

Hotel talk

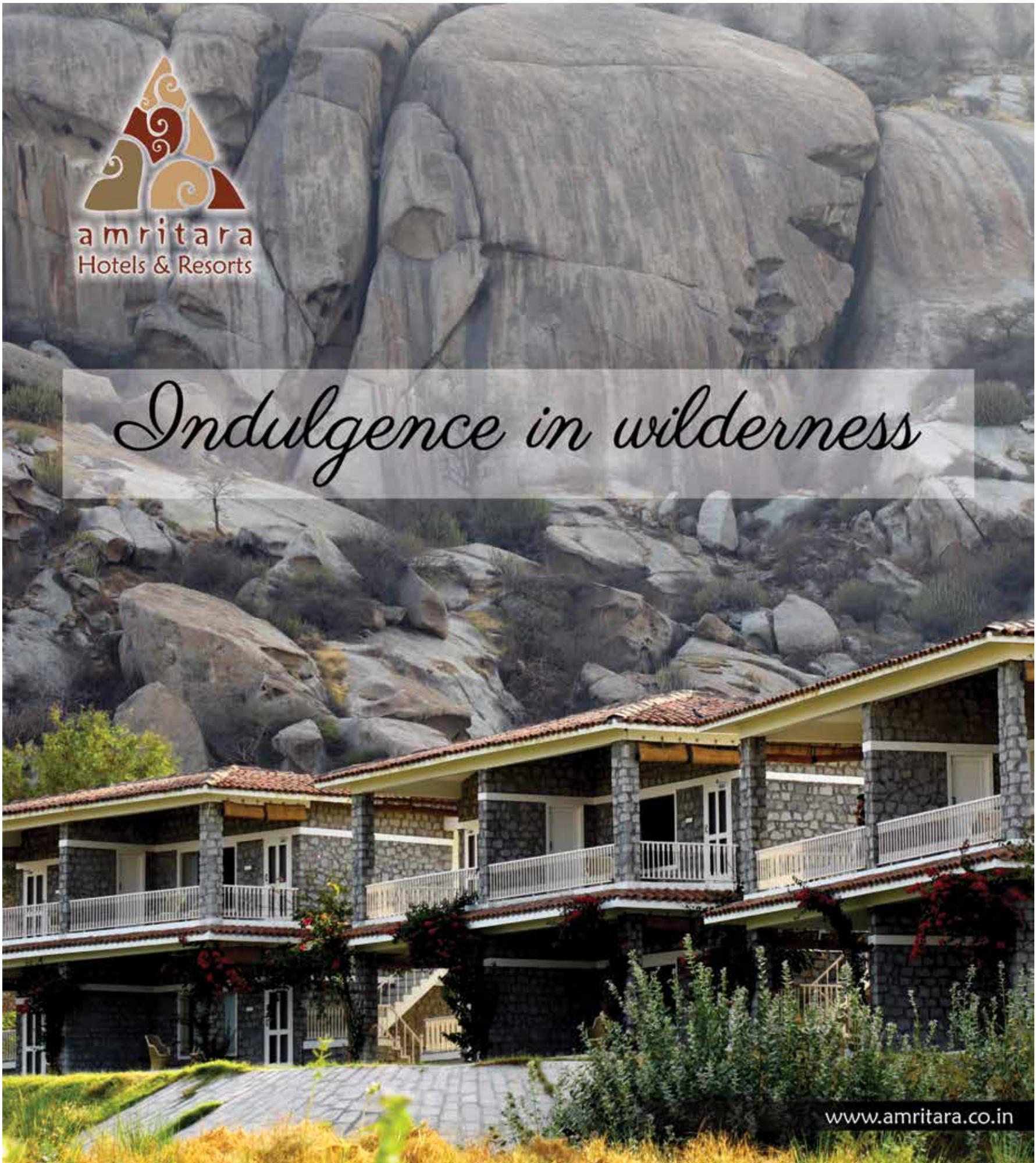
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Hotel talk

WHY GREEN IS IN

The hospitality industry has been rejoicing after the government announced a considerable reduction in the GST being levied on hotels under different star categories. The move is being lauded as one that will make a big difference in how India is perceived as a destination, particularly in relation to its Southeast Asian neighbours that, till now, enjoyed an edge over India with lower tax brackets. A lower GST also paves the way for growth in domestic tourism, with hotel accommodation getting more affordable for the discerning Indian traveller.

In terms of mid-segment hotels, India is the fastest growing market for new hotel openings. New budget properties are mushrooming across the country, especially in tiered cities that have seen good growth in leisure and business travel. Not only are these properties offering state-of-the-art amenities, they're also making sure they remain sustainable and environment-friendly.

Many properties are making contribution towards the environment by adopting technologies that reduce the use of natural resources and keep their carbon footprint low. At the same time, hotels are involving guests and enabling them to make their contribution towards nature conservation through various activities in and around the hotel. After all, isn't the involvement of the community itself the first step towards being productively sustainable?

EDITORIAL

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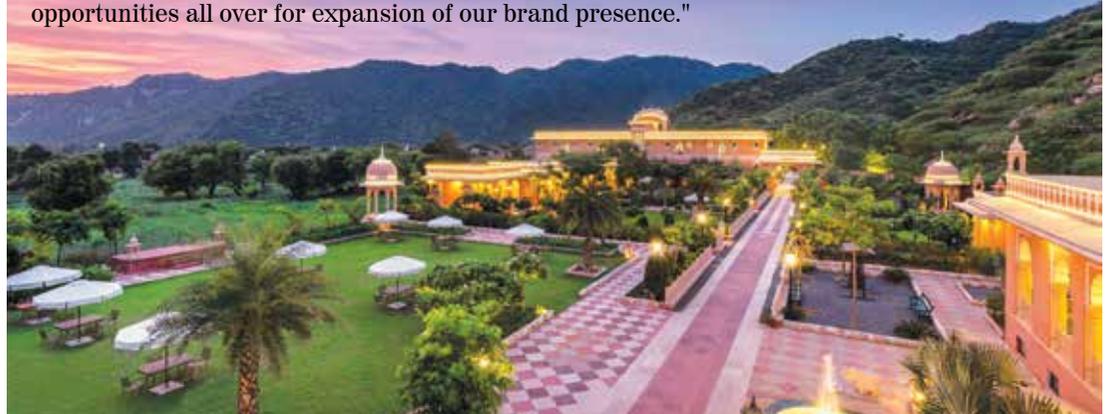
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NEWS IN BRIEF

WELCOMHERITAGE ADDS TWO HOTELS IN NORTH INDIA

WelcomHeritage is all set to flag a new property near Jaisalmer— WelcomHeritage Mohangarh Fort. **Sanjeev K Nayar**, MIH, General Manager, WelcomHeritage, informs that the fort was completed in 1944 and is known to be the youngest fort of India. Speaking further about expansion plans, he says, "We propose to flag a heritage property in Prayagraj – WelcomHeritage Badi Kothi. We look forward to continue to expand our footprint and business during the year. We are in conversation with more property owners and very soon, we will be making announcements of new properties on the board. We are keenly looking at opportunities all over for expansion of our brand presence."



Turkey's first Sofitel opens in Istanbul

Sofitel Hotels & Resorts, a leading luxury brand within the Accor group, has opened its first hotel in Turkey, Sofitel Istanbul Taksim. The hotel offers an impeccable blend of Sofitel's inspired mix of French modern elegance with the cosmopolitan style of Istanbul. Guests of Sofitel Istanbul Taksim will revel in the luxury of 202 chic guest rooms including 33 suites. The hotel is equipped to host business and social events, with two ballrooms and three well-outfitted meeting rooms.

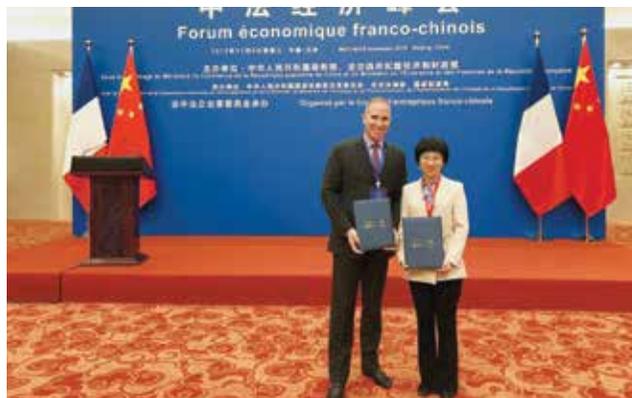
Sarovar opens 112 room hotel in Mumbai

Sarovar Hotels & Resorts has launched Royal Hometel Suites in Mumbai. The hotel features 112 rooms and suites as well as two banquet halls for conferences, weddings and social gatherings, accommodating up to 550 guests. The new property is appropriate for both business and leisure travellers.



Accor and Alibaba Group enter digital partnership

Accor and Alibaba Group have announced a strategic collaboration as a result of which they will develop a series of digital applications and loyalty programmes to improve the consumer and traveller experience over the next five years. The formal announcement was made during the 2019 China International Import Expo.





A wholesome package

Ruchi Uberai, Director, Amritara Hotels & Resorts, says that the group has curated unique offerings for its guests by blending the essence of a location with the experiences they provide.

NISHA VERMA

Amritara Hotels & Resorts is a boutique hotel chain offering unusual experiences, and has positioned itself as a niche player in the market. **Ruchi Uberai** shares, “Our authentic, 360-degree experiences are spread across magnificent destinations pan India.”

What makes them unique is their offering of nostalgic vintage journeys; spiritual experiences; heritage palaces and assets; wildlife offerings; as well as rejuvenation of body, mind and soul to take care of all the quintessential needs of guests. “Unique locations blended with contemporary facilities, amenities, and service delivery make us unique,” she adds. The brand puts in a lot of effort to offer personalised, tailor-made experiences to guests. “An evaluation of the guests’ preference is undertaken several times before they



“Our first preference is to hire locally and then equip such employees to be able to deliver results by teaching them the required skills”

RUCHI UBERAI
Director
Amritara Hotels & Resorts

arrive. At other times, guest arrival enables us to ensure offering ‘expected’ experience, whether pre-packaged or curated,” Uberai shares.

Taking cues from the destination they are situated in, she claims, “More often than not, Location of our assets permits us to offer to the guest what is unique to the region. We are grounded and connected with the local cultural history, cuisine and craft, and we work closely with the habitat and people that surround our assets. This helps us create appropriate, and quite often, invaluable experiences for our guests.” Having been part of the industry for 12 years now, Amritara Hotels & Resorts is a well-known name here. “Familiarisation trips, show-arounds, incentives, treating them as part of our family, as well as constant interaction with and visits to agencies are some of the ways we engage with the trade to boost sales. We also participate in major trade fairs and travel shows where there is an opportunity to establish relations,” insists Uberai.

The group is now indulging in reasonably aggressive marketing on social media platforms, along with advanced digital marketing activities. “We are a part of various domestic and international trade fairs and roadshows. We intend to also participate on GDS platforms in the near future,” she informs. Talking of eco-consciousness, Uberai says that as a brand, one of their core beliefs is sustainability and using it to address environmental and societal issues. “We strongly believe in giving back to society. Our first preference is to hire locally and then equip such employees to be able to deliver results by teaching them the required skills,” she concludes.



Location of their assets permits them to offer

to the guest what is unique to the region

Experiential stay on west coast

Tour operators looking for an experience based getaway for their clients can opt for Anandvan Resorts in Bhandardara.

TT BUREAU

A trusted name in hospitality, Anand & Daughters offers handcrafted hospitality solutions for sales, marketing and management of boutique properties. It has two brands under this umbrella: Anandvan Resort and Cotton Stays. **Puneet Anand**, Founder, Anand & Daughters, says, "While Anandvan Resorts has already managed to carve a niche for itself, Cotton Stays is relatively new. It has multiple properties under the banner and is great for getaways, long escapes, short breaks and glamping experiences that are natural."

Meanwhile, Anandvan Resorts is located in Bhandardara, Maharashtra. It is an eco-conscious resort, blending luxury with responsible tourism. It is exclusive with just 22 rooms, offering gorgeous tree houses and villas and close to Mumbai and Pune. For this festive season, Anand and his team have also crafted special events for Christmas and New Year for guests who want to take a break from city life as



Anandvan Resorts, with 22 rooms, offers tree houses and villas, and is close to Mumbai & Pune



"Travel agents can give their guests the opportunity to discover new places like Bhandardara"

PUNEET ANAND
Founder, Anand & Daughters

Bhandardara is a beautiful and unexplored hill station close to Mumbai.

Cotton Stays has partnered with cherry-picked hotels and resorts to offer guests the authentic Cotton Stays experience. Anand adds that these properties offer boutique stays in offbeat locations. "Travel agents can showcase unexplored destinations curated with local experiences to their clients. They can offer various experiences to their guests giving them the opportunity to discover new places like Bhandardara," he shares.



RAMSAN GOLDSTONE COMFORT
OPEN AT MOTIHARI













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TT BUREAU

Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa warmly welcomes both family and MICE guests from India.



WHAT MAKES THE PROPERTY UNIQUE?

The USP of Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa would be its proximity to the airport, which is only a 15-minute ride by boat. The short distance makes the hotel accessible for travellers from India and soon, we will be including the boat ride (shared speedboat transfers) as part of the resort package, on all channels.

Surrounding the property, we have 46 diving points that are quite popular. It's quite unusual to have that many close to the island itself. What also makes the property stand out is that there are a lot of activities on the island to keep guests busy, including wellness experiences; water sports; recreational facilities; and excursions like sandbank picnic, snorkelling safari, sunset dolphin cruise, wakeboarding, flyboarding, parasailing, etc.

DO YOU HAVE INCENTIVES FOR TRAVEL AGENT PARTNERS?

We do have preferred partnership agreements in place that are consistent across the board; we don't practise exclusives. We want to maintain a fair approach with



"We have preferred partnership agreements in place that are consistent across the board. We don't practise exclusives; we want to maintain a fair approach"

JENNIFER LIM
Director of Sales & Marketing, Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa



Sandeep Raghav, Business Development Director – South Asia, Sheraton Maldives, will drive sales exclusively from India.

all our partners. There's a reason the Indian market is doing so well not just in the Maldives, but also for Sheraton Maldives. We recently completed a \$20 million renovation of the property, so we now have new room products, a new wellness facility (which is almost ready), as well as revamped bars and restaurants (seven in total). In addition to that, we offer destination dining, which is very popular, where we take a couple to an island for a private picnic to enjoy the sunset.

ARE YOU ALSO ENCOURAGING CORPORATE MOVEMENT?

We are getting more corporates than we thought we would get. A lot of them come directly from the Marriott-linked structure. We get occasional group bookings as well. By Maldives standards, we have a small community hall and a small meeting space that can be used as a venue for social gatherings or corporate meetings, and can accommodate up to 35 guests. What makes it alluring is that we have a private pool in front. For anything larger, we set up a private tent at the property, on the beach.

KNOW?

DID YOU

India is the top source market for Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa, followed by USA, China, Australia, and Europe.

The USP of Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa is its

proximity to the airport, which is only a 15-minute ride by boat



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The Desert Palace tells tales of a bygone era with its far-reaching vibrant interiors and intricate décor. While you delve in the historic charm of this heritage city, we bring your one of the best resorts in Rajasthan, perfectly matching with the adventures awaiting your arrival in Jaisalmer.

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‘Mindset, the biggest challenge’

A revolutionary change in the mindset that hospitality is a ‘luxury industry’ is a must for the growth of the sector.

KANCHAN NATH

WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE INDIAN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY TODAY?

This industry can be a game changer for the economy. India being the huge market it is for travel and tourism, offers a diverse portfolio of niche products that include cruises; adventure sports; spiritual, medical and wellness tourism; MICE; eco-tourism; as well as film, rural, and religious tourism. India was ranked 34th in the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index 2019 published by World Economic Forum. As of 2017-18, 81.1 million people were employed in the tourism sector in India, which was 12.38 per cent of total employment in the country. With all these figures, the Indian hospitality industry is in its nascent stage as compared to its foreign counterparts. While most countries have realised Indian tourism’s contribution (present and potential) to its economy, giving the industry the necessary boost to grow further, India lacks the vision and the industry is still more or less ignored.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES THAT REMAIN FOR HOSPITALITY POST REDUCTION IN GST?

The main challenge is that this industry has been given a step-motherly treatment so far. Thankfully, our current Prime Minister, being a visionary, sees the potential of earning foreign exchange from increased footfalls from abroad as well as encouraging Indians to travel within the country. Though much delayed, it is still possible to revive the industry and the first step towards that was to reduce taxes considerably.

SOME CHALLENGES WE STILL FACE ARE:

- The GST has been revised and reduced, but only in the so-called luxury segment. The cap of ₹7,500, which is approximately \$100, is ridiculous. Nowhere in the world does one get a luxury room for that low a price.
- Input Tax Credit (ITC) is a natural corollary of GST. Restaurants, strangely, have been removed from the list of those business that can avail ITC. Earlier, they were allowed, but this was withdrawn later. We have

“

A five-year tax holiday has been offered, but the impediments to achieve these are huge

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GURBAXISH SINGH KOHLI
Vice President
FHRAI

suggested that there be two slabs of GST for restaurants. In the case where the establishment does not want to avail of ITC, the GST may be levied at five per cent (as it is at present) and where the establishment would like to avail of GST, the levy should be 11-12 per cent. The choice to go with either GST slab is to be decided by the establishment, as was done in the case of service tax.

- The mindset towards the industry remains the biggest challenge. The ‘license raj’ still exists, wherein hospitality is seen as a luxury industry and given an elitist tag. Even then, there are no SOPs granted to it, it enjoys no incentives of being an industry, and its proper due is not given as compared to its contribution as an employment and tax generator as well as a foreign exchange and revenue earner for the government.
- Connectivity needs to be improved between places of interest. Ease of access encourages increased spend and length of stay. Repositioning India as a major tourist destination is critical for the industry to achieve its potential. The Incredible India campaign needs a thorough revamp. One needs to trust the population to be able to take its own decisions. Excise laws, foreign exchange laws, so many things need to be revised.
- A five-year tax holiday has been offered for 2, 3, and 4-star category hotels located around UNESCO World Heritage sites (except Delhi and Mumbai), but the impediments to achieve these are huge. Roadblocks need to be removed and a one-window licence needs to be implemented more seriously.

WHAT IS YOUR OUTLOOK FOR THE INDUSTRY FOR 2020?

A web-based Public Service Delivery System (PSDS) had been launched by Ministry of Tourism to enable all applicants seeking approval for hotel projects to track their applications online on real-time basis. The ministry is also developing several theme-based tourist circuits under the Swadesh Darshan scheme. Besides this, convergence is required at the central and state level.

Hospitality enjoys no incentives of being an industry, and its due is not

given as compared to its contribution as an employment and tax generator

LE MURRAYA HOSPITALITY GROUP

Koh Samui, Thailand



Le Murraya Hotel

Located in the heart of Chaweng beach, 15 minutes drive from Koh Samui's International Airport, Le Murraya Boutique Hotel is Thailand's hippest hotel that bring contemporary-Asian city style to the tropical paradise of Koh Samui. This exquisite hotel, so spacious each with modern amenities and nicely decorated rooms. It is a perfect choice for long & short stay accommodation on this vibrant island get-away.

Synergy Resort

Located on Chaweng beach where cool climate and fresh sea breeze remains natural, only 10 minutes from Samui International airport and about 5 minutes from Chaweng Walking Street. Distinctive design rooms and villas offering the Natural tones, wooden floors and delicate floral decor encourage relaxation and romance.



La Vida Resort

La Vida Samui boutique resort brings a refreshingly unique experience to the shores of Chaweng Beach. Feel at home at our tropical island retreat, where beautifully curated rooms are inspired by the island's native flora, the cuisine is fresh and authentic, and the service is genuinely heartfelt. This calming sanctuary overlooking the sea is just a one-hour flight from Bangkok and 10-minute drive from Samui International Airport.



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Le Murraya
Boutique Serviced Residence & Resort

Contemporary sustainability

Hotels are adopting new-age sustainable practices by installing the necessary equipment or cutting down on resources to reduce costs. This helps to make a more meaningful contribution to society at large, and allows the business to flourish.

NISHA VERMA

ONLINE TOOLS TO MANAGE IMPACT

Satheesh MB, Chief Engineer, Crowne Plaza Kochi, claims that IHG has sustainability at the heart of how their hotels operate. “A key driver of IHG’s success has been the IHG Green Engage system, an online sustainability tool that helps hotels manage and minimise the impact on the environment,” he says.

Talking about initiatives they have adopted, he shares, “As an IHG Green Engage Level-4 property, we have always tried to inculcate the best practices of sustainability into everything we do. The three ‘R’s of ‘Reduce, Reuse and Recycle’ have been our guiding principles. All our public areas and the heart of the house are fitted with motion/occupancy sensors and powered with an LED lighting system, thus helping bring down light and energy consumption. We are also in the process of moving into a cloud-based smart monitoring system wherein the energy utility of all operational equipment can be analysed for optimum performance.”

The glass façade at the hotel is also uniquely sound and thermal-proofed, helping reduce the heat load of the building. Solar systems are used to heat the water meant for guest areas, and the entire hot water system is managed through a steam condensate return and solar hot water system. Crowne Plaza Kochi is also moving away from single-use amenities to bulk dispensers.

ENERGY-EFFICIENT TECHNOLOGY

Today, travellers look forward to staying at hotels focused on minimising harm to the environment, claims **Paramjeet Singh**, Director of Engineering at Eros Hotel New Delhi, Nehru Place. “They prefer to stay at a property that efficiently uses the latest technology to reduce energy waste and recycle waste materials. We are fully committed towards sustainability and strictly follow it as one of our values. Some recent developments that have happened at the hotel include replacement of all high energy-consuming plants and machines with energy-efficient ones, buying open access green power to the capacity of 15000 KW on a daily basis, etc. With these developments, we have seen a seven per cent saving in our total hotel operation cost,” he says.



Today, travellers prefer to stay at a property that efficiently uses the

latest technology to reduce energy waste and recycle waste materials



Crowne Plaza Kochi

The hotel has adopted various sustainable practices that are contributing towards saving natural resources and include replacement of power lighting to LED lights, reducing the electricity bill considerably; installation of water-saving aerators in every single tap of the property that has helped the hotel save 50KLD water and electricity of the treatment of the same volume of water, etc. “A bio methane gas plant has also been installed to consume 100 per cent food waste. We generate approximately six metric cubes of bio methane gas for kitchen use. We have ETP/STP in our property, ensuring zero discharge and use the same water in horticulture and hotel cooling towers,” he shares.



Eros Hotel
New Delhi, Nehru Place

EVERY DETAIL MATTERS

Siddharth Sharma, Manager Corporate Affairs and Administration, Goldstone Hotels & Resorts, says |that the group has clear fundamentals on sustainability. “When we talk about the initiatives for sustainability in business, they cannot be described in just a few words. It begins from the minutest of detail such as upkeep, quality in product and material, soft skills, factors affecting business reputation, maintenance, personalisation of each offering, etc. In addition, repeat business potential, a better market standing, a happy customer, a smiling employee, as well as a satisfied owner and associate base in the business is kept in mind,” he adds.

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AS GREEN AS IT GETS



“We are moving into a cloud-based smart monitoring system so that energy utility of all equipment can be analysed for optimum performance”

SATHEESH MB
Chief Engineer
Crowne Plaza Kochi



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PARAMJEET SINGH
Director of Engineering
Eros Hotel New Delhi, Nehru Place



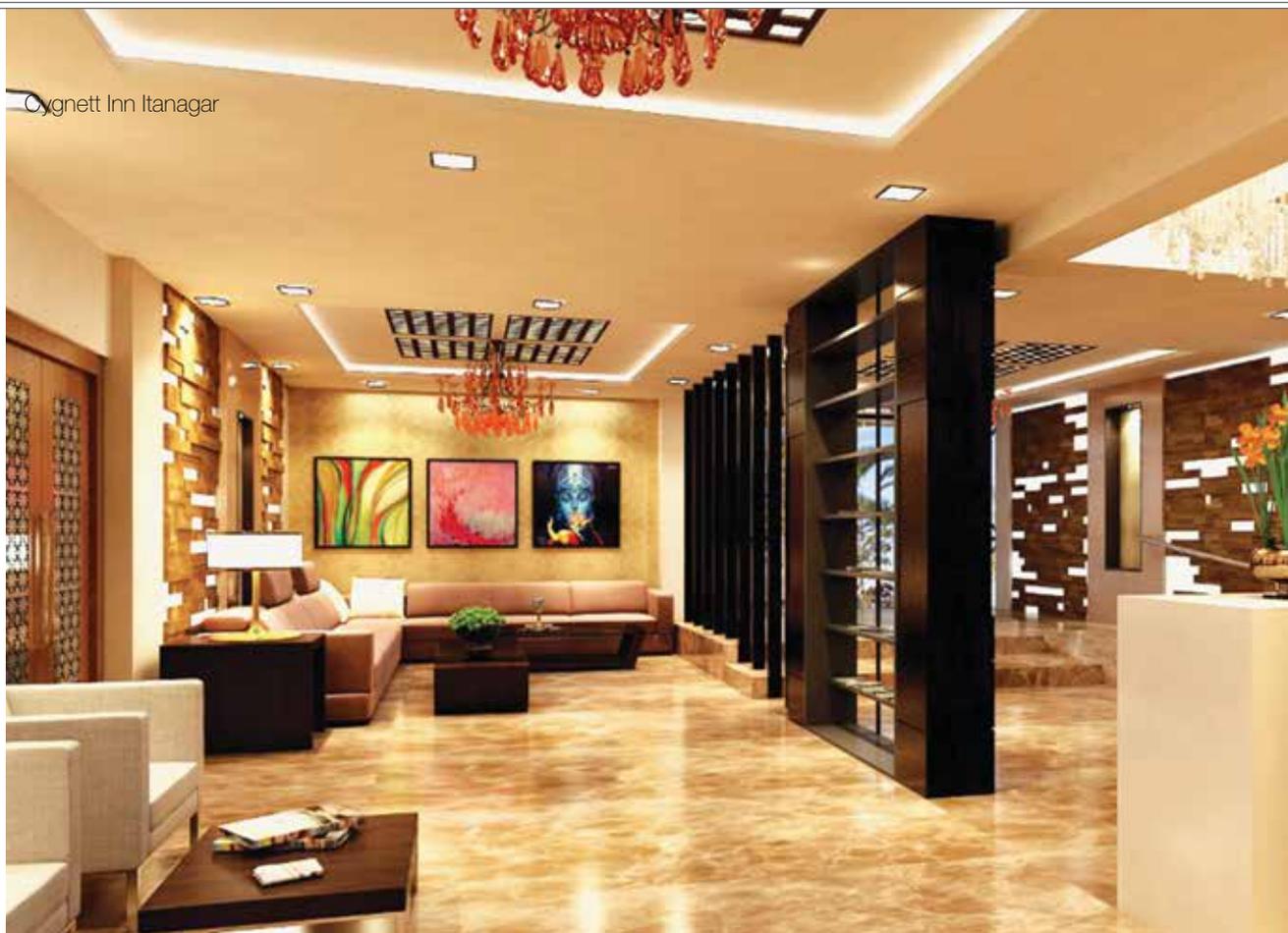
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SIDDHARTH SHARMA
Manager Corp. Affairs & Administration, Goldstone Hotels



“We keep tent cards where we ask the guest to switch off the lights when away. While going on nature walks, we usually run a cleanliness drive”

SARBENDRA SARKAR
MD & CEO
Cygnett Hotels



A hotel company's job is not only to provide quality accommodation services, but to also be responsible towards society, people and

TRAINING THE PERSONNEL

According to **Sarbendra Sarkar**, Managing Director & CEO, Cygnett Hotels, the group is committed to improving sustainability throughout its hotels. “We believe it is a continuum, not an absolute. We have developed some internal training programmes to keep our personnel in line with the latest trends and to develop new best practices towards an ecological balance. We have installed waste management machines and equipment as a prototype at some of our units. The compost is used for the gardens where we produce organic herbs and microgreens. Now, we are trying to standardise this across the chain along with putting up solar water heaters and regular checking of water outlets to prevent leaks. We are thinking out loud about cutting plastic waste to the maximum at our units,” he shares.

Speaking on involving the guest in these initiatives, he says, “We have started keeping tent cards where we ask the guest to switch off the lights when away. While going on nature walks at our resort properties across the Utrakhand region, we usually run a cleanliness drive. During events such as Earth Hour, we always ask our guests if they are comfortable participating with us.”

WASTE MANAGEMENT IS KEY

With eco-conscious travel becoming increasingly popular, there is every incentive for hotels to raise the bar to operate sustainably, insists **Tan Kim Seng**, Chief Operating Officer at Meritus Hotels & Resorts. “We are always looking for ways to enhance our sustainability governance structure

and are committed to integrating sustainability into our business. We believe it is complementary to our business strategies and creates value for our stakeholders,” he says.

The group-wide ‘Meritus Loves the Earth’ green campaign engages guests and employees alike to actively participate in waste reduction measures at Mandarin Orchard Singapore and Meritus Pelangi Beach Resort & Spa, Langkawi, by implementing the three ‘R’s — Reduce, Reuse and Recycle — across all areas of operation. Aimed at minimising disposables used, a straw-free initiative was rolled out at both properties to offer biodegradable straws as a greener alternative.

Talking about the property in Singapore, Seng says, “Being a large hotel, our flagship 1077-key Mandarin Orchard Singapore places emphasis on waste management as one of the key drivers of the hotel’s environmental sustainability efforts. Since 2014, the hotel has embarked on a food recycling programme, partnering with ECO-WIZ Group, to recycle all food waste generated. More recently, Mandarin Orchard Singapore partnered with Ecolab to recycle and repackage used soap bars from the hotel and distribute them to underprivileged families around Singapore.”

GETTING THE GUEST INVOLVED

SN Srivastava, President & Co-founder, Clarks Inn group of hotels, claims that as a hotel company, their job is not only to provide quality accommodation or guest-related services, but to also be responsible



Goldstone Hotels & Resorts



Clarks Inn Suites Gwalior

or guest-related
the environment it operates in

towards the society, its people and the environment that they operate in. “Resources, be it water, energy or things that are used in building hotels, are getting scarce day by day. As a company, we strongly advocate sustainable practices so that there is no negative environmental footprint. We want to help create a better place for people, within a sustained environment, and these ethos are integral to our spread and expansion,” he says.

As a hotel management company, Clarks Inn engages with property owners and developers right from the beginning, especially in case of Greenfield projects, for them to adopt sustainable measures like water harvesting and garbage processing. “Many of our new and upcoming properties are adopting these measures. We, however, work and operate in so many other ways as well. Reducing water consumption, sensitising guests on environment-friendly practices in regard to use or change of things like bed linen or towels, or reducing the use of plastics and segregation of waste before disposal, etc., are all part of our operation,” Srivastava adds.

At Clarks Inn, guests play an important part in the execution of sustainable practices, from reducing the use of paper, plastics and water to avoiding the frequent change of bed linen and towels.



SWISS-GARDEN HOTELS PRESENT
ITS TWO HOT SELLING PROPERTIES IN MALAYSIA



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AS GREEN AS IT GETS



“We are always looking to enhance our sustainability governance structure; it is complementary to our strategies and creates value for stakeholders”

TAN KIM SENG
Chief Operating Officer
Meritus Hotels & Resorts



“We want to help create a better place for people, within a sustained environment, and these ethos are integral to our spread and expansion”

SN SRIVASTAVA
President & Co-founder
Clarks Inn



“Guests have become cognizant of the need of sustainable environment and that helps our cause towards sustainability; they have become aware”

MAVERIK MUKERJI
General Manager Delegate,
Bengaluru & Mysuru hotels, Accor



“We seek to create long-term value for stakeholders and destinations, with the motto of embracing the environment and empowering the people”

ALPHA ELDIANSYAH
General Manager
Banyan Tree Bintan



Banyan Tree Bintan

With eco-conscious travel becoming popular, there is every incentive for hotels to raise the bar to operate sustainably

POSITIVE HOSPITALITY

At Accor, the team believes in acting for positive hospitality. **Maverik Mukerji**, General Manager Delegate – Bengaluru & Mysuru hotels, Accor, says, “We are much more than a global hotel industry leader and work in a hugely diverse range of professions. It means that we have the opportunity to open up new horizons and address our travellers' concerns about the environment and social responsibility. This is what we are now doing by setting our sights on new, strong commitments.”

With PLANET 21, Accor’s sustainable development programme, Accor is reinforcing its determination to put sustainable development at the heart of its activities by involving customers, partners, and employees to act together. “We ensure international standards of cleanliness; give an option to our banqueting guests to choose RO water stations in place of PET water bottles; our sustainability team has so far successfully eliminated plastic straws and stirrers from all our hotels and the objective now is to reduce food wastage by 30 per cent by 2020 across all our hotels; for many properties, eco-friendly cutlery is given to all take-away orders. Guests have become cognizant of the need of sustainable environment and that helps our cause towards sustainability. They have increasingly become aware especially in the areas of food wastage, usage of plastic straws, bottles, laundry, etc,” shares Mukerji.

CREATING LONG-TERM VALUE

Banyan Tree Bintan sees sustainability not only in terms of the environment, but also in terms of the benefit to surrounding communities. “This has



ibis Bengaluru City Centre

been our ethos and continues to be the guiding principle. Our concept of sustainability seeks to create long-term value for multiple stakeholders and destinations, with the motto of embracing the environment and empowering the people,” says **Alpha Eldiansyah**, General Manager, Banyan Tree Bintan (Indonesia).

Their contemporary methods of sustainability are aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by integrating climate change and related issues into business strategy and engagement across the value chain. The property also encourages its guests to be part of sustainability activities. “We created ‘Stay for Good’ programme, which encompasses our sustainability efforts and encourages our guests to get involved through a number of new initiatives. Guests can also participate in The Green Imperative Fund by contributing \$2 per night during their stay. We provide complementary education activities for our guests as well, including sea turtle release, tree planting, bird watching, village tour, school visit, soap for hope, and conservation talk,” shares Eldiansyah.

HOSPITALITY Talk



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The robots take over the mundane responsibilities of hotel staff,

thereby freeing the staff to focus more on service enhancement



Just a command away...

Digital technology may well be the perfect solution for hotels. A spokesperson of Alibaba Group shares how they have created a hotel model that optimally blends hospitality with digitisation, with the FlyZoo Hotel.

TT BUREAU

WHAT MAKES FLYZOO UNIQUE?

FlyZoo is the first-ever model hotel with a hotel-wide client identity recognition system and a large-scale use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to generate a convenient, seamless experience for guests. The use of intelligent facilities coupled with digital management and operational systems enables hotel employees to spend less time on routine work and focus on providing guests with exemplary service.

Other highlights are:

- Room reservation can be made with the FlyZoo App, which also allows guests to pre-select the preferred floors, locations and directions of their rooms.
- Check-in can be done entirely through the App before a guest's arrival or through one of the self-service check-in kiosks in the hotel lobby. Both options involve leading facial recognition technology that will then also enable guests to conveniently unlock their room doors.
- With the hotel-wide client identity recognition system, guests can also have their faces scanned as identity proof to activate elevators and access the gym and restaurants.
- Tmall Genie, a smart speaker system available in the hotel's rooms, assists with temperature control, lights, curtains and operating the television. Tmall Genie is also on hand 24x7, to allow guests to request water and other amenities through voice commands.
- Delivery of food and other items will be partially performed by the hotel's room-service robots.
- Robots are also used in the hotel's restaurants to

CEO'S DESK

"The FlyZoo Hotel represents Alibaba's endeavour to marry hospitality with technology, and ultimately empower the tourism industry to embrace innovation. Our use of intelligent facilities coupled with digital management and operational systems means that employees can focus on providing guests with a level of service that goes the extra mile," says **Andy Wang**, CEO, Alibaba Future Hotel.



assist in dish delivery. Guests can choose not to use facial recognition, and access their floors, rooms and hotel facilities by traditional means instead.

WHAT KIND OF CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE?

In the current digital age, talent acquisition is one of the greatest challenges. FlyZoo as well as other hotels need multidisciplinary professionals who are not only knowledgeable about the hotel industry, but also in possession of a digital mindset so that hotels can be well-positioned to leverage on new technology to address challenges in operations and business development.

WHY DO YOU THINK THE HOTEL INDUSTRY NEEDS A CONCEPT LIKE THIS?

Digital technology is permeating every part of our lives as numerous industries are on the cusp of digital adoption to leverage the power of technology to reshape their business.

At the same time, technology trends are already influencing customer behaviour and expectations, and over the next decade or so, these effects are only going to grow.

With FlyZoo Hotel, Alibaba has created a model hotel that blends hospitality with digital technology and offline with online. The robots take over the mundane responsibilities of hotel staff, thereby freeing the staff to focus more on service enhancement.

Invest now to cash in later

JAIDEEP DANG, Managing Director - Hotels & Hospitality Group, JLL, says that this is the right time to invest in hotel development to make the most of demand three to five years down the line.

ANUPRIYA BISHNOI

WHERE DO HOTEL INVESTMENTS STAND IN TODAY'S MARKET SCENARIO?

Real estate developers who are not having the best time because markets are soft may not be focusing on hotel development, but that doesn't mean it's not happening. The set of people developing hotels earlier has changed, so we now have businessmen from sectors like automobile, manufacturing and infrastructure, who are now taking this segment ahead in both Tier-I and Tier-II cities. Resultantly, those who own land parcels are now unlocking them; where earlier they had a unit or a factory, they are now offering it for hotel development to ensure the land is optimally utilised.

That said, all conventional hotel companies are still investing. This is a very good time to invest because by the time you build and open to the market, chances are that the wave will be up and you will hit at the right time.

SO, IS A BROWNFIELD INVESTMENT BETTER THAN GREENFIELD?

People want to pace up. There are structures that are only partly built and people are keenly considering them. Investors for this segment are not too many, but they are looking for such opportunities and it's a good time to buy.

DO DOMESTIC COMPANIES ENJOY AN EDGE OVER INTERNATIONAL CHAINS?

When you see growth in Tier-II or III towns, you will realise that people are not adamant on building the biggest hotel. Instead, they want to build a 60, 70 or 80-key property. This is where domestic hotel companies have an edge over international chains, because they are not sitting out of various countries to get an approval on certain projects. Indian companies understand the market more than anybody else; they would know the potential

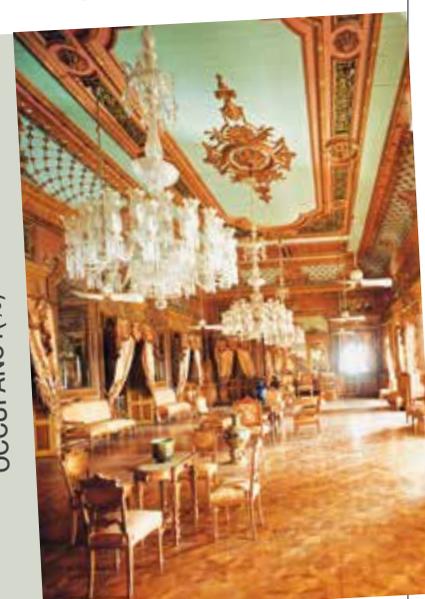
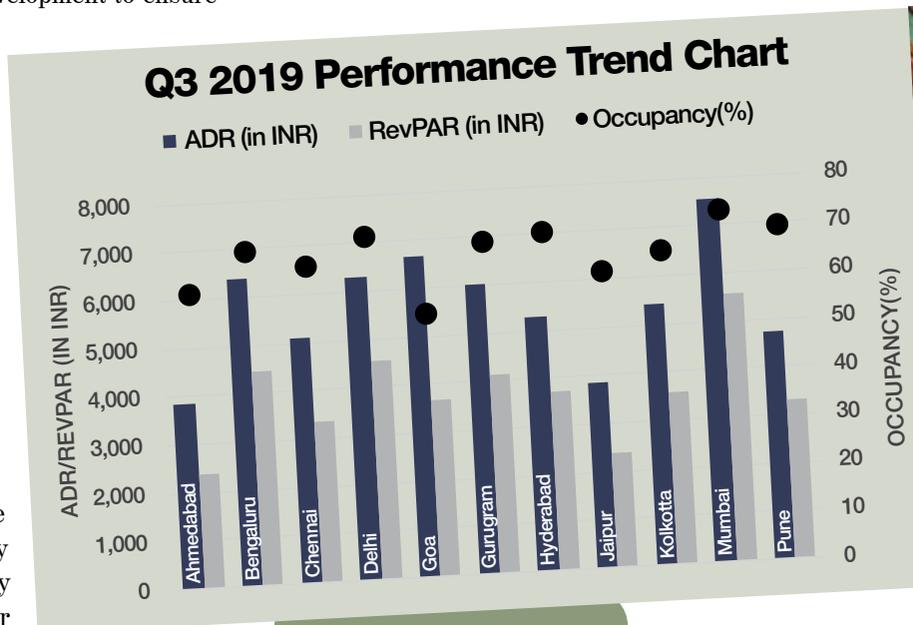


JAIDEEP DANG
MD - Hotels & Hospitality Group, JLL

of Dehradun or Raipur much better than their international counterparts.

THEN, WHAT HAS TAKEN HOMEGROWN BRANDS SO LONG TO EXPAND TO SMALLER CITIES?

No, I think the process has been gradual. There was a time when international brands came to India and made a significant impact on the industry. They pushed the needle on how these brands operate. There comes a point when everyone sees growth. What is happening now is not a 'sudden'



KEY FINDINGS

- Nine out of 11 markets recorded an increase in RevPAR in Q3 2019 over 2018
- Occupancy in most cities in India is on a rise.
- Mumbai is the winner when it comes to RevPAR in absolute terms.
- Bengaluru is the leader in RevPAR percentage change in Q3 2019 over the same period in 2018.

activity; it has been continuous and is just getting bigger and better!

WHAT ABOUT INDIAN BRANDS IN FOREIGN MARKETS? HOW WELL DO THEY PERFORM?

The legendary Indian brands have done well abroad, be it Taj or Oberoi. They have been operating overseas for at least 50 years now and have created a great brand appeal. Though the extent of penetration is not much, they continue to be hallmarks of Indian hospitality. One also keeps hearing that OYO is expanding to different markets, but only time will tell what will happen because that's a very different model.

A professional portrait of Atul Jain, a middle-aged man with dark hair, wearing glasses, a dark suit, a white shirt, and a yellow patterned tie. He is smiling and looking directly at the camera against a dark red background.

ATUL JAIN, COO,
Best Western
Hotels & Resorts
(India, Bangladesh
& Sri Lanka), talks
about the group's
expansion plans.

‘The Best’ service for SUCCESS

LET'S TALK ABOUT BEST WESTERN'S EXPANSION PLANS - INDIA, TO BE SPECIFIC.

We have been experiencing a remarkable growth and penetration into diverse markets in India in the past three years, and we hope to gather more pace with the opening of 10 more hotels in the next six months that will take our tally to 2,000 operating keys. This would be followed by the opening of over 1,000 keys in the pipeline. The new hotels shall operate under Best Western, Best Western Plus, SureStay Plus, and SureStay Hotel by Best Western brands in locations across India. Apart from the new-build hotels, we're equally focused on conversion hotels to aid rapid expansion, and we have suitable brands to offer for an easy conversion.

THE HOSPITALITY LANDSCAPE IS GETTING OVERCROWDED. HOW ARE YOU GEARED TO DEAL WITH THESE CHANGING BUSINESS DYNAMICS?

There has been a tremendous growth in the number of brands in the market, both international and domestic, which is good for the promoters in terms of the wide range of choices that they have and puts them at an advantageous position for negotiating the

“
Apart from the new-build hotels, we're equally focused on conversion hotels to aid rapid expansion
”

loyalty programme that keep us in a pretty good shape to defend against the OTAs.

Thirdly, there has to be a focus on the quality of experience you give to the guest at your hotel. Ultimately, what is the one thing a hotel has that the OTAs don't have? It is the ability to interact with customers. OTAs can send business to the hotel, but they have no way of interacting with our customers. Therefore, we educate the hotels that they have to provide that superior experience because that is what is going to make people come back.

Lastly, we need to work out the most advantageous commercial terms with OTAs. It is not just in terms of negotiating lower commissions, but also in aspects like last room availability and the ability to sell number rates through the loyalty programme, etc., that will ensure our brand search terms are protected.

WHAT BRANDS DO YOU CURRENTLY HAVE IN YOUR PORTFOLIO?

Best Western, Best Western Plus, and Best Western Premier have been the mainstay brands for a long time, corresponding to the midscale, upper midscale, and upscale segments, respectively. SureStay and



OTAs are here to stay and exist as a considerable business channel. We must work with them on the terms suitable to us, and there are certain ways to coexist

terms. Further, every hotel chain has multiple brands and new brands keep getting added to the portfolio every year. Here, I would like to say that for a brand to be successful, it needs to have a well-defined selling proposition about what the brand stands for. So, if you look at all of our brands, they are clearly defined in terms of their positioning, development guidelines, and guest facilities and services, all aimed at providing a distinct experience to the guest.

WHAT ABOUT THE GROWING INFLUENCE OF OTAs IN THE HOSPITALITY BUSINESS?

OTAs are here to stay and exist as a considerable business channel. Hence, in my view, we must work with them on the terms suitable to us, and I think there are certain ways to coexist. Firstly, the brand has to think about not allowing them to cannibalise their business, which means your website, mobile App, and electronic distribution needs to be really strong. Secondly, your loyalty programme is the best defence against OTAs because they don't have it. In our case, we have an award-winning website, mobile App, and

BEST WESTERN'S EVOLUTION

Starting with the flagship 'Best Western' brand, the brand portfolio grew to seven brands by the end of 2014. Earlier this year, three more brands were added to the brand portfolio with the acquisition of WorldHotels.

Today, Best Western Hotels & Resorts has 16 brands and over 4,500 hotels in more than 100 countries.

SureStay Plus by Best Western are the lower midscale and midscale brands for smaller room inventories and are primarily for conversion properties. Vib and Glo brands are upper midscale and midscale boutique brands. While Vib is for primary locations and aimed at tech-savvy, contemporary travellers, Glo is for the secondary market. Executive Residency is an upper midscale brand catering to the extended-stay segment for both business and leisure travellers.

Then, there is a bouquet of soft brands comprising SureStay Collection, Best Western Signature Collection, and Best Western Premier Collection, ranging from midscale to luxury segments for quality hotels having a significant brand presence of their own, providing the owners with the advantage of the strong reservation and distribution systems, and the Quality Program of the brand at the back end. Last year, two more brands were launched, namely Aiden and Sadie, which are high-end boutique lifestyle brands belonging to the upper midscale and upscale positionings.

Being a net zero hotel

ASHRAE India Chapter's recently-held AIC Tech Conference 2019 delved on building sustainable hotels by first devising means to reduce energy consumption and then ensuring minimum wastage.

KANCHAN NATH

A zero-energy building, also known as a Zero Net Energy (ZNE) building, Net Zero Energy Building (NZEB), or simply a net zero building, is one with zero net energy consumption, which means that the total amount of energy consumed by the building on an annual basis is roughly equal to the amount of renewable energy created onsite or by renewable energy sources elsewhere. At the recently-held AIC Tech Conference 2019, panellists deliberated on 'Sustainability in Practice - Building Sustainable Hotels'. Moderated by **Pankaj Dharkar**, President, Pankaj Dharkar and Associates, panellists included **Sanjay Batra**, Project Director, MEDANTA; **Frank Mills**, President & Owner, Frank Mills Consulting and a distinguished lecturer at ASHRAE (American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-conditioning Engineers); **Sandeep Goel**, Director, Proion Consultants; **GC Modgil**, Founder, Sterling India Consulting Engineers and **Rishi Pawah**, MRICS, AVP - Property Management at CapitaLand India. With limited resources across the world, sustainability can be the only way forward, but one main issue that remains is the space constraint, primarily for hotels in metro cities. Resorts in leisure destinations usually have a lot more space to set up more solar panels. Opening the discussion that day, Dharkar said, "For a net zero building, the hotel needs to be very efficient. Most consultants have seen energy-efficient equipment last for 15-20 years. Therefore, it does not remain a struggle to convince customers, payback always justifies the same."

GETTING TO NET ZERO

Talking about the performance of a group of hotels last year, Modgil said that among the 160 hotels, the owner-driven ones were observed to have been performing much better in terms of energy, sustainability, waste management, as well as supply chain. "So, the one factor that helps in being net zero is the involvement of the owners themselves, making a noticeable difference," he shared.



There is so much technology available for net zero buildings, but awareness is very poor. There is a need to train operators or it will not yield a dividend

“The quantum of area required for solar panels is huge and you generate a miniscule amount from it. Today, there is a new thing in the market where you take a place far away, you take some land on lease and put in the solar panels there. You can eject metred power into the state electricity board grid, thereby getting cheap metred power for your hotel. There are companies that are doing this for you, so many hotels can utilise it and head towards net zero,” Batra added.

Sharing a different perspective, Goel said that the objective is to optimise the Energy Performance Index (EPI); the concept of net zero is still aspirational. “Guest needs are paramount! When you get into a situation where the guest comes first, you cannot achieve the goals you could have in a more controlled environment. Therefore, the maximum one can do is strive for optimisation of EPI,” he explained.

TOO MUCH TECH MAY NOT BE GOOD

Besides space, technology seemed to be a key concern when getting hotels to be net zero. Batra said, “Today, we are very concerned about water! We recycle and reuse, but the biggest guzzlers of water are the AC cooling towers. So, we are now debating whether we should go with air chillers rather than water chillers, since the scarcity of water is a huge issue. While the efficiency of air coolers has started to improve, some new technology in this direction would be welcome.”



DID YOU KNOW?

There are 27 USGBC LEED-certified hotels in India (21 Platinum, 5 Gold, & 1 Silver), more than 40 IGBC-certified projects, & 2 GEM-certified hotels.

To this, Mills added, “Most hotels are located in beautiful locations - the seaside, by the lake, or in the mountains. That does give us a chance to look at nature and passive design to make the hotel not only beautiful, but also comfortable.”

Pawah felt that while data sharing is important for net zero buildings, there is no real platform for it. “There is so much technology available for net zero buildings, but the awareness is very poor. Without proper maintenance, nothing can be achieved. Capex does not seem to be a challenge these days, it is the operation that seems to be a challenge,” he said. Sharing a similar view, Modgil said, “There is a need to train operators. What we design will not yield a dividend if the operator does not perfectly understand how to operate it.”



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JA Lake View Hotel is the first hotel in the Middle East to voice-enable every guest room with Volara-Alexa. Guests can learn about boating and sea plane excursions, water-sport equipment, and our golf course. If guests prefer a quiet night in their room, they can ask Alexa to turn down the lights. This is truly the next level in service excellence and guest engagement.

ANTHONY ROSS
Chief Executive Officer
JA Resorts & Hotels

JA Lake View Hotel is the first hotel in the Middle East to voice-enable every guest room with Volara-Alexa. Guests



HUSSAIN PATEL
Director
Tripjack

After investing heavily in technology, we are able to offer our partners rich content, a seamless booking experience, and competitive local hotel and flight rates from popular countries. Our new website is more intuitive and we are looking at adding a lot of content in the hotel segment, online. We are contracting with hotels directly. The prices we have will be competitive.

PUSHPARAJ S
Director of Sales & Marketing
Radisson Blu Pune Hinjawadi

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to bring innovation to the hospitality industry. Moreover, it's a move that signals a trend towards 'smart hotels', which Radisson Blu Pune Hinjawadi aims to bring with it. With AI coming into the picture, we will be able to not only create end-to-end experiences resulting in delighted guests, but also increase revenue for the hotel. In today's world, travellers are not just looking for a flight, a room, or a hotel service. A definite shift in guest expectations has taken place over the years; guests are looking for purchase options that cover a larger part of their journey.



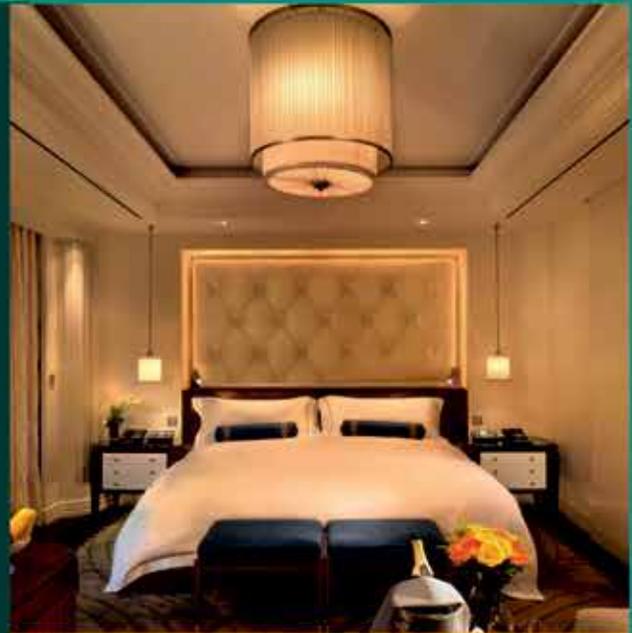
ALEFIYA SINGH
Director
IRIS Reps India

Regal International Hotels Group has come up with an innovative website for travel agents, called

'Regal Travel Pro'. This entitles agents to access special rates with discounts. Apart from real-time availability and rates, agents can also be part of the rewards programme that will be introduced soon. Regal Hotels also has an App for M!CE organisers.



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