



ENGAGE

November - December 2021 | Volume 1 | Issue 6



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From the President's Desk



PUNEET CHHATWAL
President, Hotel Association of India
MD & CEO, The Indian Hotels Company Limited

As we put together the last edition of HAI Engage for 2021, we mark not just the end of another year but also celebrate 25 years of the Hotel Association of India (HAI). Our history, as the apex organization of the Indian hospitality industry, mirrors the evolution of India's travel and hospitality sector and we can be proud of its journey and achievements over the years.

From when it was first established in 1996 to date, HAI has borne witness to many a momentous occasion which has impacted the course of the industry. Be it policy changes such as adopting the single-tariff system and the granting of "industry status" by state governments like Maharashtra, Karnataka etc, or initiatives such as the establishment of the Tourism Export Promotion Council (TEPC), promoting public-private partnerships (PPP), MOUs with various nations to promote bilateral ties in tourism and more, HAI has always been at the forefront of change and growth for the industry as a whole. HAI has made sure that the industry's needs are addressed at the topmost fora of the country and its relevance of having a multiplier effect on the economy both in terms of GDP growth and employment is well established.

However, this journey has not been without its own set of challenges. The most recent being the one that has marked the beginning of the new decade, which started off with a bang, only to be faced with one of the biggest global crises in recent years. The pandemic took the world by storm, bringing lives and livelihoods to a halt, impacting the travel and hospitality industry significantly. And yet, in spite of the many trials and tribulations, the industry displayed a spirit of unwavering resilience. Resilience that saw us overcome the many hurdles and emerge stronger. Resilience, which resulted in a faster resurgence in the aftermath of the second wave of the pandemic.

That the industry put forth a united front through the darkest of times, driven by a sense of purpose that saw all stakeholders, big and small, lend a helping hand towards the community while supporting the country's battle against the pandemic, is especially laudable. This, coupled with agility and innovation saw the hospitality sector come up with creative solutions that have kept the wheels of business turning. National initiatives such as 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' and 'Dekho Apna Desh' further fuelled a strong sense of pride in all that our country has to offer, a pride that was reflected in customers too. Not only did the pandemic provide an unexpected boom to domestic tourism, it in fact, threw light on the many hidden destinations and treasures that India has to offer travellers, leading Indian travellers to discover an all-new India in this new age of travel.

During these times the needs of customers became dynamic, with safety and hygiene being key consideration points for travel. Brand trust emerged as a vital element, and industry players hastened to meet these evolving requirements rapidly. Technology became one of the currencies of these new times – from zero-touch check-in and check-out, digital invoicing, online payment options and QR codes to digital menus. The utilization of technological interventions has accelerated in the recent months.

As we look forward to a post-pandemic era, it is imperative that we reflect upon the lessons learnt while we rethink our businesses and try to build upon a more inclusive and sustainable future for the travel and hospitality industry. We are already moving in the right direction, with brands becoming more conscious than ever before of their responsibility towards ecological stewardship, diversity, inclusion and continuous skilling of its people.

To conclude, I would like to thank every member of HAI for your relentless support and continuous guidance. Today, HAI stands as a harbinger of change for the industry because of the strength and unity of purpose of all of us together. We look forward to more glorious innings ahead.

Wishing you a very Happy and Prosperous New Year filled with good health, happiness and success! **HAI**

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The capacity to innovate and adapt technology in all spheres of operations, and to provide leadership in sustainability will be the new challenges for Hospitality.



HOTEL ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

Copyright@Hotel Association of India, New Delhi
Volume 1, Issue 6, November-December 2021
Edited, Printed and Published by
Hotel Association of India
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PRINTED AT
Thomson Press (India) Limited
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HAI asks Delhi Government to keep “Classified” Hotels out of the purview of the New Excise Policy

New Delhi, 3 December 2021: Hotel Association of India (HAI), the apex body of the Indian hospitality sector, has appealed to the Delhi government to keep hotels classified in the approved categories of the Ministry of Tourism (GoI), outside the purview of the New Excise Policy. While the new policy envisions “reforms” as the backbone to augment revenues for the Government and considers requirements of a modern, progressive city; aspects related to licenses for banquet halls in hotels need to be revisited for the sector to survive and thrive especially in the backdrop of the pandemic. HAI has made recommendations to Shri Arava Gopi Krishna, Delhi Excise Commissioner and Shri Manish Sisodia, Deputy Chief Minister of Delhi to address challenges faced by the industry as a result of flaws in the New Excise Policy.

Calling for the immediate deferment in the rollout of the New Excise Policy, **Shri MP Bezbaruah, Secretary General, Hotel Association of India** said, “Several clauses in the New Excise Policy go against the very basis of ease of

doing business by Hotels. For instance, one of the clauses in the new excise policy makes hotels liable for acts of a third party by making them responsible and penalizing them for any misrepresentation of facts by the customer. This will have an adverse impact on hotels’ liquor sales and create operational difficulties for hotels. Similarly, there is a differing view on the timings for service of liquor. While license conditions permit service throughout the day, permissions differ under the licensing conditions applicable as per permissions of the Delhi Police. The policy lacks clarity and needs to be reviewed before being implemented fully. Engagement with relevant industry players before implementing the policy will go a long way in creating a mutually beneficial framework in Delhi NCR.”

Presently, Delhi Police permissions under the DCP Licensing conditions allow restaurants to remain open till 1 am only. The non-clarity has ensured that State Excise Officials maintain the status quo on this issue for the time being. HAI, in its letter to the Delhi Excise

Commissioner and the State Government highlighted that in the absence of a ‘specific’ license, hotels are unable to serve, or own liquor stored in L-15/L-16 licensed premises in banquets.

The liquor procured under the new L-38 License by the host will be handed over to the hotel only on the date of the function. “Moreover, the terms and conditions of the existing L-16 license have not been modified from which it can be inferred that the hotel can still serve liquor from L16 in the banquets on the basis of L-38 License”, **Bezbaruah added.**

Moreover, for hotel hosted functions too, hotels will be required to procure liquor under L-38 and will not be able to hold left over stocks back in the premises. Further, in order to store leftover stocks, guests/hotel representatives (for internal functions) are required to apply for L-30 license within the permissible storage limit within 7 days of an event. HAI has also called for a uniform policy for charging corkage/ service facilities apart from seeking implementation of a policy to charge license fee in the absence of fixed per event charge which can be levied to customers. **HAI**

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HAI submits pre-budget recommendations for FY 2022-23 on direct taxes, custom & excise and policy & other key issues

The Hotel Association of India (HAI), the apex body of the Indian Hospitality Industry, has submitted its suggestions for the consideration by the Government in the Union Budget of 2022-23. The delegation included Ms. Charulata Sukhija, Deputy Secretary General, HAI; Mr. R Shankar, Head- Corporate Affairs, EIH Ltd. (The Oberoi Group of Hotels) & Member, HAI Executive Committee; Mr. Mohit Gupta, Vice President (Finance), IHCL (Taj Group of Hotels) and Mr. Milind Wadekar, Chief Finance Officer, Chalet Hotels Ltd. Here are the key Pre-Budget recommendations:



DIRECT TAXES

- a) Higher depreciation rate to Hotel Buildings from 10% to 35%
- b) Section 37: Tax Treatment of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Expenditure
- c) Leave Travel Allowance (LTA) Modification of rule
- d) Section 72- Setoff of Business losses

CUSTOMS EXCISE

- a) Bring petroleum products and alcohol under GST
- b) Increase SEIS rate of rewards

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) Infrastructure Status
- b) Financial Assistance: One-time financial assistance, Waiver of property tax, deferment of GST
- c) Foreign Policy - Service Exports from India Scheme - (SEIS) 2019-20 & Beyond
- d) Faster resolution of NCLT matters
- e) Subsidised Power Tariffs



Complete plan to sell Ashok Hotel is ready, the government will give it to the private sector on a 60-years contract

The Central Government has prepared a complete plan to sell the historic Ashok Hotel. The government is working on a plan to give this hotel to the private sector on a 60- years contract as part of its ambitious Asset Monetization programme. Along with this, the govt. will also give a land parcel in the 21.5-acre complex for one more

hotel or serviced apartment and other development works.

ITC hotels and CII to provide training in the field of International hospitality

Industry unit CII and ITC Hotels of the country collaborated to develop skills in the field of hospitality. For this, Swiss training partner Ecole Hotelier EHL (Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne) will extend support. A company spokes-



person said that EHL's 12 Macrinas will offer Vocational Educational and Training (VET) Professional Diploma Program in ITC hotels namely ITC Maurya (New Delhi), ITC Shonar and ITC Royal Bengal (Kolkata), ITC Maratha (Mumbai) and ITC Grand Chola (Chennai).



As international flight ban continues, Travel agents seek Rebates & Grants

Travel agencies have sought immediate monetary relief, tax rebates and moratoriums from the government to survive a "huge depression" in the industry, as scheduled international flights remain suspended in the country.

FHRAI urges govt. to include hotel tourism sector in NIP

Hospitality industry body FHRAI has asked the Finance Ministry to include hotels and tourism related sectors in the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) so as to enable the COVID-19 hit sector to avail of funds with extended repayment periods at a low rate of interest.



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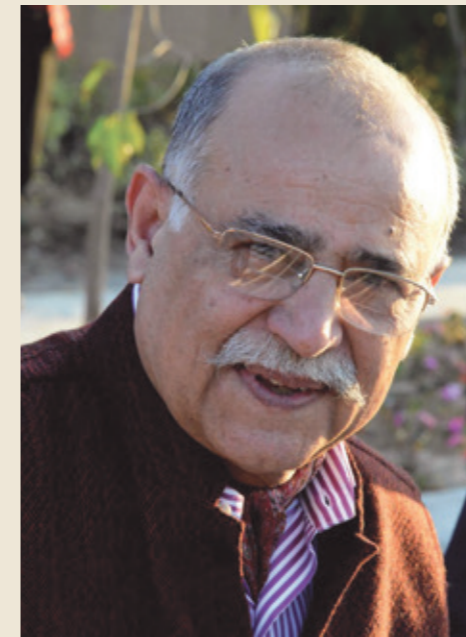
Inspire people through our foods and beverages brands to make choices that create more smiles for them and the planet.



Flipping Through Down The Years

Stalwarts of the Industry and leading visionaries got together in 1996 to form HAI, and work out its functions and governance. There was to be no single President for life. In an Exclusive, some past presidents talk to HAI ENGAGE on the journey of HAI, the milestones achieved, and the challenges ahead.

L TO R: LALIT SURI, RAYMOND N BICKSON, NAKUL ANAND, PRIYA PAUL, MAJOR SSH REHMAN & VIKRAM OBEROI



Major S. S.H. REHMAN,
president, HAI
 Dec 1996 – Nov 2001

“We need to look at future opportunities closely”

Doyen of the industry, the pioneering visionary who turned ITC Hotels from a three-property enterprise to one of the country’s most professionally managed corporate houses, that now has over 100 properties in 70 locations, HABIB REHMAN has been one of the leading lights in Hospitality’s journey. He is the author of three books, a memoir, *Borders To Boardroom*, on his canine companion, *A Home for Gori*, and the very special, *Kebabs Journeys to Bukhara*. The founding president of HAI shares valuable insights on the birth of a special body for Hotels, the unique issues facing the industry, a vision of urban planning, and the huge possibilities ahead. Excerpts:

Tell us about the beginnings...

There was a strongly felt need for a fillip to an organized way of tourism in co-ordination with key stakeholders, in this case--Hotels and travel agents.

At that time there were two bodies involved, the Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Association of India (FHRAI), and the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI). They also had cross-membership, helmed by known industry figures like Ram Prasad, Inder Sharma, Ajit Kerkar and others. After the economic reforms of 1991-92, the economy opened and the winds of change drew further focus on tourism, for new monies to come in, to attract foreign exchange, and so on. This move gave impetus to the growth of hotels and restaurants. This development triggered much more enhanced investments in hotels and mushrooming of restaurants that were all over. The effect was that FHRAI became a body where restaurants were joining fast, because their numbers were growing overwhelmingly. The hotel representation was getting relatively lesser, based on the organizational representative structure of the body, and somehow that was the natural evolution of a body like HAI. The concerns of hotels and restaurants are different in some significant areas. The financial investment and management demands involved in hotels and restaurants are in many ways different in scale, with immobility, of the asset.

All these issues began to surface as a concern. At the same time, noise was continuing that hotels were elitist, and thus needed a makeover in image for the tasks at hand. Getting help from the government in this scenario was becoming that much more laboured, and it was a constant engagement at that time, caught between the socialist mindset overhang and seen as a patronizing elitist culture.

Another issue was the depreciating value of the rupee against the dollar--the gap was widening rapidly. Also, there was the issue of dual tariff, that created enormous stress among consumers/ guests/corporations, many trade bodies and countries. There was concurrently the increasing requirement of forex to infuse in the state-of-the-art equipment ancillaries in this globalized industry with dynamic needs. Thus came the urgent need for the industry to push the critical EPCG (Export Promotion Capital Goods) scheme, an incentive scheme to meet forex requirements.

Amidst all this, there was a growing

“The Ayodhya story, including the Ram Mandir, may be told theatrically, taking inspiration from the Ramayana, a powerful heritage...building upon and nurturing what is already there”

demand from all quarters to enhance forex, through tourism and hotels were not seen in step with the times.

So, to address the multiple existing and emerging concerns, the vital needs of the hotel industry (and the related economy, to service all stakeholders involved in an efficient manner), it was felt to better separate and have a concerted body to address the needs of the hospitality. And that’s how HAI came into being, on December 4, 1996. It represents the entire cross-section of the hotel industry, ranging from small, medium and large hotels to exclusive standalone hotels and the major hotel groups. Most of the raging concerns have been accomplished by successors very effectively over the years.

What special insights would you like to share?

There were doyens of the industry, like Mr PRS Oberoi, Mr Lalit Suri, Mr Krishna Kumar, Ms Priya Paul, Mr Advani, to name a few. It’s also a matter of great satisfaction that HAI is being led by people of much caliber, like Puneet Chhatwal, KB Kachru, MP Bezbaruah, and so on.

In the immediate need for the growth of hotel and tourism, one is incentivization of domestic travel. This is in line with the Prime Minister’s call (made before the pandemic), to visit home destinations. Now, the states with attractive assets that are willing to participate, and offer

subsidies and concessional measures, boarding and lodging relief, LTC and other such associated tax incentives should be on board.

In the mid-term, the whole city of Ayodhya could be developed, enveloping the Ram Mandir, as Ramayana is a powerful chapter in our heritage...the story can be told theatrically, and with sensibilities to nurture, that are already there. Reportedly, Saudi Arabia earns \$12 billion as a pilgrim destination, and \$4 billion come during Hajj alone. Ayodhya development offers immense possibilities, and can attract global interest, and it must be planned and positioned in such a way.

For the long term, there is the upcoming opening of the Jewar Airport, and we can simultaneously create a medical township...think of a 50,000-bed specialty hospitals/spread with all the attendant support elements and structures like medical colleges, nursing schools, faculty, research, housing hostels, a range of hospitality services, together with Film City already being talked about—the potential is huge.

Thus, the NOIDA Expressway may be developed as a destination in itself, like Singapore and Dubai, and therein come manifold opportunities. Some suggestions

include:

- a) Development of Ayodhya ("Ramayana Land" can have potential similar to 'Disney Land')
- b) Development of Medical cities
- c) Development of Film city
- d) Exploring the industrial, commercial, residential potential of NOIDA
- e) Incorporating a UP High Court bench in the development of NOIDA.

Presently we have one High court in Allahabad amidst a population of 24 Crore of Uttar Pradesh state which is more than that of our neighbouring country - Pakistan (22 Crores) and Bangladesh (16 Crores). Hence it is important to accelerate its economic growth and development.

Thus, the entire urban planning could be reimaged.

What are the challenges and opportunities now?

The hotel industry derives business from, and is dependent, upon the larger economic ecosystem. We need to create relative policies to address the needs among different segments of customers, vis-à-vis location, services offered and price-points. This means coordinated land, location and pricing adjustments, adjusted floor space index (FSI), commercial

funding for different range of accommodation. However, market forces are moving towards such adjustments and there is a growing understanding of the role of the hospitality industry in the overall mix of economic activities, recognizing it as a sector with special needs. A hotel is a fixed asset that is not mobile, and so much thought has to be made to the overall planning as well. It is good to remember that hospitality is the first interface for any foreign visitor to the country, and in that sense, it's a great marketer of the country.

Now with automation, artificial intelligence and disruptive technology, the industry, like other sectors, is at an inflection point. The last year-and-a half has shown that the hospital is now moving to the hotel, as people need to feel safe and secure. Technology perhaps will now be showing all critical health parameters in one go; so, as we check-in, with thermal scanning, we'll be able to check heart rate, BP, sugar level, and so on. So, we have to be on top of the game to watch the emerging trends, and take suitable action in time.

The pandemic has dealt a severe blow, but nature also has a survival kit. We shall overcome this... it's another chapter in the evolution cycle, a sort of a spring-cleaning, a great opportunity to Pause and Reset. **HAI**



PRIYA PAUL, president, HAI, Dec 2005 - Nov 2009

“We had to ensure our voice is heard”

Priya Paul, Chairperson, Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels Limited, has been voicing concerns of the industry at various fora. Counted among the top iconic women business leaders of the country, she stands out for her unmatched contribution in Hospitality, ensuring inclusivity, women's rights, equal opportunities, social concerns, business direction, growth, vision and a zeal for perfection that settles only for the best. Excerpts from an interview:

Tell us from the start...

It was an honour for me to be called to be a part of the formation of HAI in December 1996. HAI was being led by stalwarts in the industry, like Mr Oberoi, Mr GautamKhanna, Mr Lalit Suri, and many other leading names. I was relatively young in Hospitality, as I had been in the industry for only six to seven years at that time. Nonetheless, it's been a great experience, the camaraderie was great, and it was so exciting building HAI, ensuring that Hospitality gets its share of voice. We all worked hard, we were able to engage with policymakers, the media, the stakeholders, and create a thorough understanding of the special needs of the industry. For me, it was particularly interesting to be associated with HAI. The real focus has always been to do good work, and we did a lot of work to develop the charter of HAI, and figured out how the new body will work, its governance, and so many other issues, for instance, we wanted to ensure there was no one president for life. The first few years were all about settling in, understanding the problems of big and small players, setting the tone, talking to stakeholders, understanding the challenges, and so on. We did this through various summits, conferences, conversations with media and the government.

We also had to ensure that Hospitality got its due share of consideration in Policy. It's one of the biggest jobs' generator, a vital sector of the economy, contributing to over seven per cent to the GDP of India, with a great multiplier effect on the economy, connected as it is to Tourism, and feeder industries, like transport, railways, aviation, and so on. We had to

create the space, so that our voice is heard, and people could see the full potential and not just see it as an industry catering to the elite.

What milestones during your tenure you would like to mention?

The standout incident that shook the entire nation at that time was the 26/11 attack. The dastardly attack on two of the great, iconic hotels of Mumbai, Taj and Oberoi, was deeply scarring. Following the gruesome killings, HAI formulated the first-ever "Guidelines for Safety Measures in Hotels" based on a study of best international practices, and circulated it to all member hotels, to adopt according to their needs. The HAI Guidelines were issued on 10th December 2008.

There were other landmark events, like in 2005, the annual HAI Directory of Hotels began to be circulated by the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of External Affairs, among foreign travel agents & operators, and opinion makers, through the Government of India's Tourist Offices and Indian Missions abroad. Another promotional-first scored by HAI was creating awareness about World Tourism Day on 27th September. To encourage and facilitate member-hotels

“The 26/11 attack on two of the great, iconic hotels in Mumbai, Taj and Oberoi, was deeply scarring. Following the gruesome killings, HAI formulated the first-ever ‘Guidelines for Safety Measures in Hotels’ based on a study of best international practices”

towards celebrating World Tourism Day, HAI outlined a bouquet of activities to be organized by the hotels.

In 2006, after a prolonged battle of over five years, HAI helped in getting repealed, section 30 of the Punjab Excise Act 1914, an archaic and anti-women provision which barred women from serving in bars and hotels.

For the first time, "tourism-friendly" measures were announced in the Union Budget of 2006-07. These measures were aimed at making India a more affordable destination, fuelling the growth of Hospitality infrastructure, facilitating business re-organization, re-structuring of the Hospitality industry and motivating the State Governments to rationalize tourism tax regimes. The major incentive extended to the Hospitality industry included an exemption of Service Tax in hotels, relating to Conference and Banquets business

HAI also pursued with the Ministry of Commerce, Government of India, for the grant of zero duty import facility to hotels and standalone restaurants. Under the "Served from Indian Scheme", the industry was granted zero duty facility applicable to all hotels including one-star and two-star hotels, for the import of food items and alcoholic beverages, which would make India an affordable destination. In 2007 we organized the 1st HAI Hoteliers' Conclave on "Re-shaping the Hospitality Industry to stay ahead in the fast changing Global Economy." Representatives from India and the SAARC countries participated in the Event.

HAI had been making relentless efforts to persuade the Government of the



Late Mr Lalit Suri, president, HAI, Dec 2001-2005

Born on April 15, 1947, in Rawalpindi, an automobile engineer by qualification, the late Lalit Suri's tryst with Hospitality began when he took over the leadership of Bharat Hotels as CMD, in 1987. He was an entrepreneur, a politician, an MP, an avid art collector, a philanthropist, a respected figure in domestic and international business circles, and known for his vision and dynamism.

In his HAI presidential address, Lalit Suri said it was important to take corrective measures to ensure that the decline in tourist arrivals following the terrorist attacks in US and the war in Afghanistan do not result in the vast infrastructure of hotels getting decimated. Outlining his agenda, Suri stressed the need

to rationalize tax structure in hotels. He said HAI would work on building infrastructure for the industry, and set the pace for construction of 50,000 additional hotel rooms, required to accommodate an estimated 3.5 million tourists, projected in the 10th Plan period. **HAI**



National Capital Territory of Delhi to rationalize the Luxury Tax in hotels in Delhi. A delegation of HAI Executive Committee members met with Sheila Dixit, Chief Minister of NCT of Delhi, on January 23, 2009, and urged her to rationalize the luxury tax. This resulted in the Government of NCT of Delhi issuing a Notification on June 22, 2009, reducing the Luxury Tax from 12.5 percent to 10 percent in hotels.

Also, in 2009, HAI took the lead voluntarily on "Hunar se Rozgar", before it was made mandatory by the Ministry.

What are the challenges now?

We represent all players together--big or small. The industry has gone through a rough time, and it is heart-warming to see the synergies now. Even Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has mentioned that Hospitality has been one of the worst hit industries in the pandemic. For the first time now, people understand and appreciate the importance of Hospitality in the economy. It is not just about hotels, or about luxury, it's about airline passengers, it's about transport movements, it's about employment generation, about

craftspeople and local talent, local artisans and livelihoods--it's about business that impacts us all. Hospitality is intricately woven with the health of the economy. To me this awareness among people is a big zone of opportunity. We have to ensure more and more people come back to Hospitality, for work, for leisure, for meetings, wedding and so on. And, it's not just about the big hotels, it's the small homestays, the small hotels, in the very remote nooks of the country--that's the hospitality business of India!

How will the bounce-back happen?

The industry is working with the government. We should now be ensuring double dose vaccination for all. That will open travel and boost confidence of all. Travellers are looking for safe and hygienic places. The pandemic brought much swifter adoption of technologies, motivated by a combination of safety requirements and consumer behaviour. A complete or partial waiver of statutory payments, like property tax/lease rentals/licence fee/excise fee payable by hotels to various government authorities will help

the Industry. Paying for utilities like electricity on actual consumption basis rather than on a minimum load would also be helpful. Some states like Maharashtra and Karnataka have made welcome moves in this area.

From a policy perspective, Industry status to hotels across all States, allowing them to avail the benefits available to the manufacturing sector, like lower property tax, lower licence fees, lower tariffs on utilities like electricity and water, is long due. It is time to look towards domestic tourism with a stronger focus, to incentivize domestic travel, generate employment and create tourism destinations that are prepared to handle increased number of visitors.

Making the currently announced ECLG Scheme for hotels available to a larger section of hotels will prevent many hotels from shutting down on account of a liquidity crunch. Our people and our industry have proved themselves positive and resilient. I would encourage all to continue in the same way, as I have complete confidence that we will all emerge successful. **HAI**

What were the sustainable initiatives undertaken during your time?

Sustainability needs to be a top priority. When you are in a leadership position, you hold the responsibility, to set an example through actions, and not just words. "Responsible Luxury" is one such initiative that I've emphasized, engaging with the hotel industry through a strong and clear focus towards incorporating sustainable options. Electrical consumption through renewable sources, installation of energy conservation systems, reliance on local and natural food and ingredients, and many such options continue to be adopted by the hotel industry. By closely associating with the tourism industry, we worked towards developing the right infrastructure in the right way, to enhance the position of the industry in contributing towards economic growth.

The sector's biggest challenge and opportunity?

Amongst the biggest challenges is maintaining a balance between the diverse and constantly evolving expectations of consumers, and internal development, to build sustainability. The industry is recovering from the pandemic setback, so I would say the worst is over, but it is wise not to let the guard down. The industry needs to monitor safety protocols, and to achieve this balance, we have to ensure well-maintained resources. However, as domestic leisure bookings, from staycations to dine-ins, witnessed the quickest revival, we are seeing more opportunities than challenges.

To battle Covid setback, what can the sector do?

A positive mind will identify solutions and bring in more creative energy in the system. It is imperative that we look at the opportunity in every crisis. We need to ensure that the customer anxiety is replaced with assurance and must enable visible demonstration of the same. It is important to heighten focus on safety and hygiene measures. At ITC Hotels, the guiding principle is "atithi devo bhava (guest is God)". ITC Hotels has achieved the distinctive milestone of being the First Hotel chain in the world to receive the platinum level certification under DNV's My Care Infection risk management programme. The "WeAssure" business assurance

"As domestic leisure bookings, from staycations to dine-ins witnessed the quickest revival, we are seeing more opportunities than challenges"

certification stands as a testimonial to rigorous health, hygiene and safety protocols being implemented to ensure safety of guests and associates, across all ITC Hotels. ITC Hotels have introduced pathogen-prevention measures by inducting world class technologies for infection mitigation, and redefining service delivery processes. We cannot be individually well in a society that is unwell. At ITC Hotels, sustainability is the bedrock of our operations. ITC Hotels is the world's largest chain with the maximum number of LEED Platinum Certified properties. We must, together create a better legacy for the future.

What were the milestone events when you were president?

2010: HAI offered active support for the Commonwealth Games. HAI coordinated with all major hotels in Delhi to earmark accommodation for the large number of international sports officials, delegations and sports enthusiasts arriving in Delhi to attend the Commonwealth Games. The Organizing Committee of the Games availed the help of HAI in securing timely completion of accommodation facilities for the athletes.

●The 2nd HAI Hoteliers' Conclave was organized on August 24-25, 2010, at the Taj Palace, New Delhi, with the objective to develop a policy perspective through deeper insights into the mega trends impacting the industry. The conclave was inaugurated by then Union Minister for Tourism, Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation, Km Selja. As president of HAI, I made a cutting-edge presentation on the trends that would impact the industry. A unique feature of the year's conclave was the participation of delegates from SAARC countries. Representatives of the Hotel Associations of Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan deliberated with their Indian counterparts on "Building Transnational Partnerships" among SAARC member countries.

●The session "Lest We Forget..." applauded the gallantry demonstrated by the NSG commandos and the hotel staff members in rescuing guests trapped in Mumbai's Taj Mahal Palace & Tower and the Oberoi Trident, when they were attacked by terrorists on 26/11. JK Dutt, former Director-General of NSG, in his presentation, gave a graphic description of how the rescue operation was mounted and the terrorists were "neutralized". The session will be remembered for the moving ceremony at which three nominees each of the two targeted hotels of Mumbai were presented with HAI plaques for their heroic action, by RH Khwaja, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism. As their individual Citations were read out by moderator, N Chawla, in precise and sombre tones, delegates had misty eyes.

●Another highlight of the conclave that year was the launching of the "HAI Anthem". The song is a tribute to the resilience of the Indian Hotel Industry, which has over the years, battled challenges like the global meltdown towards the end of 2008, H1N1 flu which assumed endemic proportions, and the horrendous 26/11 terror attacks.

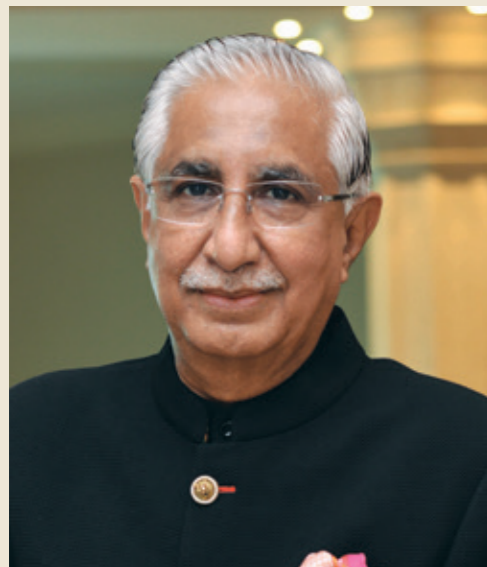
●HAI produced a white paper on GST. It also did extensive groundwork and submitted a comprehensive Memorandum to the Ministry of Finance and the Empowered Committee of Finance Ministers of States, providing a strong justification for the inclusion of hotel industry in the lower slab of GST rate of 12 per cent.

2012: HAI successfully spearheaded the legal campaign in 2012 for vacation of the ban ordered by the Supreme Court on all tourism activities in the core areas of Tiger Reserve Parks. HAI prepared a comprehensive justification for the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) for revising the guidelines to permit tourism activities in the Tiger Reserves, keeping in view the contribution hospitality and tourism sector makes in weaning away forest dwellers and tribals from their traditional pursuits of hunting and poaching, by providing them more avenues and opportunities for rehabilitation in the hospitality industry. The ban was lifted on October 16, 2012.

●HAI'S Professional Development

"Sustainability needs to be a top priority now"

Leading Hospitality visionary, Executive Director, ITC Limited, NAKUL ANAND, has been the torchbearer of Sustainability, rooting for Responsible Luxury. He shares with us HAI's unique contribution when he was president HAI.



NAKUL ANAND, president, HAI
Dec 2009 – Nov 2013

What would you like to say about HAI's contribution to the growth of the sector?

HAI has managed a firm connection between all industry professionals, from veterans to budding hoteliers. As it brought together great minds in the industry, it built a platform to have an organized flow of operations, by escalating innovations through the amalgamation of

new-age trends with the classic policies of the industry. HAI has efficiently addressed all factors that affect the hotel industry, while simultaneously devising ways to enhance productivity in the sector.

Be it intervening to contain inappropriate and unfair practices by the industry players or representing the sector to communicate with different

authorities in times of crisis, HAI has managed to eliminate practices that exploit and misuse workforce and resources. HAI has also enhanced focus on sustainability, by incorporating it in its policies.

During the pandemic, HAI took the responsibility of identifying ways towards resiliency.



Programme (PDP)-2012 was developed in collaboration with Lausanne Hospitality Consulting (LHC) to offer summer courses, where hospitality managers and professionals got unequalled opportunities of networking with colleagues from all over the country for learning and expanding their professional knowledge, skills and competences. A set of three programs were conducted from July to September 2012, by Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne (LHE), Switzerland.

●2012-13: The RBI in 2012 notified "Hotels of 3-Star & above categories located in cities having a population of

more than one million" in the Harmonized Master List of Sub Sectors of Infrastructure. A year later, the List was updated by the Union Finance Ministry to include "Hotels with project cost of more than Rs 200 crore."

●HAI organized its Triennial Hoteliers' Conclave in May 2013 at The Oberoi, Gurgaon. In the backdrop of the dominant role of information technology, online marketing and booking of hotel accommodation & reservations etc., the event was positioned as an "e-Conclave". The third in the series of HAI Conclaves drew wide ranging participation from owners,

CEOs and General Managers of leading Hotels and from representatives of Hotel Associations of Nepal, Bhutan and Pakistan. Sessions were conducted by leading Indian and International hospitality experts, policy makers from the government and faculty experts from the Cornell University, USA.

●Among the noteworthy social inclusion initiatives is the celebration of World Environment Day on June 5. It has been celebrated annually by HAI's member hotels since inception. Students from nearby schools and orphanages are invited to participate along with hotel guests and employees. **HAI**

undertaken at that time?

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, launched by the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi ji on 2nd October 2014, was HAI's flagship public inclusion programme. HAI pledged the unanimous support of all its members to help fulfil Mahatma Gandhi's vision of a 'Clean India'. HAI member hotels gave it utmost priority and ensured that the movement continues to be sustained over the years. Each of the member hotels adopted a stretch of up to 500 m of area close to their property to maintain a clean and litter-free environment. HAI also participated in all umbrella programmes, including Swachh Smarak Abhiyan and Swachh Vidyalaya Abhiyan 2015. We adopted monuments and provided gender-segregated toilets for girl students in a school in Agra.

Since the inception of these programmes, our member hotels have striven to make a difference to the local and national landscape. We continue to do so because HAI is committed to sustaining efforts and encouraging others to contribute to a clean India and a sustainable future for all.

Some HAI hotels have switched partly or fully to renewable energy like solar and wind. I urge state governments and utilities to drive policies that enable hotels to adopt renewal power given the enormous benefits this has for our environment today and into the future.

What have been the sector's biggest challenges, and opportunities?

Hotels and the hospitality sectors continue to face new challenges. Even when challenges seem unsurmountable, they always present an opportunity for

"We have heightened our advocacy for the hospitality sector through media channels, in collaboration with other industry bodies, and established State Chapters to amplify regional issues"

change and improvement. However, the largest, unprecedented challenge we have ever had to face has undoubtedly been the Covid19 pandemic.

Over the last year or so, HAI collaborated directly with the Ministry of Tourism to finalise Covid-related protocols and SOPs for hotels across India.

We have heightened our advocacy for the hospitality sector through media channels, in collaboration with other industry bodies and established State Chapters to amplify regional issues. We appealed to the government for extended help for the hospitality sector and wrote to policymakers at all levels, as well as appearing directly before the Parliamentary Standing Committees for Transport, Tourism and Culture. The report submitted by the committee captures all the issues of our Industry.

HAI continues to project the social face of the industry - hotels distributing meals, supplies and providing accommodation for our key workers in healthcare and sanitation, as well as migrant workers. In support of the government's Vande Bharat initiative, our hotels have also served as quarantine centres and augmented bed capacities of hospitals.

"Some of the positive changes that have benefitted our industry in recent times have

been the rationalisation of GST in hotels from 28% to 18% when tariffs are ₹ 7,500 or higher. The reduction of MAT from 18% to 15% in 2019 and the reduction of Corporate Tax to 25%. Service Exports from India Scheme (SEIS) reward points have also been beneficial and we hope that they will continue and be revised to the original level of 10% instead of the current 5%."

The Ministry of Tourism's Incredible India Tourist Facilitator Certification Programme (January 2021) was a fantastic opportunity for us. By improving our domestic tourist spots to international standards, opening new areas to increase employment opportunities and taking certifiable learning to local people to facilitate tourism in their areas, domestic and international tourism has been strengthened.

HAI has also worked to enhance skill development facilities in hospitality. This has allowed us to seek out and train previously unskilled job-seekers, as well as women and people from deprived backgrounds. Skilling is widely recognised as the key to growth and employability. It empowers individuals with opportunities to find reliable employment opportunities and earn a decent living wage. It provides the hospitality industry with well-equipped employees upon whom we can depend.

To battle Covid setback what should the sector do now?

There is no doubt that the hospitality sector has been greatly affected by the pandemic. This is why an association such as HAI remains so vital; to speak on behalf of those that need assistance and to articulate to those with the power to direct change, what the industry needs and priorities are. **HAI**

"Challenges always present an opportunity for change and improvement"

Vikram Oberoi, CEO and Managing Director, The Oberoi Group, runs the premium hospitality chain with outstanding visionary skills, and a focus towards detailing and people, following with elan, the footsteps of his legendary father, and his grandfather and founder of the group, MS Oberoi. Excerpts from his interview:



VIKRAM OBEROI, president HAI, Nov 2014 - Jan 2020

How has HAI contributed to the growth of the sector?

The liberalisation of the Indian economy in the mid-1990s ushered in economic reforms that opened many opportunities of growth in many sectors of our economy - the hotel sector regrettably was not included to the extent we had hoped for at that time. Against this backdrop, India's major corporate hotel groups came together and HAI was formed. HAI since then has played a vital role and has been a significant and unified voice for our industry. Many initiatives have been taken by HAI over the years. These have benefitted the sector and led to its growth. Given how people-intensive hotels are, this has also created significant employment opportunities for people across our nation.

Any milestone events you would like to mention?

Mr PRS Oberoi, Executive Chairman, The Oberoi Group personally wrote a letter to the Hon'ble Prime Minister in 2019 appealing for several key reforms to energise the tourism and hospitality sectors. These were not only wholly taken on board by the Prime Minister but were also reflected in the Economic Survey 2019 and the Union Budget 2019-2020.

In 2020, we established HAI State Chapters, which afforded hotels in Maharashtra and Karnataka the status of "Industry". This has brought about benefits such as lower property tax, lower tariffs for utilities etc.

HAI played a significant role and

collaborated with other industry bodies including FHRAI/CII/FICCI/FAITH to communicate and highlight industry issues. In 2016, HAI convened the South Asian Hoteliers Conclave to deliberate upon disasters and evolve a template for disaster relief, rescue and evacuation of tourists, if required, through cooperation, aid and assistance.

In 2017, HAI successfully persuaded the Supreme Court to amend its order prohibiting the sale of liquor within 500 metres of national and state highways. Subsequently, the Hon'ble Court clarified that the ban did not apply to hotels and we were able to continue serving our guests as before.

What about the sustainable initiatives



RAYMOND BICKSON, president HAI, 2013 - 2014

It is a matter of pride and satisfaction that the Hotel Association of India, founded in 1996 to facilitate hospitality industry to move in tandem with the First Generation Economic Reforms of 1990's, has been performing a pro-active role in its journey, creating new milestones of progress and undertaking initiatives of social inclusion for the hospitality industry. These include bringing world class hospitality education programmes to India, celebrating WHO's Hand Hygiene Day, UNEP's World Environment Day in partnership with local schools and orphanages, and Adoption of historic national monuments by the member hotels. Indian economy is seeing Second Generation

Reforms, guided by the economic vision of the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi to Build Brand India on the strength of 5-Ts : Tradition, Talent, Tourism, Transport and Technology. Government's objective to accelerate economic growth and create jobs in the country can be achieved by giving unprecedented focus on tourism and hospitality with a slew of growth-oriented initiatives. HAI in its various memoranda to the Government has focussed on the key Reform Imperatives required to help pandemic hit India tourism recover rapidly and enable it to continue making significant contribution to the nation's GDP, employment and foreign exchange earnings. **HAI**



Taking Hospitality Towards Glorious Strides

Hospitality is a key pillar of the tourism industry, that contributes nearly seven per cent to the GDP of India, is a huge employment generator, and a key sector that carries the development narrative forward, especially localised development. The apex national body, the Hotel Association of India (HAI), was formed by seasoned and visionary leaders, 25 years ago. The founder-leaders wanted to represent the industry's unique needs at the highest fora, national policy bodies and governmental institutions. Over the years, HAI has made significant contributions towards representing the specific requirements of small, medium and large hotels. Today, the sector is dealing with digitisation, crucial issues of safety and hygiene, and ensuring an accelerated recovery for all. Experts talk about HAI's contributions, and the way forward.

BY NITI SINGH

It was in 1996, that stalwarts of the Hotel industry, legends like PRS Oberoi, RK Krishna Kumar, CPK Nair, LP Gupta, SSH Rehman, Lalit Suri, Priya Paul, and Anil Bhandari, and many others, got together and decided to give due representation to the unique and distinctive demands of the Hotel industry, through the formation of the Hotel Association of India (HAI). The list of visionaries who have given direction to HAI is like a power list of the Hospitality Industry. In addition, Patu Keswani of Lemontree hotels, Anil Madhok & Ajay Bakaya of Sarovar Hotels, Sanjay Sethi of Chalet Hotels and many others, have added to the momentum. Mr.R.K.Puri who superannuated as Additional Member, Tourism and Catering, Railway Board was appointed Founder Secretary-General of the body in April 1997. He was also Member, Board of Directors,





PRS Oberoi, founder patron, along with others, had set the working template for HAI, and the grand vision for the prime body. In 2019, Mr Oberoi presented HAI's memorandum to the Prime Minister, recommending key reforms for the industry.

PRS OBEROI
Founder & Patron-in-chief



"HAI has worked relentlessly during the pandemic, to impress upon the government to allow hotels to resume operations. It took several strategic initiatives to communicate the pain of the industry to the policymakers at all levels."

KB KACHRU
Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia Radisson Hotel Group



"HAI has a crucial role to play on issues such as responsible and sustainable tourism. The association could push for the recognition of this industry's contribution in creating local supply chains, and as a large employment generator."

DR JYOTSNA SURI
CMD, Chairperson & MD, Bharat Hotels Ltd



"During the pandemic, Hospitality was recognised as one of the most stressed sectors in urgent need of liquidity and relief. HAI was invited by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture to present its views on the adequacy or otherwise of the financial aid provided by the banks, as per the directions of the Government of India."

ROHIT KHOSLA,
Executive Vice-President,
IHCL



"HAI has been playing a proactive role in building a brand image for the hotel industry, since 1996. Particularly during the pandemic, the efforts of HAI have been commendable."

JK MOHANTY
CMD, SWOSTI GROUP



"The clientele is going to change, we have to make sure that we are able to please the millennials, the future clients. Their outlook is going to be significant."

MP BEZBARUAH
Secretary-General, HAI



"By launching social inclusion initiatives, HAI projects the 'social face' of the Hospitality industry. These initiatives are unprecedented and have no parallel in any Hospitality body, at the global level. HAI has, and will, continue to shape the future of the industry."

CHARULATA SUKHIIJA
Deputy Secretary-General, HAI

International Hotels and Restaurants Association (IH&RA) from 1998 to 2002.

The HAI's Executive Committee is a powerful body, comprising hotel owners and top-brass Hotel professionals. It is recognized by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, and is invited by the Ministry of Finance for annual pre-budget consultations. In addition to being a member of the National Tourism Advisory Council (NTAC), it is also represented in all important ministerial committees and taskforces constituted on various subjects that are linked to the growth and development of India's Tourism and Hospitality.

It is also a member of and an active participant, with other top industry bodies, like CII, FICCI, FAITH, PATA, that work towards the promotion of various sectors and industries. Among its landmark legal victories, over the years, have been securing for hotels the right to adopt a "dual" tariff system, repealing archaic anti-women provisions of the Punjab Excise Act that debarred women from serving in hotel bars, among others.

The members of HAI include many known voices of responsible and sustainable Hospitality, small, medium and large hotels, as well as exclusive, standalone hotels and major hotel groups. In addition to focusing on industry-centric initiatives, HAI promotes regional

cooperation, research and education in Hospitality. HAI pioneered the establishment of SAARC Hotels Association, signed memorandums of understanding with Uganda and Nepal for cooperation in the field of Hospitality and Tourism. Papers published by HAI include among others, the first-ever "Guidelines for security measures in Hotels", papers on "Tariff Systems in Hotels", Goods & Services Tax, debt outlook in the Hospitality sector, and many other landmark initiatives (See Box).

Conscious of inclusivity, HAI has launched several initiatives on social inclusion, the oldest being the "Green Week" to celebrate World Environment Day. All member-hotels engage in activities showcasing the importance of preserving the environment. These activities involve not just owners, managers and associates of hotels, but include vendors, associate families, students, NGOs and local communities too. HAI initiated the celebration of World Hand Hygiene Day to sensitise stakeholders, staff and others, on hygiene and prevention of common diseases, way back in 2015. Responding to the clarion call of honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Swachh Bharat campaign, each of the HAI member-hotels adopted a stretch of up to 500 m of area close to their property, for maintenance

and cleanliness.

PRS Oberoi, founder & patron-in-chief along with others, had set the working template for HAI, and the grand vision for the prime body. Among HAI's numerous noteworthy contributions in recent times has been Mr Oberoi's presentation of HAI's memorandum to the Prime Minister in 2019, seeking seven key reforms to energise the tourism and Hospitality sector, as a growth engine for achieving US \$ 5 trillion economy envisaged for India. These included rationalising GST in Hotels at 12 per cent taxation on a globally competitive basis, including Hotel Industry in "Infrastructure Sector" category under Section 80/1A of the IT Act; enhancing hotel room accommodation on a fast-track basis; enlarging skill development facilities in the Hospitality industry to engage skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled job-seekers; improving tourist places to international standards; reduction in 30 per cent Corporate Tax to 25 per cent for hotel companies; and Revising the Hotel industry's reward points under the Service Exports from India Scheme (SEIS) from 5 per cent to its original level of 10 per cent.

Commenting on recent developments, another industry veteran, Rohit Khosla, Executive Vice-President, IHCL, says: "During the pandemic, HAI worked relentlessly on its own as well as in

collaboration with other industry bodies to reach out to policy makers at the highest level, including the PMO and NITI Aayog for relief for the industry. HAI submitted a white paper on 'Debt Outlook in the Indian hospitality Industry' to RBI. Hospitality was recognised as one of the most stressed sectors in urgent need of liquidity and relief from statutory liabilities. HAI was invited by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture, to present its views on the adequacy or otherwise of the financial aid provided by the banks as per the directions of the Government of India."

He suggests that the State Planning Commissions must oversee convergence within the tourism departments and between different sectors to assess and guide sustainable tourism, capacity-building, marketing and promotions, including product development, standards, certification and guidelines, data management and research, and infrastructure planning and implementation.

He points out challenges such as lack of good quality tourism infrastructure, global concerns regarding health and safety, increasing possibility of natural disasters, and shortfall of adequately trained and skilled manpower. While several plans and programmes have

already been devised for tackling such challenges, successful implementation would be critical to accelerate growth, he says. Tourism infrastructure which includes transportation, lodging, food joints, civic amenities, helplines, medical centres, and so on, are vital for sustaining tourism.

Talking of HAI and its role, Charulata Sukhija, Deputy Secretary-General, HAI, says: "Among other things, I would like to mention that HAI is committed to work towards the promotion of Regional Cooperation and Hospitality Research and Education. By launching social inclusion initiatives, HAI projects the 'social face' of the Hospitality Industry. These initiatives are unprecedented and have no parallel in any Hospitality Body at the global level. Thus, HAI has, and will, continue to shape the future of the industry."

Sukhija, who joined HAI in 2008, mentions some recent stellar achievements, like the granting of the status of Industry to hotels by the State governments of Karnataka and Maharashtra, the contribution of HAI in securing "export house status" for tourism and hospitality, zero duty import facility for hotels under the erstwhile Served from India Scheme (SFIS), or the current Service Exports from India Scheme (SEIS). The latter enabled hotels to reach global standards, by facilitating

imports of finest materials, beverages, and so on. "Drafting and facilitating the model code of conduct among hoteliers, travel agents and tour operators, rationalization of taxes on hotels like luxury tax and GST, including the abolishing of the Hotel Expenditure Tax imposed by the Central government, in addition to State taxes, have been other noteworthy landmarks that have helped in making India a more competitive destination for travellers, both Indian and foreign," she adds.

Tourism contributes to over seven per cent to the GDP of India. Since March 2020, hotels have been struggling to manage their statutory and capital expenditure obligations. Repayment of loans with interest is not just difficult but impossible under a more severe economic environment due to Covid-19. Many hotels were forced to close down. The sector has taken a hit of over Rs 1.30 lakh crore in revenue for the fiscal year 2020-21. Though signs of revival have been seen in recent months, the industry is at an inflection point.

About recent developments, leading voice of Hospitality and Tourism in India, MP Bezbaruah, Secretary-General, HAI: "See, the bounce-back is going to be slow in the short-term. It will be at the end of 2022 or maybe early 2023 when we will see bigger pent-up demand, bigger

HAI's Trailblazing Journey

Founded in 1996

- HAI called to intervene on behalf of the Hospitality industry to seek a judicial redressal of a directive requiring hotels of approved categories classified by the Ministry of Tourism to follow a single-tariff system instead of the then prevailing dual tariff system. The stand taken by HAI was endorsed by the High Court of Delhi which granted stay on the operation of the common directive
- Affiliation with WHO rings in the concept of healthy hotels. The first-ever national seminar on hygiene management and hotels was organised at ITC Sheraton Hotel Agra in 1997
- In 1998, after HAI undertook extensive ground work and built consensus among all travel, tourism and hospitality sectors, government granted "export house status" for Tourism and Hospitality. The Government of India issued a gazette notification on 26 November, 1998, placing hotels and tourism units in the categories of service export house; international service export house; international star service export house; and, international superstars

service export house, in accordance with the quantum of forex earnings made by them

- HAI conceptualised the establishment of Tourism Export Promotion Council (TEPC). Hotels, travel agents, tour operators, transporters, airlines, and tourism finance companies came on a common platform. The memorandum and articles of association of TEPC was prepared by HAI, and formally signed on 20 November, 1998
- In 1999, HAI helped secure legal verdict in favour of hotel industry upholding its rights to determine tariffs in hotels. The SAARC Hotel Association was established same year
- In 2000, the concept of healthy hotels in partnership with World Health Organisation gained currency. In the same year, HAI conducted a study of tariff system in hotels, and helped in the first-ever white paper on tariff system in hotels.
- In 2001, guidelines for provision of disabled-friendly facilities in hotels were framed
- HAI took an important step towards

promoting Public Private Partnerships (PPP) in the industry. HAI member hotels and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) join hands in the maintenance of national monuments. Example can be seen, in the illumination and maintenance of the Humayun's Tomb, Delhi, by the Oberoi group of hotels; development of facilities for visitors at Agra Fort by ITC hotels; maintenance and illumination of Jantar Mantar observatory in Delhi by the APJ Surrendra Park hotels, and so on. HAI had identified 34 monuments and helped their adoption by member hotels

- In 2002, HAI represented the Hotel industry in an interaction with foreign press correspondents. Such activities help in making foreign countries aware of facilities available in hotels in India
- Survey of safety of hotels undertaken
- In 2001, an MOU signed with Nepal and Uganda to promote bilateral ties in tourism, and in the Afro Asian region
- International code of conduct to govern relations between hoteliers, travel agents and tour operators, formulated in 2004. The Travel agents Association

of India (TAAI), the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) and HAI concluded the first-ever tripartite agreement between hoteliers, travel agents and tour operators in India on 28 April, 2004

- In 2004, Hotel Expenditure Tax (HET) imposed by the Union Government on Hotels abolished on the initiative of HAI
- Built momentum for SAARC Hotel Association in 2005
- In 2005, the HAI directory of hotels goes global
- In 2006, HAI helped in getting repealed, section 30 of the Punjab Excise Act 1914, an archaic and anti-women provision which barred women from serving in bars and hotels
- In 2007, the first-ever Hoteliers' conclave organised, on reshaping the hospitality industry to stay ahead in the fast-changing global economy. It was attended by the representatives of India and SAARC countries. The 2nd Hoteliers Conclave was held in 2010, and the 3rd in 2013 and 4th in 2016
- In 2008, first-ever guidelines for secu-

rity measures in hotels formed

- In 2009, Luxury Tax reduced in Delhi, from 12.5 to 10 per cent
- In 2010, HAI was invited in advisory capacity to help in planning and preparations for the 2010 Commonwealth Games.
- In 2011, HAI formulated a comprehensive white paper on fixation of hotel industry in the proposed GST in the category of services of social importance
- In 2012, HAI spearheaded the legal campaign in Supreme Court for lifting of ban on all tourism activities in core areas of Tiger Reserve Parks
- Participated in a WTO workshop on application of WTO rules to trade in tourism service
- HAI undertook detailed work and drafted the Constitution of a new body to be called the Confederation of Indian travel and Tourism Industry (CITTI). It was eventually launched under the acronym FAITH, or Federation of Association of Indian Tourism and Hospitality, on 14 May, 2013. Nakul Anand, president HAI, was unanimously elected the first chairman of FAITH.

• In 2013, the government granted infrastructure status to hotels with a project cost of more than ₹ 200 crore each (excluding land costs), and to the convention centres with a project cost of over ₹ 300 crore each. The 100 per cent FDI in the hotel and tourism sector is paving the way to more investments in the country through the automatic route. A five-year tax holiday has been offered for 2-4-star category hotels located around UNESCO World Heritage sites (except for locations like Delhi and Mumbai)

• In 2016, convened South Asian Hoteliers Conclave to deliberate on disasters, rescue and relief.

• HAI's educational initiatives: HAI has taken initiative in bringing world-class education programmes to India, delivered through two of world's leading hotel management schools, the Ecole hoteliers de Lausanne (Switzerland) and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University School of Hotel and Tourism management. Both of them delivered training modules conducted through a certification programmes for senior management.





SOUTH ASIAN HOTELIERS' CONCLAVE 2016

Organised by
Hotel Association of India
9th - 10th August 2016, Taj Palace, New Delhi

SAH 16



Gratitude and Acknowledgements

In the Commemorative Year of HAI completing 25 Years, HAI gratefully acknowledges the contribution of members in the journey. We apologise if any names have been left out and not been acknowledged here.

Mr. Sunder Advani, Mr. Vivek Nair, Mr. R Shankar, Mr. Samir M.C, Col. H.S Sandhu, Ms. Deepa Misra Harris, Mr. Ravi Boothalingam, Mr. Palani G Periasamy, Late Mr. R.K. Baid, Mr. Veer Vijay Singh, Mr. Devendra Bharna, Mr. Rattan Keswani.

About Some Previous EC Members

Late Mr LP Gupta

Chairman & Managing Director, UP Hotels Limited, was HAI Executive Committee Member from 1996-2004.

Mr RK Krishna Kumar

Managing Director of Taj Hotels, was HAI Executive Committee Member from 1998 – 2003. He is a 2009 Padma Shri awardee.

Late Capt CP Krishnan Nair

Chairman, Leela Venture Limited, was Member of HAI Executive Committee from 2001-11. Recipient of the Padma Bhushan 2010.

Mr RK Puri

HAI's Founder Secretary General. Served in that capacity till June 2020. He entered the Indian Police Service (IPS) in 1961 and the Indian Railways Traffic Service (IRTS) in 1962. He served in the Central Government for 35 years in senior capacities. As the first Director of Tourism, Railway Board (1980-82), he was instrumental in the launching of the popular tourist

train "Palace-on-Wheels". As founder director, Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management (IITTM) – 1986-90, he authored the curriculum of "Post-Graduate Degree in Tourism Management (PGDTM)". He is a winner of awards like "Vishisht Yogyata Padak" by the Ministry of Railways, "PATA Gold Medal - Grand Category ; IATO Hall of Fame Award.

Late Mr Anil Bhandari

Chairman & Managing Director, Indian Tourism Development Corporation Limited, was HAI Vice President from 1996 – 1997.

Mr Ajoy K Misra

Senior Vice-President IHCL, was HAI Executive Committee Member from 1999-2002 and served as the Association's Hony Secretary from 2003-04; Hony Treasurer from 2005-08 and was its Vice President from 2009-11.

Mr Suresh Talera

Chairman, Talera Group of Hotels, was HAI Executive Committee Member from 2007-18 and served as the Association's Secretary from 2014-18.

Mr Rupak Gupta

Jt Managing Director, UP Hotels Limited, was HAI

Executive Committee Member from 2005-19 and served as Honorary Secretary from 2009-11 and Hony. Treasurer from 2014-19.

Mr Rakesh Sarna

Chairman and Managing Director, IHCL, was HAI Vice-President from 2014-16.

Mr Raymond Bickson

Chairman and Managing Director, IHCL, was President HAI from 2013-14.

Mr Suresh Kumar

Managing Director, Fortune Park Hotels, was HAI Executive Committee Member from 2007-17.

Mr Ramesh Khanna

Executive Director, Eastern International Hotels, was HAI Executive Committee Member from 1996-98.

Mr Gautam Khanna

Executive Director Oberoi Hotels, was HAI Executive Committee Member from 1996-99. He also served as Hony. Treasurer from 1996-97 and as Vice-President from 1998-99.



tourist inflows, and a lot more money available to travel. But, the nature of the demand has also changed. People are more tech-savvy now. How we respond to the changes as an industry, how we holistically achieve health and safety, are going to be crucial for survival. The number one issue is how to adapt to technology, automation, and artificial intelligence. Those who do it well in time, will reap the advantages of productivity, efficiency, and profitability. Also, another big responsibility is that of climate change. What are we doing to check that? Such concerns are going to be big now."

On HAI's role, he says: "HAI is the core of Hospitality, its progress and its reaction to the emerging challenges will shape the future of the industry. It is an apex body, linking members to the wider hospitality industry. It's a platform of experienced and seasoned members, and everyone's issue is taken up and reflected upon. There is a vision document for 2030 wherein issues coming to notice of the policy members will be taken into account. At every budget, HAI collates suggestions from members and their proposals are taken to the highest fora. I think a major achievement is that HAI is recognised as a partner in the concept of PPP, because HAI is in all government

committees."

Regarding the changing dynamics, he believes that the most important thing is that the clientele is going to change. "We have to make sure we are able to please the Millennials, the future clients. Their outlook is important. They are an internet savvy generation, they would like direct online bookings, and may never take the agent route. We need to be prepared for such changes. They are also very choosy people. Hospitality has to adjust to their demands and devise new ways to interact with them. Each customer's needs have to be serviced. This is the time of multi-skilling. Gone are the days of specialised people handling one or two core jobs, now each person has to be a complete service provider, and therefore, more training is needed now. The service provider has to be in a continuous training mode. Another change is that customers want increased flexibility in bookings and cancellations."

Among the sticky issues, he mentions new technologies, and particularly, health tech, the issue of liquidity post-Covid, getting relief from states, and putting tourism on the concurrent list. "Tourism and hospitality do not get full benefits of infrastructure status. However, new policies are in the offing, and there is a lot to look forward to," he adds optimistically.

Dr Jyotsna Suri, a veteran in the hospitality business, who has been serving as the CMD of Bharat Hotels and The Lalit Hotels since 2006, says: "HAI has a crucial role to play on issues such as responsible and sustainable tourism. The association could push for the recognition of the industry's contribution in creating local supply chains and as a large employment generator." About the main challenges, she says: "With apprehension over resumption of international flights, inbound travel will take a while. Besides this, another constant challenge is lack of uniform Covid guidelines across states. Just like 9/11 signalled a transformation in airport security, health, hygiene and sanitation are the 'new security' in the post-Covid era. The requirements have changed, for banqueting events and F&B. The focus is now more on immunity boosting and health-centric menus. Consumer now prefer contactless check-in and payments. The industry is adopting technology to keep up with the change. The time to sit on the side-lines, and wait for a long-term solution to present itself is coming to an end. There is an immediate need for the industry to innovate by offering new product lines and embrace technology to engage with guests faster."



KB Kachru, Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia Radisson Hotel Group, and winner of many prestigious awards in the industry, says: "It's important to have a long-term vision, accept disruption as a learning curve, and take advantage of the downtime, to reinvent, and introspect. HAI has worked relentlessly during the pandemic, to impress upon the government to allow hotels to resume operations. It took several initiatives to communicate the pain of the industry to policymakers. The future of the industry, in large parts, will be defined by how we as professionals, and our brands, address the evolving consumer needs. It's important to acknowledge that the potential of the Indian domestic travel market is unmatched, and the current times will make it even more important for every player to have a strong domestic business. Leveraging India's natural environment, its wellness systems, naturopathy, Ayurveda, Yoga, meditation, and promoting traditional cuisine, will be an asset in this journey towards recovery. Sustainability, safety, hygiene, and technology are at the heart of the business now. As guest behaviour and needs evolve and bring permanent changes to business environments, we must be prepared to exceed the expectations."

Regarding HAI's most progressive contributions in recent times, he says:

"HAI has looked at the sector's issues over three categories--solutions needed for survival, revival, and for long-term growth or thrive. In all these categories 'liquidity' is a key factor. There is need to infuse liquidity in the industry through initiatives like one-time loan re-structuring, improved terms under the ECLGS scheme, revised eligibility ratios under the resolution framework, and release of SEIS benefits due to the hotels for the last two fiscals. Among the policy changes the industry has been voicing for a long time is the status of an 'infrastructure industry' by the central government. This would allow it to avail the benefits of low-cost funding and tax benefits that are currently available to industries like ports, railways, highways, and so on."

He points out that the pandemic has significantly changed tourist attitudes. "Travellers are more inclined on choosing hotels that adhere to sustainable practices. Domestic tourism and staycations, along with local food are some of the new trends emerging in the sector. F&B has taken the centre-stage and has played an important role in the revival of the Hospitality sector. There is further scope for Indian cuisine to solidify its position on the world map. The government can play a significant role by organizing food festivals. Many players in the industry have been doing

their bit to create visibility for Indian fusion food, for instance, Bukhara, Indian Accent, Meetha by Radisson, and many others. We should continue to build excitement for Indian food globally," he adds.

On Covid-response, he says: "The way Hospitality has stood tall and serviced the community in the wake of every crisis, especially Covid-19, is truly amazing. It is this representation of humanity that will keep the Hospitality industry going. The pandemic has given us an opportunity to reflect on areas of potential."

Another celebrated stalwart, JK Mohanty, CMD, Swosti Group, says: "HAI has been performing a pro-active role in building a brand image for the hotel industry since 1996. Particularly during the pandemic, the efforts of HAI have been commendable. HAI has taken up various issues of the industry, such as one-time re-structuring of loans and extension of loan moratorium, infrastructure status to the industry, waiver of taxes/licence fees imposed on the hotel industry etc., with the Central government/RBI for survival and revival of the hotel industry."

There are challenges, and opportunities ahead. The innate human thirst for adventure and travel will bring Hospitality back on track. With HAI leading from the front, the journey can only get more exciting. **HAI**

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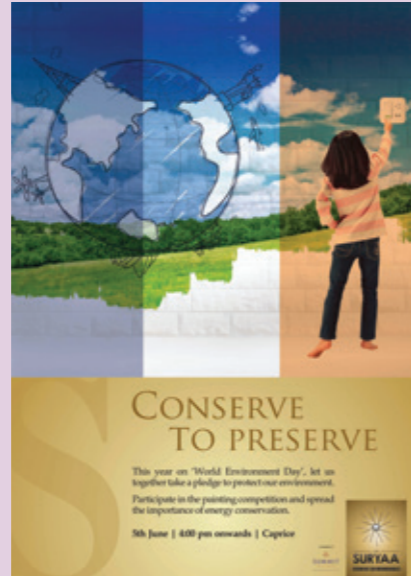
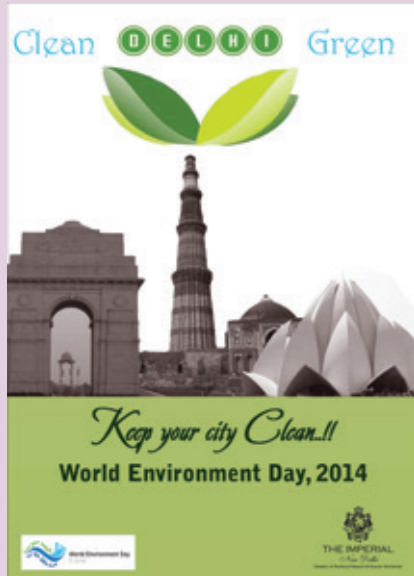


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HAI has been leading from the front, with many path-breaking Initiatives to encourage and foster Socially Inclusive, Healthy and Dynamic Communities. Some of these are:

- HAI member hotels and the Archaeological Survey of India joining hands in the maintenance of national monuments
- Building awareness towards Hygiene through Hand Hygiene Day
- Celebrating Environment Day and observing green week; promoting Swachh Bharat Abhiyan; providing Relief & Support to the Health Workers, Migrant Labour, Elderly and others during the pandemic.



Lessons From Covid



MANAV THADANI

Despite the looming threat of a third COVID-19 wave in India, life and business seemed to have returned to some semblance of normality. Offices, colleges, bazaars, malls, clubs and theatres are operational once more and, indeed, hotels across the country are welcoming many more guests than we might have imagined at the beginning of this fiscal. We are in no way, shape or form at a full recovery, but the industry is slowly getting back to its feet. The devastation of the global pandemic brought with it an overwhelming need for companies to revisit their value chains and unearth some way forward. The personal and professional reflection has provided learnings which will not only help us escape our crisis but also take us into a new future. Specific to the hospitality industry, an inertia was delaying not only its digital transformation but its approach to innovation, creativity and agility. Notwithstanding the damage caused, the pandemic supercharged the discourse and action around these areas with companies

The pandemic was a once-in-a-century opportunity to Pause and Reset. The devastation caused to Hospitality has been unprecedented. However, being a huge revenue generator for the Economy, it needs to get its act together, fast.

BY MANAV THADANI AND KUSH ANAND
of leading Consultancy firm, Hotelivate

scrambling to adapt and survive.

In the face of the doom and gloom predictions at the beginning of the pandemic, the positive reaction of the industry was heartening. While mass furloughing did occur, it remained a last resort for most hotel companies as they did their best to embody the people-first promise of our industry. The doubling up of assets as quarantine centres around the country was an invaluable support to government bodies and the hospitality competence was crucial to providing comfort to people and families in a difficult situation. Despite their woes, brands began using digital channels to reach out to their guests and followers to share housekeeping tips and tricks, mixology lessons and special recipes to provide some variety in routine and joy in isolation. Before long, the customer journey was designed to be almost entirely contactless, and the promise of a safe, hygienic environment was released. Nonetheless, everchanging travel advisories and bans continued to plague the industry and paint a bleak picture.

However, the stronger occupancies which hotels in both, urban and leisure locations, are lately experiencing is a stunning contrast to the general mood back then and a clear sign of recovery in progress. Along the way, "Revenge Tourism" provided a mega boost to the leisure

Specific to the hospitality industry, an inertia was delaying not only its digital transformation but its approach to innovation, creativity and agility. The pandemic supercharged the discourse and action around these areas, with companies scrambling to adapt and survive



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The government's Emergency Credit Line Schemes, among other Central and State level relief initiatives, helped to stem the industry's bleeding. Also, hotels have started experimenting with technological innovations to curb energy costs, investing in alternative sources of power, relying on atypical organisational structures, and exploring every stream of incremental revenue



KUSH ANAND

destinations of India. Health concerns and restrictions on gatherings brought small weddings back into fashion and this benefited hotels which could not typically compete due to limited banqueting space and a smaller room inventory. The Government's Emergency Credit Line Schemes, among other Central and State level relief initiatives, helped to stem our industry's bleeding. At the company level, hotels began experimenting with technological innovations to curb energy costs, investing in alternative sources of power, relying on atypical organisational structures, and exploring every stream of incremental revenue. The crucial learning for the industry was that our business models and companies were not nearly flexible or smart enough.

Health and hygiene have always been crucial components of hospitality and, going forward, the industry may only focus on conforming to their own high standards. The need of the hour is smarter technology and sustainable solutions. The SHA (Sustainable Hospitality Alliance) is a step in the right direction. In India, it is crucial that the development of tourism and hospitality is a combined effort between public and private entities to achieve the optimal triple bottom line. Regarding technology, our industry must be open-minded and provide platforms to support new-age companies and tech innovations attempting to make a difference in our carbon footprint and impact.

Hotel companies have also committed to changing business models with forays into the cloud kitchen and home delivery segments with India's largest hotel companies, the Indian Hotels Company Limited and Marriott International, launching QMin and Marriott on Wheels respectively. Other players have taken a more restrained approach, but most hotel food and beverage offerings are available on some delivery platform. Another trend which might outlive this crisis is the sub-leasing of

hotel spaces for purposes such as co-working. At Hotelivate, we have also seen themes of wellness offerings, lifestyle clubs and branded residences gather momentum with requests for studies and inquiries about these concepts increasing in frequency. Boutique hotels and homestays have also made an admirable case for the business sense in their product. These products feature small inventories, tailored services, and the promise of an authentic experience. The promise of intimacy and smaller groups inspired customer confidence and drove their popularity and performance.

It is our view that the current performance of hotels, coupled with India's inoculation efforts, should allow for a positive industry outlook. If the worst of the pandemic is indeed behind us, the industry can expect to make a recovery to pre-covid performance levels by the middle of FY24. Nationwide occupancies will likely breach the 65% threshold by late next year and ADRs will scale 2019 levels 12-15 months later. In that time, the return of corporate clientele, Corporate MICE and international flights will cause changes in the rate and segmentation charts which are currently dominated by domestic leisure travellers and room nights from Social MICE. We should nevertheless expect that, going forward, domestic travellers will represent a larger and higher paying segment than before. All things considered, the recent months of uninterrupted business, and perhaps the festive season, have uplifted the general industry mood and allowed for the hope of a sustained recovery. **HA**



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BY BITTU SAHGAL

Rewilding Helps Communities and Planets

Environmental activist, writer, and the founder of Sanctuary Nature Foundation, suggests sustainable ways to save the planet, and people.

“You are a guest of nature - behave.”
- Friedensreich Hundertwasser

I have been editing Sanctuary Asia magazine for 40 years, and I believe viscerally that mindful, sensible wildlife tourism is a strong conservation tool. I totally attribute my love for the wild to the nature experiences I had when I was young, without the distractions of the internet, super luxuries and television. Beyond just entertainment, travel into the wilds was, and still remains, life!

I saw my first tiger in the newly-declared Kanha Tiger Reserve in the mid-1970s and have travelled through endless forests in India over my four-decade-long tryst with India's exquisite wildernesses. The first decade was spent savouring the fierce beauty of wildernesses that so typified the Indian subcontinent. The last four have been devoted to the twin-purpose, of experiencing and defending a natural heritage of incalculable worth. The tiger for me was always centre-stage along my journey, as a metaphor for every living thing, plant and animal, that inhabited its magnificent kingdom, indeed the planet.

It took Sita over 15 minutes of belly-crawling through Bandavgarh's Rajbehra grassland to reach within 30 m. of the sounder of wild pigs, snuffling for tubers some 50 m., from where we sat atop one of the reserve's riding elephants in the late 1980s. In a hushed voice, Kuttapan, Bandhavgarh's famous mahout whispered: “Yahin kahin Banka bhi hoga. Uske saath ghoom rehi he Sita aajkal (the tiger Banka must be somewhere here, the tigress Sita moves with him).

The hunt turned out to be a non-starter, the pigs scrambling away when the wind turned. But those 15 minutes were electrifying, as only those who

know the joy of stopping and staring, will understand. My life has been filled with such moments spent in solitude, in Forest Rest Houses across India. Silence is not the absence of sound, but the presence of natural sounds. Such are the silences I seek when I manage to escape the push and shove of urbania. Those are the healing silences, I imagine, everyone seeks, to escape from the “aspirational conveyor” that has come to define urban life.

While all of us dream of a life, filled with peace and purpose, I realised long ago both come easily to me, in dark Forest Rest Houses, listening to the staccato chip-chuck of Indian nightjars, jackals howling in the night, chital alarms, or the gentle moan of a tiger, wafting across its dark domain.

When first I travelled to such isolated places, tourism as we know it today, was virtually non-existent. I would stay with the late Fateh Singh Rathore at no-electricity-allowed Jogi Mahal in Ranthambhore; at the famous Old Forest Rest House in Dhikala where forest guards would tell tales of how Jim Corbett was once turfed out by an officious Collector in the middle of the night. I would walk the Kanha meadows with my friend, the late Manglu Baiga,

a forest watcher, who first introduced most Field Directors to the tiger reserve in their charge.

Communing with nature and listening to stories told by the likes of the late Qasim Wani and my friend Abdul Rahman Mir, and Nazir Malik, the latter two living their lives on the edge of Kashmir's magical Dachigam National Park, made me feel alive. Such silence, joy and adventure is unavailable to those who seek 24x7 luxury, and modern amenities. But I knew, even back then, that we had to create circumstances that attracted diverse people to our most precious biodiversity vaults, or we might lose them forever. We needed to encourage a diversity of experiences for rich and poor, young and old, casual wildlife enthusiasts, and deep ecologists.

The tourism industry has been hard hit by the recent pandemic, which scientists say was a direct result of a combination of the illegal trade in wildlife and the destruction of ecosystems that caused not just Covid-19, but the many climate-related disruptions to our lives and our economy.

This is why the Sanctuary Nature Foundation launched a community

“We need to create circumstances that attract diverse people to our most precious biodiversity vaults, or we might lose them forever.

We need to encourage a diversity of experiences, for rich and poor, young and old, casual wildlife enthusiasts, and deep ecologists”



Photo: Anish Andheria / Sanctuary Photo library



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Be it the Northern Lights or The Louvre, there are some experiences that are so enriching that their grandeur can only be witnessed by one and can never be truly described in all their essence.

Then again, there are some experiences that are above and beyond the wonders of the world, that even those used to the finest luxuries will feel privileged to experience.



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tourism initiative in 2014, after watching the way wildlife tourism experiences were going downhill, even as “tiger sightings” were rising in India. Added to this was the fact that village communities living on the edges of biodiverse habitats were paying a high price for our successes, by way of crop losses, livestock depredation and, even the loss of loved ones.

Instead of relying only on cash compensation when tragedy struck, we figured that the combination of tourism demand at our finest national parks and sanctuaries, high human-wildlife conflict, and failed or failing farms, presented India with an opportunity to improve the lives of hardworking, communities that understood better than any urban citizens how to live next to and protect our wildlife.

This was the genesis of the Sanctuary Community Owned Community Operated Conservancy concept, better known as COCOON Conservancies. The initiative was launched seven years ago, in consultation with local communities living outside our Protected Areas. After a series of baithaks with local communities, forest officials, and credible members of the travel and tourism trade, Sanctuary found a way to make local communities the primary beneficiaries of wildlife tourism. Local people helped enhance the wildlife tourism experience of those living in all categories of lodges—high-end, medium and low. In rewilded areas, on privately owned lands, people could enjoy real wilderness experiences on the outer peripheries of Kaziranga, Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Nagarhole, Tadoba, Periyar and other such exquisite destinations.

The formula remains simple. Relieve the stress of farmers willing to merge land holdings abutting wildlife areas, and then rewild their failed farms without selling their lands. Here, for a modest cover charge, and to the accompaniment of birdsong, chital alarms, an occasional tiger or leopard sighting, lodge guests, in the company of village guides and wildlife experts, would be able to walk, enjoy a meal by a campfire, spend a quiet day birding, or just lie back in hammocks, surrounded by nothing but nature, at its best.

The income from such rewilded lands would exceed that earned from

“Nothing comes easy, nothing is impossible either. The renewal of the biosphere, can and must be, catalysed by tourism of the right kind. If destinations and communities become the prime beneficiaries, then we can be sure that people will flock to the rewilded geographies of India, and the world”



Photo: Kalyan Verma / Kanha National Park

farming. Such community-owned lands, bundled together in parcels of between ten to 100 acres, or more, would be a boon to guests staying around, because guests come from afar not “just to see a tiger”, but also to unwind, and reduce stress, by communing with nature. Within just a couple of years of “benign neglect” (the formula uses by Project Tiger to rewild much of India before the word “rewilding” began to be mentioned at global meets), such farms, already being visited by wild pigs, monkeys, deer, birds and more will turn into biodiverse havens, comparable to the quality of wildernesses in the core area of our finest parks. What Sanctuary’s Cocoon Conservancy projects promise to do is to ensure that tourism becomes the main income source for communities and families, while offering unmatched nature experiences to visitors seeking peace, away from the madding crowd.

During the initial phase of our COCON project, the rewilding transition was financed by Sanctuary. The communities were paid full amount they might have earned from farming, without actually farming. We soon saw the forests come back

to life. Womenfolk began to earn incomes from handicrafts, menfolk supplemented their incomes from other jobs because they did not have to spend months watching over crops in fields. Working with the Maharashtra State Government and local conservationists, Sanctuary successfully created a 100 acre+ COCOON Conservancy in the Nagpur district, adjacent to the Umred-Karhandla-Paoni Wildlife Sanctuary. Here, because the Maharashtra Government collaborated with us, tiger, leopard, gaur, wild pig, monkey, and deer populations dramatically rose. The initiative is far from “successful” yet. But Sanctuary has already taken the idea to destinations as far from each other, as Dara Community Reserves in Kashmir, near tiger reserves such as Panna, Pench, Bandhavgarh and Satpura in Madhya Pradesh, Corbett in Uttarakhand, and Sundarbans in West Bengal.

Nothing comes easy, but nothing is impossible either. The renewal of the biosphere, can and must be catalysed by tourism of the right kind. If destinations and communities become the prime beneficiaries, then we can be sure that people will flock to the rewilded geographies of India, and the world. In the process, seemingly intractable problems, such as our climate crisis can actually begin to be solved, because rewilding brings atmospheric carbon down, helps prevent floods and droughts and offers more employment than any industry could hope to.

All this can happen provided we prioritise, care for and respect species, habitats and the communities living closest to our wild spaces. There is no reason why we cannot look to experience India’s wild wonderlands, even as we create millions of jobs, livelihoods and save the planet.

Yes, the tourism and travel industry can help millions of local and global visitors to experience India’s fabled wild wonderlands, while saving the planet! **HAI**

-The author is the Editor of Sanctuary Asia

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TAMIL NADU

A Tourist Goldmine

The true potential of the State's tourism offering is unparalleled. Here is why it needs to be on your radar.

By Riaan Jacob George



Gangaikondacholapuram Bull



Teagarden



Chidambaram

MOST TRAVEL INDUSTRY insiders will agree that Tamil Nadu has tremendous tourist offerings, and impressive tourist numbers, but the state has just not been vocal—or visible—enough as the more “traditional” tourist destinations like, say, Goa or Rajasthan. While the south

Indian state does enjoy its fair share of the inbound visitor pie, the truth is that the sheer diversity of Tamil Nadu's landscapes, architectural, spiritual, cultural and culinary experiences, is unmatched, and with the right marketing, the state can enjoy much more revenue. According to [statista.com](#), Tamil Nadu had the highest number of domestic tourists among all

other Indian states, welcoming 140 million tourist visits in 2020. According to a government report by Tamil Nadu Tourism, in 2014, 2015 and 2017, the state ranked first in both domestic and foreign tourist visits.

We spoke to some travel professionals to understand their perspective—and perception—of Tamil Nadu. “With regards to tourism, the

diversity it has to offer, from hill stations like Ooty and Kodaikanal to the beaches of Rameswaram and Mahabalipuram, the state has it all, in addition to architectural marvels of the temple cities of Madurai and Trichy. Most importantly, there is a strong developmental aspect that is gradually taking place under the leadership of the new government, where tourism is being

considered as an important source of revenue and a means of showcasing the heritage of the state. “Infrastructure and accessibility are key aspects here,” says Neeraj Gupta, a Chennai-based wedding planner and luxury travel agent.

An emerging market, Gupta says, is the wedding market, where a lot of people are now starting to plan their weddings at the high-end properties in

Mahabalipuram.

“While the heritage angle and the gorgeous temple cities of Tamil Nadu are a big draw for most tourists to the state, there is a new and emerging market of tourists here, which is the luxury traveller. Tamil Nadu is now catching the attention of luxury travellers. Starting with Chennai, which needs no introduction with respect to



Meenakshi Temple

Eco-tourism is an angle that many hospitality entrepreneurs and tourism stakeholders want to focus on, in Tamil Nadu, as they see it as having a great growth potential, for developing a sustainable tourism market

hotels like the magnificent ITC Grand Chola, The Leela Palace Chennai and Taj Coromandel. “The city has undergone a tremendous renaissance and is a great option for travellers given the number of new restaurants, the cafe scene and the cool nightlife that it offers,” says Siddharth Bhatia, Delhi-based luxury travel specialist and wedding planner.

Going forward, to truly harness the potential of tourism in Tamil Nadu, the stakeholders in this segment will have to focus on a bevy of factors. Starting with going beyond purely the heritage and spiritual angle, to target new segments of travellers like wellness, MICE, weddings, Uber-luxury, adventure and even festive travel. Infrastructure around the main tourism hotspots will also play an important role in developing the market. Experts suggest that the development of coastal tourism will go a



Shore temple near Mahabalipuram

long way in attracting high-spending luxury travellers and divert them from traditional beach destinations like Goa or Kerala. The sustainable tourism angle—eco-tourism—is another element, which can be a huge focus, given Tamil Nadu’s impressive natural diversity and stunning beauty.

Diverse Landscapes

Let’s start with what this state is best known for—its temples. Spectacular architecture and centuries’-old temples

like those in Madurai, Rameswaram and Tiruchirappalli are an absolute marvel to visit. The temples of Thanjavur and Chidambaram also feature significantly on the tourist trail. The famous Chola dynasty temples need no introduction and the best variety of these can be seen at the empire’s former capital at Gangaikonda Cholapuram.

Then comes the beautiful coast of Tamil Nadu, with the azure waters of the Bay of Bengal. Chennai’s Marina Beach is definitely worth a stroll past, during



Kodaikanal

The state offers huge diversity, from hill stations like Ooty and Kodaikanal, to the beaches of Rameswaram and Mahabalipuram

your urban getaway to the state capital, or you could drive down the coast to Thiruvannamiyur, Tiruchendur or even as far as Kanyakumari to the southernmost tip of India. These white beaches are almost untouched by rampant tourism and are dotted with quaint hotels and homestay options.

The state also has marvellous hill stations. While Ooty and Kodaikanal, are often far too popular for the off-beat traveller, there are many other options you may explore, such as Kolli Hills, Sirumalai Hills, Valparai, Topslip and the Parvathamalai Hills. These places make for beautiful road trips and you can chance upon some real gems in terms of

local eateries, beautiful hillside bungalows, homestays and boutique properties.

Tamil Nadu is also great for wildlife and nature enthusiasts, as it has quite a few beautiful national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. The Anamalai Tiger Reserve is definitely worth a visit while the Guindy National Park—located within the Chennai city limits—is a fantastic spot for birding. In addition, the wildlife sanctuaries in Mudumalai, Kodiakarai and Kalakkad (among many others), attract serious wildlife enthusiasts and offer great drives, treks and stay options out in the wilderness.

The Old and New Coexist

What’s most fascinating, however, in Tamil Nadu’s tourism story is just how beautifully the old world coexists with

modernity. A classic example of this is Chennai, where its age-old neighbourhoods are now being gentrified by boutiques and cafes, with an influx of professionals from around India. Take the ITC Grand Chola, for instance, which has raised the bar of hospitality offering in Chennai. This mega hotel boasts 600 rooms and no less than 10 F&B outlets, including a concept restaurant, Avartana, which specializes in modern South Indian fare. ITC Grand Chola has given a boost to the city’s MICE scene, transforming it into a serious MICE and wedding destination. Similarly, a short drive from downtown Chennai, the Mahabalipuram beach stretch has, in recent times, become a hotbed of luxury travel opportunities. “While the temple town of Mahabalipuram has always attracted





Nilgiris



Mamallapuram

spiritual and heritage tourism, the recent rise of its beachside luxury hotels has given a new economic boost to the stretch," Neeraj Gupta says. A case in point is the stunning property by Marriott International, Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa, with direct beach access, large event spaces and a spa. IHG's InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort is another such example, popular among people from across the country to host lavish destination weddings, thanks to its beautiful beach location and outstanding event spaces.

The boutique hospitality space is also emerging, especially in the hills of Tamil

Spectacular architecture and centuries-old temples like those in Madurai, Rameswaram and Tiruchirapalli are an absolute marvel to visit

Nadu, catering to a more discerning, understated luxury audience. Take, for instance, The Tamara Kodai in Kodaikanal, housed in a stately colonial-era bungalow, which is all about modern luxury and trendy experiences, in a heritage setting. Or the magnificent Anantya Resort, situated along the Chittar Lake, close to

Kanyakumari, which is a barefoot luxury experience in a relatively offbeat destination. Another example of exquisite boutique luxury is Thekkady's Hills and Hues Resort or Spice Village by CGH Earth. This eco-tourism spot has a key focus on sustainable tourism, which is another important page in Tamil Nadu's tourism story. Eco-tourism is an angle that many hospitality entrepreneurs and tourism stakeholders want to focus on, in Tamil Nadu, as they see it as a great growth potential, for developing a sustainable tourism market. **HAI**

Images courtesy: Tamil Nadu Tourism

AND THE JOURNEY CONTINUES...

The capacity to innovate and adapt technology in all spheres of operations, and to provide leadership in sustainability will be the new challenges for Hospitality.

By MP BEZBARUAH
Secretary General, Hotel Association of India



Twenty-five years have rolled by since a few tourism and hospitality stalwarts and visionaries got together to lay the foundation of a new organization, the Hotel Association of India (HAI). The enumerated objectives for the new organization were wide but the underlying focus was unmistakable. It was to create an identity for the industry, provide an image of the strength of Indian hospitality within and outside the country, to provide benchmark for excellence in service quality and strive collectively for achieving its due place in the country's economy. It envisaged efficiency in operations, collaborations among stakeholders, technology, concern for sustainability and creating skilled manpower—these would be some issues that would shape the future of the hospitality industry.

It was a significant event and to understand it we have to see this development in the context of its time. Travel is an ancient phenomenon, perhaps an integral part of the evolution of human civilization. But the history of organized tourism is a fairly modern history. World Tourism Organization started keeping data of international travellers only around the sixties of the last century. India started well, setting up a department of tourism in the sixties. Nehru with his oft quoted statement, "welcome a tourist and send back a friend", pointed to the potential of tourism for international understanding. But the potential of tourism as an economic force was hardly recognized! Those were the days when the reconstruction of the post-colonial economy needed foreign exchange badly and the country's balances were low. Tourism's importance lay in its capacity to earn valuable foreign exchange.

For the next two decades, nothing much happened. Successive Five Year Plans ignored tourism. There was no long-term vision and three decades after planned development started in the country, in 1982, the first National Tourism Policy was adopted. It took few more years and much exhortation from the National Tourism Committee of 1989 to recognize the importance of tourism, the need for strategic development of the sector

and to the key role of the private sector. In that sense the Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97) was like a fresh wind for tourism. Among other things it suggested that "the future growth of tourism should therefore be achieved mainly through private initiative."

To entrust such a role to the private sector and to build a sound and strong public private partnership, government needed a credible, cohesive voice of the private sector. The voice of hospitality sector was disparate, its collective face invisible. For example, in 1996, India received a meagre 2.3 m foreign tourist. As per the National Action Plan of 1992, the target by 1997 was 6 m tourists. But there was shortage of accommodation. Yet there was no visible plan to encourage growth of the sector or to fill the gap through pragmatic incentives and collaborative nurturing of the sector. On the other hand, there was a gap in understanding. The hotels were seen as elitist, not requiring any support.

The emergence of HAI was important because it has constantly tried and succeeded to a large extent, to bridge this gap. It has provided a platform for articulation of common problems, given a credible identity to the sector and enabled government to meaningfully pursue the idea of partnership. Over the years HAI has done a lot to create awareness about the industry and its role in the economy and in the process has been able to remove many wrong perceptions. For example, the need for creating a brand image of India was always acutely felt. Resources have been scarce and therefore government willingness to commit such resources for promotion of a brand was lacking. Even MOT rued at that time that tourism was what everyone talked about but no one cared. It is not much known that the members of HAI were in the forefront in creating a very innovative partnership with the government to float the first ever attempt at creating a brand image. They committed a percentage of their foreign exchange earnings to create a brand initially called Experience India. In the meantime, efforts of the Ministry to get proper recognition for tourism were showing results, more funds were available for promotion and the idea





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mooted saw germination in the game changing Incredible India campaign so brilliantly piloted by the then Joint Secretary, Amitabh Kant.

Much of what HAI has achieved over the years are in public domain. Much more however may be imperceptible. Hospitality industry is now a respectable responsible identity, its voice is heard by the policy makers. Individual members have enhanced industry’s knowledge pool by collectively sharing good practices and innovations. HAI’s constant emphasis on quality in service and standards have enthused members to set a higher benchmark for the industry. During the Pandemic, the industry faced an unprecedented crisis. HAI forcefully and persistently articulated the industry’s pain and grievances. It was heard with deep respect and great concern by Parliamentary Committees, by the Ministries, and by all stakeholders. HAI had very high visibility in print and electronic media. While the government response was always positive, actual action left much to be desired. Yet, HAI can say with much satisfaction that whatever results came out, it had a role in it. The government has acknowledged issues like “industry status”, “infrastructure status”, putting tourism in the concurrent list, etc., which HAI persistently pursued, and are now being actively considered. Many of the state governments have passed on much needed relief suggested by HAI.

Since 1996 tourism and hospitality has changed a lot. Covid-19 has brought in fundamental changes in both demand and supply of services and it is most likely that the future will see many significant changes. “Market of one”, “experience economy”, “consumer is King” are some of the buzzwords of tourism and hospitality world. The capacity to innovate and adopt, and adapt, technology in all spheres of operation, training and motivation of the service providers in new technology, creating consumer trust, finding new and flexible ways to respond to consumer demand, bookings and cancellations, leadership in responsible and sustainable ways—these are some of the issues that will challenge the industry. HAI has also to craft its role to facilitate the members in meeting the new challenges by informing, educating and sharing.

In the gloomy days of Covid-19, HAI had formulated its short-term vision mainly of meeting the existential crisis--- Survival, Revival and Thrival. As the darkest days seem to be slowly coming to an end, HAI has a challenge like never before. The challenge is to motivate and carry all members in a robust journey of embracing the wider but uncertain horizons of a world shattered by a virus, threatened by changes in our environment, yet a “brave new world” of technological achievements breaking all frontiers of human imagination. **HAI**



~~EXCITED ABOUT GOING ON A VACAY WITH MY BESTIE~~ *is bringing his annoying Girlfriend.*



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