



ENGAGE

July-August 2025 | Volume 5 | Issue 4



STAYING RESILIENT

**HOSPITALITY SHOWS STRENGTH,
STRATEGY AND STABILITY IN
TURBULENT TIMES**



**UNLOCKING INDIA'S
TOURISM POTENTIAL**

Puneet Chhatwal, MD & CEO, IHCL





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From the President's Desk



KB Kachru
President, Hotel Association of India
Chairman - South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group

We take up the theme of resilience in this issue, which coincides with India's 79th Year of Independence. If there is one sector that stands out as a stellar example of resilience, it is the hospitality industry.

While the pandemic is a defining recent example of resurgence. Indian hospitality has demonstrated resilience in the face of numerous tough times, adapting quickly to challenges and rebounding effectively. The 26/11 attack on the Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai, was a devastating blow. Yet, the hotel reopened within weeks. Staff became heroes for their courage, going beyond their call of duty to help guests trapped inside. Taj Hotels emerged stronger, turning tragedy into an enduring story of resilience. More recently, following the attack in Pahalgam in April this year, hotels, guesthouses, and tour operators in Pahalgam and nearby regions (Gulmarg, Sonmarg, Srinagar) saw a wave of cancellations. Both domestic tourists and international travellers either cut short trips or stayed away entirely. However, the hotels unitedly worked at providing comfort and security to the stranded tourists. The Industry organised visits and campaigns to the region to instill confidence among travellers. They were rewarded by an early return of tourists.

For the capital-intensive hotel sector, with high and largely fixed operational costs, such occurrences are deeply challenging. No matter what happens, the costs of maintenance, staff, or supplies cannot be deferred. And hospitality has been braving this all—with a smile and in the true spirit of Atithi Devo Bhava.

We have a long road ahead. The journey to 2047, the Amrit Kaal period of high growth, is ambitious. As per the government's plan, India is aiming for 100 million foreign tourist arrivals, a \$3 trillion tourism economy, and a place among the top five destinations in the world.

Goalposts are meant to crystallise growth journeys. We must make efforts, embracing all that it takes to achieve this vision. This issue is packed with ideas on how to forge our path ahead, with innovation, upskilling, resilience, and sustainable growth at the heart of these endeavours. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "The future depends on what we do in the present." Let's get the brickwork going, no matter what comes along the way.

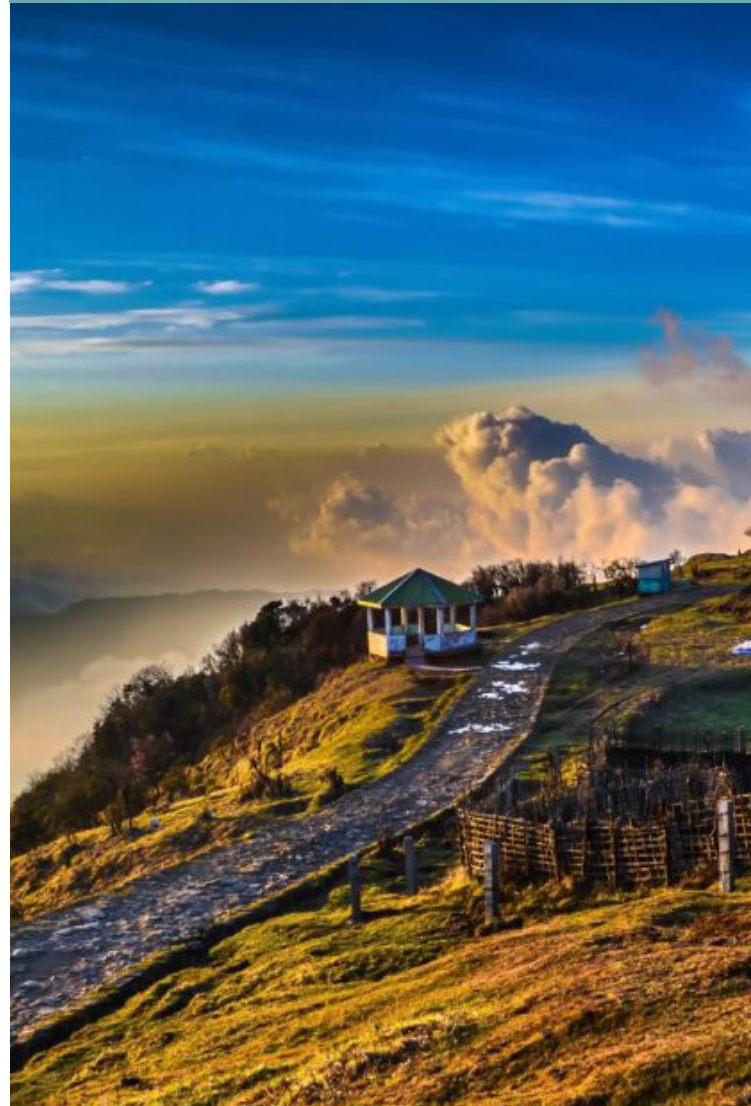
Happy Resilience Journeys to all! **HAI**

CONTENTS

VOLUME 5

ISSUE 4

JULY- AUGUST 2025



Cover Story

Resilience & Renewal: Reimagining Indian Hospitality

From grounded flights and shuttered hotels to shifting traveller expectations, Indian tourism has faced some tough tests in recent years. Yet the industry continues to adapt, innovate, and reimagine its future—anchored in resilience and guided by the enduring appeal of India's cultural and natural wealth.

Team HAI Engage

LeaderSpeak

Unlocking India's tourism potential

While the last five years have reshaped Indian hospitality, demand is now broader, expectations are sharper, and the market is more layered. It's clear, the old playbook needs to be reimaged.
By Puneet Chhatwal



FAITH Conclave

National Tourism Conclave on Indian Tourism: Invincible Spirit



Destination

Echoes of the past The UNESCO trail through vintage India

In this issue, we trace timeless tales across India's World Heritage sites.
By Riaan Jacob George



The Last Word

Roll out the roadmap

Our action plan should aim at developing infrastructure that can sustain the objective of a \$3 trillion economy with 100 million international tourist arrivals and 15 billion domestic visits.



32



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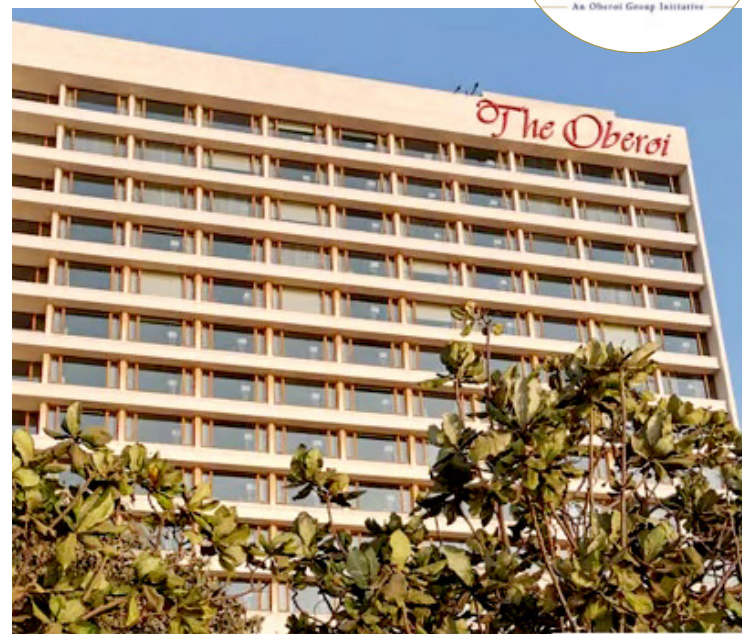
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Oberoai Group awards hospitality scholarships



The Oberoi Group has announced Ms Kritika Sharma, Executive Housekeeper at Taj Westend, Bangalore, and Ms Alisha Rampal, Director of Food & Beverage at Trident, Bandra Kurla, Mumbai, as the recipients of its esteemed Dare to Dream – Rai Bahadur Mohan Singh Oberoi and Be the Best – Prithvi Raj Singh Oberoi scholarships, respectively.

Instituted in honour of the Group's visionary founders, the scholarships recognise outstanding professionals who exemplify excellence in learning, leadership, and service in the hospitality sector. Both winners will pursue the Master of Hospitality program at EHL Lausanne, Switzerland — a two-year MBA that blends virtual coursework with a three-week on-campus residency and an international study tour of leading global hotels. "Hospitality is more than a profession—it is a passion, a pursuit of excellence, and a commitment to service," said Vikram Oberoi, CEO, The Oberoi Group. "We are proud to support individuals who have the potential to lead and inspire the future of our industry."

Ranju Alex honoured with Bharat Gaurav award at British Parliament

Ranju Alex, Area Vice President—South Asia at Marriott International, has been conferred the prestigious Bharat Gaurav Award 2025 at a grand ceremony held at the British Parliament, House of Commons, in London on July 3, 2025.

This international honour, which recognises Indians who have brought global pride to the nation, places her alongside past luminaries such as Indira Nooyi, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, and Sunita Williams. Alex was recognised for her pioneering role in transforming the South Asian hospitality landscape and her inspiring leadership that blends business

performance with social purpose.

As Regional Vice President — South Asia at Marriott, she has driven strategic growth, people development, and inclusive workplace practices across one of the world's most dynamic hospitality markets. Her leadership philosophy—"Pursuit of Excellence with Humility in Leadership"—reflects her commitment to empowering teams, championing diversity, and leading with compassion.

Describing her as "a leader who blends excellence with humility," the Bharat Gaurav team praised her for inspiring others to lead with purpose and grace.



Her recognition marks not just a personal milestone but a proud moment for India and the global hospitality industry, setting an example for aspiring professionals and women leaders worldwide.

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Kachru inspires students

The LaLiT Suri Hospitality School recently hosted Mr K.B. Kachru, Chairman – South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, as Guest of Honour at its Valedictory Function, marking a significant moment for the graduating batch. A stalwart in the hospitality industry, Mr. Kachru’s presence added gravitas to the ceremony and inspired students with his insights and humility.

In his keynote address, Mr Kachru urged students to pursue excellence with passion, remain adaptable in a dynamic industry, and stay anchored to values like integrity and lifelong learning. He also lauded the institution’s consistent 100% placement record and commended the faculty for delivering industry-relevant education and nurturing talent with commitment.

Highlighting the celebration, Mr Kachru presented three top student awards: Chetan Kumar received The LaLiT Scholar Award, Nitin Choudhary was honoured with The LaLiT All-Rounder Award, and Chanchal Tewatia won The LaLiT Gourmet Innovator Award. His visit reaffirmed the school’s mission to develop future-ready professionals, and left a lasting impact on both students and faculty.

Across the country, World Environment Day 2025 was observed through meaningful participation and a growing movement toward responsible hospitality.



Indian brands make global waves

India’s top brands are fast emerging as global powerhouses, with Tata Group becoming the first Indian brand to cross the USD 30 billion mark in value and retaining its crown as the nation’s most valuable brand. Adani Group led the pack with an 82% surge, making it the fastest-growing Indian brand in 2025. Taj Hotels continued to shine with a AAA+ brand strength rating and a BSI score of 92.2/100. Other heavyweights like Infosys, LIC, HDFC, and Reliance posted strong double-digit growth, while Zomato made an impressive debut at rank 39. As India balances growth opportunities and global challenges, brands are also driving sustainability, with Tata leading on perception value and Infosys showing the highest positive gap value. Amid growing global influence, India’s soft power through its brands is firmly in the spotlight.

Green Luxury, the Oberoi Way

With ‘Elements by Oberoi’, the hospitality group blends elegance with environmental and social responsibility, proving that sustainability and luxury can thrive together.

In a world increasingly conscious of its environmental footprint, The Oberoi Group has set a benchmark in responsible luxury through its ‘Elements by Oberoi’ sustainability initiative. The programme, built around the three elements of Earth, Water, and Air, embeds sustainability into every layer of hotel operations, while aligning with the Group’s commitment to community upliftment and its 2030 sustainability goals.

Under the **Earth** pillar, Oberoi Hotels have championed biodiversity through sustainable landscaping. The Oberoi, Marrakech features expansive olive groves, while Wildflower Hall and The Oberoi Cecil are surrounded by flourishing apple orchards that support the local ecosystem. Organic farming thrives across several properties, with herbs and vegetables grown on-site using compost from kitchen waste. All hotels in India operate Organic Waste Converters, creating a closed-loop system. Additionally, non-recyclable guest amenities have been replaced with biodegradable alternatives, and retired linens are repurposed to minimise landfill waste. In-house glass water bottling systems, introduced across Indian properties, have eliminated over six million single-use plastic bottles annually.

The **Water** element is addressed through rainwater harvesting and Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD) systems in multiple properties. Marine conservation is



championed at The Oberoi Beach Resort, Lombok with coral reef restoration, and at Bali with a Turtle Sanctuary. The brand’s sustainable laundry systems reduce water usage by 40% and energy by 15%, maintaining high service standards with minimal environmental impact.

When it comes to **Air**, The Oberoi Group ensures premium indoor air quality in its urban hotels through advanced purification systems—especially critical in pollution-prone cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru. Many properties, including The Oberoi, Gurgaon and Trident, Gurgaon, are fully solar-powered. Others, like The Oberoi Udaivilas and Wildflower Hall, use a mix of solar, wind, and hydroelectric power, significantly reducing emissions. EV charging stations are available across all Indian hotels, while smart energy systems adjust power consumption based on real-time occupancy and weather, ensuring efficiency without compromising comfort.

Beyond environmental stewardship, Oberoi’s impact extends into **communities**. Each hotel is built in collaboration with local artisans and designed to reflect regional culture. Initiatives like Soap for Hope convert used hotel soaps into new bars for underserved communities, promoting hygiene and reducing waste. The Group’s CSR programme Saksham, in partnership with SOS Children’s Villages of India, supports over 230 family homes with access to education,

healthcare, and stable environments. The RISE programme (Refine and Invest in Skill Enhancement), meanwhile, trains and employs hospitality talent from diverse backgrounds, ensuring long-term careers aligned with Oberoi’s service standards.

As The Oberoi Group moves towards its 2030 goals, it continues to redefine hospitality by blending luxury with responsibility—proving that sustainability can be both aspirational and actionable.

Elements by Oberoi: Highlights

EARTH

- Organic farming & composting
- In-house water bottling eliminating 6M+ plastic bottles annually
- Biodegradable amenities and linen reuse

WATER

- Rainwater harvesting & ZLD systems
- Coral reef restoration and turtle conservation
- Laundry systems saving 40% water

AIR

- Air purification in high-pollution cities
- Solar, wind, and hydroelectric-powered hotels
- EV charging & smart energy management

COMMUNITY

- Saksham: Supporting 230+ SOS family homes
- RISE: Career training for underprivileged youth
- Soap for Hope: Recycled soaps for hygiene in low-income communities

Tourism rebounds in Valley: CM Omar Abdullah

Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah inaugurated the Travel & Tourism Fair (TTF) Kolkata 2025, India’s oldest B2B travel trade show, at Biswa Bangla Mela Prangan. Speaking at the event, he said tourism in Kashmir is witnessing a strong rebound, with a steady influx of visitors despite recent setbacks like the Pahalgam attack. “The Amarnath Yatra is also progressing well, with pilgrims arriving in good numbers on both routes. I interacted with several of them, and they are all happy,” he said. Expressing optimism, he added, “I’ve come to Kolkata to invite more tourists from West Bengal this year. Jammu & Kashmir is proud to be a key stakeholder in India’s tourism growth story.”

The CM emphasised that the tourism strategy now extends beyond traditional sites, with off-beat destinations like Gurez, Bangus, Bhaderwah, Sanasar, Doodh-



pathri, and Basohli gaining popularity. He also highlighted the state’s focus on border tourism in areas like Uri, Keran, Teetwal, and Suchetgarh, aiming to ensure local communities benefit from tourism-led development. Looking ahead, he shared plans to develop Jammu & Kashmir as a premier MICE destination, leveraging its natural beauty, cultural richness, and enhanced infrastructure to attract conferences, incentives, and exhibitions.

Unlocking India's Tourism Potential

While the last five years have reshaped Indian hospitality, demand is now broader, expectations are sharper, and the market is more layered. It's clear, the old playbook needs to be reimagined, writes

Puneet Chhatwal,

MD & CEO, IHCL.

India's hospitality sector has witnessed three consecutive fiscal years of double-digit revenue growth led by favourable macro-economics and growing consumer discretionary spends. Maintaining a sustained annual GDP growth of 6% +, India is now the fourth largest economy, well on its way to becoming the third. Government capital expenditure on infrastructure development has been a key driver, directly boosting demand in the travel and tourism sector. This coupled with demand outpacing supply and the permanent shift in consumer behaviour, has contributed to the sector's performance.

However, India continues to be an underserved hospitality sector when compared to the major lodging markets. The branded room supply in India is at 0.2 million with a penetration of rooms per 1,000 people at 0.1. This in China stands



Government capital expenditure on infrastructure development has been a key driver, directly boosting demand in the travel and tourism sector

at 4.5 million rooms at a penetration of 3.2. India's hotel supply while growing year on year continues to be sub optimal. This presents a huge opportunity.

The value of the travel and tourism sector's contribution to the Indian economy is expected to reach USD468.6 billion by 2033, a CAGR of 8.4% far exceeding the overall economy CAGR of 6.5% in the same period, according to figures from the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC).

KEY ENABLERS

The Union budget in February 2025, recognising the importance of the tourism sector, offered a multi-pronged approach, laying a foundation for unlocking its potential. This includes developing 50 tourist destinations with their inclusion in

the harmonised master list of infrastructure, expansion of the UDAN scheme, enhancing connectivity to 120 new destinations, facilitating ease of travel by streamlining visas and special incentives for skilling to build employability in the sector.

The government's role goes beyond these direct measures with its continued focus on infrastructure-led investments and consumption push through direct tax cuts and rationalisation of tax slabs, placing significant disposable income in middle-class households, setting the stage for a demand boost.

INNOVATION VITAL FOR GROWTH

While the last five years have reshaped Indian hospitality, demand is now broader, expectations are sharper, and the market is more layered. It's clear: the old playbook needs to be reimagined. The private sector will need to sharpen its focus on new formats, building deeper customer connections and deploying technology across the value chain. Innovation is clearly the need of the hour to stay relevant in a



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rapidly evolving and dynamic marketplace. As the country's largest hospitality company, IHCL, under its five-year strategic roadmap Accelerate 2030, continues to expand and refine its brand portfolio, introducing new brands and formats to cater to India's diverse market, with the vision of achieving greater scale and leadership across its operating segments.

TALENT HUB

According to the WTTC, India is expected to add nearly 10 million jobs in the tourism sector by 2028, and the total number of jobs directly or indirectly dependent on the travel and tourism industry will increase from 42.9 million in 2018 to 52.3 million in 2028. Being labour-intensive, the sector creates a large number of jobs and the majority require low-skill levels. This makes the sector intrinsic to India's employment agenda.

Being labour-intensive, the sector creates a large number of jobs, and a majority require low-skill levels. This makes the sector intrinsic to India's employment agenda

Most recently, IHCL signed an MoU with the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, Goa, for the country's largest hospitality skilling centre in Goa to boost employment opportunities for youth in the state.

GOING GREEN

Moving beyond conventional sustainability of reducing single-use plastics and conserving resources, Indian hospitality is now more forward-focused on restoring ecosystems, empowering communities and building long-term resilience. The government, too, is shifting gears with Swadesh Darshan 2.0, focusing on destination-led development rooted in sustainability and community engagement. Infrastructure like eco-lodges, nature centres, clean mobility, and decentralised waste systems aim to boost local economies while minimising ecological impact.

In the country's evolving economic landscape, tourism has emerged as a powerful force driving not only economic growth but also forging a path towards a brighter and more inclusive future. With strong structural tailwinds—rising GDP, infrastructure investments, growing hotel demand, and increasing consumer affluence—the sector is well-positioned to accelerate its momentum. **HAI**

paathyā

Recognising the urgent need for skilling in India, IHCL, guided by its ESG+ framework of Paathya, aims to skill 1,00,000 youth by 2030 to bridge the employment gap with a target of ensuring over 25% of those trained are women. Fostering DEI in the Indian hospitality industry and addressing systemic inequalities can contribute to a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable industry. Through various collaborations, IHCL partners with 52 skilling centres across India, from Kupwara in J&K, and Guwahati in Assam, to Chhindwara in Madhya Pradesh, and Bidar in Karnataka, among others.

Resilience & Renewal

REIMAGINING INDIAN HOSPITALITY

From grounded flights and shuttered hotels to shifting traveller expectations, Indian tourism has faced some tough tests in recent years. Yet the industry continues to adapt, innovate, and reimagine its future—anchored in resilience and guided by the enduring appeal of India's cultural and natural wealth.

Team HAI Engage

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esilience is not merely about recovery—it is about renewal. For India tourism, resilience has been a defining thread through some of the most turbulent years in recent memory. From pandemic disruptions that grounded flights and shut down hotels to geopolitical tensions and economic headwinds that shook global travel, the industry has endured many challenges. What has sustained it is not just the ability to bounce back, but the capacity to reimagine itself—adapting to new traveller behaviours, rebuilding with innovation, and staying anchored in India's timeless appeal as a destination. At its heart, resilience is a mix of agility and belief: agility to embrace change and belief in the enduring draw of India's cultural and natural wealth.



India's tourism and hospitality sector is set for record expansion, with revenues projected to cross \$59 billion (Rs 5.1 lakh crore) by 2028, according to a report by Capitalmind PMS. The boom is being fuelled by rising disposable incomes, infrastructure upgrades, and a renewed surge in both domestic and international travel. The report highlights how Ayurveda resorts, palace stays, and yoga retreats are increasingly booked out.

Domestic tourism is emerging as the key driver, expected to double to 5.2 billion visits by 2030 from 2.5 billion in 2024, translating into a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 13.4%. Visitor spending is forecast to nearly triple to Rs 33.95 trillion by

2034, according to WTTC data. Weddings and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) are the major growth drivers. The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) reported 3.8 million weddings between 23 November and 15 December 2023, generating Rs 4.74 lakh crore, a 26% year-on-year growth.

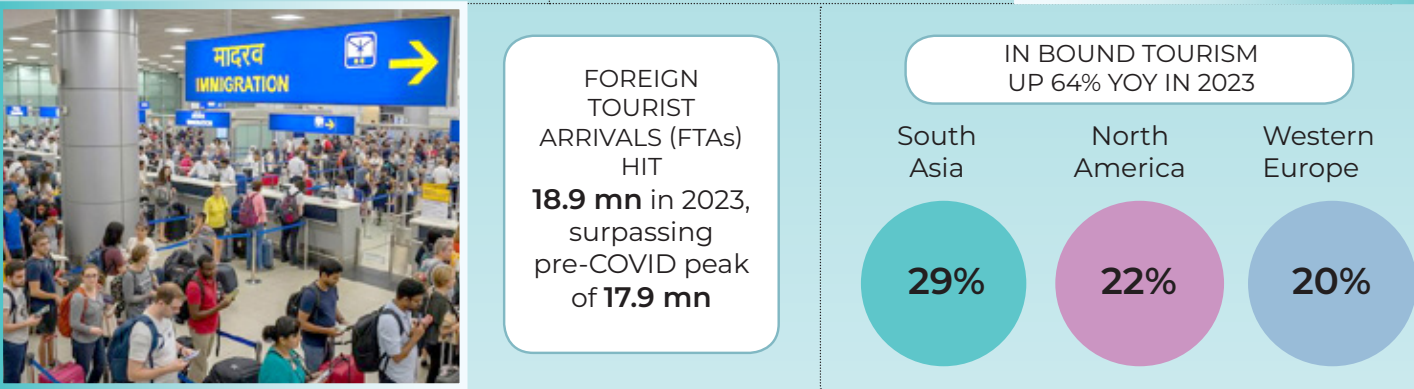
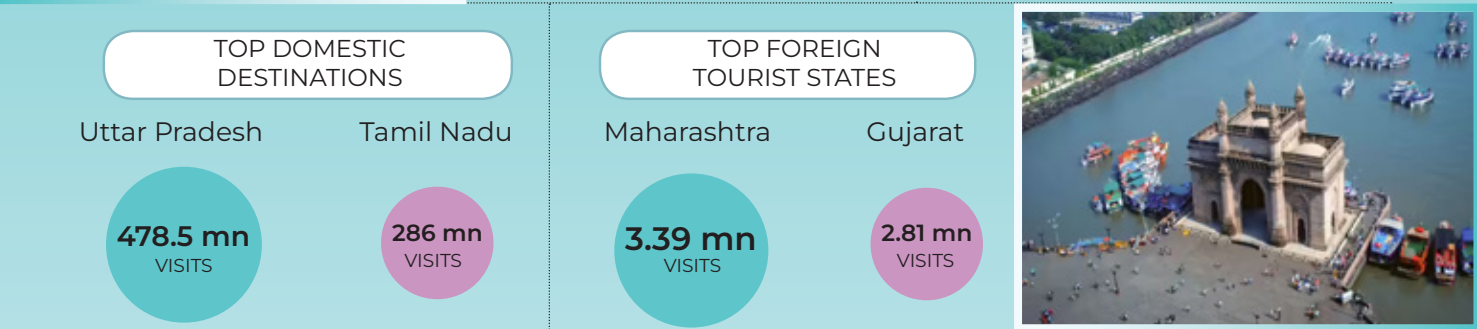
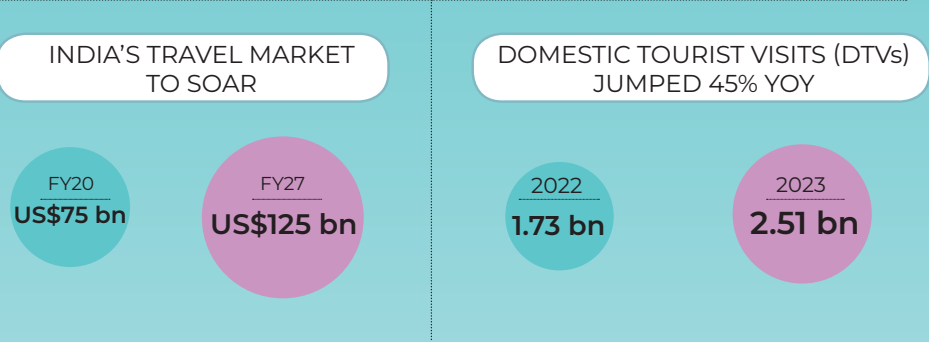
High Net Worth Individuals (HNWIs) are expected to grow 107% to 1.65 million by FY27, according to Knight Frank's The Wealth Report 2023 & 2024. Destination weddings in Jaipur, Udaipur, Goa, and Delhi are booming, with luxury hotels earning Rs 25-30 million (US\$300,000–360,000) per event from buyouts and large-format celebrations. Hotel expenses alone account for 50% of destination wedding spends.

KEY CHALLENGES

- India’s hospitality industry boasts 3.4 million keys as of 31 March 2024, but the organised sector (branded, aggregators, quality independents) is just 11%. Branded hotels comprise 45% of this (170,000 keys), with luxury hotels a mere 17% (29,000 keys across 230 hotels).
- The demand-supply gap, especially in luxury, is widening due to rising incomes, premium preferences, and limited inventory. Barriers like scarce land, high capital costs, and long gestation periods keep supply constrained, driving ARR growth and occupancy (60–70% in luxury). The luxury segment’s Total Revenue per Available Room (TRevPAR) is 117% higher than upscale and 298% higher than midscale.



INDIA’S TRAVEL MOMENTUM



SOURCE: Capitalmind PMS report



National Tourism Conclave on Indian Tourism: Invincible Spirit



The Federation of Associations in Tourism and Hospitality (FAITH), India's apex tourism policy and strategy think tank of the national associations, held its National Tourism Conclave on 12-13 August at Hotel Taj Palace, New Delhi. The event, titled Indian Tourism: Invincible Spirit, focused on charting a bold vision for the sector.

The key objectives included: creating a pathway to a \$3 trillion tourism economy that contributes 10% to the Viksit Bharat vision of a \$30 trillion GDP; positioning India among the top five in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Travel & Tourism Development Index; increasing foreign exchange earnings from tourism from the

current ~\$30 billion to ~\$400 billion; and strengthening tourism as a socio-economic growth engine by expanding domestic visits from 2 billion at present to 20 billion.

At the event, Chairman and HAI nominee of FAITH and MD & CEO, IHCL **Puneet Chhatwal** called tourism the heartbeat of the nation, highlighting its power to connect cultures and drive economies. He emphasised its growing role in business, medical, and spiritual tourism.

Chhatwal underlined the sector's resilience in the face of challenges. "One in four new jobs globally comes from tourism, aviation, and hospitality," he said, noting that the



industry currently accounts for 7-9% of global employment—a figure he expects will soon reach double digits. He described tourism as a powerful multiplier of livelihoods that India must harness for future prosperity.

The Hotel Association of India (HAI), apex body of the nation's hospitality industry, has launched an industry-first structured mentoring program to develop 100,000 hotel leaders in support of India's Tourism Vision 2047. Covering 50 tier-2 and tier-3 locations, the initiative aims to address the sector's widening talent gap and foster sustainable growth. Designed by domain experts from HAI member hotels, the program will focus on leadership development, career progression, organizational culture, talent attraction, retention, and engagement.

Hon'ble Minister of Tourism **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat** hailed it as a "game-changer" that will strengthen India's position as a global tourism powerhouse and contribute to the \$3 trillion tourism economy target by 2047. HAI President and Radisson Hotel Group Chairman—South Asia, **K.B. Kachru**, said the initiative, rooted in the guru-shishya tradition, will prepare skilled managers essential for the projected expansion to one million branded hotel rooms.



Tourism is the heartbeat of the nation. One in four new jobs globally comes from tourism, aviation and hospitality

PUNEET CHHATWAL

Chairman and HAI nominee of FAITH and MD & CEO, IHCL

“Disruptions are no longer exceptional events. Crisis-resilient strategies anticipate potential disruptions through systematic monitoring and scenario mapping and planning”

ANIL CHADHA
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
ITC HOTELS LTD.

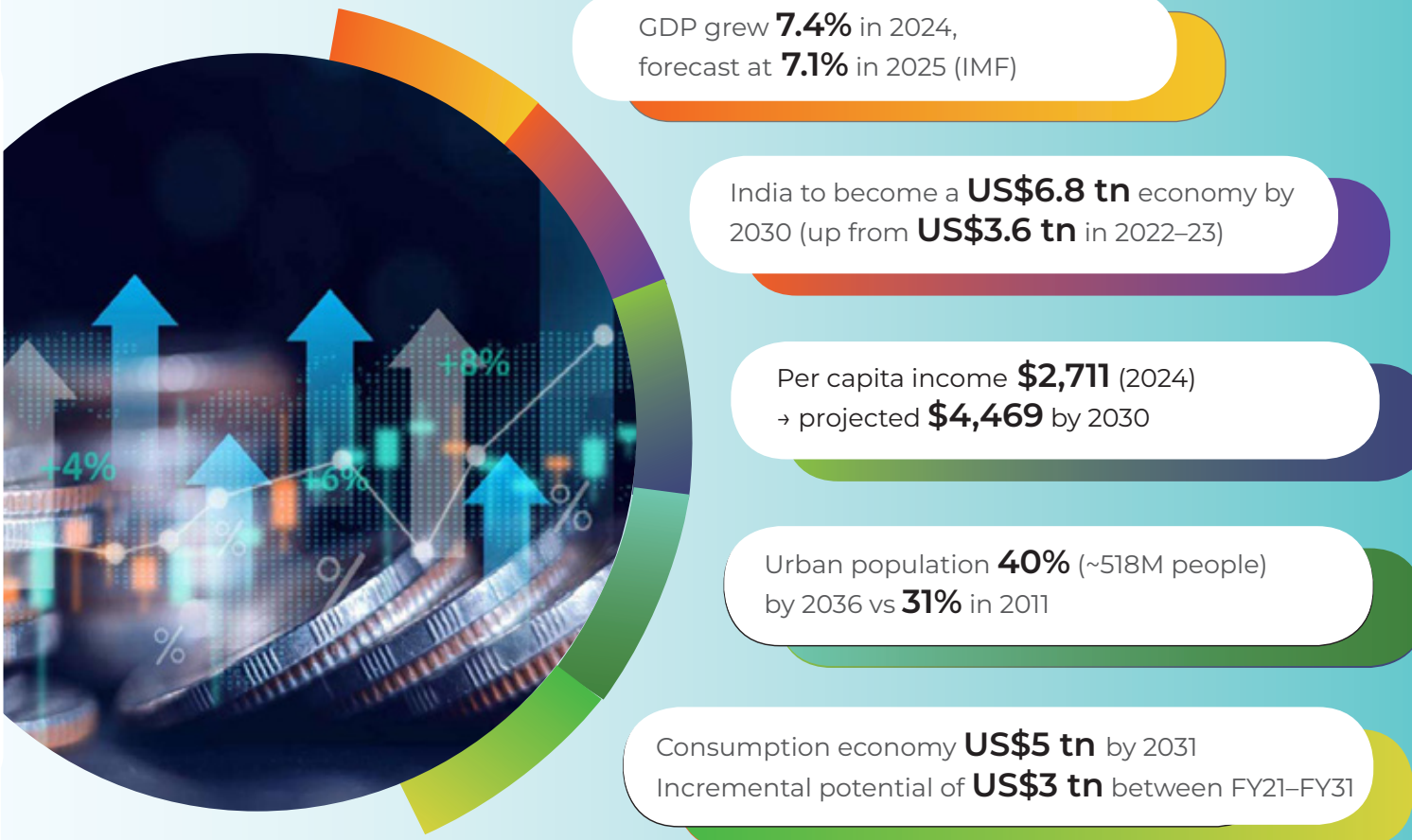
Anil Chadha, Managing Director, ITC Hotels Ltd. says, “We are experiencing an era defined by unprecedented change, uncertainty, conflicts and climate crisis. And yet, India remains amongst the world’s fastest growing economies. With 6 brands across our portfolio catering to different segments, we are well poised to take our growth trajectory higher and wider. Tier 2/3 cities have gained tourism interest as travellers want to partake of local flavours and connect deeper with the cultural ethos



of the region. As part of our Digital First initiative, we have integrated technology to offer seamless, personalised experiences. Resilience, to us, is not about bouncing back, it’s about staying ahead. From a workforce lens, we are committed to encourage growth and empowerment for our robust talent pool.”



INDIA’S ECONOMIC TAILWINDS



SOURCE: Capitalmind PMS report

He adds that disruptions are part of every brand’s growth cycle, and the processes have to be robust enough to absorb the disruptions while staying focused on the goals ahead. “We need to ensure our actions are in sync with the moment the down cycle turns into upwards. Attention to quality, rigorous training, upskilling and leading with innovation across various fields of operation is a must. Disruptions are no longer exceptional events. Crisis-resilient strategies anticipate potential disruptions through systematic monitoring and planning.”

He says that at ITC Hotels, technology is a cornerstone of their strategy to remain resilient, relevant, and ahead of the curve.

“ At IATO, we have focused on strengthening the backbone of our inbound tour operator community. Our efforts have centred on policy advocacy, skill development, digital transformation, and stakeholder collaboration ”

RAVI GOSAIN

President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO)



Talking about the industry's resilience and the efforts of the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), **Ravi Gosain**, President, IATO, says, "We have focused on strengthening the backbone of our inbound tour operator community. Our efforts have centred on policy advocacy, skill development, digital transformation, and stakeholder collaboration. We have engaged with the government to secure sectoral support, streamline visa and entry

protocols, and push for robust international marketing campaigns."

He notes that the pandemic underscored the value of agility. IATO members diversified offerings, embraced technology, and shifted towards experiential, sustainable travel in line with global traveller expectations. The association's Sub-Committee platforms keep the trade engaged, informed, and forward-looking.



With growing demand for wellness, rural, spiritual, and heritage tourism, Gosain sees strong opportunities for inbound revival. "Resilience is a mindset—rooted in unity, driven by purpose, and fuelled by the passion of countless professionals who believe in India's potential. As we look ahead, we do so with optimism, anchored in experience and ready for the challenges of tomorrow," he said.

Manav Soni, Chairman, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) Tourism Council, says, "As a longstanding stakeholder in the evolution of India's tourism sector, I believe our collective resilience lies in a proactive, collaborative, and technology-driven approach to reimagining how we operate."

He notes that tour operators and travel agents must evolve from traditional, volume-driven models to more agile



“ As a longstanding stakeholder in the evolution of India's tourism sector, I believe our collective resilience lies in a proactive, collaborative, and technology-driven approach to reimagining how we operate ”

MANAV SONI

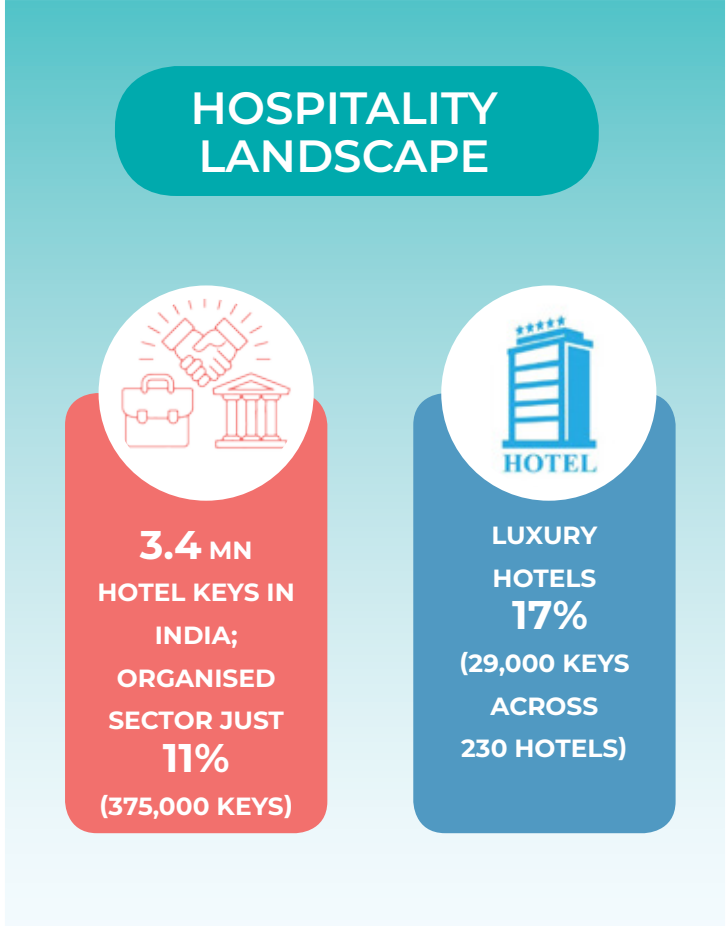
Chairman, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) Tourism Council



workshops and certification programmes, TAAI is aligning members with international standards. Training now extends to crisis management, cybersecurity, digital marketing, and cross-border coordination—core competencies in a rapidly evolving travel landscape.

The pandemic highlighted the strength of India’s domestic tourism. By promoting lesser-known destinations and working with state tourism boards, TAAI is helping decentralise footfall, encourage community-based tourism, and boost local economies. Travel agents in smaller towns are emerging as vital catalysts for change.

“Resilience is all about standing together,” Soni adds. “Through TAAI’s regional chapters and forums, we’ve built strong networks that support members in times of need. A resilient industry is a united one.”



SOURCE: Capitalmind PMS report

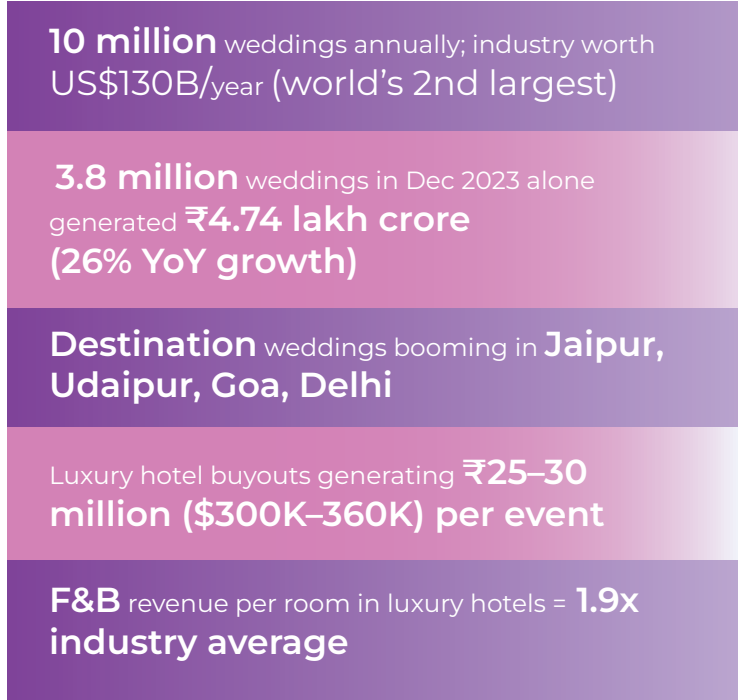


operations. Demand is rising for customised travel, experiential journeys, and niche segments such as wellness, rural, and eco-tourism. By diversifying offerings and integrating sustainable practices, the industry can reduce dependence on singular markets and peak seasons.

Resilience requires embracing the digital shift. TAAI is encouraging members to adopt AI-powered booking platforms, virtual tours, CRM systems, and targeted digital marketing. Tools such as automation, data analytics, and mobile engagement not only elevate customer experience but also enable faster, more informed responses during crises.

Continuous learning is another pillar of survival. Through skill development

WEDDINGS, MICE & F&B



SOURCE: Capitalmind PMS report





“At Lemon Tree Hotels, resilience is our strategic muscle—the ability to adapt to change without losing sight of purpose: delivering consistent value to guests, employees, and stakeholders. During the pandemic, we recalibrated costs without layoffs and reimaged contactless guest experiences”

PATANJALI G. KESWANI

Chairman & Managing Director, Lemon Tree Hotels



Says **Patanjali G. Keswani**, Chairman & Managing Director, Lemon Tree Hotels: “At Lemon Tree Hotels, resilience is our strategic muscle—the ability to adapt to change without losing sight of our purpose: delivering consistent value to guests, employees, and stakeholders. It rests on three pillars: operational agility, people-first leadership, and digital transformation. During the pandemic, we recalibrated costs without layoffs and reimaged contactless guest experiences.”

In the past five years, the group has redefined its operating model, shifting from fixed to variable cost structures, consolidating non-core operations, and investing in tech that provides predictive insights rather than just forecasts.

The industry faces a talent deficit, and there is a need for proactive recruitment strategies and robust talent development programmes. Lemon Tree’s roadmap to becoming the most preferred Indian hotel chain by 2030 across the mid-market and upscale segments includes achieving over 50% EBITDA margins, 20% Return on Capital Employed (ROCE), expanding to 30,000 rooms in 200 cities, becoming debt-free by CY28, and building a bionic revenue management system with automated processes. It is also committed to ESG leadership, with 100% green-certified properties.

Digital innovation streamlines operations, enables personalisation, and boosts loyalty, while flexible work models and



transparent communication strengthen team trust. “Digital innovation has been a force multiplier, helping us streamline back-end efficiencies, enhance guest personalisation and gain real-time visibility across operations. Technology, when humanised, becomes a true enabler of resilience. Guest preferences are shifting rapidly—our recent upgrades to Aurika, Lemon Tree/Premier, Red Fox and Keys brands focus on personalisation, sustainability, and digital convenience,” he says.

You cannot prepare for every crisis, but you can prepare an approach to respond to any crisis. Focusing on innovation and informed risk-mitigation must be the long-term approach to resilience. **HAI**





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ECHOES OF THE PAST

THE UNESCO TRAIL THROUGH VINTAGE INDIA

In this issue, we trace timeless tales across
India's World Heritage sites.

BY RIAAN JACOB GEORGE



Mysore Palace

India has many UNESCO World Heritage Sites that reflect its long history, cultural variety, and architectural skill. These sites are important not just because they are old, but because they tell us how people lived, believed, and expressed themselves over time. Below are 10 cultural sites that offer insight into different parts of India's heritage.



Bhimbetka Rock Shelters

1. BHIMBETKA ROCK SHELTERS, Madhya Pradesh

The Bhimbetka Rock Shelters are found in a forest at the edge of the Vindhya hills. These natural caves have been used by humans for thousands of years. Some of the oldest human-made drawings in the world can be seen on the walls here, with some paintings dating back to over a 10,000 years ago. They show scenes of people hunting, dancing, and gathering, giving us a sense of how early humans lived. The art styles changed over time, which shows how the culture developed across different periods. Even today, tribal groups still live in the nearby areas.



2. AJANTA CAVES, Maharashtra

The Ajanta Caves are a group of Buddhist rock-cut caves that date back to the 2nd century BCE. They are located in a remote valley surrounded by hills and were once used as monasteries and prayer halls by monks. Inside the caves are beautiful wall paintings and carvings, many of which are based on the life stories of the Buddha. These artworks show great detail and emotional expression, and they are among the finest examples of early Indian paintings. The Ajanta Caves give us a clear picture of what religious life and art looked like in ancient India.



Ajanta Caves



Mahabalipuram Shore Temple

3. MONUMENTS AT MAHABALIPURAM, Tamil Nadu

Mahabalipuram is a coastal town in Tamil Nadu that has many stone monuments built by the Pallava dynasty in the 7th and 8th centuries. The site includes cave temples, carved rocks, and freestanding temples shaped like chariots, called rathas. One of the most well-known pieces is a massive stone showing a scene from Hindu mythology– the descent of the holy Ganges River to Earth. The carvings at Mahabalipuram reflect religious stories and early South Indian architecture. Because of its location near the sea, the monuments were also part of a thriving port city.



Sun Temple, Konark, Odisha

4. SUN TEMPLE, KONARK, Odisha

The Sun Temple at Konark was built in the 13th century by King Narasimhadeva I and is dedicated to the Sun god. The temple was designed in the shape of a large stone chariot with 24 wheels and pulled by seven stone horses. Though parts of the temple have fallen apart over time, the remaining structures still show fine carvings of gods, animals, dancers, and musicians. This temple is a key example of Kalinga-style temple architecture and reflects both religious beliefs and astronomical knowledge of the time.



Basilica of Bom Jesus, Goa

5. CHURCHES AND CONVENTS, Goa

During the Portuguese rule in Goa from the 16th to 18th centuries, many churches and convents were built in and around Old Goa. These churches and convents became centres for teaching and missionary work. The architecture of these churches and convents show different European architectural styles, including Baroque and Gothic, and feature large altars, carved wood, and stone details. One of the most important is the Basilica of Bom Jesus, which contains the tomb of St Francis Xavier, a missionary who played a major role in spreading Christianity in Asia. Even today, his body is preserved in the Basilica which has become a must-visit when in Goa.

6. JANTAR MANTAR, Jaipur, Rajasthan

The Jantar Mantar in Jaipur is an open-air observatory built in the early 1700s by Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II, who was interested in astronomy. The site includes 19 large instruments made of stone and metal, which were designed to study the sun, moon, planets, and stars using the naked eye. One of the most famous structures here is the Samrat Yantra, the world's largest stone sundial. The instruments are accurate and still usable today. Jantar Mantar shows how science, design, and astronomy came together during this time in India's history.



Jantar Mantar, Jaipur



Rani-ki-Vav, Gujarat

7. RANI-KI-VAV, Gujarat

Rani-ki-Vav, or 'The Queen's Stepwell', was built in the 11th century in memory of King Bhima I by his queen, Udayamati. This underground structure was used to store water during dry seasons, but it was also designed as a place for rest and worship. The stepwell goes down several levels, with over 1,500 sculptures carved into its walls. Many of these show Vishnu in different forms, along with gods, goddesses, and scenes from myths. The design of the stepwell combines utility with religious art, showing how water and spirituality were connected in everyday life.



Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas

9. SANTINIKETAN, West Bengal

Santiniketan was founded by Rabindranath Tagore in the early 1900s as a place for learning that was connected to nature and creativity. Tagore was a believer of open-air education and many of the classrooms were outdoors under trees. It later became Visva-Bharati University, and is a big attraction for artists, scholars, and students from around the world. More than 250 years ago, Tagore planted a Banyan tree which is still visited by all who go to Santiniketan. Till today, Santiniketan is known for promoting art, culture, and learning in a way that respects both tradition and change.



Santiniketan, West Bengal

10. MOIDAMS OF CHARAIDEO, Assam

The Moidams are burial mounds built by the Ahom kings and nobles, mainly in the area of Charaideo. They date back to the 13th century and were used instead of cremation. The mounds are large earthen structures built over underground burial chambers. Sometimes, objects were buried with the body to support the person in the next life. The Moidams reflect the beliefs, customs, and royal traditions of the Ahom dynasty, who ruled Assam for almost 600 years. **HAI**



Moidams of Charaideo, Assam

Roll out the roadmap

Our action plan should aim at developing infrastructure that can sustain the objective of a \$3 trillion economy with 100 million international tourist arrivals and 15 billion domestic visits.

By MP BEZBARUAH
Secretary General, Hotel Association of India



This issue of HAI Engage coincides with an important conclave of all the tourism industry associations—FAITH—on the theme of “Indian Tourism: Invincible Spirit”.

The outcome of the conclave provides a blueprint for the industry for its journey to a \$3 trillion tourism economy.

The various associations gave their vision for the industry and deliberated on the detailed micro picture of what ails the industry and what needs to be done in the future. HAI, however, decided to go a step further and, apart from detailing the micro problems which need immediate attention, also looked at the macro dimensions of the future roadmap for Indian tourism, believing that for a cohesive attention to the micro problems, a strong macro framework is necessary.

The journey starts with what the Prime Minister exhorted the industry to do, in his interaction with the industry after the last budget of the country: roll out the roadmap. Implicit in it is the assumption that the road has been clearly charted. The prime minister’s exhortation is significant because it shifts emphasis to action rather than just policy pronouncement. And India’s last tourism policy was way back in 2002.

However, the journey to say, 2047 has been differently described by policy makers— 100 million foreign tourist arrivals, \$3 trillion tourism economy and globally a place among the top five destinations in the world. They are not conflicting goals, but each has a different connotation. The conclave has mentioned \$3 trillion tourism economy as an underlying target, and that is a pragmatic goal to look forward to. The role of tourism in an economy is wide and it would be unwise to limit the goal of tourism growth to the number of foreign tourist

arrivals or to a competition with other countries on the number of arrivals. Tourism is recognised as a tool for economic development, as an instrument of inclusive growth. Therefore, its contribution to the GDP of the country would be a more reasonable aspiration. Such an objective recognises the income and employment-creating capacity of tourism. Tourism has a very strong multiplier impact on employment and income and even a larger “ripple effect” throughout the economy.

The contribution to GDP is perhaps understated. The normal accounting system cannot fully take into account the multiplier effects and “ripple” effects of any tourism activity. The government has accepted the Tourism Satellite Accounting system. There is a strong case for using this system rigorously in tourism accounting.

Though India’s tourism policy is dated, recent budget announcements have outlined key policy directions and a clear roadmap for its implementation. Some of them are:

- Comprehensive development with the convergence of all the stakeholders. Such convergence is essential between the plans of different ministries and departments of the government whose activities are integral to tourism, like culture, civil aviation, railways and road transport. Similarly, as the development of destinations is the primary responsibility of the states, strong coordination between the states and the centre is a prime requirement.
- Development in a mission mode.
- Professional destination management and development of new destinations.
- Strong public-private partnership system.



In tune with the policy of sustainable development and the objective of using tourism as a tool for inclusive growth, positive intervention is required to spread tourism within India more evenly, by prioritising infrastructure and destination development in the less developed areas

It is now accepted globally that the ultimate, unavoidable objective of any tourism planning must be within the framework of sustainability. In the Indian context, the total picture must include huge domestic tourism, which is now 2.5 billion and has the potential of growing to 15 billion as per a study done by HAI.

Our action plan should aim at developing infrastructure that can sustain the objective of a \$3 trillion economy with 100 million international tourist arrivals and 15 billion domestic visits. The canvas of action commensurate with India's tourism growth objectives is very wide but some of the critical interventions required can be briefly mentioned.

► First, destination development. In tune with the policy of sustainable development and the objective of using tourism as a tool for inclusive growth, positive intervention is required to spread tourism within India more evenly by prioritising infrastructure and destination development in the less developed areas, along with an appropriate marketing strategy towards that end. At present six states get about 60% of total foreign visits and five states get about 60% of the total domestic visits. Unless new destinations are properly developed, the present popular destinations may

soon become unsustainable, and India will face problems of over-tourism. Fortunately, the new trend of tourism is tilted towards nature, culture and wellness areas in which India has abundant possibilities to develop.

► Second, connectivity to India and within India to the new destinations. Expansion of connectivity—road, rail, waterways and air--and convergence of their development in synergy with the new destinations will be the most critical component of the strategy for future tourism growth. According to a WTTC report, 80% of domestic tourists travel by road to their destinations. Therefore, destination development and road connectivity should converge with the creative, integrated development of wayside facilities that showcase local art, craft, and cuisine, while involving local communities in their management as part of a holistic planning process. Similarly, the projected growth in tourism should match the growth in civil aviation capacities, both in air and in ground handling. The National Tourism Policy 2002 had made a rough assessment that per every 1 million additional tourists, 29 additional aircraft are required with an investment of Rs 21,823 crore (2002 prices).

► Third is accommodation. A place to stay is the most basic and unavoidable requirement of tourism development. There is a big gap in the demand and supply of accommodation. DG tourism had estimated that presently there are 1.8 lakh branded hotel rooms against the requirement of 4 lakh. There are 1.65 million unbranded rooms against the demand for 2.8 million. The 2002 Policy estimated that for 1 million additional tourists, 30,107 additional rooms are required, with an investment of Rs 4,516 crore (2002 prices). The highlight of this assessment is that these additional rooms will create 1.5 lakh direct and indirect jobs. But the development of accommodation is capital-intensive and time-consuming. HAI has been advocating for incentives like infrastructure status, industry benefits and Ease of Doing Business to kick start the process so that the mismatch of demand and supply do not adversely affect the tourism ambitions. For example, WTTC, in a report, has made the disturbing revelation that 49 pre- construction and 27 pre-opening licences/ approvals are required.

The road ahead is long, and the agenda for action is extensive. The strategy of convergent, comprehensive action in mission mode is logical. It is now time, as the PM says, to follow the roadmap with determined, concerted action by all the stakeholders. **HAI**

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