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An Exclusive Business Magazine for the Hotel Industry

Business

Beyond Room Revenue

Feature

The Front Office - Ever Evolving Hub

Spotlight

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Paw-some Stays

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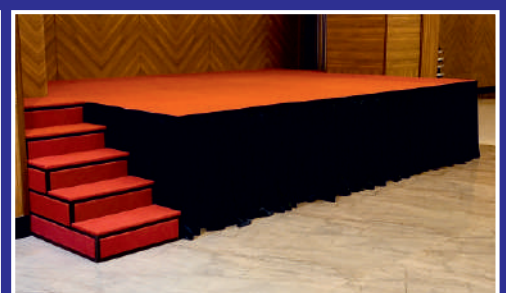
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India's hospitality landscape continues to evolve at an energetic pace, driven by shifting traveller expectations, rapid operational innovation, and dynamic investment models. As the industry broadens its horizons, this issue turns the spotlight toward emerging accommodation formats redefining how and where guests choose to stay.

Our cover story explores how alternative accommodation in India is steadily gaining ground with both leisure and business travellers. What is driving this shift, and how do these formats offer greater flexibility, more personal experiences, and smarter value, from serviced apartments and homestays to co-living spaces that bring together comfort, convenience, and a sense of local connection?

As room revenue alone is no longer enough, hotels are finding new ways to increase revenues. From food and events to meetings, our business story looks at how they are building more stable income streams.

Our feature story explores how hotel front offices have evolved from simple reception desks into dynamic, guest-focused hubs. Blending warm hospitality with smart technology, they now shape first impressions, personalize experiences, and play a key role in defining the hotel's overall brand identity.

As a spotlight story, this article highlights how AI is transforming travel planning. It helps travellers create personalized itineraries, compare options, and manage logistics with ease, making holiday planning smarter, faster, and more intuitive.

A rising trend captured in our story highlights the growth of pet-friendly hotels in India. As pets become family, hotels are evolving with thoughtful amenities and policies, ensuring a comfortable, inclusive stay for both travellers and their furry companions.

Stay updated with the latest from the hospitality world, as we bring you key industry news, new openings, leadership movements, and noteworthy happenings shaping the future of travel, hotels, and the hospitality landscape.

Rajat Taneja

rajathammer@gmail.com

HAMMER HOTEL Business Review

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Publisher cum Editor

Rajat Taneja

Resident Editor

Sharmila Chand (Delhi)

Ashok Malkani (Mumbai)

Gita Hari (Mumbai)

Sr. Content Writer

Nikita Madan

Layout & Design

Hari Kumar V

Production Assistant

Simran Gomber

Advertising Sales

Sumesh Sharma

Director Sales

Sanjay Anand

Mobile: +91 9811136837

Please share the press releases and media materials at
info@hammer.co.in

Editorial & Advertising Office:

Hammer Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

206, Samrat Bhawan,

Ranjeet Nagar Commercial Complex, New Delhi-110008

Phone: 91-11-45093486, 45084903

E-mail: info@hammer.co.in

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A photograph of four men in business suits standing in front of a backdrop featuring logos for 'Hampton', 'ROYAL ORCHID', and 'piore'. The two men in the center are holding two framed certificates. The man on the far left is smiling, and the man on the far right is also smiling. The backdrop is white with repeating logos in blue and purple.

In India, Hampton by Hilton hotels will be thoughtfully adapted to local preferences, incorporating design, service, and amenities tailored to the domestic market while maintaining the brand's globally recognised standards.

Saurabh Mitra, General Manager, Vivanta Vrindavan, said, “Vivanta Vrindavan has been designed to reflect the vibrant spirit of the destination. Our team looks forward to welcoming guests and are committed to delivering thoughtful service and experiences that enhance every stay.”



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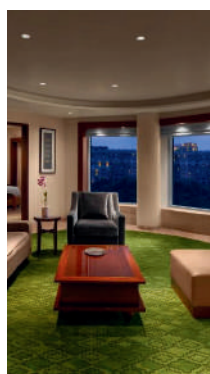
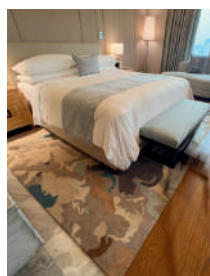


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Param Kannampilly, Pioneer of Sustainable Hospitality in India, Passes Away

The Indian hospitality industry mourns the loss of Param Kannampilly, Chairman and Managing Director of Concept Hospitality Pvt. Ltd., who passed away peacefully on March 30, 2026, in Mumbai, surrounded by his loved ones.



A visionary leader and a true pioneer, Kannampilly was instrumental in shaping the evolution of modern hospitality in India. As the driving force behind The Fern Hotels & Resorts, he was among the earliest advocates of sustainable hospitality, long before it became an industry imperative. His unwavering belief that luxury could seamlessly coexist with environmental responsibility redefined benchmarks and inspired a new way of thinking within the sector.

Beyond building a successful brand, Kannampilly created a legacy grounded in purpose, innovation, and integrity. His contributions extended far beyond business, influencing industry professionals and encouraging a more conscious and responsible approach to hospitality.

His passing marks a profound loss for the industry, leaving behind a void that will be deeply felt. Yet, his vision, values, and enduring impact will continue to inspire and guide the future of hospitality in India.

Grand Continent Hotels Strengthens Presence in Rameshwaram

Grand Continent Hotels Limited announced the launch of its new property in Rameshwaram. Located on Pamban Island, the contemporary four-star vegetarian hotel reflects the company's continued focus on expanding in high-demand spiritual and leisure travel markets across India.

The launch underscores the brand's strategic emphasis on destinations witnessing consistent year-round footfall driven by pilgrimage tourism apart from key Business Cities. Speaking on the



occasion, Ramesh Shiva, Founder & Managing Director, Grand Continent Hotels Limited, said, "The launch of our Rameshwaram property marks an important milestone as our 31st hotel and reinforces our focus on high-potential pilgrimage destinations. South India continues to be a strong growth market for us and we see sustained demand in destinations like Rameshwaram where travellers seek reliable, comfortable and well-located accommodation."

The Rameshwaram hotel features 48 well-appointed rooms across categories including Grand Suite Rooms, Premium Rooms with Balcony, Grand Family Rooms and Deluxe Rooms, designed with contemporary interiors and equipped with essential amenities such as high-speed Wi-Fi, smart TV, tea and coffee maker, electronic safe and 24-hour hot water, along with wheelchair access for added convenience. The property also houses Flavours, a multi-cuisine pure vegetarian restaurant with 48 covers, offering Jain and Satvik meal options suited to the preferences of pilgrimage travellers, along with a dedicated play zone for families.

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The Westin Goa Celebrates Its Fifth Anniversary

The Westin Goa celebrates half a decade of shaping a stay that goes beyond the beach in North Goa's evolving hospitality landscape. Located in Anjuna, the hotel has built a clear identity over the years - balancing easy access to the region's social hotspots with an experience-led environment within the property itself.

Since its opening, The Westin Goa has focused on delivering a well-rounded stay defined by spacious accommodations, intuitive service, and a strong emphasis on social and experiential engagement. The hotel's rooms and suites, many with direct pool access, are designed to encourage longer stays, catering to both leisure travellers and the growing segment of work-from-hotel guests. This positioning has allowed the property to remain relevant beyond seasonal demand cycles, drawing a consistent mix of domestic and international visitors.

Food and beverage has emerged as a



defining strength for the hotel. The Market, the all-day dining venue, offers a mix of global and regional cuisines within a setting that blends indoor and outdoor elements, making it a central touch point for guests across the day. T&A, the hotel's Pan-Asian restaurant, introduces a more contemporary dining format, while Anjuna Coffee & Co. caters to the demand for casual, café-style experiences.

Commenting on the occasion, Harish Gopalakrishnan, General Manager, The Westin Goa, said, "Completing five years is a significant milestone for us. The way guests engage with hospitality today has

evolved, with a stronger focus on experiences across wellness, dining, and programming. Our approach has been to build a balanced offering that stays relevant to these expectations. Going forward, we remain focused on refining and strengthening the overall guest experience."

To mark the occasion, the hotel hosted a specially curated anniversary experience on April 21, bringing together food, beverage, and wellness. The celebration featured an anniversary brunch at The Market, followed by a limited-edition cocktail showcase at Drift, themed "5 Years, 5 Cocktails," reflecting the bar's journey and signature style.

The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts Marks 40 Years of Indian Luxury

The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts marks a defining milestone in 2026 as it celebrates four decades of True Indian Luxury - a journey shaped by grace, guided by purpose, and rooted in the timeless Indian ethos of Atithi Devo Bhava. Since the opening of its first hotel, The Leela Mumbai, in 1986, the brand has crafted experiences that transcend hospitality - where every stay is an immersion into India's rich cultural tapestry, expressed through art, architecture, cuisine, and intuitive service.

Over the past 40 years, The Leela has evolved into a portfolio of iconic palaces, hotels and resorts - each a reflection of India's heritage, reimagined for the modern global traveller. As it enters its fifth decade, the brand continues to chart a confident path forward with a growing portfolio of distinctive destinations. This year marks a significant phase of expansion with the upcoming launch of The Leela Coorg Forest Sanctuary, followed by The Leela Jaisalmer, and The Leela Luxury Residences in Mumbai - further strengthening its position as a leading voice in luxury hospitality.

The celebrations commenced with a simultaneous all-employee town hall across all of The Leela's properties, a moment of collective pride and reflection. Associates were honoured through a commemorative pinning ceremony, receiving specially designed 40-year insignia, alongside long service awards recognizing individuals who have shaped the brand's journey over decades.



This tribute to its people underscores Leela's enduring belief that true luxury is, above all, human at heart.

Anuraag Bhatnagar, Chief Executive Officer, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, said, "As we celebrate 40 years of The Leela, we honour a journey defined by passion, purpose and an unwavering commitment to excellence. From our beginnings in Mumbai to a growing portfolio of iconic destinations, our endeavour has always been to showcase India's rich cultural heritage through the lens of refined luxury. As we look ahead, we remain focused on thoughtful expansion, elevating guest experiences, and continuing to set new benchmarks for Indian luxury on the global stage."

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Courtyard by Marriott Debuts in Tirupati

Marriott International has expanded its footprint in South India with the opening of Courtyard by Marriott Tirupati, marking the brand's debut in Andhra Pradesh. Strategically located in Tirupati, one of India's most visited pilgrimage destinations and home to the revered Tirumala Venkateswara Temple, the hotel strengthens Marriott's presence in high-demand spiritual and leisure markets.

The 130-room property combines modern



comfort with functional design, catering to both business and leisure travellers. Rooms and suites feature ample natural light, plush bedding and well-equipped workspaces supported by high-speed connectivity, ensuring a seamless stay experience.

Conveniently located, the hotel is just a 15-minute drive from the railway station and approximately 20 minutes from Tirupati Airport, offering easy accessibility for guests travelling from across the country.

Guests can enjoy a range of amenities, including a spa, outdoor pool and a 24/7 fitness centre. The hotel's dining offerings include The Kitchen Collective, an all-day dining restaurant serving global, wellness-focused and authentic Andhra cuisine; The Spirit Society, a contemporary lounge for cocktails and small plates; and Deck9, a relaxed poolside venue.

The property also positions itself as a key events destination with over 6,200 sq. ft. of flexible meeting and banquet space, highlighted by a grand pillarless ballroom. With modern facilities and versatile venues, the hotel is well-equipped to host weddings, conferences and social gatherings.

ITC Hotels Expands Boutique Portfolio with Storii Jawai

ITC Hotels Limited expanded its experiential boutique portfolio with the opening of Storii Jawai, marking its 11th Storii property. Located in Jawai, a region globally recognised for leopard sightings, dramatic granite hills and the Jawai River, the destination was known for its rich ecosystem, including diverse wildlife and migratory birds, making it a unique hub for nature-led travel.

The arrival experience begins at a tented reception, which leads guests to a central bungalow housing a lounge and bar. The property features suites overlooking the rugged landscape, along with safari-style accommodations and regionally inspired dining experiences.

The villas are set within a preserved grove and thoughtfully integrated into the natural surroundings to retain existing greenery. Each villa includes private courtyards, plunge pools and tented elements that blend comfort with an immersive outdoor experience. An infinity pool, positioned at an elevated point, overlooks a natural lake and the surrounding terrain.

The property also offers curated wildlife experiences, alongside dedicated spaces for relaxation and wellness, creating a balanced stay rooted in nature and understated luxury.



Wyndham Hotels & Resorts Signs 92-Key Wyndham Garden in Khajuraho

Wyndham Hotels & Resorts has expanded its India pipeline with the signing of Wyndham Garden Khajuraho Airport Road, in partnership with AS Hotels. The 92-key property is scheduled to open in Q3

2027, marking the brand's entry into the heritage destination of Khajuraho.

Strategically located on Airport Road, the hotel will offer convenient access to key transport links as well as major attractions, including the UNESCO-listed Khajuraho Group of Monuments. Known for its rich cultural and architectural heritage, the destination continues to draw both domestic and international travellers.

The upcoming hotel will feature 92 guest rooms, along with an all-day dining restaurant, meeting and event spaces, a fitness centre and a swimming pool. Designed in line with Wyndham Garden brand standards, the property will cater to both leisure and business travellers, strengthening the company's presence in culturally significant markets across India.



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Wyndham Hotels & Resorts Signs 120-Key Wyndham Grand Property in Goa

Wyndham Hotels & Resorts has announced the signing of Wyndham Grand Goa Vagator, a 120-key luxury hotel being developed in partnership with Hotel Library Club Private Limited. Scheduled to open in the fourth quarter of 2029, the project will



mark Wyndham’s third property in Goa, further strengthening its footprint in one of India’s most sought-after leisure destinations.

The upcoming hotel is designed to cater to a diverse mix of demand, including leisure travellers, destination weddings, group business and the growing MICE segment. The property will offer a range of upscale amenities, including luxury rooms and suites, vibrant social spaces, an all-day dining restaurant, bar, specialty restaurant, swimming pool and a fitness centre.

In addition, the hotel will feature modern meeting and event facilities, positioning it to tap into the rising demand for corporate gatherings and large-scale events in the region.

This signing underscores Wyndham’s continued expansion across India, with a strategic focus on high-performing resort and lifestyle destinations, further reinforcing its growth momentum in the country.

Hyatt Signs New Hotel in Ahmedabad’s Nikol

Hyatt Hotels Corporation has announced the signing of Hyatt Place Ahmedabad Nikol, further strengthening its expansion strategy in India. Developed in partnership with Golden Buildcon, the 140-key hotel will reinforce Hyatt’s growing presence in Ahmedabad, a key administrative and commercial hub.

Designed to offer a balance of comfort, style, and functionality, the hotel will cater to both business and leisure travellers. It will feature multiple dining options, including a main restaurant and a convenient grab-and-go market, delivering diverse culinary experiences.

For meetings and events, the property will include a 3,455 sq. ft. ballroom, complemented by additional conference rooms and

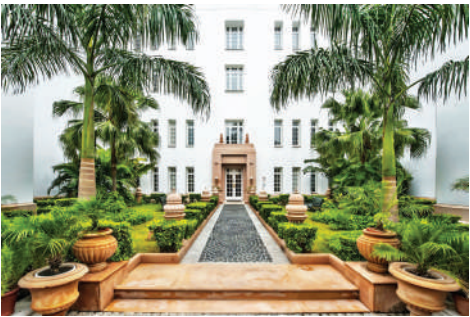


a dedicated boardroom, offering flexible spaces for corporate and social gatherings.

Guests will also have access to a fitness centre and swimming pool, enhancing the overall stay experience. The signing marks another step in Hyatt’s continued focus on expanding its footprint in high-growth urban markets across India.

The Imperial New Delhi Honoured as India’s Best Luxury Hotel

The Indian Chamber of Commerce has recognised The Imperial New Delhi as the Best Luxury Hotel in India at the 2nd ICC Aviation and Tourism Conference held in April 2026. The accolade celebrates the hotel’s enduring contribution to India’s luxury hospitality landscape and its status as a distinguished heritage landmark.



Established in 1936, The Imperial has long been regarded among Asia’s finest hotels, seamlessly blending colonial-era grandeur with contemporary sophistication. Its architecture, refined interiors, and impeccable service standards create a timeless experience that continues to attract dignitaries, celebrities, and global travellers.

The hotel’s legacy is further enhanced by its signature offerings, including award-winning dining destinations like The Spice Route, opulent suites featuring heritage-inspired décor, and a globally acclaimed spa. Its prime location near Connaught Place makes it an ideal choice for both business and leisure guests, while its curated experiences set it apart within India’s competitive luxury segment.

This recognition not only elevates The Imperial’s prestige but also reinforces New Delhi’s growing stature as a hub for premium hospitality. It reflects the evolving standards of excellence in Indian tourism, where heritage and innovation come together to deliver world-class experiences.

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Housekeepers Synergy – 4.0 Concluded Successfully in Bengaluru

Housekeepers Synergy – 4.0, organised by PRISTAL in collaboration with the Professional Housekeepers Association (PHA) Karnataka Chapter, was hosted at Hotel Country Inn & Suites by Radisson, Bengaluru.

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

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

A key highlight of the event was the panel discussion on “Sustainable Laundry Solutions for the Future of Housekeeping.”. The discussion focused on sustainable practices, resource efficiency and the role of innovation in transforming laundry operations for the future. It emphasised sustainable practices, resource efficiency and innovation in laundry operations.



Jayashree Nagaraj, emphasised the critical importance of adopting structured linen management practices within the housekeeping domain. She further advocated for the development and adoption of high-quality, environmentally friendly products tailored to the Indian market.

Bharat Pristal India Pvt Ltd showcased its range of advanced laundry products during the event.

A special recognition was awarded to Dhirain, Secretary– PHA YUVA Board Karnataka and a student of the Army Institute of Hotel Management, for his dedication, positive attitude and active involvement in the event.

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

New Ayurveda Retreat in North Kerala

Gateway Bekal, nestled in the serene backwaters of North Kerala and just two hours from Mangalore Airport, has announced its evolution as a premier destination for authentic Ayurveda and transformative wellness experiences. Rooted in the healing traditions of North Kerala and lush backwaters and biodiversity, the resort offers discerning travellers from across the globe, a sanctuary where classical Ayurvedic wisdom meets contemporary premium hospitality.

By integrating Arya Vaidy Kottakkal's uncompromising Ayurvedic practices within a contemporary resort setting, Gateway Bekal bridges ancient wisdom with modern hospitality, making authentic Ayurveda accessible to international and domestic travellers seeking credible, results-driven wellness experiences.

Set amidst 30 acres of serene backwaters, biodiversity parks, and lush

greenery, Gateway Bekal provides the ideal environment for meaningful healing journeys. Its strategic proximity to Mangalore and Kannur airports ensures seamless access for global travellers, enabling the resort's world-



class wellness offerings to reach discerning seekers from around the world.

Commenting on the announcement, J. Gopalakrishnan, General Manager, Gateway Bekal, said, “At Gateway Bekal, we see ourselves not just as a destination,

but as a gateway one that allows time-honoured traditions like Ayurveda to find relevance, resonance, and reach among global audiences. This collaboration allows us to offer guests authentic, physician-led Ayurvedic care in an environment that respects its purity and depth, further cementing our position as North Kerala's foremost destination for wellness and Ayurveda.”

The resort's wellness offerings draw from the richness of classical Ayurvedic therapies such as Churna Pinda Sweda for joint mobility, Udvartana for metabolic balance, Nasyam for sinus detoxification, Padabhyanga for improved circulation and sleep, alongside Abhyanga and Shirodhara for deep relaxation and holistic rejuvenation. Each treatment is rooted in tradition, administered with clinical integrity, and delivered within a setting of quiet natural beauty.

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Mega Mumbai Hotel by Raheja Group & IHG Launched in Presence of CM Fadnavis

In a moment marked by tradition, reverence, and significance, a Pre-Opening Puja Ceremony was hosted by Ms. Vijayta Raheja and Mr. Nikhil K. Raheja of the K Raheja family group, alongside Mr. Sudeep Jain, Managing Director (South West Asia), IHG Hotels & Resorts, to mark the upcoming launch of their landmark hospitality development in Powai, Mumbai.

The ceremony was graciously attended by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Shri Devendra Fadnavis Ji, lending the occasion prestige and progressive significance.

This mega development, positioned as a key addition to Mumbai's evolving hospitality landscape, comprises a dual hotel complex along with a large-format convention centre. The project features approximately 300 keys, 13 meeting rooms, 4 F&B outlets, expansive lawns, and multiple public and event spaces, and is scheduled to open in 2026.

Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Devendra Fadnavis Ji stated the importance of such large-scale integrated developments, noting that they play a vital role in strengthening Mumbai's position as a global destination for tourism, business, and international MICE (Meetings,



Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions). He congratulated the K Raheja Group and IHG Hotels & Resorts on this landmark venture.

The ceremony concluded on a note of optimism and forward momentum, marking the beginning of a landmark development set to contribute to Maharashtra's pro-growth vision while reinforcing Mumbai's standing as a premier global hub for hospitality, tourism and large-scale conventions.

JW Marriott Maldives Kaafu Atoll Unveils Curated Family Island Escape Offer

JW Marriott Maldives Kaafu Atoll Island Resort has invited families to reconnect, unwind and create lasting memories with its thoughtfully curated family moments, designed to offer immersive island experiences for guests of all ages.

Set within the serene Emboodhu Finolhu lagoon and just 15 minutes from Velana International Airport, the resort presents an idyllic sanctuary. The resort's spacious private pool villas ranging from expansive beach sanctuaries to overwater villas are designed with families in mind, offering generous indoor and outdoor living spaces, dedicated areas for relaxation and seamless access to the island's natural beauty.

Elaborating further, Srikanth Devarapalli, General Manager, JW Marriott Maldives Kaafu Atoll Island Resort, said "In today's fast-paced world, meaningful travel is increasingly defined by the quality of time spent together. At JW Marriott Maldives Kaafu Atoll Island Resort, our approach to family experiences is rooted in creating intentional spaces for connections, where every touchpoint, from villa design to curated

activities, encourages families to engage, explore and unwind together. Whether it's discovering the island's natural beauty or sharing simple, unhurried moments, our goal is



to craft experiences that stay with our guests long after their journey ends."

Families can indulge in a diverse culinary journey across the resort's seven signature restaurants and bars, where menus cater to both adventurous palates and younger guests. The younger crowd are invited to explore the Family by JW program, where curated activities inspire creativity, learning and discovery, while teens can enjoy tailored recreational experiences across the island. The parents can unwind at the overwater Spa by JW, participate in wellness rituals, or enjoy tranquil moments overlooking the Indian Ocean.

The offer also includes personalised experiences such as private beach dinners, guided snorkeling excursions across vibrant coral gardens, sunset cruises with opportunities for dolphin sightings and wellness sessions designed to bring families closer together while celebrating the beauty of island living.

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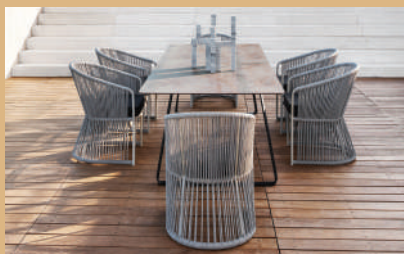


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NoorMahal, Karnal Joins Autograph Collection Hotels Portfolio

Autograph Collection Hotels, part of Marriott International's global portfolio, has made its debut in India with the opening of NoorMahal, Delhi NCR, Karnal. The 176-room property is positioned along the historic Grand Trunk Road and marks the introduction of Marriott Bonvoy's 19th brand in the country. With this launch, the group's portfolio in South Asia reaches 235 hotels.

NoorMahal has been selected as the debut property for the brand in India, reflecting its positioning as a palace-style hotel that blends heritage with modern functionality. The property brings together heritage-inspired architecture and contemporary hospitality infrastructure, featuring over 300,000 square feet of event and convention space. With expansive venues such as the Rani ka Bagh and Raja ka Bagh lawns, alongside indoor spaces including Sheesh Mahal and Darbar Hall, the hotel is positioned to host weddings, large-scale social events, and corporate gatherings.

Commenting on the launch, Kiran Andicot, Senior Vice President, South Asia, Marriott International, said "Autograph Collection Hotels are a product of clear vision, designed with heart, and express a strong sense of place. NoorMahal embodies all of that, making it the ideal debut for the brand in India. This launch also marks the introduction of our 19th Marriott Bonvoy brand in the country, reflecting the continued evolution and depth



of our portfolio. As Indian travelers increasingly seek stays that are distinctive, design-led, and rooted in cultural authenticity, Autograph Collection arrives at a moment of strong relevance for the market. NoorMahal brings this to life beautifully, where India's regal heritage meets contemporary artistry to create rich, immersive moments for the modern design-conscious traveler. NoorMahal is truly Exactly Like Nothing Else, and we are thrilled to introduce the Autograph Collection experience to India's discerning travelers."

Grand Continent Hotels Enters Delhi NCR

Grand Continent Hotels Limited has announced the launch of its new property in Gurugram, a key corporate hub known for its modern infrastructure and strong business ecosystem, marking the brand's entry into the Delhi NCR region. This development represents a key milestone as the company builds on its established presence in South India and strengthens its footprint across North Indian markets.

Located in Sector 45, Greenwood City, the Gurugram property is positioned to cater to the city's growing demand from corporate travellers, long-stay guests, and domestic leisure segments. With its proximity to major business districts and connectivity hubs, the hotel is designed to offer

a practical and comfortable stay experience aligned with the evolving expectations of the mid-market hospitality segment.

The launch comes at a time when Grand Continent Hotels has scaled its operations to 30 properties across 17+ cities with over 1,800 keys, reflecting steady growth and operational consistency. The company has built its presence by focusing on high-demand urban locations, efficient service models, and standardized

offerings that appeal to both business and leisure travellers.

Speaking on the occasion, Ramesh Siva, Founder & Managing Director, Grand Continent Hotels Limited, said, "The launch in Gurugram marks an important step in our growth journey. Having established a strong foundation in South India, we are now focused on expanding across key North Indian markets including Delhi NCR, Ayodhya, Jaipur, Varanasi, Somnath and Rameswaram. Strengthening our presence in the city further, we

have also signed a 56-key hotel, strategically located near the Google office in Gurugram. Over the next two years, we plan to add 15 hotels across these key cities as we continue to build a scalable and sustainable hospitality network."



The brand is positioned in the mid-market hospitality segment, with a focus on strategic locations, standardized service delivery, and efficient operations. Its portfolio spans key destinations across India, with an international presence in the USA and Dubai, and includes cities such as Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Goa, Tirupati, Mahabalipuram, Dwarka, Udaipur, and Gurugram, among others.



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Abhishek Bahadur



Hilton Hyderabad Genome Valley Resort & Spa announced the appointment of Abhishek Bahadur as Commercial Director. With 17 years of experience across some of India’s most respected hospitality brands, Abhishek brings a proven track record in driving integrated commercial strategy, market expansion and high value stakeholder relationships. In his role, he will lead the resort’s overall

commercial function, overseeing sales, marketing and revenue management, with a clear focus on accelerating growth across key segments including leisure, weddings and MICE. His professional journey includes key roles with JW Marriott New Delhi Aerocity, The Leela Palaces Hotels & Resorts, The Oberoi and Trident Gurgaon, The Claridges New Delhi and ITC Hotels. At Hilton Hyderabad Genome Valley Resort & Spa, Abhishek has been instrumental since the pre-opening phase, playing a pivotal role in shaping the resort’s commercial DNA. He has led the development of the go-to-market strategy, established pricing and segment frameworks and built a robust foundation across distribution channels.

Gaurav Issar



JW Marriott Mussoorie Walnut Grove Resort & Spa announced the appointment of Gaurav Issar as its new General Manager. A seasoned hospitality professional with over twenty five years of experience, Gaurav brings with him a wealth of expertise shaped by his journey across some of the most respected names in the hospitality industry, including Hyatt International and Oberoi Hotels & Resorts. Beginning

his career in the Front Office, he steadily evolved through diverse roles across hotel operations and revenue management, building a strong foundation in both guest engagement and commercial strategy.

At JW Marriott Mussoorie Walnut Grove Resort & Spa, Gaurav brings a leadership philosophy rooted in authenticity, attention to detail and a deep understanding of evolving guest expectations. With his extensive resort experience and commercial acumen, he is poised to further strengthen the hotel’s market positioning while enhancing Marriott’s brand presence in the region.

Sonia D’Cunha



Hilton Hyderabad Genome Valley Resort & Spa is pleased to announce the appointment of Sonia D’Cunha as Director of Human Resources. D’Cunha brings over 16 years of experience in human capital leadership across India’s luxury hospitality sector. She joins the resort from The Leela Hyderabad, where she served as Human Resources Manager and led a team that delivered a 94

percent colleague satisfaction score and a 30 percent reduction in employee turnover.

Before that, she has worked at Hyatt Regency Trivandrum and Grand Hyatt Kochi and excelled in a combination of strategic thinking, operational understanding and genuine investment in people that she now brings to Hilton.

In her role as Director of Human Resources, Ms. D’Cunha will lead the resort’s people and culture agenda, working closely with the executive committee to align HR strategy with business objectives. Her priorities will include leadership development, succession planning, performance management, and colleague engagement across all departments, alongside ensuring full compliance with Hilton’s global HR standards.

Himanshu Bhatnagar



The Westin Gurgaon, New Delhi, and The Westin Sohna Resort and Spa have appointed Himanshu Bhatnagar as the Multi-Property Director of Human Resources.

With over 18 years of progressive experience in human resources within the hospitality industry, including more than nine years with Marriott International, Himanshu brings a strong foundation in strategic HR leadership, talent development, and associate engagement. He most recently served as Director of Human Resources at Le Méridien Gurgaon.

Himanshu is the recipient of multiple prestigious accolades, including HR Leader of the Year at the Hotelier India Awards (2023) and several Marriott APEC HR Awards between 2021 and 2024, spanning talent development, team excellence, and wellness initiatives.

In his new role, Himanshu will lead the overarching people and culture strategy across both properties, aligning with Marriott International’s People First philosophy to cultivate leadership excellence, strengthen organizational capability, and deliver sustained business impact. His passion for building meaningful connections and making a difference in people’s lives has been a defining force in his journey—an approach that continues to shape his leadership philosophy.



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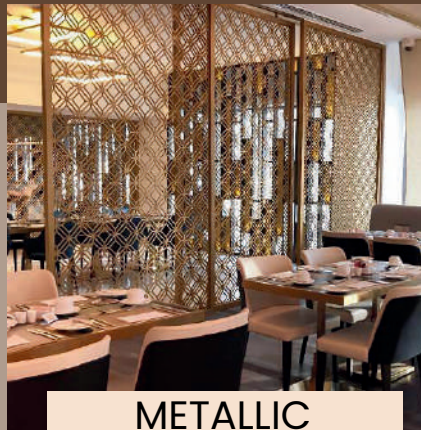
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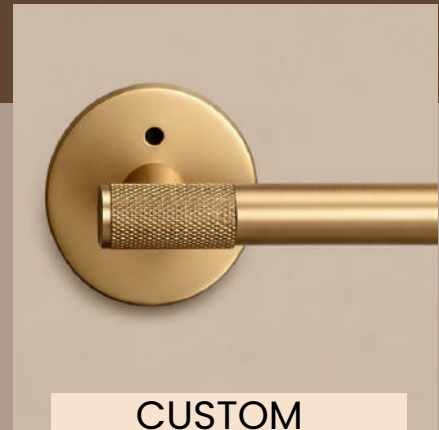
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Alternate Accommodation

From homestays to kingly castles.....

The history of hotels, which are defined as establishments providing accommodation, meals, and other services for travellers and tourists, goes back to ancient times of civilisation. While the concept of a hotel being an establishment providing accommodation to tourists is widely accepted, at times tourists find accommodation in just a room in somebody's home. This is homestays, an alternate accommodation for tourists who want something different from a hotel. Today, even forts and palaces are providing accommodation to tourists. Alternate accommodation to hotels is becoming the choice of a selected segment of tourists.

While hotels are the major accommodation providers, alternate accommodation is also finding favour with a section of the travellers. **Ashok Malkani** unveils why some of these distinctive formats are gaining traction among modern travellers.

Hotels have been serving the needs of tourists since ages. They proliferated throughout Western Europe and North America in the early 19th century. The precursor to the modern hotel was the inn of medieval Europe. The history of hotels in India has been vibrant and evolving. From its nascent stage during the British rule, when hotels were needed for suitable accommodations for visiting British officials, it has transformed through times and, today, they present a riveting narrative. Hotel industry has emerged as a powerhouse having a tapestry of both renowned hospitality chains and unmissable landmark hotels. Receptive to global influences, hotels have adopted modern trends, practices and technological advances. They have evolved from the initial boarding houses to sophisticated and luxurious accommodations we see today.

Boasting of an impressive tapestry of cultural diversity, India, with over 2,000 distinct languages, is unparalleled as far as complexity and richness of its cultural practices is concerned. Thus national, as well as international tourists visit the country to gain knowledge and experience of multicultural populace. In keeping with their desire to experience the different cultural aspects of the of the multi-faceted population many tourists – particularly the young and gen z – want to experience new environment in their accommodation as compared to hotels.

Heritage Hotels

The country's rich cultural heritage, coupled with its diverse landscapes, has fostered a thriving ecosystem of traditional and contemporary accommodations. Heritage palaces and forts have been turned into hotels, offering travellers an authentic and immersive experience. The charm of royal life, which has intrigued many, draws international as well as national tourists into splendour of palaces and forts, some of which have, today, been transformed into luxury hotels offering a taste of regal living with modern comforts. Heritage homes, with their stories etched into the walls, cater to those seeking a blend of luxury and culture.

Forts too have been transformed into



hotels for those seeking adventure.

A few of the elegant palaces – or homestays – which offer perfect setting are:

City Palace, Jaipur: Maharaja Sawai Padmanabh Singh was the first king of the 300-year-old City Palace, home to Jaipur's royal family, to invite, on Airbnb, travellers to stay in the Gudliya suite located in the palace's private quarters. The suite is equipped with its own lounge and indoor pool as well as a terrace to enjoy the surrounding Aravalli hills

The Belgadia Palace (in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha): This 18th century Victorian property, admeasuring 15 acres, home of the royal family of Mayurbhanj, has been restored to its former glory and revamped into boutique homestay managed

by the present day descendants of the family.

Shahpura Bagh Bhilwara: The 45-acre gardens private property of Rajadhiraj Nahar Singh of Shahpura, is a four hours journey from both Jaipur and Udaipur. Nestled between two serene lakes, the family-owned property offers nine suites. Guests can explore Dhikola Fort, a private 450-year-old fort owned by the family

Neemrana Fort Palace: Located close to Delhi, Neemrana Fort Palace was founded by Prithviraj Chauhan in 1464 and later became the residence of Raja Rajinder Singh of Neemrana.

Samode Palace, Samode: It is a blend of Rajput and Mughal architecture, transformed into a heritage hotel that reflects the grandeur of its past. The accommodation part of the palace is managed by Taj Hotels

Umaid Bhawan Palace Udaipur: One of the world's largest private residences, Umaid Bhawan Palace continues to be partially occupied by the royal family. The other part is managed by Taj Hotels,

Falaknuma Palace, Hyderabad: Originally the residence of the Nizam of Hyderabad, Falaknuma Palace was leased to Taj Hotels by Prince Nizam Mukkaram Jah Bahadur in 2000.

These are only a few of the palaces which have been converted, fully or partly, into hotels.

One may add that several ancient Indian



Keshav Baljee



forts too have been transformed into luxury hotels. Some of them are:

Ahilya Fort, Madhya Pradesh: This is a 250-year-old fort built on the edge of a cliff, above the Narmada River.

Alila Fort Bishangarh, Rajasthan: It is a 230-year-old fort turned into a hotel whose design was inspired by both, British and Mughal eras with Tudor-style ogee arches and mirror-mosaic Tikhri art.

Fort Jadhavgad, Pune: one of Maharashtra's only fort turned hotel, the 300 year old Maratha stronghold constructed by Pillaji Jadhavrao, a general under Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj has been turned into a heritage hotel

Fort Rajwada, Jaisalmer: This 200 year old heritage hotel, in the heart of Thar Desert is a blend of modern and classical design with interiors inspired by the soothing shades of sandstone.

But when one speaks of tourist accommodation, forts and palaces are options of a select few. They are a secondary option for normal and regular tourists. For regular tourists, besides hotels today, there are also home stays available, which have been popularised by Airbnb, one of the first private players to enter this market.

Popularity of Homestays

Homestays gained momentum with the launch of Airbnb in India in early 2010s. At present it boasts of over 70,000 homes. Several other operators like StayVista,

SaffronStays and Lohono by Isprava (which collectively operate a few thousand homes) have entered the arena and are flourishing alongside organised hotel sector which has over 160,000 branded hotel rooms.

Increasingly, travellers are gravitating towards homestays, particularly for family trips where cost efficiency becomes a key consideration. Beyond the economic advantage, these stays offer an authentic, personalised experience rooted in local culture, warm hospitality, and a genuine sense of belonging.

So, can one surmise that the accommodation option is shifting to other occupancies than hotels?

Keshav Baljee, Executive Director, Royal Orchid, states, "I wouldn't call it a shift away from hotels. It can be categorised more as a broadening of the accommodation ecosystem."

He adds, "Travel has expanded exponentially over the last few years, especially post-COVID. With this broadening, the traveller's expectations too have evolved. People are not just looking for a place to stay, but rather they want to check out a specific kind of experience. It is here that the alternate accommodations come into the picture."

He stressed, "Despite that, hotels continue to be the most trusted and scalable format, especially for business travel, large events, and premium stays.

What we're seeing is segmentation and not a substitution."

Alternative Accommodations

Castles and forts converted into accommodation for travellers as well as homestays, it is widely believed cannot compete with hotel accommodation. One may state that both sectors have experienced significant shifts in demand and supply dynamics from pre-covid to past covid period. A significant segment of travellers continues to see a clear distinction between the structured offerings of hotels and the more personal, experience-led nature of homestays.

The option to choose hotel or homestay accommodation depends on the individuals' requirements. You can choose homestay when you want to experience local life or you are travelling to offbeat rural destinations or you are on a tight budget.

A layman may ask: What are the other alternatives compared to hotels and how has their popularity risen?

Keshav Baljee replies, "The key alternatives today include homestays, villas, serviced apartments, hostels, and independent boutique properties.

"Their rise is largely driven by:

- Digital platforms that make it easier to discover and book
- Younger traveller demographic, which is seeking flexibility and personalization and is ready to experiment
- Growth in leisure and group travel, where these formats are often more suitable

"These alternative formats have grown as they serve very specific use-cases without replacing the need for hotels."

On a global scale, alternate accommodation, according to Precedence Research, is predicted to surpass around \$1,043.15 billion in 2035 from \$233.50 billion in 2025, at a CAGR of 16.15% between 2026 and 2035. The global alternative accommodation market is mainly driven by the constantly evolving international tourism sector and comfortable vacation stays.

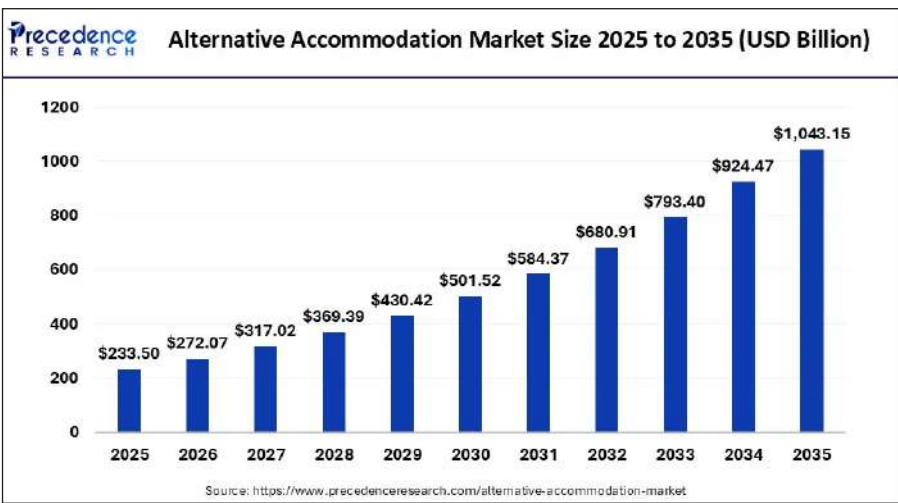
Precedence Research states that AI contributes to the rise in alternate accommodation industry by personalization and automation. Some of these factors

improvising services for the tourists are: Modifying room temperature and lighting facilities. AI also provides smart voice-controlled environments, plans the staff schedules for cleaning, enhances chatbots in support of booking, increases the level of safety by means of smart monitoring. AI also ensures automated check-ins.

The growth in alternative accommodation is fuelled by several factors. Firstly, the rise of the sharing economy has made alternative accommodation more accessible. Secondly, millennials and Gen Z is keen to have authentic experiences which is possible with alternate accommodation which comprises not only of homestays but also of tree houses, etc. The adoption of technology has also made the booking process more streamlined. The alternate accommodation market offers diverse accommodation types, ranging from budget-friendly shared rooms to luxurious villas and unique experiences like glamping.

Boutique Hotels

In India, the land of palaces, castles, world-



class spa retreats, destination resorts, and plenty of opulence, there is no dearth of luxury 5-star hotels in the country. However, with a section of the young generation seeking accommodation that is less traditional, boutique hotels are becoming popular. These unique, design-focused properties are redefining the conventional hotel experience by offering hyper-local, personalized, and immersive stays.

As per Market Research Future analysis,

the Boutique Hotel Sector Outlook Market was estimated at \$17.66 Billion in 2024. The boutique hotel industry is projected to grow from \$18.54 Billion in 2025 to \$30.12 Billion by 2035, exhibiting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.9% during the forecast period 2025 – 2035.

Some of the reasons attributed for the booming growth of boutique hotels in India are:

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Changing traveller preferences: Millennials and Gen Z are keen to have authentic experiences in Instagram-worthy locations which are provided by these hotels.

Provision of local architecture: Since the pandemic, Indian travellers are increasingly exploring lesser-known destinations, and boutique hotels, often located in heritage towns or offbeat locations, displaying handwoven textiles in Rajasthan or offbeat bamboo architecture in Northeast, cater to this growing segment.

Technology: Instagram portraying boutique hotels' aesthetics and experiential appeal make them desirable among digital-savvy travellers

Keshav Baljee states, "Boutique hotels have gained traction because they strike a balance between structure and individuality."

He adds, "Travellers today are moving away from standardized experiences. They want design, storytelling, and a sense of place. Boutique hotels offer that along with a level of service reliability that unorganized formats often cannot."

He further, continues, "This is also why you see established hotel groups increasingly investing in distinctive, experience-led properties."

Offbeat Accommodations

Popular offbeat destinations in India, with unique accommodations often provide a

thrill for the travellers. These unusual stays blend culture, adventure, and cinematic vibes. Take the case of Tirthan Valley Treehouses. Imagine waking up in a wooden treehouse, surrounded by the sound of a river gurgling nearby and birds chirping in the pine forests! Or, take the case of Ooty's fairytale-like treehouses tucked among eucalyptus and Nilgiri forests. They offer panoramic views of rolling tea estates. One can spend the mornings hiking to waterfalls, afternoons riding the toy train and the evening enjoying the cool breeze from your wooden porch.

One may also mention the Alampara, a boutique glamping retreat, located between Marakkanam and Pondicherry. Set across 50 acres of coastal lagoons, salt pans, and a private sandbar, it has four luxury tents. Its eco-conscious design and quiet surroundings make it ideal for nature lovers. Guests can kayak, spot migratory birds, or explore the ruins of the 17th-century Alamparai Fort nearby

Keshav Baljee disclosed, "India has seen growing interest in offbeat accommodations in India. Some of the formats are:

- Treehouses
- Glamping sites
- Heritage palaces and forts
- Tea estate bungalows
- Houseboats

"These accommodations attract travellers because they turn the stay itself into the core of the travel experience.

They are immersive, distinctive, and highly shareable, the last being especially important in the age of social media.

"From a hospitality standpoint, they are high on experience but difficult to scale, which limits their overall share."

Eco-friendly Accommodation

India has a choice of accommodations available for its tourists. Besides the luxury hotels it also offers a diverse range of eco-friendly hotels that seamlessly blend luxury with sustainability. Today tourists are not seeking accommodation which is comfortable but also eco-friendly. Tourists are opting for accommodations that align with their environmental values.

Presently, luxury travel is increasingly including eco-consciousness, authenticity and immersion in local culture. India is becoming a fertile ground for sustainable accommodations. A study by Booking.com found that over 90% of Indian travellers want to travel sustainably.

One may ask: What are eco-friendly accommodation options in India and what are its pros and cons?

Keshav Baljee answers, "Eco-friendly options include eco-resorts, wildlife lodges, sustainable boutique hotels, and farm stays."

He adds, "There are several clear advantages for this. They are:

- They align with the demands and expectations of a growing segment of eco-

conscious travellers

- They have a strong brand narrative
- They command a premium price

He adds, "However, these hotels come with challenges, which are:

- Higher development and operating costs
- Limited scalability
- Operational complexities, especially in remote locations”

He avers, "Sustainability, in our view, is moving from being a niche offering to a core expectation across all hospitality formats."

Accommodation Preferences for the Future

As hospitality industry transitions during the coming years, experts believe that it will focus on experience-driven offerings, and technological integration to meet the evolving traveller preferences.

One of the biggest trends impacting all industries is the increased adoption of artificial intelligence (AI). At present, hospitality industry is using AI tools to

analyse booking patterns, length of stay, and on-property spending to support revenue management, marketing, and operational decisions. According to a study by Cornell University's Nolan School of Hotel Administration, hotels using AI-enabled revenue management systems have reported an average revenue increase of 7.2% over traditional systems. So, this is likely to continue.

But one cannot replace AI for people. Guests may use AI to plan their trips, but once they arrive, they still expect warmth, flexibility, problem-solving (such as handling upgrades or unexpected issues), and human connections. Thus the importance of human touch for the success of the property will continue to play an important role.

One wonders: What will accommodation preferences look like in the future?

Keshav Baljee explicates, “The future will be defined by choice, segmentation, and hybrid models.

"This will effect a change in the ecosystem where we will see:

- Hotels evolving to become more experience-led and less transactional
- Growth of branded alternatives, where hotel companies extend into villas and boutique formats
- Continued demand for trusted, standardized hospitality, especially as travel becomes more mainstream
- Ultimately, the winning model will not be one format over another; it will be more to do with the one which can combine consistency with personalization at scale.

“That is where established hotel groups like Royal Orchid Hotels Ltd and Regenta Hotels & Resorts hold a clear advantage to offer consistency and personal along with scale of operations.”

Conclusion

While a select segment of the tourists would prefer to occupy alternate accommodation like homestays (for economy) or heritage properties like castles and forts, hotels will continue to be the choice of the majority of travellers. ■



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In the present competitive hospitality landscape relying exclusively on room rents for generating sustainable income is no longer a workable strategy. Hoteliers, across the globe, are rethinking their revenue growth strategies to ever-changing demands of the guests and the increasing costs of sustenance. While room revenue still remains the primary income generator, it presents several limitations, like seasonal fluctuations being one of them. Recognising the pitfalls of being room-rate-centric, hotels, today, are exploring avenues—like F&B, corporate meetings and events, et al.—to supplement room revenue. **Ashok Malkani** gauges how MICE, F&B, etc add to a hotel's income.

With increasing costs, profit margin improvement is a pressing goal for the hospitality industry, particularly for luxury hotels. Gone are the days when one measured a hotel's success by occupancy rates. The evolving hospitality industry is thriving today by strategically diversifying their revenue systems. Today, thriving Indian hotels are those that strategically diversify their revenue streams, creating a robust and resilient business model. With rising input and operational costs, high occupancy no longer guarantees good revenue and high profitability for hotels. Revenue models are being rebalanced. But will other segments

significantly help in boosting revenue and if so, what are the segments?

Suhail Kannampilly, Managing Director, The Fern Hotels & Resorts, states, "High occupancy alone is no longer a reliable indicator of profitability as cost structures across energy, manpower and procurement continue to rise. Hotels must therefore adopt a more diversified and balanced revenue strategy that goes beyond room sales. Other segments can significantly enhance revenue contribution when managed strategically. Food and beverage is a key driver, particularly when positioned not just as a support function but as a standalone revenue centre

with strong local appeal. MICE, weddings and social events also offer high yield opportunities as they drive both room nights and ancillary spends. Wellness and experiential offerings are emerging as important contributors. Guests today seek curated experiences such as local cuisine showcases, sustainable dining and immersive cultural activities. These not only increase spend per guest but also strengthen brand recall."

He adds, "At The Fern Hotels and Resorts, we focus on an integrated revenue approach where rooms, F&B and events are aligned under a unified strategy. This ensures that

each segment contributes meaningfully to overall profitability while enhancing the guest experience."

Gurmeet Singh, Assistant Vice President, Brigade Hospitality Services Limited, disclosed, "We manage five clubs and two convention centres under the Brigade Hospitality Services Limited portfolio. Rooms exist at only two properties, Signature Club Resort, Devanahalli and Woodrose Club, JP Nagar. Hence, our revenue streams have always been diversified which has actually worked in our favour. Our larger chunks of revenue comes from F&B- restaurants, bars, banquets, social functions, day outings and conferences. Sports facilities across our clubs and resort bring in revenue through team outings and external bookings, not just members. Membership fees, event hosting, and ancillary services round off a well-diversified revenue model."

Kunal Shanker, General Manager, Novotel Mumbai Juhu Beach declares, "Non-room revenue is already playing a much larger role in the overall business. At our property,

it contributes close to 40 percent, depending on the season, and this has naturally shifted how we look at performance. Food and beverage, conferences, weddings, and curated events are now central to our strategy rather than being seen as add-ons. There is also a clear change in how success is measured—we focus on the total value each guest or group brings across multiple touchpoints, not just room revenue. In terms of demand, a few segments continue to stand out. Corporate groups and conferences bring both scale and consistency, particularly from sectors like pharma and financial services. Social events and weddings are another key contributor, often larger in size and more customized in nature. At the same time, food and beverage has evolved significantly, with guests seeking out experiences rather than just dining. This includes themed evenings, chef collaborations, and distinct formats across venues like Sampan, Bageecha, and Gadda Da Vida. Beach front setups and cabana-style dining further enhance this appeal. We are also seeing growing interest

in experiential formats such as automobile launches, fashion showcases, and other lifestyle-led events, reinforcing the shift towards more dynamic and experience-driven hospitality."

Arjun Baljee, Founder of ICONIQA + President of Royal Orchid Hotels Ltd., asserts, "High occupancy alone is no longer a guarantee of profitability. At Royal Orchid Hotels Ltd, we have always believed that a hotel must optimize revenue from every part of the asset, including food & beverage, conference rooms, spas, and other ancillary services, to boost the total return on the asset and not depend solely on rooms.

Some of the other segments which are now central to profitability are:

Food and Beverage (F&B): Well-positioned standalone restaurants, curated dining experiences, and delivery formats,

MICE and Events: Meetings, weddings, and conferences offer high revenue density. They drive not just banquet income but also rooms, F&B, and ancillary spend.

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and palace properties in our portfolio benefit significantly from this segment.

Experiential Add-ons: Wellness, local experiences, and curated activities increase total guest spend without heavy capital investment.

Loyalty and Direct Channels: Regenta Rewards improves repeat business and reduces OTA commissions, directly impacting profitability."

He continues, "The shift is clearly toward maximising total revenue per guest."

Jai Sreedhar, Joint Managing Director & CEO, Rosetta Hospitality, affirms, "High occupancy, by itself, no longer guarantees healthy profitability. In today's environment, where input costs, manpower costs, utilities, and distribution expenses continue to rise, the more relevant question is not merely how many rooms a hotel sells, but how effectively it monetises the guest beyond the room.

"Non-room revenues are therefore no longer ancillary; they are central to a hotel's commercial performance. Food and beverage, MICE, wellness, destination experiences, celebrations, and curated on-property programming are all significant contributors when approached with discipline and intent.

"The real shift is from a room-centric view of revenue to a more comprehensive view of total revenue per guest and total revenue per stay. A guest who stays for two nights but meaningfully engages with dining, events, experiences, or wellness contributes far more to the hotel's profitability than a guest who merely occupies a room.

Reimagining F&B Profitability

Normally when one talks about a hotel's revenue it often centres around room revenue, which is considered to be the highest. However, in the ever-evolving Indian hospitality industry, relying solely on one segment – the room rent – is no longer a sustainable strategy. Traditionally the financial performance of the Indian hospitality sector, which is a vibrant and significant contributor to the nation's economy, was gauged by room occupancy rates and revenue per available room (RevPAR). However, the astute Indian hotel chains, finding it necessary to pivot towards diversification in hospitality revenue to meet the increasing expenditure, is undergoing a fundamental shift in business



Gurmeet Singh

modelling, which is essential for sustained growth and resilience.

There are multifaceted revenue earning streams for a hotel, which have to be understood. One of them is: food & beverage (F&B). But there are several obligations -like quality and complying with eco-friendly regulations. So how does a hotelier comply with these two obligations? Does technology help?

Kunal Shanker states, "To ensure higher profitability while maintaining quality and eco-friendliness one has to pay consistent attention to detail. Menus are designed keeping in mind what works for guests and what is viable from a cost perspective. There is a focus on seasonal produce and locally sourced ingredients. A lot of effort goes into reducing waste. This includes better portion control and more accurate planning. On the sustainability side, we are working on reducing single-use materials and improving

waste handling. The aim is to maintain quality while being more mindful of costs."

He continues, "Some technological changes which are visible to guests, as far as f&b segment is concerned are digital menus and QR-based ordering. The more important technological changes occur in the background. We are able to track what guests are ordering and when. This helps us make better decisions on menus and planning."

Suhail Kannampilly avers, "Managing F&B profitably while maintaining quality and eco-friendly practices requires a disciplined and forward-looking approach. The focus must be on smart menu engineering, efficient sourcing and minimising waste without compromising on guest experience. Menu design plays a critical role. Dishes must be curated based on ingredient availability, seasonality and cost efficiency. A focused menu with well executed offerings often performs better than an extensive selection that strains resources. Sourcing locally not only reduces costs but also aligns with sustainability goals and enhances freshness."

He adds, "At The Fern Hotels and Resorts sustainability is embedded in our culinary philosophy. We actively promote responsible sourcing, reduce single use materials and implement waste management practices across kitchens. Operational efficiency is equally important."

Speaking about the role of technology in aiding evolution of F&B he states, "Technology and innovation are redefining how hotel F&B operations are managed and experienced. From procurement to guest engagement, digital tools are enabling greater efficiency, consistency and personalisation. Advanced point of sale systems and data analytics allow hotels to track consumption patterns, optimise menu pricing and identify high performing dishes. This helps in making informed decisions that directly impact profitability. Kitchen management systems streamline order flow and reduce turnaround time which enhances service efficiency. Technology is also supporting sustainability efforts through better inventory tracking and waste reduction mechanisms."

He informs, "At The Fern Hotels and Resorts, we leverage technology to strengthen both operational performance and guest experience. However, technology



Suhail Kannampilly

complements but does not replace the human element.”

Arjun Baljee believes that to manage hotel F&B for higher profitability while maintaining quality and eco-friendliness, “F&B must be run as a disciplined business unit. For this one must adopt the following methods:

- Menu engineering and rationalisation: Focus on high-margin, high-demand items
- Procurement efficiency: Local sourcing reduces cost and ensures freshness
- Waste and portion control: Directly impacts margins while supporting sustainability goals
- Energy-efficient operations: Optimised kitchen equipment and processes reduce overheads
- Clear restaurant positioning: Strong concepts attract non-resident diners.”

He adds, “Technology is reshaping both hotel operations and guest engagement. Data-driven demand forecasting improves purchasing and staffing efficiency. Additionally, an integrated POS and digital ordering system enhances speed, accuracy, and table turnover. We are also tapping into personalisation through data, which enables us to create targeted offers and have better guest engagement. At the back end, kitchen automation improves consistency and reduces dependency on skilled manpower. These innovations drive meaningful improvements in margins and guest satisfaction.”

Gurmeet Singh disclosed, “For F&B profitability, while maintain regulations,



Arjun Baljee

we keep menus focused, not too large, but well-curated. That controls wastage and keeps kitchen efficiency high. Seasonal and locally sourced ingredients help on both cost and quality. We, at Brigade Hospitality, have installed glass bottling plants at Woodrose and Signature Club. This eliminates packaged water, reduces plastic, saves cost. Chef’s Table, a curated dining experience we launched across all our clubs in partnership with all our 5-star hotel chefs has added a premium F&B layer without heavy infrastructure investment.”

He adds, “Technology has played an important role innovating and revolutionising F&B. At Brigade Hospitality, we keep menus focused, not too large, but well-curated. That controls wastage and keeps kitchen efficiency high. Seasonal and locally sourced ingredients help on both cost and quality.”

Jai Sreedhar avers, “Food and beverage becomes profitable not through excess, but through discipline. The first principle is that F&B must be treated as a serious commercial vertical and not merely as a support department. That requires menu engineering, pricing discipline, portion control, procurement intelligence, and a very clear understanding of what sells, what yields margin, and what merely creates operational complexity.

He reveals, “At Rosetta Sakleshpur, this finds expression in a farm-linked culinary philosophy, where a part of the offering is rooted in ingredients grown within or around the property ecosystem. That creates not only authenticity, but also a stronger connection between product, place, and guest experience.

“Eco-consciousness, similarly, becomes meaningful only when it is operationally embedded in waste reduction, energy-efficient kitchen practices, careful use of perishables, and responsible sourcing. The future of hotel F&B lies in making it both commercially sharper and operationally more responsible.”

Delving on the importance of technology in achieving this, he says, “Technology is making hotel F&B more intelligent, more measurable, and more commercially accountable. In the past, many F&B decisions were taken largely on instinct. Today, data allows us to understand consumption patterns, demand cycles, wastage levels, menu contribution, inventory movement, and guest preferences with much greater precision. This enables better menu engineering, stronger forecasting, tighter stock control, and more informed pricing decisions.

MICE as a Revenue Multiplier

Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) is a segment that helps immensely in boosting revenue through increasing demand in various segments of the hotel like rooms, F&B, banquets, spa & recreation. MICE market is considered to be a major and expanding economic segment. According to Site Minder, MICE can contribute 20-30% of total revenue, and in some cases as much as 40%.

As per Market Research Future analysis, the India mice market size was estimated at



\$62.09 billion in 2024 and was projected to grow from \$67.29 billion in 2025 to \$150.5 billion by 2035, exhibiting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.3% during the forecast period 2025 – 2035.

A novice may have queries like: Does MICE matter? How do you make yourself operationally ready for MICE? How to promote it and increase revenue through MICE events and services?

Gurmeet Singh explains, "A well-trained, dedicated banqueting and events team is considered to be the backbone of aspiration of the hotel to succeed in MICE tourism. At Brigade Hospitality Services Limited, we invest in this continuously. Infrastructure, AV, high-speed internet, breakout spaces is reviewed and upgraded regularly. Every venue has clear SOPs for setup, service, and breakdown. Consistency matters when a client comes back. Our sports facilities double up as team activity spaces for MICE groups, that's an operational edge most standalone venues don't have."

He adds, "For clubs and resorts similar to ours, MICE is not a side business but central to what we do. Our Clubs & Convention Centres are built for exactly this. Corporate meetings, leadership conclaves, product launches, training programmes. We promote through active marketing efforts, direct corporate outreach through our well-trained team, our member network, and Brigade's larger ecosystem of business parks and office communities nearby."

"We design integrated day-conference packages that combine the hall, meals, tea breaks, and curated activities, enabling clients to plan efficiently while naturally enhancing overall event value. Post-event dinners, cocktail



Jai Sreedhar

evenings, and informal team engagements using our sports and recreational facilities further extend the experience and are well received by corporate groups."

Suhail Kannampilly elucidates, "Operational readiness for MICE begins with infrastructure but extends far beyond it. Hotels must ensure that their event spaces are flexible, well designed and equipped with modern technology to accommodate diverse requirements. Equally important is having a trained and coordinated team. MICE events demand precision, responsiveness and the ability to manage large groups efficiently. This requires close collaboration between sales, operations, F&B and technical teams. Standard operating procedures must be clearly defined and consistently implemented.

"At The Fern Hotels and Resorts, we place strong emphasis on preparedness and adaptability. Our teams are trained to handle events of varying scale while maintaining service quality and sustainability standards. By combining infrastructure,

skilled manpower and efficient processes we ensure that every MICE engagement is executed seamlessly and contributes positively to overall revenue performance. Hence, planning and communication are critical. Detailed pre-event coordination with clients helps anticipate requirements and avoid last minute challenges."

He continues, "MICE plays a crucial role in the hospitality sector as it drives consistent demand, improves occupancy patterns and generates significant ancillary revenue. Unlike transient travel, MICE business is often planned in advance which allows hotels to optimise inventory and pricing strategies more effectively. MICE events also contribute to multiple revenue streams including rooms, F&B and event services. Corporate meetings, conferences and exhibitions typically involve group bookings which ensure higher occupancy over defined periods. In addition, these events enhance brand visibility and positioning within the corporate segment.

"At The Fern Hotels and Resorts, we emphasise flexibility, service excellence and sustainable practices in our MICE offerings."

Arjun Baljee avers, "MICE remains a cornerstone of hospitality revenue in India for the following reasons:

- It ensures base occupancy, especially on weekdays
 - It drives high-value, multi-department revenue
 - It provides predictability and scale
- To promote MICE, several elements must work in tandem:
- Leveraging location and accessibility advantages
 - Strong corporate and MICE sales teams
 - Partnerships with event planners and wedding specialists
 - Digital showcasing through virtual tours and content

This aligns with our belief that banqueting and events are not secondary but integral to the business."

He continues, "Execution capability is critical. A few essentials are investing in flexible, tech-enabled event spaces, establishing specialized sales and event coordination teams, and offering tailored, seamless catering and accommodation packages. An absolute essential is technology & connectivity, as without a high-speed Wi-Fi, modern AV



equipment, and capabilities for hybrid/virtual meetings, no MICE venue will be functional.

Explaining how hotels could increase revenue through MICE events and services, he states, "Revenue growth comes from expanding total event value by focussing on different aspects depending upon the requirement. It could be an enhanced corporate experience with incentives like premium transport, on-site catering, and personalized concierge services, as business attendees are generally less price-sensitive. Many prefer to go for a bundled offering that includes rooms, F&B, venues, and experiences. This can naturally enhance the total revenue.

"The objective is to maximise revenue per event rather than just volume."

Jai Sreedhar affirms, "MICE matters because it activates the hotel as a complete commercial organism. Unlike transient room business, MICE engages multiple revenue centres simultaneously. It drives rooms, food and beverage, banqueting, conferences, experiences, transportation, and often a number of ancillary services as well. It also brings in group business of a higher planning value and frequently of a repeat nature.

"For many hotels, particularly destination hotels, MICE is one of the most important ways of improving revenue depth and increasing utilisation across departments. It allows the property to move from being a place of stay to a place of engagement.

"To promote MICE effectively, a hotel must do three things well. First, it must offer credible event infrastructure, spaces that are flexible, well-supported, and professionally maintained. Second, it must build confidence through dependable execution. Third, it must position itself not just as a venue, but as a setting in which meaningful corporate experiences can be created.

"At Rosetta Sakleshpur and Elements by Rosetta, Varca, Goa, the MICE strategy is necessarily destination-specific. The market, source mix, and event logic vary by location. What remains constant, however, is the need to align product, sales effort, and guest experience in a way that makes the hotel relevant to the corporate and institutional client."

He further informs, "The most profitable MICE business is rarely the result of selling a



Kunal Shanker

hall alone. It comes from packaging the event as an integrated commercial opportunity."

"Hotels increase MICE revenue when they move beyond bare conference and offer a fuller event ecosystem - accommodation, dining, meeting services, themed dinners, outdoor activities, wellness elements, team-building, transport, and other curated components that increase both guest engagement and spend.

"Revenue also improves when space is used intelligently, when premium event services are upsold thoughtfully, and when pricing reflects value rather than mere occupancy logic. In the final analysis, a hotel grows MICE revenue not only by selling an event, but by ensuring that the event meaningfully activates the rest of the hotel."

He apprises, "Operational readiness for MICE begins long before the event is sold.

Kunal Shanker, explaining why MICE matters in hospitality industry, "It brings stability. Conferences and corporate groups help maintain steady occupancy, especially during the week. They also contribute to other areas like dining and event services. Over time, they help build relationships with organisations, which often leads to repeat business. It is a mix of outreach and offering the right spaces."

He enlightens, "To make hotel ready for capturing Mice revenue ultimately comes down to preparation and coordination. There needs to be a dedicated team that handles events from start to finish. Different departments need to work closely together. Facilities also need to be flexible. This includes spaces that can be adapted and technical

support where required. Planning in advance is important. Understanding how the event will flow helps ensure smoother execution."

He adds, "Increasing revenue through MICE ultimately comes down to preparation and coordination. There needs to be a dedicated team that handles events from start to finish. Different departments need to work closely together. Facilities also need to be flexible. This includes spaces that can be adapted and technical support where required. Planning in advance is important. Understanding how the event will flow helps ensure smoother execution."

Conclusion

The hotel industry now is diversifying into other segments beyond merely catering to rooms for the tourists.

Suhail Kannampilly says, "Personalisation is becoming increasingly important. Understanding guest preferences and tailoring experiences accordingly can significantly enhance loyalty and repeat business. At the same time, cost optimisation must be pursued through efficiency rather than compromise on quality."

Jai Sreedhar is of the view, "The hotels that will perform best in the coming years will be those that combine strong brand positioning, disciplined commercial thinking, operational consistency, and a deeper understanding of guest behaviour. In hospitality today, the question is no longer how to sell a room. The question is how to build a complete and commercially intelligent guest journey."

Gurmeet Singh states, "Looking ahead, we strongly believe the future of hospitality revenue lies in experiences. Curated offerings such as Chef's Table evenings, wine tastings, sports tournaments, and cultural events go beyond the traditional room-or-meal format, driving sustained footfall, deeper engagement, and incremental revenue while strengthening brand affinity."

Arjun Baljee avers, "We are always ahead of the curve when it comes to implementing any innovation or technology to improve guest experience and optimize efficiency, diversification, and smart growth."

Kunal Shanker affirms, "The role of a hotel is changing. Guests are not coming in only for rooms. They are looking for places to meet, dine, celebrate, and spend time." ■



The Front Office - Ever Evolving Hub

By Sharmila Chand

Front offices in hotels have gone through a sea change. There is a shift from quiet reception desks into an active, tech-driven “hub” of customer experience, brand identity and data-driven insights. Before the guest is asked to handover his ID proof, there is a refreshing welcome drink served with a smile. That sets the mood right followed by functional check - in formality where advanced technology steps in.

Technology integration, such as Property Management Systems (PMS), mobile apps, and artificial intelligence (AI), is in place to enable faster service, contactless options, and data-driven personalization.

Let’s explore the new trends that have brought about evolution in the hotel’s front office. This is one department which is now

considered a “Stage” or “Gateway” rather than just a desk, reflecting its importance in shaping the overall brand reputation.

Subhashish Gupta, Senior General Manager, Radisson Blu Hotel, Chennai

“Front Office is the soul of the guest’s journey”

Having spent nearly four decades in the hospitality industry, I have witnessed the Front Office evolve from a purely functional touchpoint into the very soul of the guest journey. What was once defined by registers, physical keys, and procedural efficiency has transformed into an intuitive, experience-led engagement - where anticipation often precedes request.

At Radisson Blu Hotel & Suites

GRT Chennai, this evolution has been consciously embraced by blending advanced technology with the timeless essence of hospitality.

Following our renovation in December 2022, we introduced:

- Contactless and mobile check-in, enabling guests to enjoy a seamless and expedited arrival.
- At the same time, we continue to preserve the warmth of a personal welcome for guests who value human interaction.

This balance between efficiency and emotional connection defines modern Front Office operations.

Additionally, through data-driven personalization, we:

- Recognize returning guests.
- Understand preferences.



"Successful Front Offices of the future will be those that gracefully harmonize innovation with empathy, embrace technology not as a replacement, but as an enabler - freeing their teams from routine tasks and empowering them to focus on what truly matters: meaningful guest engagement"

**- Subhashish Gupta
Senior General Manager,
Radisson Blu Hotel, Chennai**

- Curate bespoke experiences (room selection, dining, services).

Integrated guest platforms further ensure seamless communication and service delivery, elevating the overall experience.

Key trends in Front Office Evolution

At Radisson Blu Hotel & Suites GRT Chennai, the evolving trends are not just industry concepts but actively shape how we design and deliver guest experiences - ensuring every interaction is seamless, intuitive, and personalized.

Contactless & Mobile Technology

The adoption of mobile check-in, digital keys, and contactless payments has significantly enhanced convenience, speed, and guest autonomy. It reduces wait times and aligns with modern expectations of frictionless service.

Data-Driven Personalization

With advanced PMS systems, hotels can now anticipate guest needs, personalize

stays, and create memorable experiences. This has shifted hospitality from reactive service to proactive engagement.

Integrated Guest Communication Platforms

Unified communication tools (apps, chat systems, service platforms) enable real-time interaction between guests and hotel teams, ensuring faster response times and seamless service coordination.

AI & Automation (Emerging Trend)

The introduction of chatbots and virtual concierge services will redefine service accessibility. These tools provide 24/7 assistance, consistency, and efficiency, allowing teams to focus on high-value guest interactions.

Gopalakrishnan Jothi, General Manager, Gateway Bekal

"Speed, ease, and personalization are no longer privileges; they are prerequisites"

The front office has evolved from a transactional function into the very heart of the guest experience. What was once focused on check-ins and check-outs now plays a defining role across the entire stay, from pre-arrival anticipation to a warm and memorable farewell.

This evolution has been shaped by technology and increasingly discerning guest expectations.

Yet what excites me most is the human dimension of this shift. It is no longer simply the face of the hotel. It is the soul of the stay.

Key trends in Front Office Evolution

Digitalisation and Automation

Technology has fundamentally redefined front office operations, replacing manual, paper-intensive processes with intuitive, efficient systems. Traditional check-ins have evolved into seamless, device-led interactions enabling instant access to guest profiles, greater accuracy, and a noticeably more fluid arrival experience. The result is a meaningful uplift in both operational efficiency and guest satisfaction.

Personalisation of Guest Experience

Modern front office operations are increasingly driven by data-led insights that enable a far more tailored approach to service. Guest preferences, from room



"Today front office professional is an administrator and a significant curator, someone who anticipates needs, crafts tailored experiences, and ensures every guest feels genuinely seen and valued"

**- Gopalakrishnan Jothi
General Manager, Gateway Bekal**

configuration to dietary requirements, are captured and applied thoughtfully, allowing the team to anticipate needs before they are expressed. This goes beyond service delivery; it creates an experience rooted in genuine recognition, strengthening loyalty and deepening the guest's connection with the brand.

Contactless and Smart Services

The shift towards contactless solutions has accelerated in recent years, reshaping how guests engage with the front office. Mobile check-ins, digital room keys, and QR-based service access have introduced a more autonomous and efficient guest journey. These innovations not only address evolving expectations around convenience and safety but also allow for a more streamlined and responsive service model.

Environmentally Sustainable Practices

Sustainability is now firmly embedded in front office operations, driven by a conscious shift towards paperless processes, digital pre-check-in, and mobile-enabled room access. These initiatives reduce reliance on physical documentation and plastic key cards, while enhancing efficiency and ease of use for guests.

Vineet Kumar, Rooms Division Manager, Hilton Bangalore Embassy Golflinks

"The Front Office has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past decade. What was once primarily a functional space for check-ins and administrative processes, has evolved into a strategic touchpoint that shapes the guest's first and lasting impression of the hotel.

As I handle the Rooms Division and Front Office, technology has played a crucial role in today's hospitality landscape. Integrated Property Management Systems, mobile check-in capabilities, and digital pre-arrival engagement allow much of the operational process to be completed seamlessly before the guest even steps into the lobby.

At our property, these digital tools help us streamline arrival formalities while simultaneously allowing our teams to focus on what truly defines luxury hospitality—anticipating guest needs, recognizing preferences, and delivering highly personalized service. In many ways, technology has not replaced the human element; it has elevated it by giving our teams the time and insight to engage more meaningfully with guests."

The Future of The Front Office

"Hospitality is entering a new era, one where artificial intelligence, predictive analytics, and hyper-personalisation are sharpening our ability to serve with greater intention. At a destination such



"The role of the Front Office professional will continue to evolve—from performing transactional tasks to becoming immersive Experiential curators who build relationships and craft memorable moments for guests"

**- Vineet Kumar
Rooms Division Manager, Hilton
Bangalore Embassy Golflinks**

as ours, where the experience is deeply rooted in place and culture, this evolution feels both timely and meaningful," says Gopalakrishnan Jothi.

"The future of the Front Office will not be defined by visibility, but by subtlety - where processes become almost invisible, yet their impact is deeply felt," opines Subhashish Gupta. "It will be an environment where efficiency is no longer showcased, but seamlessly experienced; where every interaction flows effortlessly, guided by intelligence that works quietly in

the background."

He further adds, "Technology will play a pivotal role in shaping this transformation. It will drive efficiency with precision, enable personalization at an unprecedented scale, and ensure a level of consistency and responsiveness that modern travelers have come to expect."

"Yet, the true essence of hospitality will not reside in technology alone," cautions Gupta. "The defining element will continue to be human connection- genuine, intuitive, and empathetic. In a world increasingly driven by automation, it is the warmth of a smile, the understanding of an unspoken need, and the ability to create a moment of comfort or delight that will set exceptional Front Offices apart."

Vineet Kumar, emphasizes on the balance factor when he says, "Ultimately, the future of the Front Office lies in achieving the perfect balance between innovation and authenticity. While technology will continue to enhance efficiency and personalization, it is the genuine warmth of human hospitality that will remain the defining hallmark of exceptional guest experiences."

To Conclude

In the words of Gopalakrishnan Jothi, "The front office professional of tomorrow will need to be as fluent with data as they are with people. The role is evolving from coordination to curation, reading insights, anticipating needs, and delivering moments that feel personal and considered.

That said, no technology will replicate what a well-trained, emotionally intelligent hospitality professional brings to a guest interaction. The warmth of a destination, its culture, and its people remain irreplaceable."

The future belongs to those who honour this truth: using technology to elevate the human connection, never to substitute it.

Design too will play a crucial role. As the hotel industry continues to evolve, we can anticipate to see more innovations that blend technology with design. The focus will be on creating spaces that not only look chic and elegant but also work in tandem to enhance the team's work and guest experience. ■



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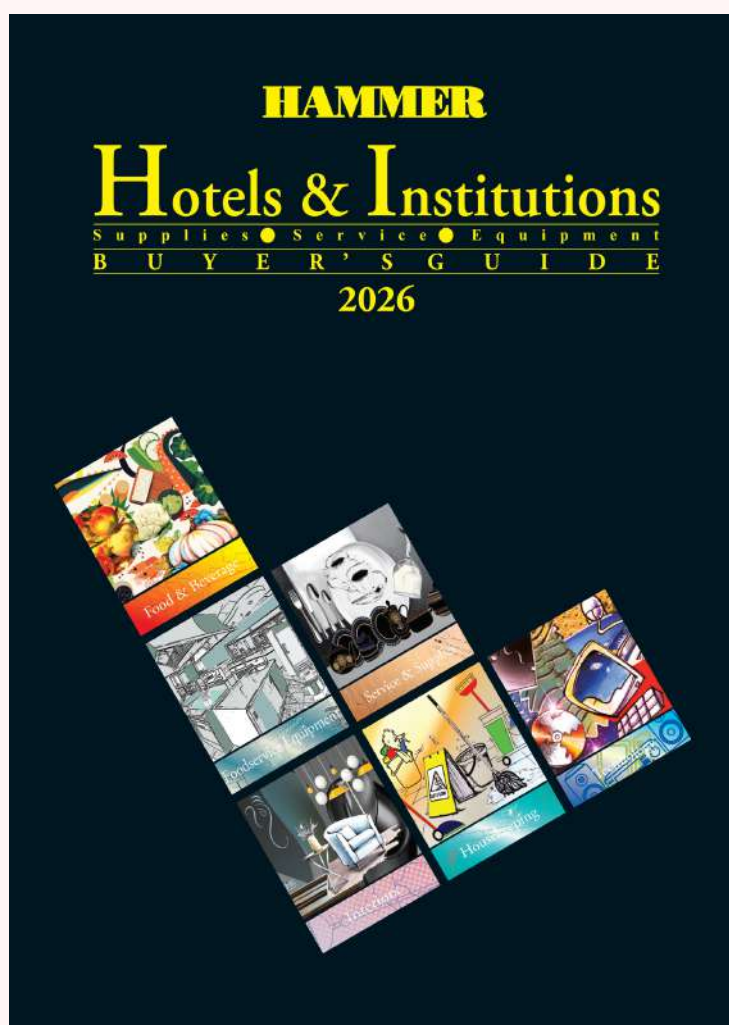
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Is AI the Latest Travel Planner on the Block

AI-powered travel plans reduce stress and save time albeit human touch lingers

By Gita Hari

Travelers are using AI tools to refine itineraries, stays and experiences rather than plan from scratch. From those bitten by wanderlust to casual, everyone takes their travel plans seriously by consulting various sources like experts, agents, friends. Before chalking out the travel arrangements, a majority of us, apart from connecting with professional tour operators, make it a point to skim over travel articles, social media posts, and influencer blogs. Still there is something missing. What you have ultimately got is a whole lot of personal views instead of proper insight which aligns with your preferences, budget, or accessibility. Here steps in man's most transformative technology - Artificial Intelligence (AI) - Google Gemini, ChatGPT, Claude, DeepSeek, and the rest, to ensure you gain a better understanding and visualise the picture of your dream holiday.

At the outset, the exciting and positive aspect is the advantage to feel free to oscillate with AI tools, refining and escalating your itineraries and requirements. It is important to understand the most looked-for feature of AI in travel is logistics. It equips you to accomplish your ideal vacation in the subsequent legs of your travel agenda.

AI Apps as Counsellor

Dedicated travelers advise Gemini for generating bespoke journeys. Recently, a group of 12 globe-trotting millennials headed off to explore Rishikesh-Haridwar and their feedback avers, "We booked flights, hotels based on Gemini recommendations and it also gave precise, live information regarding routes, hotel locations, and rates. Due to its embedded system linkage with Google Maps, we found Gemini to be a robust AI assistant app for creating travel itineraries, one step at

a time. Its mechanism also includes tips on hotel ratings, local dining destinations, food ratings and operating hours which facilitated our trip."

AI apps come in handy as a real-time, interactive travel buddy. They provide regional picks, spearhead logistics, and refine plans with rest days, hidden gems, the best time to visit to minimise traffic or crowding, in accordance with weather or crowds. The engaging feature of ideating travel plans with ChatGPT is you can discover and compare potential properties based on a range of amenities. For instance, if the hotel or resort is pet-friendly, senior citizen supportive, has butler service, offers fine-dine gourmet cuisine and/or simple and home-style meals. It also offers options on best locations, hotel views, proximity to beach, CBD and helps compare rates, nearby sights, travel updates like safety alerts, Government warnings, pointers, and other related information. DeepSeek is known for its organised and detailed target planner, customised day-to-day schedules and for being an interactive travel companion.

Are you waiting for a price-drop for hospitality rates? "Look no further than Grok,"



Ravi Rai

says international student and traveler-on-a-budget, Mark Gibbens, adding further, “it not only identifies flight rate drops but also hospitality discounted tariff, nightly rate slump, bargains, and recommendations for multiple trips. Since I am an adventure freak, it even helped me with the availability of specific activities at promotional rates.”

If it’s an itemised list of costs for every exploration in an itinerary, and save the journeying preferences, then Claude can be credited for its excellent results. All-inclusive logistics like packing check-list (kids’ stuff etc), climate monitor, local transport, travel hacks, besides info on restaurants where reservations in advance is mandatory, are accessible. According to Chinmaya Natarajan, a Digital Business Manager, who consults Gemini or Claude, “We used AI when planning our Bali trip. We asked it to create an x-day itinerary, include slow days, less frequented places and a logistically efficient travel plan. AI is helpful but one needs to keep asking it questions from varied angles to get the full picture. It can give lots of info but the final optimisation is best done with personal preferences in mind, which I would rather not share too much with AI.”

How Hotels Reclaim their Slot

Despite the advent of AI, hotels have found ways to take back the reins and regain momentum by turning inquiries into direct bookings. Most guests visit the property’s website with queries. AI Chatbot helps with answers and proactively reaches out with new promotions, discounts, availability of rooms, or loyalty programs if incorporated by the hotel. AI’s virtual assistants aim to offer a human touch while engaging in conversations with the outcome of higher customer satisfaction and scalability. The hospitality sector leverages these to gain guest trust and repeat clientele.

While AI tools can guide you with unlimited information, the key is communication – word your questions in a specific manner to get accurate answers, suggests Chinmaya. Instead of generic queries like “How to have an ideal vacation” ask “Suggest a beach escapade in Chennai or hotels that are eco-conscious in Goa”.

“With folks keen to experience new vistas and offbeat destinations with thrilling activities



Vijay Chandran

tossed in, their go-to consultant is AI. It helps them check flight fares, accommodations in keeping with their budget, and more prior to the actual booking of their cherished expeditions,” notes destinations expert Aditya Gupta, founder AN Traveller, adding, “With short attention span in today’s times, AI-powered bookings are preferred for their faster and competent results.”

The evolution of travel planning has entered a new era, as industry stalwarts observe, one where artificial intelligence is not replacing human expertise but enhancing it. With the growing use of AI tools travelers today are no longer building itineraries from scratch. Instead, they are arriving with well-researched preferences, using AI to refine their journeys before they even step into a hotel.

AI and Human Service – a Winning Combo

Guests today are not just asking “what can I



Aditya Gupta

do?”—they are asking “how can this be made more meaningful?”

“AI enables them to build a foundation, but it is the hotel’s role to elevate that into something truly memorable. Whether it is a serene sunrise experience by the ghats of Pushkar, a curated wellness journey, or access to authentic local culture, the difference lies in personalization and execution,” emphasises Vijay Chandran – General Manager, The Westin Pushkar Resort & Spa. Travelers are more informed, more curious, and increasingly intentional about how they spend their time.

Ravi Rai – General Manager, The Orchid Hotel Mumbai, observes, “AI has enabled guests to consider all options and assess opportunities. They now have the choice to compare experiences even before they venture, letting them exercise their preferences. At Orchid Hotel we are progressively incorporating AI to speed up, to surpass targets with shifting demands and redefining expectations but communication and personalisation still hold good.”

As travellers continue to seek deeper, more bespoke activities, the role of hospitality will only become more significant. The true opportunity lies in embracing this shift—where technology enhances the journey, and human connection defines it. “At our resort, we see guests engaging deeply with our teams to fine-tune their plans—seeking recommendations that go beyond algorithms. This reinforces a key truth: while AI can suggest, it is people who truly curate. The future of travel lies not in choosing between AI and human service, but in combining the strengths of both. AI brings efficiency and insight; hotels bring authenticity and emotion,” says Vijay Chandran.

Despite the rise of AI, guests continue to rely on hotel teams for what technology cannot replicate—intuition, empathy, and local expertise. Concierge and experience teams today play a more refined role, transforming pre-planned ideas into seamless, immersive experiences. “At our resort, we see guests engaging deeply with our teams to fine-tune their plans—seeking recommendations that go beyond algorithms. This reinforces a key truth: while AI can suggest, it is people who truly curate,” signs off Vijay Chandran. ■

Pic Courtesy: Aravali Marriott Hotel Resort and Spa



Paw-some Stays

Inside India's growing pet-friendly future in hospitality

By Nikita Madan

Pet-friendly travel in India has evolved from being a niche offering to an essential part of the hospitality experience. For many travellers today, pets are not just companions, they are family. Leaving them behind while going on holiday no longer feels like an option. Instead, people are actively seeking out accommodations that welcome their furry companions with the same warmth and comfort extended to human guests. This shift has led to a transformation in how hotels approach pet-friendly stays. It is no longer enough to simply "allow furry companions." True pet-friendly hospitality is about creating an environment where pets are thoughtfully considered at every stage of the guest experience. From check-in to check-out, the focus is on ensuring that both the traveller and their adorable fur balls feel equally at ease.

At the heart of this experience is a sense of inclusion. When guests arrive at a pet-friendly hotel, the welcome often extends beyond a standard greeting. Some properties provide small gestures like treats, water bowls, or pet kits that immediately signal that pets are valued guests. These details, though simple, play an important role in making their furry companions feel

comfortable in a new environment, while also putting owners at ease.

Pet Amenities

To maintain balance and ensure a smooth experience for all guests, it is best to follow

clearly defined pet policies. These guidelines help set expectations and avoid confusion during the stay. Most properties limit the number of pets allowed per room, usually permitting one or two pets. There may also be restrictions based on size or breed, with some hotels accommodating only small to medium-sized pets, while others take a more inclusive approach.

Inside the room, the experience can be carefully curated to replicate a sense of familiarity for pets. Comfortable bedding, food and water bowls and toys can be provided to help pets settle in quickly. Specialised pet menus, featuring simple, nutritious meals tailored to their dietary needs, can also be offered. These thoughtful touches ensure that fur babies do not feel out of place, even in an unfamiliar setting.

Himadri Ray, General Manager, the Yellow House IHCL SeleQtions, Anjuna says, "We offer curated pet menus with nutritious and vet-conscious meal options. Chefs look forward to meeting the pet owners to understand the kind of meal their pets are used to and serve accordingly."

Manuj Ralhan, General Manager, Novotel Jaipur asserts, "Pets are treated to specially



"At The Yellow House, we extend our signature hospitality to pets through thoughtfully curated amenities."

Himadri Ray

**General Manager, the Yellow House
IHCL SeleQtions, Anjuna**



“Pets traveling with guests are treated as small children who need extra attention.”

Nitesh Kapur
Director of Rooms, Aravali
Marriott Hotel Resort and Spa

.....
curated vegetarian and non-vegetarian meal options designed with care. Available through in-room dining, these offerings allow pets to enjoy meals comfortably alongside their owners. This thoughtful inclusion transforms the stay into a shared experience, ensuring pets receive the same attention and hospitality as their human companions.”

Beyond the room, dedicated pet-friendly spaces are becoming a key feature of many hotels. Open lawns, walking paths and enclosed play areas provide pets with the freedom to move, explore and expend energy. For owners, these spaces offer peace of mind, knowing their pets can enjoy the outdoors in a secure environment.

Grooming services and basic care options may also be offered, ensuring that pets remain comfortable throughout the trip. The presence of trained staff who are comfortable handling animals will further enhance the overall experience, creating a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere. 24/7 vet contact or on-call vets service can be provided. Having tie-ups with Veterinary hospitals for emergencies will make the pet owners secure about staying at your hotel.

Pearl Sanga, Director, Della Group says, “As one of the first pet-friendly luxury resorts in India, Della Resorts and Adventure believes that guests shouldn’t have to leave their pets behind to enjoy a great getaway. Our resort is home to 33 dogs, and that naturally

shapes the way we think about hospitality for pets. Everything we do, from having a 24-hour vet on call, to dedicated caretakers, to thoughtfully planned diets, comes from real, hands-on experience of caring for animals every single day. For us, being pet-friendly isn’t an add-on, it’s a part of how we think about hospitality.

The idea is simple: both pets and their owners should feel comfortable, welcome and completely at ease from the moment they arrive. We also offer thoughtful touches like pet bowls, bedding and feeding arrangements on request and several outdoor and dining spaces where pets can comfortably be part of the experience.

Beyond that, our team is always around to help, whether it’s with walks, basic care or anything specific a guest might need. And for those looking for extra support, we do have dedicated care facilities, along with access to veterinary guidance and personalised dietary assistance. Overall, the idea is to keep things simple, comfortable and stress-free, so both pets and their owners can truly relax and enjoy their time with us.”

Increased Revenue

Welcoming pets into your hotel goes beyond simply filling more rooms, it opens up multiple avenues for additional revenue through thoughtfully designed pet-friendly offerings. Charging a nightly pet fee, can be complemented by refundable security deposits to cover potential damages. Beyond this, properties can upsell specialised amenities such as in-room dog beds, food bowls and pet-friendly room service, enhancing both guest experience and revenue. You can further capitalise on this segment by offering



Pic Courtesy: Della Resorts and Adventure



“Pets are not treated differently — they’re simply part of the overall guest experience.”

Pearl Sanga
Director, Della Group

.....
pet grooming or spa services, either in-house or through partnerships with local providers, encouraging longer and more comfortable stays for pet owners. In fact, the assurance of pet-friendly accommodations often leads guests, especially long-term travellers and business professionals to extend their trips.

Pearl Sanga reveals, “At Della Resorts and Adventure, we didn’t want pet-friendly rooms to feel like a compromise, they still reflect the same design-led, luxury aesthetic. At the same time, we’ve made sure the spaces are practical. Rooms are more spacious, making it easier for pets to move around, and we’ve used materials that are durable and easy to maintain without taking away from the look and feel.”

Having a pet-friendly hotel is all about creating a great experience for your guests. A pet-friendly hotel inspires pet owners to tell the pet-parent community about their stay and generate referrals. Having your hotel recognised as a good place for pets will inspire pet owners to share their experience with friends, family and online review sites. After all, pets are family, and we want them to have the very best money can buy. If your hotel is pet-friendly, be sure your customers know this by displaying pet-centric information and your policy prominently on your website.

Manuj Ralhan continues, “ Pet-friendly services build emotional connections that translate into loyalty. Guests are more likely to extend stays, choose premium rooms, and return when their pets are welcomed.



“At our hotel, pets are welcomed with the same warmth as their owners.”

Manuj Ralhan
General Manager, Novotel Jaipur

Additional revenue opportunities include pet fees, curated menus, and accessory rentals. Over time, this offering strengthens brand positioning and encourages repeat visits through positive word-of-mouth.”

Boosts Guest Loyalty

In an industry driven by repeat business and word-of-mouth referrals, catering to pet owners is a powerful way to build lasting guest loyalty. By creating a genuinely welcoming experience for both pets and their owners, hotels can foster strong emotional connections with their guests. Thoughtful



touches such as remembering a pet’s name, preferences or offering a welcome treat or personalised tag can significantly enhance brand affinity and leave a lasting impression. A large majority of pet owners tend to remain loyal to pet-friendly hotels, as a stress-free and accommodating environment encourages repeat bookings. Satisfied guests are also more likely to share positive online reviews and recommend the property to fellow travellers, often amplifying their experiences through social media by posting photos of their pets in new surroundings.

Amit Sangwan, General Manager, Novotel Goa Resort and Spa asserts, “Pet-friendly offerings strengthen guest loyalty by addressing the emotional need to travel with pets. This encourages longer stays, repeat visits, and positive word-of-mouth. Additionally, it unlocks ancillary revenue through specialized services and premium experiences. We are currently offering an introductory stay package valid until 30th September 2026 for guests travelling with pets.”

This not only boosts organic visibility but also attracts new potential guests. Ultimately, a well-executed pet-friendly policy goes beyond increasing occupancy; it helps cultivate a sense of community and belonging among pet owners, strengthening long-term customer relationships.

Hygiene & Operations

Ensuring that rooms and common areas remain clean and allergen-free is essential in a dog-friendly hotel. Regular deep cleaning is essential to maintain hygiene standards. This includes thorough vacuuming, steam cleaning carpets and sanitising surfaces to remove pet hair and odours. It’s crucial to use cleaning agents that are effective yet safe for pets to prevent adverse reactions. Implementing air purification systems can help reduce airborne allergens, ensuring a comfortable environment for all guests.

Nitesh Kapur, Director of Rooms, Aravali Marriott Hotel Resort and spa, stated, “Whenever a guest with a pet checks in a special door knob is given to the guest which indicates to the staff that there is a pet in the room. Additionally post check out the room is deep cleaned & sanitised thoroughly. Each pet bed is drycleaned post check out as pets are extremely sensitive towards the smell of



“We offer a curated pet menu featuring customisable DIY bowls, bone broth, veggie stews, healthy shakes, and peanut butter cookies, among others.”

Amit Sangwan
General Manager, Novotel Goa Resort and Spa

another pet.”

Amit Sangwan remarked, “We follow stringent hygiene protocols, including deep cleaning, eco-friendly products and thorough sanitisation after each stay. Clear SOPs ensure separation of pet-friendly inventory, regular inspections and strict adherence to safety standards, enabling a balanced and comfortable environment for all guests.”

Catering to both guests with and without pets necessitates thoughtful space allocation and clear communication of policies. Allocating specific rooms or floors for guests with fur babies helps manage interactions and ensures that guests without pets have separate spaces.

Conclusion

More than ever, travellers are seeking accommodations that welcome their four-legged companions, and leading hotels are scaling up to the challenge. Even railways and airways (like Air India and Akasa Air) are stepping up to the popular demand by allowing pet travel in the cabin or the first class in case of the railways.

By embracing the pet-friendly movement, these properties aren’t just meeting demands, they’re creating unforgettable experiences that set them apart.

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“I am deeply passionate about hospitality and truly driven by this profession”

Yatender Negi, General Manager, V Sarovar Portico MI Road, Jaipur

By Sharmila Chand



With over 35 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Yatender Negi is a respected leader known for operational excellence and service innovation.

Currently serving as General Manager of V Sarovar Portico MI Road Jaipur, he also holds the position of Director on the Board of Vera Hotels Pvt. Ltd., the owning company of prominent hotels in Jaipur and Agra.

During his career, he has been associated with leading hotel brands including ITC Hotels, Holiday Inn, Radisson Hotel Group, Ramada, Clarks Amer, Rajasthali Resort & Spa.

His contribution to hospitality has earned him several prestigious recognitions, including the Rajasthan Gaurav Award, Lifetime Achievement Award (Disha Care London) and the Gyan Yogi Award, and more.

In an exclusive interview, he tells us about his journey, work philosophy and more.....

What is the USP of your property?

At V Sarovar Portico MI Road Jaipur, our uniqueness lies in three key aspects:

Heritage Meets Modern Luxury:

The property blends the charm of Jaipur's royal heritage with modern hospitality standards.

Prime Location:

Located on Jaipur's iconic MI Road, the hotel offers excellent connectivity to major tourist attractions, shopping areas, and business districts.

Versatile Banquet & Event Spaces:

Elegant indoor halls with state-of-the-art facilities and a spacious open courtyard.

What inspired you to join hospitality?

My journey in hospitality spans over three decades. Initially, I was drawn by the glamour of the hotel industry, but over time, what truly inspired me was the opportunity to interact with people from diverse cultures and create memorable guest experiences.

The industry has given me immense learning and helped me grow from operational roles to leadership positions. In many ways, I believe I was meant for hospitality & it is not just my profession, but a part of who I am.

One key learning from your hospitality journey?

The biggest lesson I have learned is that true hospitality lies in genuine care for guests. Infrastructure and facilities are important, but it is the warmth of service

and human connection that truly defines a memorable stay.

What do you enjoy most about leading the hotel?

This is actually my favourite question. I am deeply passionate about hospitality. For me, it is not just a job, but something I genuinely love doing every single day.

What I enjoy most is interacting with people, both guests and my team. While creating memorable guest experiences is always rewarding, what gives me even greater satisfaction is coaching, training, and motivating my team members. I strongly believe in nurturing talent and helping individuals grow into confident professionals and future leaders.

Seeing my team evolve, succeed, and take on bigger responsibilities gives me immense pride. In many ways, building people and shaping their future is just as fulfilling as delighting our guests.

What has been the most rewarding moment in your career?

While I have been fortunate to receive many recognitions during my journey, one moment that remains truly special to me was when I was invited as a Guest of Honour by the same organization where I had started my career.

I addressed & motivated the team who were once my colleagues. Sitting on the stage and speaking to them was a very humbling experience. It made me reflect on how far the journey had come, from working alongside

the team to being in a position to guide and inspire them.

It was not a moment of achievement alone, but one of gratitude and quiet pride. That experience will always remain very close to my heart.

Your guiding philosophy at work?

Service with sincerity, leadership with humility, continuous improvement & above all, fall in love with your product."

When passion meets sincerity and humility, it creates experiences that guests remember and teams take pride in.

Advice for youngsters entering hospitality?

Hospitality is a dynamic and highly rewarding field. My advice to youngsters is to be passionate about your work, stay committed, and keep learning at every stage of your career.

Always maintain a positive service attitude & most importantly, learn to put yourself in the guest's shoes, this is the true essence of hospitality.

How do you define yourself?

A dynamic hospitality leader with over three decades of experience, who believes in creating exceptional guest experiences, and delivering consistent results.

I am deeply passionate about my profession, and I take pride in mentoring teams, shaping future leaders, and contributing meaningfully to the growth of the industry.



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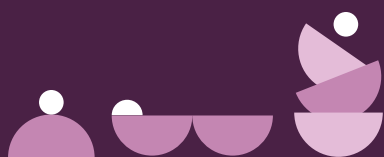
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