GAP ——

Phones, Keys, and the Information Guests Need

Hotel telephones remain a primary lifeline for guests — yet the design of in-room communication has barely evolved in two decades. Small omissions create disproportionate friction, particularly during conventions, weddings, or international travel when guests are most disoriented.

1. ROOM NUMBER ON THE HANDSET

Guests frequently forget their room number — especially during large events. With no room identification on the telephone, they are forced to dig out a key card or step into the corridor to read the door number. A simple display sticker resolves this entirely.

2. INTER-ROOM DIALLING INSTRUCTIONS

Many hotels fail to provide clear instructions for dialling another guest room directly — leaving conference attendees, families, and group travellers routing every call through reception.

3. MISSING EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Numbers for fire, medical, and security are frequently absent from the guest-room handset. In an emergency, no guest should be searching for a directory.

3. DOOR LOCKS THAT DEACTIVATE WITHOUT WARNING

Outdated electronic locks deactivate room keys unexpectedly, forcing exhausted guests to search for a corridor phone or trek back to reception after long travel hours. Modern PMS-integrated locks remove this friction entirely.

—— TELEVISION & ENTERTAINMENT ——

The Screen That Should Welcome, Not Confuse

The in-room television is one of the few touchpoints a guest will interact with every day of their stay. It is also one of the most consistently mishandled — burdened with dual remotes, manufacturer logos, and standby lights bright enough to read by.

TWO REMOTES

The Confusion of TV and Set-Top Box

Despite years of integration options, most hotels still issue two separate remotes — one for the TV and another for the set-top box. Guests regularly struggle to identify which remote controls which function. A single, simplified controller is now the industry baseline.

TV BRANDING

Manufacturer Logos, Not Your Brand

Most televisions still boot with hardcoded LG or Samsung branding instead of reinforcing the hotel's own identity. Even the first few channels are rarely optimised for hotel services, in-room dining, spa promotions, city guides, or local attractions — every one a missed touchpoint.

REMOTE SENSORS

The IR Receiver That Refuses to Listen

Guests often struggle to change channels because remote-control sensors for televisions and set-top boxes are loosely pasted or incorrectly positioned near the television bezel. A loose sensor is not a guest problem — it is a maintenance failure dressed up as one.

KEY-CARD INTEGRATION

The Welcome That Never Happens

Very few hotels have implemented systems where inserting the room key automatically powers on the television with a personalised welcome message integrated through the PMS. The opportunity for a memorable first impression — wasted on a black screen.

STANDBY LIGHTS

The Glow That Steals Sleep

After long flights, many guests simply want complete darkness. Yet TV standby LEDs, set-top box indicators, Wi-Fi router lights, and charging-dock glow create unnecessary brightness throughout the night. Discreet covers and motion-aware ambient design fix this in hours, not years.

FIRST-CHANNEL STRATEGY

A Curated Welcome Journey

The first three channels a guest sees should answer three questions: where am I, what can I order, and what is happening in this city tonight? Instead they are typically random news feeds. The TV is real estate — and hotels rarely use it.

—— CONNECTIVITY ——

Wi-Fi Is No Longer an Amenity. It Is a Utility.

In today's hospitality environment, internet connectivity is no longer a luxury feature — it is an essential utility, on par with water and electricity. Yet surprisingly, many hotels still fail to provide clear Wi-Fi usage instructions, passwords, QR codes, or login guidance inside guest rooms or on digital key covers.

Many hotels continue to use outdated 2.4 GHz wireless access points despite purchasing high-speed internet bandwidth — and during power outages, Wi-Fi often goes down entirely because switches and access points are not connected to UPS-backed circuits. The guest pays for the upgrade and never receives it.

> *Thoughtful communication design can dramatically reduce guest friction and unnecessary reception calls — freeing front office teams to focus on meaningful, eye-to-eye hospitality rather than answering routine technical questions.*

Six Connectivity Fundamentals Every Luxury Property Should Have

- Wi-Fi details printed clearly on key card holders, with QR codes for instant connection.
- QR-code-based instant connection systems eliminating the password-typing ritual entirely.
- TV welcome screens that display network credentials alongside the personalised welcome.
- PMS-integrated digital guest directories accessible from television and mobile.
- Multilingual in-room connectivity guides covering the property's top guest origin markets.
- One-click guest authentication using room number and surname — no friction, no front office call.

Small operational improvements like these reduce repetitive front office calls and allow reception teams to focus on personalised guest interaction, problem-solving, and the kind of attentive hospitality that no algorithm can replace.

—— THE KEY CARD DILEMMA ——

Operational Efficiency Meets Guest Safety

An interesting operational practice observed in a few hotels is the use of small room-identification stickers or coded markings on electronic key cards or key sleeves. This helps guests remember their room number more easily and assists front office teams in quickly identifying returned keys during check-out, key refreshing, or reprogramming processes.

Operationally, this improves efficiency significantly during busy check-in and check-out periods. However, this convenience also introduces a security consideration. If a guest misplaces a clearly marked key card outside the hotel premises, exposed room identification could potentially compromise guest safety.

> *The best hospitality practices balance operational efficiency with security — using discreet coding systems, partial identifiers, PMS-linked digital authentication, or branded key jackets rather than displaying full room numbers openly on key cards.*

YouMee

Manga, Miso, and more

Asmita Mukherjee | Hyderabad

In a dining landscape crowded with Pan-Asian restaurants, YouMee has built a personality that feels instantly recognisable.Part of the Lite Bite Foods portfolio – the hospitality group behind brands such as Punjab Grill, YouMee has steadily expanded its footprint across India, appealing to a generation of diners who seek experiences that go beyond the plate. Its blend of Asian comfort food, manga-inspired storytelling and vibrant interiors has helped the brand cultivate a loyal following in cities across the country.

At the Nexus Mall outlet in Kukatpally, Hyderabad that identity is evident. The space truly is a visual nod to contemporary Asian pop culture, with colourful manga illustrations, neon signage, Korean-inspired graphics, and suspended oriental umbrellas that create a lively atmosphere. Unlike the muted elegance often associated with Asian fine dining, YouMee embraces a more playful aesthetic. The result is a space that feels energetic, youthful and distinctly Gen Z, yet comfortable enough for a leisurely meal.

The food, lives up to the visual appeal. We began with the Cheese Spring Rolls and Sichuan Crispy Chicken, both familiar crowd-pleasers that arrived crisp. A highlight from the sushi section was the Prawn Tempura Roll. The contrast between the crunchy tempura prawn and the soft, seasoned rice worked beautifully, making it one of the most enjoyable dishes of the evening.

The dim sum selection showcased the kitchen's versatility. The Chilli Coriander Chicken Dumplings offered robust flavours, while the Edamame Black Mushroom Dumplings brought a lighter, earthier balance to the table. The New York Cheese Chilli Oil Dumplings added an indulgent touch, pairing creamy richness with a gentle kick of spice.

A comforting bowl of Miso Shiru set the stage for the mains. On the other hand, the YouMee Signature Ramen delivered exactly what one expects from a good ramen bowl – a rich broth, springy noodles and layers of flavour that gradually unfolded with each spoonful.

Among the larger plates, the Chilli Black Bean Fish stood out for its delicate texture and punchy sauce. Equally satisfying was the Sticky Chicken Fried Rice, a hearty dish that balanced savoury flavours with comforting familiarity. From the ongoing Manga Matsuri menu, the YouMee Chef's Special Chicken impressed with its smoky wok-tossed notes, while the Steamed Sea Bass was elegant in its simplicity, allowing the freshness of the fish to shine through, served in a soya-based sauce.

Dessert came in the form of Mango Sticky Rice along with coconut milk, a classic that remains hard to resist when done right. The sweet mango paired beautifully with

the creamy sticky rice, bringing the meal to a satisfying close. Complementing it were three mango-based beverages; Mango Chia Delight, Spicy Mango and Mango Mania, each offering a refreshing take on the season's favourite fruit.

What we enjoyed the most during the meal was how naturally the restaurant's playful personality translated onto the plate. The Prawn Tempura Roll, flavourful dim sums, comforting ramen and delicately prepared sea bass each brought something different to the table, creating a meal that felt varied without losing focus. Combined with the lively interiors and easy-going atmosphere, YouMee offers the kind of dining experience that encourages guests to linger a little longer. ■

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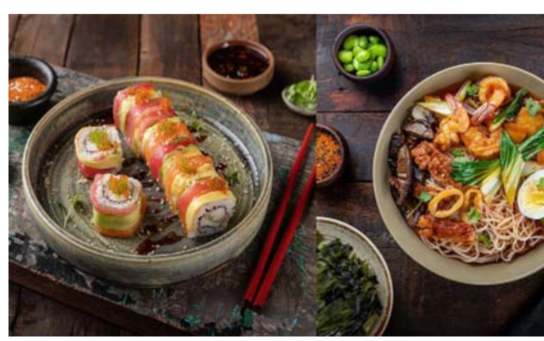
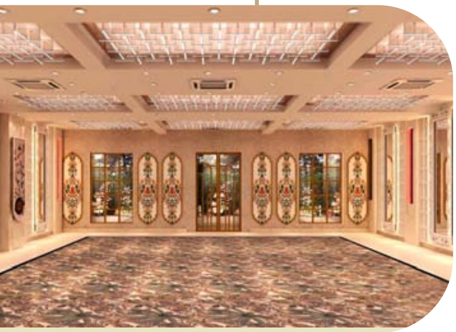


Summit Salasar – The Mandir Collection

Summit Hotels & Resorts has announced its entry into India's fast-growing spiritual tourism segment with the launch of The Mandir Collection, a dedicated hospitality brand focused on pilgrimage destinations and faith-inspired travel experiences. The move comes as spiritual tourism continues to gain momentum across the country, driven by improved connectivity, government-led infrastructure development, and growing consumer interest in wellness, culture, and religious travel.



As part of the brand's debut, the company has selected Salasar in Rajasthan for its first property under The Mandir Collection. The upcoming Summit Salasar – The Mandir Collection is being positioned as a premium spiritual retreat designed to serve devotees, leisure travellers, wellness seekers, and families visiting one of India's prominent pilgrimage destinations. The proposed development is expected to feature around 70 rooms and villas, including private pool villas, alongside a range of curated experiences inspired by spirituality and Indian traditions. Planned amenities include a Satvik dining concept, temple assistance services, wellness-focused offerings, devotional evening programmes, banquet facilities, outdoor event spaces, and convenient access to the revered Salasar Balaji Temple.

Fortune Select Hotel, Guwahati

ITC Hotels Limited has announced the signing of a 90-key Fortune Select hotel in Guwahati, strengthening its expansion strategy across India's high-growth markets and marking a significant addition to its presence in Northeast India.

Scheduled to open in April 2028, the hotel will feature well-appointed rooms, an all-day dining restaurant, banquet and conferencing facilities, along with modern amenities designed for business and leisure travellers. As a major commercial and tourism gateway to the Northeast, Guwahati attracts visitors heading to destinations such as Kamakhya Temple, Kaziranga National Park, Hajo and Madan Kamdev. Improved air, rail and road connectivity, along with rapid infrastructure growth, continue to drive hospitality demand in the region.

Regenta Place by ROHL, Hyderabad

Located in the heart of Hyderabad's HITEC City, the hotel is aimed at both business and leisure travellers, offering a mix of contemporary hospitality and convenient urban connectivity. The property enjoys close proximity to key commercial and lifestyle destinations, including Mindspace IT Hub, IKEA, Inorbit Mall and Shilparamam. Guests can also access leisure attractions such as Durgam Cheruvu, while the hotel remains well connected to Rajiv Gandhi International Airport and the Raidurg Metro Station.

The hotel features 74 rooms, including suites, executive rooms and business rooms, designed to provide comfort and functionality for modern travellers.

Cygnett Inn Motihari

Cygnett Hotels & Resorts has announced the signing of Cygnett Inn Motihari, a new 70-key brownfield hospitality project in Bihar aimed at strengthening branded hospitality and event infrastructure in the emerging regional market. The hotel will operate under the company's midscale brand, Cygnett Inn, and is designed to cater to business travellers, leisure guests, conferences, weddings, and social events. Located in Motihari in East Champaran district, the project reflects growing hospitality demand across Tier II and Tier III destinations driven by improving connectivity, regional business activity, and expanding social infrastructure. The hotel will feature 70 rooms along with facilities including an all-day dining restaurant, gymnasium, spa, and swimming pool. A major focus of the development is its event and banqueting infrastructure. The property will include a 5,500 sq. ft. banquet hall connected to a 17,000 sq. ft. outdoor lawn, alongside two dedicated meeting spaces for conferences and private gatherings.

The hotel is expected to become operational by the end of the year.

Jaquar brings Oasis Steam and Shower

Jaquar has introduced the Oasis Steam and Shower enclosure, a premium wellness solution that combines steam therapy and showering in a single unit. Featuring chromotherapy, aromatherapy, Bluetooth speakers, brass body jets, an overhead maze shower, hand shower and an Aquamax thermostatic diverter, Oasis delivers a luxurious spa experience at home. Designed with a stainless-steel frame and toughened glass, it also includes an auto-drain function and temperature sensor for safety and convenience. Suitable for homes, hotels, gyms and spas, Oasis is priced at INR 3.11 lakh and is available through authorized Jaquar dealers.

ORAFOR launches new hospitality uniform collection for hotels and restaurants

ORAFOR has unveiled a new range of premium hospitality uniforms tailored for hotels, restaurants, cafés, cloud kitchens and catering businesses across India. The collection includes chef coats, steward uniforms, waiter uniforms, service jackets and aprons, designed to combine comfort, durability and professional aesthetics. With features such as breathable fabrics, ease of movement and customization options including logo embroidery and colour personalization, the range aims to help businesses strengthen brand identity while enhancing employee comfort. According to Director Jatin Manchanda, the launch reflects growing demand for functional, brand-aligned workwear in India's expanding hospitality sector.

UN Tourism launches hospitality training course on WhatsApp

UN Tourism has launched a digital hospitality and tourism management course delivered entirely through WhatsApp, offering an innovative and accessible learning platform for industry professionals, entrepreneurs and SMEs. Developed in partnership with Fundación Mahou San Miguel, the programme covers business management, customer service, digital marketing, sustainability and customer loyalty through short, mobile-friendly lessons. Initially available to residents in Spain, the course offers 2,000 fully subsidised places. Participants who complete all modules will receive a joint certification from UN Tourism and Fundación Mahou San Miguel, aimed at strengthening skills, promoting innovation and enhancing competitiveness across the hospitality sector.

Cloudbeds launches major platform upgrades focused on revenue, operations and AI

Cloudbeds has announced a broad range of new platform enhancements aimed at helping hoteliers drive revenue, streamline operations and leverage data-driven decision-making. The Spring Release 2026 introduces new capabilities including Groups & Events, Spaces, the Immersive Booking Engine, an upgraded Calendar, Cloudbeds Accounting, enhanced Data Insights and Ask Signals, a conversational AI interface. The updates enable hotels to manage group bookings, rentable spaces and direct reservations more efficiently while improving reporting and financial management. According to CEO Adam Harris, the release is designed to simplify hotel technology and deliver stronger business performance through unified data and AI.

HYATT HOTELS

Ruban Das, General Manager, Hyatt Hyderabad Gachibowli

Das began his hospitality career with Hyatt Hotels in 2002 as a Corporate Trainee at Hyatt Regency Kolkata and has since held leadership roles across leading global brands, including Hilton and Accor. Most recently, he served as General Manager of Hyatt Regency Chennai, where he led initiatives focused on operational excellence, profitability and service enhancement.

In his new role, Das will oversee all aspects of operations at Hyatt Hyderabad Gachibowli and drive the hotel's growth in one of India's fastest-growing hospitality markets.

Abhishek Sengupta, Director of Sales & Marketing, Hyatt Regency Lucknow

With more than 17 years of experience in hospitality sales, marketing and strategic business management, Sengupta brings extensive expertise in driving revenue growth and market expansion.

Over the course of his career, he has held leadership positions with leading hospitality brands, including Marriott International, IHG, The Lalit Hotels and The Park Hotels. He has successfully led teams across rooms, banquets, food and beverage sales, reservations and revenue management, delivering strong business performance. In his new role, he will lead the hotel's sales and marketing strategy, focusing on strengthening market presence and driving sustained growth.

Meraj Faiz, Revenue Manager, Hyatt Regency Lucknow

An alumnus of IHM Kolkata, Faiz brings over 17 years of experience in the hospitality industry, with expertise across revenue management, reservations and front office operations. During his career, he has worked with leading hospitality brands including IHG, Radisson, Hilton, The Lalit and The Park, building a strong track record in revenue optimization and operational excellence. Before joining Hyatt Regency Lucknow, Faiz was associated with The Lalit Golf & Spa Resort, Goa, where he played a key role in developing revenue strategies, driving business growth and supporting sales teams to achieve performance goals. In his new role, Faiz will be responsible for leading the hotel's revenue management initiatives, leveraging his industry knowledge and strategic insight to enhance profitability and support the property's continued growth.

ACCOR HOTELS

Chef Amit Dean, Executive Sous Chef, Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre & HICC

NHCC and HICC elevated Chef Amit Dean to the position of Executive Sous Chef, reinforcing its commitment to culinary excellence and innovation. With extensive experience across leading hospitality brands including The Oberoi Rajvilas, Carnival Cruise Line, Hyatt Regency Lucknow, Marriott Indore and Hyatt Jamaica, Chef Amit brings a diverse culinary perspective shaped by Indian luxury hospitality and international operations.

Known for his expertise in Indian, Italian and Jamaican cuisines, Chef Amit has developed strong capabilities in large-scale banqueting, modern kitchen management and guest-centric dining experiences. In his new role, he will support the hotel's overall culinary strategy across restaurants, banquets, weddings, conferences and bespoke dining events.

MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL

Subham Saha, Director of Catering Sales, Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel

With more than a decade of experience in hospitality sales, business development and revenue generation, Saha brings extensive expertise in catering sales, MICE, strategic account management and client relationship management.

In his new role, he will lead the hotel's catering sales strategy across weddings, social events, corporate gatherings and MICE segments, with a focus on driving revenue growth, strengthening client partnerships and expanding business opportunities.

Prior to joining Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway, Saha served as Associate Director of Sales at The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat. He has also held key positions with Renaissance Bengaluru Race Course Hotel, The Lalit Ashok Bangalore and The Oberoi Group, and was part of the task force team at JW Marriott Bengaluru Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa.

R.N.I.No.MAHENG/2007/22934,
Licence to post without pre-payment WPP LICENSE NO. MR / TECH / WPP-29/SOUTH / 2019-21, Regn. No: MCS/181/2019-21, Published on 1st of every month, Posted at Mumbai Patrika Channel Sorting Office, Mumbai 400 001 on 3rd & 4th every month

Printed and Published by Sheldon Eric Santwan On Behalf Of Saffron Synergies Pvt. Ltd, Printed At Indigo Press (India) Private Limited, 1c/716, 21 Bharat Crown Compound, A.G. Pawar Marg, Dadoji Konddeo X Road, Ghodapdev, Byculla (East), Mumbai 400 027 And Published From Saffron Synergies Pvt. Ltd. 902, Cozy Apartments Chs Ltd. Yari Road, Versova, Andheri (West), Mumbai 400 061. **Editor : Sheldon Eric Santwan**