

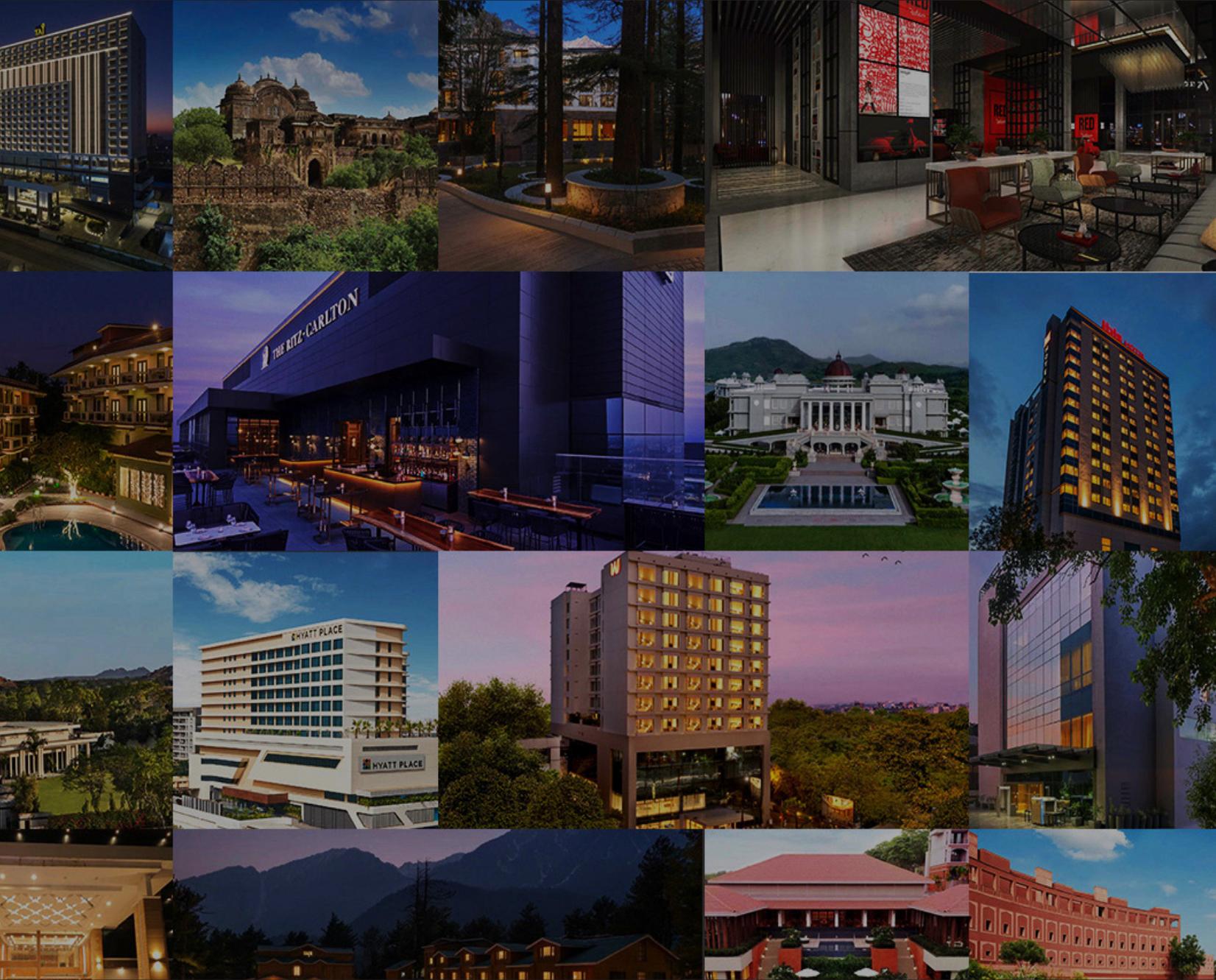
FOR THE HOSPITALITY PROFESSIONAL

# Hospitality BIZ

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## HICSA 2022

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# Sterling Holidays appoints Vikram Lalvani as MD & CEO

Ramesh Ramanathan hands over baton to Vikram Lalvani. Will continue to guide the company as Chairman.

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Sterling Holiday Resorts Limited has appointed Vikram Lalvani as the new Managing Director and CEO of the company.

After seven years of overseeing various strategic responsibilities at Sterling, which included, Customer Engagement, Revenue maximization, Hotel Sales and Resort Operations, Lalvani will be taking on the role of Managing Director of Sterling Holiday Resorts Ltd, a post which was effectively held by Ramesh Ramanathan since 2011, who will now continue to guide the company as its Chairman.

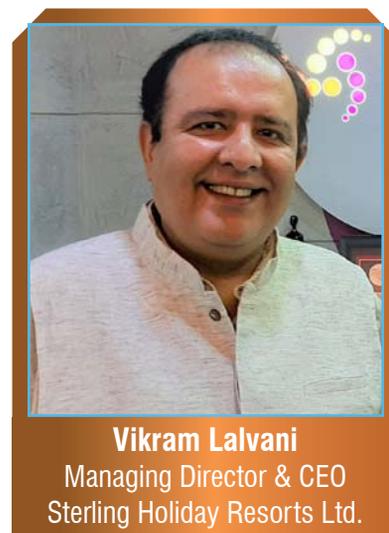
As CMD for Sterling, Ramesh Ramanathan has been instrumental in steering the company's turn-around and making it profitable and establishing the Sterling Brand in the Leisure Holiday space. Continuing to serve the company as the Chairman, Ramesh Ramanathan, said, "I am extremely pleased on the appointment of Vikram as Managing Director & CEO,



to lead Sterling towards newer avenues. I look forward to working with him towards our common vision of making Sterling the No. 1 Leisure Hospitality brand in India. On behalf of the board and the team, we are confident that Vikram's vast experience in the hospitality industry will be a huge advantage for us."

Commenting on his new role, Vikram Lalvani, Managing Director & CEO, Sterling Holiday Resorts Ltd. said, "We will continue on the growth path set for us and drive to double our inventory and footprint to over 5,000+ rooms by 2025. With focus on Digitization, we will bring innovation in services for our guests and create a unique place for Sterling in the leisure space."

In his previous role as COO, of Sterling



**Vikram Lalvani**  
Managing Director & CEO  
Sterling Holiday Resorts Ltd.

Holidays, Lalvani has been responsible for successfully strengthening the preferred partners' network, launching new revenue focused projects, spearheading the expansion plans across the country which now includes 38 plus resorts in operation and many more in the pipe-line. ■

## Hiring in travel and hospitality sector saw an 18% growth in March after two years of COVID-19, says Report



HBI Staff | Hyderabad

The country's travel and hospitality sector, the worst affected in the last two years, has witnessed a robust recovery with a 47.6% growth in payroll headcount in the month compared with the same period last year, according to data collated by Allsec Technologies, a Qness Corp company.

Ashish Johri, CEO, Allsec Technologies (a Qness Company), said, "We have seen an optimistic recovery pattern across industries this month. It is heartening to see Travel & Hospitality lead the way, along with several other industries which were severely impacted by the pandemic."

The country's job market, overall, has witnessed a recovery in March, growing by 18.4% year-on-year as the economy returned to normalcy after the third wave of the pandemic, said Qness Corp. ■

# Balancing Our Culture Conundrum

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

Many of our current organizational roadblocks, particularly in the context of talent, revolve around fostering a prolific leadership culture. High context cultures focus on relatively informal, warmth emitting, community behaviours. Low context cultures on the other hand are shaped by more formal, rational, personality driven adaptations. The enculturation of low context practices in a high context environment widens the cultural gap. Is the nature of our behavioural adaptations, the right fit for the environment, in which we practice leadership? The purpose of this exposition is to determine the appropriateness of our cultural adaptations, largely in the light of our people related challenges today.

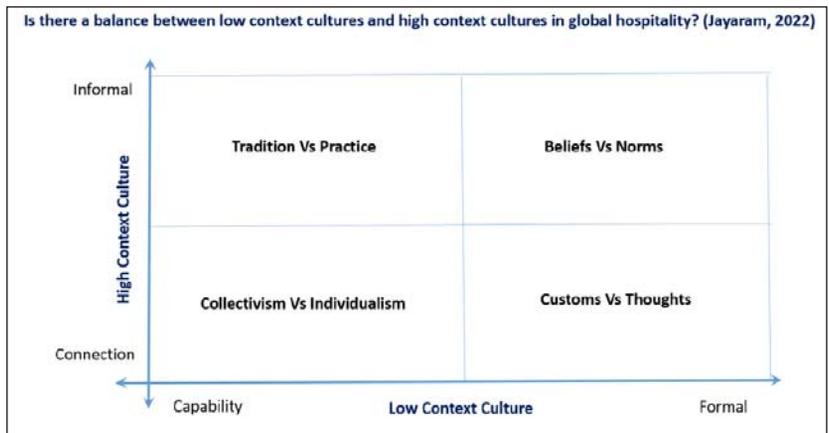
High context cultures rely on dimensions such as an inherent connection between people with informal, earnest and familial behaviour. Low context cultures are bounded by capability-driven and formal interactions amongst people.

This interaction space nurturing links is a potent make-or-break context, in the evolution of positive workplace relationships. This also lays the ground for an effective leadership culture, which fosters higher levels of fulfilment, productivity and trust. Interestingly the warm culture in our host nation, has incorporated colder practices from newer work cultures. The implications of adjusting to low context practices in a high context environment reveals some fallacies.

**1. Collectivism Vs Individualism:** High context cultures leverage the connection between people. This may suffer in a capability based approach, which low context cultures use. The focus then shifts from a collective, team based winning construct to celebrating individual stars. Power distances tend to increase when individualistic capacity shadows team fallouts. Warmly engaged teams tend to improvise, innovate, adjust and engage to cover up individual gaps. Balancing positive/negative effects in adapting any single cultural orientation is truly vital.

**2. Customs Vs Thoughts:** Warmer cultures are more likely to uphold customs and traditions, driven by an inherent belief system of renewal. Rational thinking on age-old traditions now moderate and shape new thought processes. The acceptance of emerging thought processes in a warm cultural environment, presents its own set of trials. Finding acceptance of rational thoughts in high context work environments, needs empathetic cultural adaption by leaders. An ideal approach is to practice valid customs in more logical, acceptable formats for today.

**3. Traditions Vs Practice:** Traditions are usually based on a well-entrenched set of values and passed down tacitly. They have a powerful ability to unify people, as emotional content is required to enhance motivation levels. Contemporary practice and its embedded



rationality needs generations of acceptance to become tradition. The nature of current practice also changes rapidly given technological advancement. The hybridization of cultural advantages from the use of traditions vs practice, remains an adaptation choice for leaders in action now.

**4. Beliefs Vs Norms:** Informal belief systems remain all powerful and sustaining for people as they navigate crises. Formal norms and adoptions are likely to be seen as more short term responses. Once status quo is altered and a degree of familiarity gets re-established, the evolution of a new belief system will likely emerge. It is true that established norms become beliefs over time on account of experience and results. The tightrope walk on incorporating valid norms, standards and practices to reinforce a new belief system is a priority to focus on.

Using low context solutions in high context environments represents its own pros and cons. The implications of projected outcomes must guide leadership behaviour. The inherent strengths of a high context culture are obvious, in dealing with the diversity in our nation. The relative weaknesses of relying on high context behaviours completely, needs to be rationalized by examining low context options. This is largely relevant in the backdrop of the industry wide crisis with respect to talent development and enhancement. A holistic environment meeting newer expectations must emerge.

And in conclusion, multiple generations working in industry have promised our aspiring youth an exciting journey working in hospitality. Will multiple influences across families, friends, education systems and new-age workplace trends, create a more distorted hybrid culture in the coming future? If we recognize the direction our industry's indigenous work culture is taking today, we may be able to reflect and act. Do we need to integrate greater high context elements or replace them sharply with more rational low context thoughts? Will it protect the future of our industry as we fully renew now?

**Do we need to introspect, on our own high or low context cultural values as industry leaders today? ■**

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



# HICSA 2022: Back in Person

Hotel Investment Conference - South Asia (HICSA) 2022 by Hotelivate will be conducted as an exclusively in-person conference, with an aim to instil a sense of confidence in the fraternity. A collection of keynote addresses, group and panel discussions will tell the story of the ordeal that the industry continues to face and the ongoing journey of hospitality towards better days. The theme of this year's conference is about that journey where the collective focus is on working at it harder, trying to make it better, doing it faster, making the industry stronger - Harder, Better, Faster and Stronger. The two-day hospitality-focused conference scheduled on April 6-7, will be aimed at providing a much-needed boost to one of the worst-affected industries in the world with some of its most prominent thought-leaders and trend-setters uniting under one roof. **Asmita Mukherjee** spoke with **Manav Thadani, Co-founder, Hotelivate** to know how the biggest event of the Indian hospitality industry is preparing itself for a comeback.



ways. Tourism as well as its allied services contributes to the nation's GDP in a big way and the pandemic has adversely impacted that as well. The list can go on, but the top three would be business losses, loss of talent/retention challenges and working capital issues.

**Q** After a long break of almost two years because of the pandemic, HICSA is getting back to its charm. How are you seeing this opportunity?

We had done HICSA last year as well and it was in a hybrid format for the first time. This

**Q** What is the USP of HICSA 2022? How is it different from previous editions of HICSA?

For the very first time, we have a theme as a tagline that resonated with the current mood of the sector - Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger. We don't think that we could have said this better in any other way. This year HICSA will also see a lot of first-time speakers. We take feedback very seriously and this was something that had come up in the previous editions. Keeping that in mind, we have a fantastic line-up this year. There is also an impressive gender representation with almost 30% of its speakers being inspiring women.

**Q** What can be expected from HICSA 2022?

HICSA 2022 will enable great sessions with an incredible amount of insight from industry stalwarts along with excellent networking opportunities. In fact this year, we have kept aside designated time for a power networking segment so that there is an opportunity for every delegate to meet and greet as well as exchange business cards.

**Q** How has the pandemic-led situation for the last two years affected the hotel industry?

The pandemic has made us all see unprecedented times. The hotel industry or let's say, the entire travel and tourism sector has seen the worst of it in many

**Q** Slowly the industry is getting back on track. How soon do you think the industry will match the pace of pre-COVID level occupancy?

We have seen a very good pace in performance in hotels in the business locations. We believe that in most locations, the business levels will be back to 2019 levels by this coming winter season. Leisure locations that have done well however rationalise downwards a bit but will still remain strong.

**Q** What is the current investment prospect in the Indian hospitality industry?

Investors will find the right investment, always. As long as due diligence has been done, good investments will always give returns. Research says that there is a huge tourism potential for India and that the hospitality industry will grow at a very fast pace.

**Q** What is your opinion about giving industry status to the hospitality Sector? How will the industry benefit from this?

We are finally beginning to see different state governments in India beginning to give industry status to We think that this is an irreversible trend and ultimately most states will need to follow suit. By doing this the cost of doing business will come down and interest costs may also get more rationalised. ■

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year we are back to a completely in-person conference and are really looking forward to it. The theme this year is built around resilience because that is what the industry is doing - getting back on its feet. And we are glad to be facilitating its comeback.

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## NOW EVERYONE WANTS TO DELIVER

At last there are new and interesting things happening in the food and eating-out business.

With the closing down of eateries during the lockdown, cloud kitchens got a new and fresh lease of life. Today, while dining-out with all its attendant atmospherics is seemingly making a comeback, the fact remains that their erstwhile customers have also experienced the merits and conveniences of dining-in.

Lately, it was not just the neighbourhood Tikkiwala or the fast food joints that were the only food delivery staple. Things are changing. Experts say that the food delivery market in India is expected to increase up to USD seven hundred something million in just the next four years. That is supposedly a whopping almost 30 per cent increase.

The symbiosis between delivery chains and stand alone restaurants or chains does appear to be strained with an incipient struggle to grab the long end of the stick. As delivery services gain strength, the 'legacy' and 'ambience' specific outlets try to develop an independent some sort of competition in the delivery field as well.

The reason is the rapidly evolving profile of the consumer. A significantly large number of young people in various cities are totally comfortable with food delivery apps. The change in shopping preference has seamlessly flowed into ordering food from high end outlet options as well.

Here comes the swift move to app-based, digital approach of hotels, especially restaurants. Regular dine-in restaurants are not willing to cede any commercial elbow room to anyone else. The way out is to merely add their own cloud kitchen, so to say, and cater to the online food business. The attraction for dining-out is not going anywhere but no outlet worth its glorious name wants to not be a part of changing trends. No wonder the starred food delivery model of individual hotels and chains is seeing a steady, if not quantum growth. Digitisation has clearly changed lives and consumer habits.

These are exciting times. And one can use that adjective despite whatever happened in the last year or so.

Anurag Yadav  
Industry Expert

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

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

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## 'Our new 90-year lease policy has attracted reputed hospitality/realty players'

Earlier there were 72 permissions required to set up a hotel or a restaurant in Maharashtra. Now we have brought down this requirement to just 9 which is a big boost to the tourism sector because it will reduce operational costs, says **Valsa Nair Singh, IAS-Principal Secretary, Tourism, Excise & Civil Aviation, Govt of Maharashtra** in an exclusive interview with **Prasenjit Chakraborty**.

**Q During the pandemic, Maharashtra Tourism came out with new tourism policies to boost the sector. How are such policies facilitating in bringing investment to the state?**

We took a decision to undertake public private partnerships with major players for some of the best properties of Maharashtra. MTDC owns some of the best properties be it Matheran or Mahabaleshwar. Our aim is to get partners who have earned a reputation in successfully operating properties in the hospitality industry. This is because, we



believe they will run these hotels with more professionalism, and will also bring in marketing strength and brand image. This is a win-win situation for both the MTDC and our partners. This was the first step on the PPP front.

We were doing it for some time, but the lease was for 10-30 years. Now, for the first time, we extended the lease period to 90 years. As a result, big groups and real

estate players are approaching us. We have identified seven properties (both brown and green field) of the MTDC and invited private participation bids. And the response is fantastic.

Our second decision was to give industry status to the hospitality sector, and by doing so we emerged as the first state in the country to do so. It offers industry tariff to hotels, industry tariff for water, property tax etc. In this regard, the first circular came out in 1999 but was not implemented.

Our third step was ease of doing business. Earlier, for setting up a hotel or restaurant in the state it was imperative to have 72 permissions. We discussed and deliberated on this, and realised that some policies had become redundant with time. We kept only the important ones. That's how we brought it from 72 to just 9. It's a big boost to the sector because it will reduce operational cost. For any investor, we have a single liaison officer who would be assisting with the whole investment process.

In the recent past, we have infused a lot of life to the sector, so that whenever the sector opens up we can grab the opportunity. For example, we stressed on skill development during the pandemic and undertook online guide courses for young qualified people. This is a Ministry of Tourism programme, but we reimburse the entire fee for people who have qualified from Maharashtra.

**Q After having received encouraging response to your hotel initiative, what next?**

After the success of our first initiative or you can call it a pilot project, we have come up with a second tranche having identified 30 properties. Among these, some properties are really enviable for tourism potential. Some of the hotels are located on open lands near Mumbai, and can become a popular weekend getaway. Our strength is our location. I am sure our second phase

will also be successful and, will be a turning point for the tourism sector in Maharashtra, especially for investment in the hospitality sector.

Apart from PPP, we also have taken forward our commitment with Indian Hotels Company Ltd that wants to develop a five-star resort in Shiroda of the Sindhudurg district. We have leased the land and now the joint measurement is on.

Other major groups are also looking for investment in Sindhudurg, and other properties.

**Q What about the connectivity to these destinations?**

Along with this, we are also developing connectivity to these destinations. Now, we have daily flights from Mumbai to Sindhudurg, and the load factor is 75% to 80% everyday on this route. We have also started flights to Gondia, and will soon bring Amravati on the aviation map.

**Q Are you looking for any new investment in Aurangabad which attracts tourists both from domestic and international markets?**

Yes, we are looking for investment in and around Aurangabad, because Ajanta and Ellora have always been our flagship destinations. Besides this, we are also looking for investment in our forts. Forts are our biggest USP. Our sea forts are really unique. We are coming with some tourism infrastructure (not necessarily hospitality) in and around these forts to make it more convenient for tourists to visit the forts.

**Q Enlighten us about the prospects of Caravan tourism in Maharashtra.**

There are many scenic places in Maharashtra which fall under CRZ (Coastal Regulatory Zone), forest or forest buffer area or irrigation zone (near dam) where construction is not allowed. However, in such destinations parking of Caravan is allowed and here comes in our Caravan Policy playing a great role. We are helping the caravan players to tie up with hotel groups. Caravan tourism has tremendous potential in Maharashtra, as the state has very good roads. Not only that, good law and order situation also offers huge scope for Caravan tourism. Mumbai to Goa is one of the best road trips in the world. Besides this, Mumbai-Pune, Mumbai-Nashik, etc. also offer huge scope for development of Caravan tourism. ■

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# Advantage Maharashtra

In order to boost the tourism sector, the Government of Maharashtra has introduced several interesting policies and initiatives recently. Besides giving impetus to the sector, such policies will also help facilitate bringing investment into the state.

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

**M**aharashtra is situated in the western region of the country. It is the most industrialised state in India and has maintained its leading position in the industrial sector in the country. Like manufacturing, the service sector in the state, too, has flourished leaps and bounds. One of the leading sectors of service is tourism. Maharashtra is a high potential destination with a wide variety of genres, including wildlife, adventure, nature and pilgrimage, and tourism.



The state is also making its presence felt with attractive marketing campaigns, new initiatives and participation across domestic and global tourism events.

Maharashtra is one of the few states in the world which offers multiple types of destinations for its tourists. It has long coastline of 720 kilometers along the lush green Konkan region.

### FEW HIGHLIGHTS OF MAHARASHTRA TOURISM POLICY

Achieve sector growth of 10% per annum and share of 15% in GSDP through tourism and tourism related activities

Generate fresh investments in the tourism sector to the tune of INR 30,000 crore by 2025

Create 1 million additional jobs in the tourism sector by 2025

Strengthening of tourism infrastructure, especially in the form of PPP model, special tourism infrastructure, Tourism Infrastructure Development Fund, CSR, etc., are defined in this policy.

### INFRASTRUCTURE

The state is well-connected by roadways, railways, waterways and airways. The power supply in the state is one of the most stable and reliable in the country. Maharashtra has also an excellent telecommunication network. All these services help to link the state effectively with the rest of the country and with the world-cities. As a result, the Government of Maharashtra has been undertaking several infrastructural projects, from time to time, in order to attract large investments into the state.

Maharashtra has the largest road network in the country with a total road length of over 235,595 km consisting of 4,367 km of National Highways; 33,406 km of State Highways and 48,824 km of major district roads. Five national highways connect the state with Delhi, Kolkata, Allahabad, Hyderabad, and Bengaluru.

The state has a total of 24 airfields/airports. Of these, 17 are under the control of the state government; four are managed and controlled by the International Airport Authority/ Airports Authority of India, and three by the Ministry of Defence.

Maharashtra has air connectivity with 10 cities, the main airports being Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur and Nashik. Mumbai is India's busiest airport.

### INITIATIVES DURING PANDEMIC TIMES

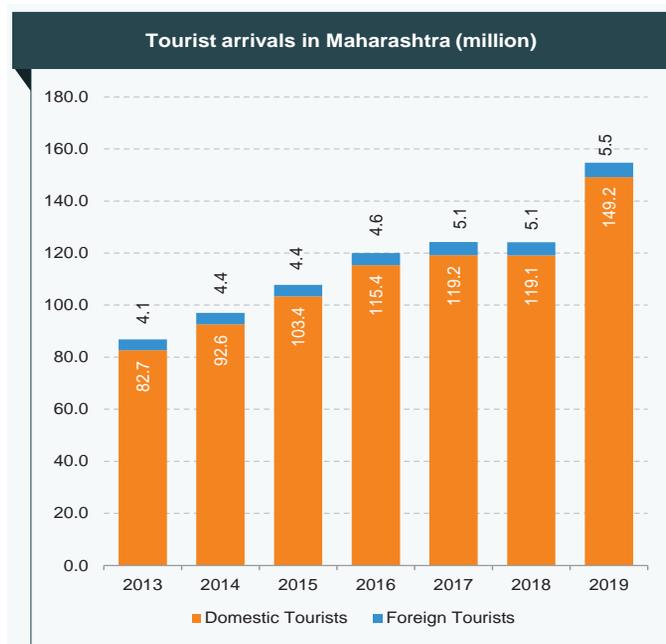
During the pandemic, the state has introduced several important policies to boost the tourism sector.

One such Policy is Adventure Tourism policy. The state is best suited for trekking after the Himalayas, hence the government launched the Adventure Tourism Policy. The state has registered many adventure tour operators.

The Beach Shack Policy is another important initiative where the Tourism Department will be issuing special permits for the temporary construction of shacks. The construction has to be compliant with environmental regulations to ensure the ecosystems of the beaches are not harmed. On a pilot project basis, the state has taken it up on eight beaches in the four coastal districts. But currently, the state is awaiting the new Coastal Zone Management Plan (CZMP), because it is a permissible activity only in the CZMP. In the current CZMP, the beach shack is not permissible. So, it is expected to start from next season.

Caravan Tourism has become increasingly popular in India post-pandemic. Travellers now want accommodation that is beyond traditional especially for remote areas where finding places to stay is a bit difficult. Taking due cognisance, the Government of Maharashtra has formulated the 'Caravan Tourism' Policy which has provisions for the Tourism Department to formulate strategies and boost caravan-related activities in the public and private sectors and on PPP basis. Caravan operators will be given incentives such as exemption in stamp duty and electricity duty, refund in GST, etc.

Single window clearance policy is an important one. Under this policy, the Department of Tourism has introduced a common online application portal that will streamline the process of seeking licenses, permissions for setting up a hospitality unit in the state. The aim is to condense the previous cumbersome mechanism of hoteliers having to seek permissions from multiple bodies into a hassle-free process in an online portal. This will reduce delays, enhance efficiency in the processing of applications, eliminate redundancies and information duplication. ■





# HICSA 2022

## All about Converging & Engaging

Asmita Mukherjee | Hyderabad

**H**otelivate is all set to host the 17th Edition of its Hotel Investment Conference - South Asia (HICSA) at the Grand Hyatt, Mumbai on April 6 and 7, 2022. While the previous edition sought to understand the damage caused by the pandemic, this edition of HICSA will be centred around resilience. With two of the most challenging years in recent times behind us, HICSA aims at igniting sparks of hope for the hospitality industry as it begins its journey on the road to recovery.

This year HICSA will be conducted as an exclusively in-person conference, with an aim to instil a sense of confidence in the fraternity. A collection of keynote addresses, group and panel discussions will tell the story of the ordeal we continue to face and the ongoing journey of hospitality towards better days. The theme of this year's conference is about that journey where the collective focus is on working at it harder, trying to make it better, doing it faster, making the industry all stronger - Harder, Better, Faster and Stronger. The two-day hospitality-focused conference will be aimed at providing a much-needed boost to one of the worst-affected industries in the world with some of its most prominent thought-leaders and trend-setters uniting under one roof.

Commenting on the 17th anniversary of HICSA, Manav Thadani, Founder Chairman of Hotelivate, said, "This year's edition will be unique and special in many ways with almost 45% of first-time speakers, another 10-15% of speakers who have spoken just once before and almost 20% of speakers being inspiring women - all bringing in a new perspective to the table. While last



year we did a hybrid version for the first time, this year, as per tradition, we are back with an exclusively in-person conference. We are extremely grateful for the support we have received from our delegates, patrons, speakers and sponsors"

Speaking about restarting in-person HICSA, Vishal Kamat, CEO, Kamat and Orchid Hotels said, "Restarting HICSA is a great opportunity as many of our dear friends and esteem to colleagues of the industry have not had a common platform over the last two years, especially in physical. The hospitality industry is all about warmth and connection which virtual events cannot fulfil. Hence, I look forward to participating in HICSA and utilising this great opportunity to reconnect and to make new connections."

Speaking about the USP of HICSA, Raof Dhanani, Managing Director, Sayaji Hotels Ltd. pointed out that it is one of the only platforms where people from the hospitality industry across the globe come together and share content-rich experiences, and it is also the only platform that provides all functional and operational



## The list of finalists across the six categories is as follows:

### Luxury Upper Upscale: Leisure

- Pilibhit House - IHCL SeleQtions, Haridwar
- Raffles Resort, Udaipur
- Welcomhotel by ITC Hotels Tavleen, Chail

### Luxury Upper Upscale: Urban

- Radisson Blu Hotel & Spa, Nashik
- Radisson Blu Resort, Visakhapatnam
- Tak Lakefront, Bhopal
- Taj Skyline, Ahmedabad

### Upscale

- Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham, Dwarka
- Radisson Resort & Spa, Lonavala
- Vivanta, Pakyong

### Upper Mid-Market

- Fairfield by Marriott, Goa
- Novotel Tribune Chandigarh
- The Fern Seaside Tent

### Mid-Market

- Country Inn & Suites by Radisson, Sonmarg
- Lemon Tree Hotel, Aligarh
- The Fern Sardar Sarovar Resort, Kevadiya

### Budget

- Ginger Gajuwaka, Visakhapatnam
- Red Fox, Vijayawada
- Regenta Inn, Amritsar

areas of the hospitality industry.

“HICSA this year will have a lot of brilliant minds talking about the same challenges taken up with a different approach. Every challenge will have a different outcome and a certain level of learning, every individual’s experience is always learning for others. So I guess this year lots of learning will be the biggest productivity of this year’s edition. HICSA provides a great platform to reunite and collectively share knowledge and experiences on a common platform. The break of two years has taken the entire industry through turmoil with umpteen new challenges and experiences which makes this year’s HICSA even more productive and fruitful for industry speer leaders to come and discuss their set of challenges and how they went about sustaining along with the challenges. This is a great opportunity for all of us to exchange ideas and learn from each other,” he said.

“In 2022, our expectation from HICSA is to have a great amount of networking and learning for better from the other industry leaders for business growth and opportunities in their editions,” added Dhanani.

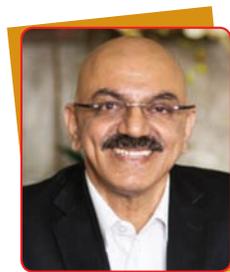
Vikram Kamat, Chairman, VITSKamats Group opined that HICSA is a great opportunity to connect with everyone.



**Vikram Kamat**  
Chairman  
VITSKamats Group



**Vishal Kamat**  
CEO  
Kamat and Orchid Hotels



**Raof Dhanani**  
Managing Director  
Sayaji Hotels Ltd.

“Hospitality people love being around and meeting people. It will be great to meet friends even if they are on paper business rivals!”

On Day 1, the conference will feature some exclusive interviews and keynote addresses in an endeavour to make the event more content-rich. It will have some notable speakers such as Jesper Palmqvist, Area Director Asia Pacific STR, Ritesh Agarwal, Founder and Group CEO, OYO, Aaditya Thackeray, Cabinet Minister of Tourism and Environment, Government of Maharashtra, Aditya Ghosh, Member - Board of Directors, FabIndia and OYO, Chairman, SEWA Social Enterprises, Katerina Giannouka, President - the Asia Pacific, Radisson Hotel Group, Peter Fulton, Group President - Europe, Africa, Middle East and South-West Asia, Hyatt Hotels Corporation, Dimitris Manikis, President - EMEA, Wyndham Hotels and Resorts and Haitham Mattar, Managing Director - India, Middle East and Africa, IHG.

HICSA will also felicitate Nakul Anand, Executive Director, ITC Limited with a lifetime achievement award, celebrating a professional journey like no other.

The day will close with the ‘HICSA Hotels of the Year Awards presented by MakeMyTrip, which recognises the most remarkable new hotel developments in the South Asian region. The nominations include hotels across six categories: Luxury/Upper Upscale Hotel – Urban; Luxury/Upper Upscale Hotel – Leisure; Upscale Segment; Upper Mid-Market Segment; Mid-Market Segment; Budget/Economy Segment. The winners will be shortlisted by a designated jury and then finally determined by the HICSA 2022 delegates through a voting process and announced as part of the conference program.

An independent panel of judges comprising key industry leaders participated in the short-listing process. The shortlisted entries from each category are presented to all HICSA delegates for an electronic voting procedure. The voting can also be done through the Hotelivate Conferences App. The winners will be announced, as part of the conference programme, on April 6, 2022.

Consistent with the HICSA tradition, Day 2 of the conference will feature many relevant panel and group discussions as well as a few keynote sessions with industry leaders. “Travel Trends in South-Asia” will be presented by Rajesh Magow, Co-Founder and Group CEO, MakeMyTrip while Nikhil Nath, Founder and CEO, Knowcross will speak about “Trends in technology”. There will also be some thought-provoking sessions like “How Will Management

Contract Evolve - Post Pandemic”, “Traditional Hotel Companies: Challenges And Opportunities”, “HR- Who Ate Our Talent?” - to name a few.

The conference will ultimately conclude with the famous “Hot Seat Debate” moderated by Manav Thadani, which will bring to light the challenging times for leadership. The panel will have Kapil Chopra, Founder and CEO, The Postcard Hotel, Priya Paul, Chairperson, Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels, and Rajeev Menon, President - Asia Pacific (excluding Greater China), Marriott International. ■

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## Hotel industry expects traction in occupancy, room rates in 2022, says HVS ANAROCK Report

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

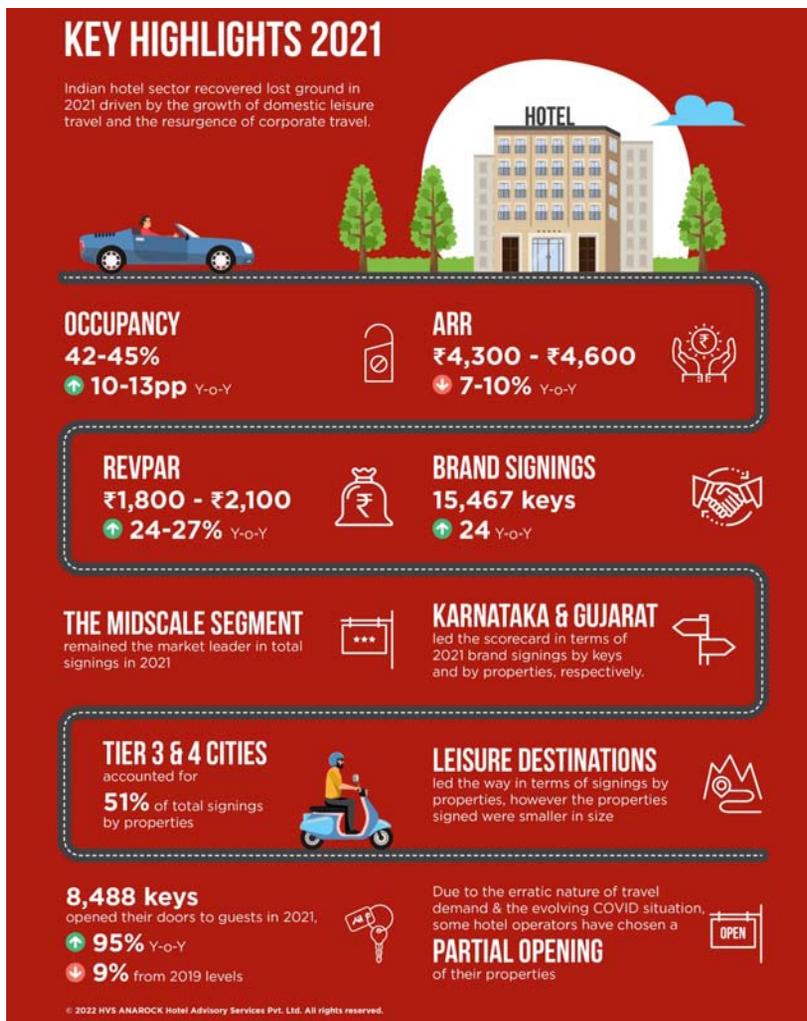
The year 2022 started on a challenging note with subdued demand in the first few weeks because of rising Omicron cases in the country, and the accompanying travel constraints across states, the HVS ANAROCK hotel sector report said.

Domestic leisure travel is the driving force behind the road to recovery coupled with an increase in business travel, and with most organisations gradually resuming to a full or hybrid work-from-office model, it said.

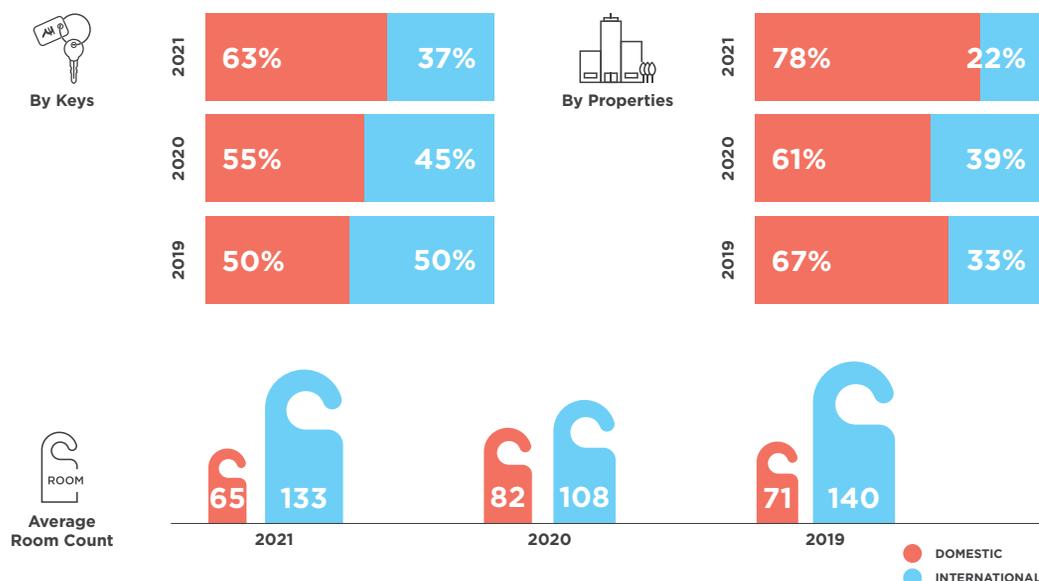
In 2021, the occupancy was 42-45 per cent and the average room rate was INR 4,300-4,600 which was higher than 2020 but less by 25-28 per cent compared to 2019 levels, it said.

“We expect India-wide occupancy to improve to 66 per cent in 2022, along with a 28 per cent increase in ARR during the year. We expect occupancy & average room rates to return to pre-pandemic levels by the end of CY22 (calendar year) and by mid-CY23, respectively,” Mandeep Singh Lamba, President (South Asia), HVS ANAROCK said in the report.

According to HVS Anarock, brand signing by 220 hotels for 17,500 rooms and scheduled opening is expected for 8,800 keys from 120 hotels in 2022. ■



### International vs Domestic Brands



\* Three properties that were renewed (376 keys) have not been included in new signings  
Based on information reported by 22 participating hotel operators for CY2021

## 2021 PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Domestic leisure travel drove the recovery throughout the year, with businesses travel also showing early signs of revival as most business and organisations gradually started returning to a full or hybrid work-from-office model during the year. Additionally, weddings and social events, as well as the resurgence of small-to-medium-sized domestic MICE events, helped to stimulate hotel demand.



Occupancy

**42-45%**  
 ↑ **10-13pp** Y-o-Y  
 ↓ **21-24pp** 2019



ARR

**₹4,300 - ₹4,600**  
 ↓ **7-10%** Y-o-Y  
 ↓ **25-28%** 2019



RevPAR

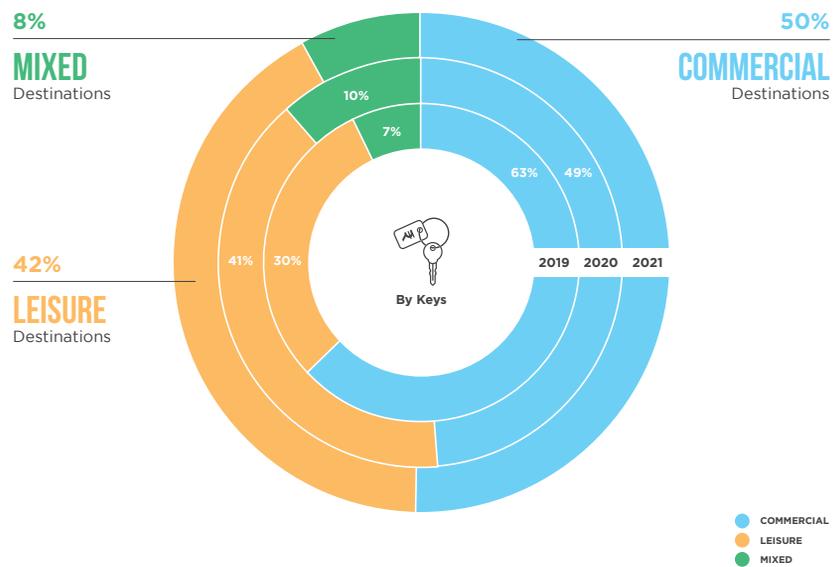
**₹1,800 - ₹2,100**  
 ↑ **24-27%** Y-o-Y  
 ↓ **50-53%** 2019

## IN 2021 THE TOP 5 OPERATORS BY BRAND SIGNINGS



## Market Segment

Commercial destinations continued to see the maximum signings by keys (50% of total signings). However, due to the lessons learned during the pandemic, hotel companies looked at increasing their distribution in leisure markets, resulting in significant growth in leisure sector development. As a result, nearly 42% of the total hotel signings by keys in 2021 were in leisure destinations in the country. Leisure destinations led the way in terms of signings by properties, accounting for 49% of the signings, followed by commercial (44%) and mixed destinations (7%).



## 2021 QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS

Although the year began on a positive note with industry-wide occupancy at nearly 50% in the first quarter, demand dipped down in the second quarter, due to fresh covid restrictions and lockdown in several places. With business travel and MICE events picking up over the last two quarters, occupancy demand improved to reach more than 57% in the last quarter.

● ARR (AVERAGE ROOM RATE)  
 ● RevPAR  
 ● OCCUPANCY



\*All data shown is an approximation and for calendar year

\* Meetings, incentives, conferencing & exhibitions

Source: HVS Research



# Resurgence of Corporate Bookings

After two years of damage, caused due to Covid related restrictions, the hotel industry is all set to back with a bang. With in-person interactions returning back slowly, corporate bookings and MICE have also started getting back their charm. **Asmita Mukherjee** spoke with industry experts to gather their Point of View about the impact of the re-emergence of corporate bookings after more than two years.

## ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

Sharing his thoughts on the resurgence of corporate bookings, Vineet Verma, Director, Brigade Hospitality said, “We are seeing a gradual trend of many office spaces re-opening and looking at this trend, we anticipate return of 60-70% of the workforce by the end of April or early May which also paves way for resuming of international flights. This will further boost the long-awaited international corporate travel segment. As far as MICE is concerned we have noticed that events which were postponed or cancelled in the first 2 months of the year are returning with fresh dates in the 2nd and 3rd quarter. There is also a good demand in the Banquet events segment with improvement over month on month.”

Echoing similar insights, Mehul

Sharma, Founder & CEO, Signum Hotels & Resorts also said that their group have started seeing a positive impact on MICE & Corporate bookings, which undoubtedly gives a rise in physical conventions and exhibitions bookings. “Travel companies are



**Vineet Verma**  
Director  
Brigade Hospitality



**Mehul Sharma**  
Founder & CEO  
Signum Hotels & Resorts

now organising close to 35 physical events on a monthly basis and approximately 10 virtual events. We are expecting a 10- 15 per cent quarter on quarter rise in the MICE segment,” he added.

Vilas Pawar, CEO, Choice Hotels India, opined that although the major share of recovery is supported by leisure travellers, there has been a substantial increase in business travel including MICE events. The occupancies are soaring and there has been a remarkable increase in corporate travel after the third wave. In a gradual recovery dictated by proximity, companies are planning to resume domestic trips first.

Adding his thoughts, Manish Goyal, Founder, Stotrak Hospitality said, “Corporate movements have started showing an upward trend from the beginning of this year, and now MICE has also started albeit at a very slow pace. March and April always have had slow movements in corporate business for hotels. Our hotel in Selaqui (Spicxe Hotel, Dehradun) is located within the industrial area of Dehradun hence a major chunk of business comes from corporates and industries. As of now, we have been able to keep the occupancies between 35-40%, although the event space hasn’t picked up much, but there are a few social and corporate gatherings booked for the coming months.”

## OFFERS TO LURE CORPORATES

The shift – “Work from Home” to “Work from Office” hasn’t gone unnoticed by the hospitality industry. Business conferences will probably be returning soon to pre-covid levels, as well. To expedite the upward trajectory, hoteliers are offering attractive packages to their corporate customers.

Arvind Rathi, Founder & Promoter, NamasteHolidays said, “We have introduced attractive and interesting packages curated as per the needs and profile of individuals from the corporate world. Our therapies consisting of the integration of India’s most powerful healing components: village life, ayurveda, vedic acupressure, naturopathy, and meditation are offered in various packages for physical and mental wellbeing.”

Hoteliers are also keeping a close eye on the intricate needs of corporates which are evolving due to the “Return to office” trend. Sensing these special needs and catering to them at the right time can be a game changer for hotels. Sharing the steps taken by his

brand, Verma said, “At the moment we are in touch with all major corporates and are working to offer special “Relocation Packages” depending upon their length of stay, inclusive of meal packages as well as laundry and housekeeping services. These are specially curated for employees returning back to the cities to resume work in their offices as well as the new recruits. We are also looking at introducing attractive meeting packages for employee social engagements.”

Sharma said that they are working on attractive deals and packages for corporate patrons who are returning to the office. He informed that the brand has also launched long stay packages for travellers, in addition to attractive rates for the ‘Work from hotel’ package.

Sharing the initiatives taken by his brand, Pawar informed, “Our hotels have devised attractive packages which are inclusive of the increased demand for leisure travel from corporates, as work-life boundaries blur. Where the destinations appeal, corporate travellers are adding weekends and weekdays to work trips for either solo or with partners or family.”

### CHANGES IN DEMANDS

The pandemic has been a game-changer for the hospitality, travel & tourism, and F&B industries, as it has transformed consumer habits, expectations, and priorities, and has brought fragility to the fore. According to Pawar, there is new mindfulness that pivots around health, hygiene, environment, and safety, while the world moves towards normalcy, and this mindfulness will remain a habit.

According to Sharma, understanding and responding to consumers’ changing behaviours will be essential to the recovery of the hospitality sector. He said that organizations will need to reimagine the customer experience and re-engage with customers to build and maintain their trust. At the same time, they will need to improve their operational agility and financial resilience to navigate the uncertainties of doing business in a world wracked by the pandemic.

Verma opined that the corporates have also become price-conscious and are expecting a rate reduction as compared to 2019. According to him, there is still a long way to go to reach the pre-covid demand.

As per Goyal, the pre-covid era was more focused on bigger buffets, better pricing and convenient rooms whereas the post-covid era is more about personalization, hygiene and outdoor spaces.

### CHALLENGES IN THE WAY

The hospitality industry is facing challenges to match operations and staffing to the pre-covid level. Pandemic had led to a major downsizing of manpower and a reduced

“We currently are facing a shortage in staff as many have shifted industries or migrated to other locations. Being in a remote part of Kerala has always a challenge and now more so. But we see this as temporary issue this will stabilize once the industry in general and medical tourism in Kerala stabilizes,”

Reiterating the same, Verma said, “There is a huge talent crunch in the Hospitality and Travel industry post-covid, as after resizing many employees chose to switch industries. We are now constantly identifying, recruiting & training the right talent with adaptability and sustenance in mind. Our collaborated efforts continue alongside the hotel management schools, with both rehiring and well-structured enhanced training to improve in house talent in order to fill the gaps created.”

### MATCHING THE PRE-COVID PACE

According to Goyal, occupancy for MICE and corporate bookings in these current times would take time to match pre-covid’s pace. He added, “The year 2022 doesn’t seem to make us reach the pre-covid numbers although with the recent surge in travel, demand in the upcoming months certainly looks very positive. It has been a very difficult situation and with the current news of the fourth wave, travel again is planned at short notice. Corporate travel and MICE are both pre-planned much in advance and during these uncertain times, they still have a dilemma to confirm the bookings. We have had two conferences pushed to April or May which were confirmed to happen in March, so there is still a sense of uncertainty.”

Verma opined, “Looking at the current pace & hopefully another wave not impacting us, we anticipate reaching the pre-covid scenario, sometime in the 1st Quarter of next year.” According to Sharma, it would take 6-9 months to match the business & bookings.

“Business travel has resumed and it is expected to rise in the coming months if the covid situation remains under control. Virtual and online meetings are here to stay as one of the key takeaways from the Covid times, and there could be a rationalization in business travel and costs of companies because of this,” added Pawar. ■

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**Vilas Pawar**  
CEO  
Choice Hotels India



**Manish Goyal**  
Founder  
Stotrak Hospitality



**Arvind Rathi**  
Founder & Promoter  
Namaste Holidays



**Abhilash K Ramesh**  
Executive Director  
Kairali Ayurvedic Group

level of operation. With business recovery, most of the staff from the hospitality industry were either poached away by other industries or themselves have left the industry.

“There is an acute shortage of skilled manpower and adding to it, there are challenges in keeping them motivated. Consistent training and better HR practices would pave the way to motivate the teams to deliver guest expectations. Staff shortage is and would continue to be an issue in the hospitality industry,” added Pawar.

Stating that shortage of staff is a temporary issue, Abhilash K Ramesh, Executive Director, Kairali Ayurvedic Group said,

# ‘Our Indian business has experienced impressive growth’

We are committed to make our brand visible across all the major and upcoming destinations around the world. Our development pipeline in 2023 is very strong with the further expansion of our brands including Address Hotels + Resorts and Vida Hotels and Resorts, says **Mark Kirby, Head of Hospitality, Emaar Hospitality Group** in a conversation with **Prasenjit Chakraborty**.



## Q In your opinion, what are some of the important factors determining hotel industry trends in the new normal?

With challenges during the pandemic, we focused more on re-inventing practices and new investments in people and products. With the new normal, we are experiencing some new travel trends and our brands are successfully embracing these changes. We are focused on adopting sustainable solutions,

prominence in the GCC region with its brands that have organically grown from within the UAE to an exceptional breadth of hotels and resorts in key locations across the region. The group attracts key international markets with a focus on the GCC, India, China, Europe, and Israel.

India is very important to us as it is one of the biggest outbound markets in the world, one of the biggest in Dubai, and amongst the top 10 for Bahrain and Turkey. Therefore, we are committed to continue growing our prominence in India to ensure this market stays aligned with our existing and upcoming strategies.

Also, our presence in India is not new, we have been represented through the Nijhawan Group for over a decade and our Indian business has experienced impressive growth. However, the last 2 years were challenging for travel and tourism across all regions but despite this, India has continued to show true potential and growth. We look forward to welcoming the Indian market to Bahrain, Turkey, and very soon in Egypt.

## Q What are your investment and expansion plans? (Specifically for India or Asia)

We are committed to making our brand visible across all the major and upcoming destinations around the world. Our development pipeline in 2023 is very strong with the further expansion of our brands including Address Hotels + Resorts and Vida Hotels and Resorts. Additionally, through our joint venture with Giorgio Armani, we will also be developing the Armani brand beyond Dubai and Milan very soon.

We have new openings within the UAE along with international destinations including Egypt, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia – all locations with India as one of its key markets.

## Q What are the opportunities that you foresee for Emaar Hospitality Group?

Emaar Hospitality Group is successfully capturing new markets in the region, and we see immense opportunities with our growing portfolio. Our latest openings like Address Istanbul and Vida Marassi al Bahrain have received great responses in these markets. Our brands have immense potential to successfully expand to new markets.

Even during the pandemic, we were focused on re-inventing practices and making new investments in people and products. We continued to expand and grow as a brand despite the recent challenges as our approach was focused on regional expansion and innovative experiences for our guests. This strategy has proven to be a success as our industry is now revived with open travel and tourism around the world while we are ready to welcome tourists with multiple new openings offering exceptional services at top destinations in the region. Going forward, we see a lot of opportunity and potential in new markets that are aligned with the group's expansion strategy.

## Q What are the lessons you learnt from the pandemic?

Despite the changes during the pandemic, as a group, we remained focused on our strategies to keep growing our brands and catering to the needs of our guests with innovative and safe solutions. Also, it is important to note that UAE was one of the first countries to restore the confidence of its citizens and residents through an effective vaccination campaign and informed policy.

Overall, it is important to have the right strategies and policies in place to ensure the success of our industry and therefore platforms like this are very important for our industry to come together and plan the way forward. ■

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wellness initiatives, and contact-less services as tourists are becoming more mindful of factors like environment, wellness, and safety. For us, guest experiences remain at the heart of what we do, and therefore it is very crucial for us to ensure that hotels are fully aligned with our guests' needs.

## Q Which are your important source markets? How do you plan to attract more footfall from India?

Emaar Hospitality Group has gained



## The Westin Mumbai Powai Lake

Chalet Hotels which already houses global brands in association with Marriott International and Accor, fortifies its offerings with this newly renovated and upgraded Hotel. The 600-room asset has undergone extensive upgradation over the past two years, to make it an aspirational choice for the new age traveller. The remodelled contemporary spaces include 'Mayouchi' a brand-new Japanese Tapas bar, 'Mumbai Express' a feel-good Deli, 'Nawab Saheb' a rejuvenated Indian restaurant, a relaxing spa, a state-of-the-art gym, a smart new lobby and stunning views of the lake front and the city skyline offering distinctive experiences. With sustainability at its core, the design philosophy takes inspiration from the concept of 'Biophilia', which suggests that humans have an innate tendency to seek connection with nature.

## Ginger Greater Noida

Ginger Greater Noida is strategically located near Pari Chowk, with convenient access to the India Expo Mart, commercial centres, Greater Noida Sports Complex and the upcoming Noida airport. The hotel offers 72 rooms, Café Etcetera – the all-day diner offering a mix of global and local cuisine, and two conference rooms with a capacity to accommodate over 100 guests.



## Ginger Kochi, Kalamassery

Located at Kalamassery, the hotel is built around the brand's design and service philosophy of offering a vibrant, contemporary, and seamless hospitality experience to its guests. Ginger Kochi, Kalamassery is strategically located on the Kochi-Salem Highway, with convenient access to Cochin SEZ and economic centre with key IT companies and industries. The hotel features 73 rooms, Café et cetera – the all-day diner, meeting rooms, a rooftop swimming pool and fitness centre.



## Welcomhotel Guntur

Specially designed to provide a delightful and enriching experience to customers, Welcomhotel Guntur has 104 well-appointed guest rooms, including a Presidential Suite, 4 Executive Suites & 4 Standard Suites. The well-designed rooms range from 32 sq. mt. to 130 sq. mt in dimension. With a repertoire of world-class hospitality offerings, the hotel promises to further enrich it's vibrant tourism and business landscape.

Welcomhotel Guntur serves as the perfect venue for celebrations, corporate events, weddings, conferences and meetings with pre-function, meeting and banquet venues spread over 836 sq. metres, infused with a grand ambience of jewel tones, enriched with indigenous vibes of Kalamkari art, balanced with sepia toned art.



## Hafele introduces Blanco Faucets

Contemporary architecture views a kitchen faucet not only as a source of water flow but also as an ornament that crowns the sink. Putting this into perspective, Hafele brings its exclusive range Blanco Faucets, conceptualised and created in line with emerging interior trends. display sheer elegance in their design and are available in a chrome plated finish as well as colours that match the look and texture of the. All Blanco faucets falling under Hafele's Range are extensively tested and certified and thus provide maximum safety in terms of health and hygiene. The durable ceramic disc cartridges provide for a precise adjustment of the water amount and temperature.



## Salud introduces a new range of non-alcoholic bitters

Salud Beverages has launched a new range of essential bitters to elevate your drink, food and social experiences. Salud has been stirring up the ready-to-drink segment in India by uncomplicating the drinking experience with its Gin Refreshers, and with its latest offering of three new non-alcoholic bitters, the brand is set to shake things up again.

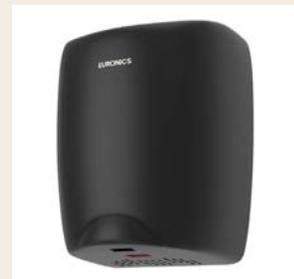


Salud has worked closely with Master blenders and distillers to craft these exquisite bitters that add an exciting depth of flavour and character. The alchemy behind Salud's bitters impart a high-quality, well-balanced and electrifying note to your food or drink of choice. We're certain it will be the magic ingredient for mixologists, bartenders and chefs to swear by. Salud's selection of bitters are available in three flavours Tropical Dew, Summer Dust, Citrus Twist. The Salud Bitters is priced at INR 499 and available in select outlets and online stores.

## Euronics brings new Black Matte series - Nero

Euronics has recently introduced a new Black Matte series - Nero which is a more aesthetic and soothing appeal to the washroom space.

Premium bathroom accessories by 'Nero' adds a very evident flair to the washroom without ever compromising its efficiency. With Nero, one can turn your bath space into an epitome of perfection and bring more finesse to the washroom experience. The color black is a bold style statement on its own. Along with an aesthetic touch, adding these matte black bathroom accessories will also bring a luxurious and elegant edge to the bathroom.



## CMC introduces Terrazzo

Classic Marble Company (CMC) has launched its latest Terrazzo product - Deluxe White from KalingaStone Elite collection. The exquisite design has mosaic patterns in a mix of big and small chips embedded in the marble slabs. The Deluxe White is a white terrazzo marble with colourful chips distinctly interspersed across the slab. A timeless terrazzo, the Deluxe White is reminiscent of the classical art deco design and is recommended for wall and floor applications for creating stunning spaces in living residences.



## ACCOR HOTELS

### **Rohan Samarth, Director of Sales & Marketing, Novotel Hotels & Resorts, Goa**



Samarth will be responsible for the entire management of the sales and marketing programs, along with the implementation of strategies and budgets for the two five-star properties in Goa. He brings with him 10 years of rich experience in Revenue Management and knows the Goa market from his past

association as Director of Revenue with Novotel Hotels and Resorts Goa in 2016. During his stint with both properties, he was awarded 'RM person of the year' by Accor for his contribution toward best market share performance and exceptional ADR growth.

### **Hitesh Mehta, Director of Finance, Novotel Kolkata**



Over the past 14 years, he has worked with Hyatt Regency Chandigarh, JW Marriott Chandigarh, Indore Marriott Hotel, Le Meridian Nagpur, The Taj Mahal Palace Mumbai and ICICI Bank. Mehta is a qualified Chartered Accountant and holds a Bachelor's degree in Commerce. He will organise and direct the team to supervise all

revenues and expenses and all inventories in his current role. He will also be responsible for managing the day to day financial reporting and controlling requirements of the departments and will be required to review and analyze management accounts. Mehta will plan, direct, supervise, and coordinate the activities of the personnel involved in the organisation's accounting and other financial functions. He will also analyze and interpret financial data and recommend changes to improve financial performance and maintain an account of all the transactions. He will be responsible for budget and cost controls, financial analysis, accounting practices and reports.

### **Chef Siddarth Noronha, Executive Chef, Sofitel Mumbai BKC**



With over 16 years of experience, Noronha counts his depth and profound understanding of cooking as a major asset. In his new role, Chef Noronha will oversee the entire functioning of Sofitel Mumbai BKC's four food and beverage outlets including the award-winning restaurants of Pondichery Café

– All-day Dining, Jyran – Tandoor Dining & Lounge, Tuskers – Vegetarian Dining & Bar and Artisan – Bar & Garden Lounge.

## INDIAN HOTELS COMPANY LTD

### **Sandip Narang, Hotel Manager, Taj West End Bengaluru**



With nearly three decades of experience working as a chef at IHCL, Narang brings with him a repertoire of knowledge and experience both in the field of culinary as well as hotel management and operations.

In his new role, he will be responsible for positioning the hotel as the landmark property in the heart of the city, in addition to managing the

hotel's commercial objectives, and delivering world-class experiences to its guests. Having graduated from the Bombay catering college, he started his culinary training at the Taj Mahal Palace and Towers. A highlight in his career was when he essayed the role of personal chef to former Indian Prime Minister, Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee on his trips to Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkey, in 2002-03.

## MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL

### **Niraj Chotai, Director of Sales, The Westin Hyderabad**



A strategic thinker, with a heightened knowledge of revenue management, sales forecasting, market evaluation, and overall systems, Chotai also brings about 15 years of experience to the table. With experience and expertise in dynamic and fast-paced markets, he has elevated himself through his numerous achievements. At

The Westin Hyderabad Mindspace, Chotai will be responsible for the annual business and marketing strategies of the hotel. Under his leadership, he shall ensure the desired targets are met and untapped business opportunities are explored. Relaying through the early stages of his career, he worked at Jurys Inns Ltd. at Heathrow, London. He moved to Taj Hotels & Resorts London and also worked at Crowne Plaza London St. James, where he was able to acquire major learnings in hospitality components. Chotai also embarked on an entrepreneurial journey with Food Fuel Restaurant in Nagpur.

### **Rajesh Kandagatla, Pastry Chef, The Westin Hyderabad Mindspace**

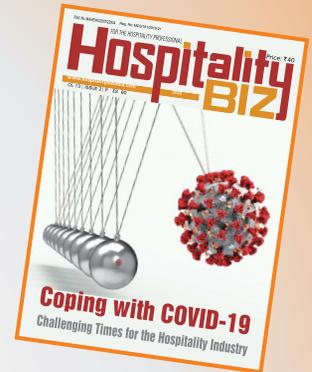


An avid and skilled pastry chef with over fifteen years of work experience in an array of environments, Rajesh Kandagatla's career has spanned regions including Hyderabad, Mumbai Chennai, and New Delhi. Always inclined towards bakery and pastry, he has manoeuvred his speciality throughout his career. The

hotels he has worked with include Le Meridian Hyderabad, Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa, JW Marriott Juhu and JW Marriott Aerocity.

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