

FOR THE HOSPITALITY PROFESSIONAL

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President & CEO of Hilton Chris Nassetta to deliver Keynote at HICSA 2023

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Hotelivate has announced Chris Nassetta – President and CEO, Hilton as a keynote speaker for the 18th Edition of the Hotel Investment Conference - South Asia (HICSA) in Bangalore from 11th - 13th April 2023. Taking place over two and a half days, the main conference is set to be hosted at the expansive conference space spanning Hilton Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park and Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park. Nassetta's keynote session will take place on Day 1 of the Conference.

Nassetta has been pivotal to the company's fast paced growth and success for over a decade. He was also recognised by the International Hospitality Institute as one of the 100 Most Powerful People in Global Hospitality in June 2022

and serves on multiple boards, including the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) where he recently held the position as the former Chairman.

"HICSA is an institution in South Asia's hospitality space and Hilton is excited to host this year's event. As the world's third largest economy, India presents a tremendous opportunity for travel and tourism, and all of us at Hilton are optimistic about the future

of this incredible market. We are working to double our portfolio here by 2027 and introduce more of our award-winning brands to travellers throughout India. I'm looking forward to connecting with India's hospitality leaders at HICSA as we define the next Golden Age of Travel, and our team is excited to share our signature hospitality with the conference attendees at the beautiful Hilton Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park and Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park," said Chris Nassetta, President & CEO, Hilton.

As one of the world's leading hospitality companies with a legacy of over 103 years, Hilton has a portfolio of 18 worldclass brands comprising more than 7,000 properties and more than a million rooms, in 122 countries and territories.

The company is also rapidly expanding in Asia Pacific and is currently the fastest growing hotel company in the region, with one in four hotel rooms under construction carrying a Hilton flag.



The Hotel Investment Conference-South Asia (HICSA), since its inaugural edition in 2005, has been an unequalled gathering platform for the hospitality industry the world over. The conference is valued for its content-rich sessions and excellent networking opportunities attracting the hospitality industry's top brands, hotel owners,

bankers, developers, and professional advisors from around the globe.

Commenting on the 18th anniversary of HICSA, Manav Thadani, Founder Chairman of Hotelivate said, "This year's edition will be unique and special in many ways. Over the years we have had a similar format, but change is truly the only constant! AI is bringing a new perspective to the table, and we must be ready to embrace it. We are delighted to have the best industry minds in attendance and are extremely happy to welcome Chris back at HICSA once again.

Attendees of the conference will get access to all the keynote addresses, interviews, panel and group discussions as well as all the breakout sessions. ■

Angel Investors Back Restaurant Chain Burma Burma

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

Hunger Pangs Pvt Ltd, which operates restaurant chain Burma Burma and Tea Room, on Tuesday announced that it has raised an undisclosed amount in a round led by Sarthak Ahuja and Aditi Randev of Niamh Ventures Pvt. Ltd, while Finnet Media, an influencer management also participated in the round.

With this fundraise, the restaurant chain plans to open eight outlets, in the next fifteen months to take the total number of outlets to fourteen.

Founded in 2014 in Mumbai by Chhajer and Ankit Gupta, the chain has about six outlets in Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Kolkata and Bengaluru and aims to make Burmese cuisine more accessible.

"Almost a decade into the business, we've tested all four zones of the Indian market for Burmese cuisine. With this round, we aim to expand our operations in new cities and expand our base in existing ones," said Chirag Chhajer, one of the firm's co-founders. "Infact, we're now ready to take Burma Burma to the next level not only in India but globally," he added.

Prior to this fundraise, Hunger Pangs secured about \$2 million in a seed round led by Negen Capital, with participation from Bbigplas Poly Pvt. Ltd, in November last year, bootstrapped until the fundraise. ■



‘In the next 10 years, we plan to increase our portfolio aggressively in South India’

Asmita Mukherjee | Hyderabad

Larisa Hotels & Resorts – a 22-key boutique property brand started its journey in 2015 with its first property in Manali. The brand believes in exclusivity and considers its people as an integral part of its growth. While explaining their growth journey Priya Thakur, Founder, Larisa Hotels & Resorts said, “After seeing a lot of success in Manali, we went on to open in Goa, Mussoorie and Shimla subsequently.” Moving forward with an ambitious spirit, the brand is planning an aggressive expansion in the southern region of India in the near future.

Thakur believes in growing slowly but steadily. Most of the properties that have been introduced by the brand are because of the fantastic response that it has received from consumers. She believes that consumers are the catalyst which fuelled Larisa’s growth.

Thakur gave an example of the effect of consumer response on their growth by saying, “After a fantastic response to our Morjim



Priya Thakur
Founder,
Larisa Hotels & Resorts



property in Goa, we decided to open another exclusive resort in North Goa - Larisa Resort Ashwem. The property boasts 2.5 acres of gorgeous Goa greenery and simple elegance.”

While speaking about their near term ambitions, Thakur stated that Larisa is currently targeting properties in the extreme northern locales such as Rajasthan, Varanasi etc, and has plans to target South India in the future. “In the next 10 years, we plan to increase our portfolio aggressively in South India,” she added.

The brand which is self-funded and follows a mixed business model is planning to go asset-light in the future. “We are looking to bring in strategic and financial partners along with raising debt as and when required. Currently, all our projects are self-funded. However, going forward we are working only on asset-light properties,” informed Thakur.

As the industry is seeing higher growth amongst domestic travellers, various small and boutique properties have mushroomed to capture the huge market luxury boutique hotel segment. Speaking



on the challenges that Larisa faces from the same segment, Thakur commented, “All markets where we exist currently are all very popular destinations. Competition is there across all the markets, however, Goa has seen a lot of new options with various hotels, resorts and villas opening. In my opinion, one has to stay true to their beliefs; in our case we believe that customer experience is our utmost priority.” However, Thakur mentioned that locations are Larisa’s USP. “We try our best to create & curate memorable stays for our guests. Choosing the correct location has always been another priority for us, which also gives us an edge over our competitors.

All our properties are a bit away from the hustle and bustle of the main city area, so people prefer to come and enjoy their stay at our property. We are preferred by travellers for our luxurious ambience, nature trail, amenities, and local food. We also hire local staff to make sure to support the local community,” she added.

The brand is also contemplating on expansion in consulting and F&B businesses along with taking their business operations to a new country. Thakur stated, “We intend to open 1-2 properties every year. Our aim is to have more than 10 properties under the brand in the next five years. Two upcoming properties are Larisa Goa – Ashwem and Nubra. We definitely want to go global and have an international presence, especially to locations which are in the range of 5-7 hours travel distance. We aim at being Larisa enterprises, providing hospitality, consulting, F&B services, etc.”

COVID-19 has taken the world by surprise and has had a decisive impact on the hospitality industry. During those trying times, Larisa survived and learned the lesson through the setbacks, Thakur said.

“As Covid came with its own challenges and setbacks for the hospitality industry. We have sailed in the boat as others but fortunately have sustained due to the strategies and support from our colleagues. There were negative as well as positive learnings. We have learnt to sustain and manage in difficult times and it has been a huge learning curve. On a positive note, we got time to do self-introspection,” she concluded. ■

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'Guests now prefer staying for longer and travelling to several destinations on their visits'

Oetker Collection, the luxury brand behind legendary hotels such as Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc, Le Bristol Paris, Brenners Park Hotel & Spa Baden-Baden, Eden Rock – St. Barths, and more is seeing a doubling of revenues from the Indian market. According to 2022 data, nearly half (46%) of the Indian guests received at the Oetker Collection hotels booked suites – a high percentage compared to other markets. **Asmita Mukherjee** spoke with **Timo Gruenert**, **Chief Executive Officer of Oetker Collection** to understand their plans for the growing Indian market.



Q As per the statistics, in the past 5 years (which include two years of pandemic slowdown) Oetker Collection saw doubling of revenues from the Indian market. According to you, what were the factors that doubled the revenue of the brand from the Indian market?

I would say that it is in large part due to the fact that Indian guests book suites at our hotels - over half the bookings from this market opt for suites.

With that, many of our guests from India tend to travel with other family members or friends so the party may book two suites or more during their visit.

Additionally, we have been fortunate to have a number of private events booked at our properties, including weddings at Chateau Saint Martin and we also had our first Indian wedding at Le Bristol Paris in recent months. Our latest hotel, The Woodward in Geneva is also popular for smaller-scale exclusive gatherings.

Q In the new normal are you witnessing any changes in consumer behaviour especially when it comes to Indian tourists? According to you, what are the reasons behind these changes?

I would say travellers are staying for longer and travelling to several destinations on their visits - we are seeing this, especially with American, Australian and Indian guests. I would imagine this is because after periods of such restrictions, people are looking to maximize the time spent with loved ones to enjoy extraordinary experiences and create memories and there may also be an element of making up for the lost time.

We are also seeing two extremes – guests wishing to book far in advance and

then we are also seeing guests the world overbooking at the last minute.

The new way of working is no doubt also a factor – there is certainly more flexibility to work remotely than ever before which encourages travel.

Q Which are your properties/destinations that are most booked and preferred by Indian travellers?

The most visited properties from the Indian market are The Lanesborough, London, Le Bristol Paris, Brenners Park-Hotel & Spa in Baden-Baden, The Woodward in Geneva and we also see a high quantity of guests at Chateau Saint-Martin & Spa in the South of France.

Q What are your plans and expectations from the Indian market?

We are excited by the opportunity in the Indian market and these are very valued guests of ours. We feel that there is much appreciation for what we offer; Masterpiece Hotels. We would like that more guests from the Indian market familiarize themselves with our collection and that their trip to Europe entails stays at more than one property of our collection. This could mean a few days in London at The Lanesborough and then onto Paris and a stay at Le Bristol before a break in the South of France at Chateau Saint Martin or perhaps The Woodward in Geneva.

Overall, I would say it's very important for us to continue to educate our valued guests – not just in India but everywhere - on all the properties within Oetker Collection as we are not in the business of trying to 'create' destinations - we only open hotels in the locations that we know our guests frequent.

Q Which Indian geo-locations are you planning to penetrate to get more footfalls?

Currently, our main markets are Mumbai followed by Delhi and I would say Hyderabad and Bangalore are growing markets for us. We will be exploring other opportunities in secondary cities with key agencies.

Q What are your future plans and strategies to target the Indian market?

We plan to increase our presence in the market with a higher volume of sales visits and participation in travel conferences – we were the first luxury hospitality company to revisit India after restrictions were lifted - and to continue to strengthen our relationships with travel agency partners and wedding/event planners. Next year, we also look forward to participating in ILTM APAC.

We will be undertaking more press and fam trips to promote and share our Collection directly- it's important that these groups can speak from the heart about our offerings by experiencing them.

We also engage a great PR agency who not only assists us in creating visibility in the market but also supports on KOL connections. Social media as we know is crucial, as are peer-to-peer recommendations.

We also plan to raise our brand profile by organizing small direct client events and will also partner with like-minded luxury brands to create high-touch experiences together that will resonate with our shared audience. ■

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THE MYTHICAL G20 SPRINGBOARD

Without a co-ordinated and sharply visible collective plan by hotel associations themselves, the G20 euphoria will remain a mere pipe dream.

India's embarkation to the G 20 presidency is making most of us see stars. Probably dollar signs as well.

The first few meetings that started from Andaman right up to Goa and the latest at Udaipur give a foretaste of the enthusiastic response of the delegates. As an aside, Rajesh Gupta, GM of Sarovar Premiere at Jaipur remarked that while the G20 presidency opportunity for India has come as a ready milch cow, perhaps there needs to be a sharper strategy to milk it. Not the government but this effort must come from within the hotel industry as a collective initiative.

This 10-month bonanza of more than 200 G20 meetings across 55 destinations can focus the world's attention on India till November 2023. Not only in the cities where these meetings will be held but the states too get a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to lay out their tourism product to a 'captive' global audience. The idea is that the fare must be presented to not merely those attending these meets but tom-tommed to the media accompanying them in a focused, efficient and calibrated manner.

Thankfully, a Visit India 2023 strategy and programme has ostensibly been set up to make this a well-oiled exercise. However merely welcoming billboards on the roads and traffic roundabouts won't suffice. In the first few days since it began, the sole publicity seemed to be seen in shoddily produced video reports from some media agencies of dancing delegates in colourful turbans.

While one doesn't doubt the efficiency of those entrusted to build the crescendo for India's G20 presidency worldwide, a more professional or slick collective brick-and-mortar plan by the hotel industry is either invisible or still being built. Why should promoting Indian hospitality always be the sole responsibility of the government?

Experts and op-eds on 2023 trends laboriously explain that 'bleisure travel' is destined to turn into a prominent trend for business travellers. Of course, all business hotels gear up to incorporate more leisure elements into the business travel experience for corporate guests. The 10-month-long celebration of G20 calls for more pronounced industry efforts.

Rajesh Gupta agrees that the Udaipur G20 meet was a perfect showcase and a spin-off event might happen in his city as well by April. Yet he points out, reflecting the views of quite a number of mid to high-segment hoteliers that greater cohesion amongst top-end hotels and chains and the smaller units has yet to happen. Bringing that about is clearly the domain of hotel associations.

It's early days yet. The G 20 roll-out, after all, has just begun. For hotel organizations, there is still time to push a more vibrant joint and cohesive strategy for the larger good.

Anurag Yadav
Industry Expert

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

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



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‘We are in the advanced stages of discussions with major hotel chains for creating innovative and patented products’

Magniflex started its journey in a small workshop in Prato, Italy in 1960. Over the years, the Magniflex mattress company has become a known name in India after they started their operations here in 2010. Now the company is eyeing the hospitality market as a part of its expansion plan. **Asmita Mukherjee** spoke with **Anand Nichani, MD, Magniflex India** to know their expansion plans in the hospitality space.



Q Please share Magniflex India’s journey so far. What percentage of market share does the company hold in the country? Magniflex began operations in India in 2010, and over the course of the last 12 years, we have expanded to gain approximately 5% of the market share in the organised mattress sector and hold close to 50% share in the International premium mattress market.

Q As the company is planning to step into the B2B market, especially in the hospitality space, how do you plan to introduce the brand in the B2B hospitality market?

Up until this point, Magniflex has only been a niche player in the hospitality industry, serving upscale boutique hotels and resorts across Europe. The hospitality industry’s priorities have changed as a result of the changing travel and vacation dynamics following Covid. Magniflex is positioning itself in the hospitality industry as a provider of all the aforementioned solutions in response to the desire for higher-quality mattresses that are more hygienic, durable, easy to clean, easy to move, and less logistically burdensome.

Q What is the brand’s USP that can attract hospitality clients?

Magniflex is a 100% made-in-Italy mattress brand with all the certifications adhering to the best of European and global standards in their products and manufacturing processes, like OEKO-TEX, CE, LGA, and GOTS to name a few. Additionally, it funds the UN’s SDG initiative. Magniflex can therefore be the most alluring offer for clients in the hotel industry.

Q As bedding plays a massive role in the quality of sleep at hotels, are you planning any innovative approach to further enhance this experience for hotel customers?

More than two-thirds of the time a guest spends in a room is on the bed, particularly the mattress. As a result, mattresses are among the key contact points in a hotel; a guest’s experience can be influenced by how well they sleep. Therefore, a hotel would be wise to spend money on a high-quality mattress that will improve the experience of its guests throughout their typically brief stays and foster their loyalty to the establishment. Based on the aforementioned considerations, Magniflex offers patented spine decompressing mattresses along with certified non-toxic, removable dry-cleanable fabrics that will elevate the overall experience of the guests at the hotels.

Q How do you plan to compete with the other brands which already have a foothold in the B2B hospitality market space?

Except for the fact that they currently offer very high/thick mattresses, the current selection of mattresses in hotels is all spring-based and offers very little to improve a guest’s sleep comfort or experience. Over time, these mattresses will need to be made more comfortable using additional toppers, protectors, etc. Additionally, because they are spring mattresses, they don’t last as long

because of the inherent tensile problems with springs. As a result, mattresses need to be changed frequently. This is where Magniflex steps in with their innovative Elioform (open-cell pure foams) and Memoform (weight-induced memory foam) mattresses. These mattresses have outstanding comfort in addition to being durable, which saves money over time. It has grown to be a known brand delivering products focused on giving its consumers fantastic sleeping experiences. It has over 60 years of experience in developing cutting-edge products and combines that with 100% Italian craftsmanship.

Q Kindly throw some light on your current distribution chain in the online as well as offline space. Going forward, what would be the strategies to scale up the distribution?

Magniflex is currently concentrating on expanding its exclusive brand franchisee network throughout all major cities in order to display the entire mattress range where buyers can experience each model whenever they want. This helps users to select the best mattress based on their preferences and level of comfort. Currently, we have franchise locations in Bengaluru, Delhi NCR, and Ahmedabad. Stores in Lucknow and Surat are also on the horizon. We will increase the number of franchise outlets to about 25 in all major and tier 2 cities nationwide in the upcoming fiscal year.

Q What are your plans for B2B tie-ups (with hotel brands) in the hospitality industry?

With all the major hotel chains, we are in the advanced stages of discussions about creating innovative and patented products that will improve the overall experience of the guests at their hotels while also giving them fantastic returns on their investments. ■

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Glocal Junction: Lifting modern Indian cuisine to new heights

Asmita Mukherjee | Hyderabad

Glocal Junction – as the name suggests, is a unique one-stop place combining global and local cuisines under one roof. Located on the first floor of Signature Tower, right in the middle of the bustling junction of Kondapur, Hyderabad, the resto-bar & grill has recently revamped its interiors and menu. The all-buffet resto-pub is known for its signature cocktails such as Toxic Box, a perfect amalgamation of litchi, galangal, lemongrass and vodka which is a fitting accompaniment to the food menu. Another lovely fusion cocktail is the Basil and Watermelon Smash- a red-coloured cocktail made with fresh watermelon and basil juice paired with the perfect amount of vodka that



can wipe out one's tiredness in a sip.

The unmatched cocktails are to be paired with Glocal Junction's newly introduced menu offering various veg and non-veg options. Among the starters, Crispy Chicken Wings – juicy & tender chicken strips deep fried to perfection served with an in-house dip tantalises one's gustatory system. Other starters such as Amritsari Fish Tikka, Chicken Kebab, Crispy Corn, Cheese Balls, Thin-crust Pizza and Chilli Garlic Prawns also deserve special mention.

For teetotallers, several signature mocktails are on offer such as the Berry Bull, made with mixed berry juice and red bull, and lemongrass & lemon juice infused Tangerine Lemongrass Cooler which are perfect drinks to enjoy the evenings.

The live chat counter offers lip-smacking golgappa along with various chats. The resto-pub offers healthy salads on the counter such

as healthy Boiled Egg Salad, Chicken Salad and many more.

After the lip-smacking starters, one should go for the buffet spread. The soup section has veg and non-veg options. In veg, the menu offers Tomato Soup while in non-veg options Hyderabad's favourite Mutton Marag is served piping hot for guests to start the meal.

In the main course Chicken Biryani, Veg Pulao, Veg Noodles, Kadhai Chicken, Dal Makhani, Mutton Rogan Josh, and Palak Paneer showcase the expertise of Glocal Junction's chefs.

Among the wide spread of desserts, hot Gulab Jamuns along with other desserts such as Phirni, and Brownies provide a sweet ending to a filling meal.

The buffet starts from INR 722 (excluding taxes) and includes one glass of beer or one mocktail in the package. ■

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As the hospitality sector witnesses a rebound, the industry is expecting better numbers than it had seen in pre-covid times. The increasing desire to travel among travellers has fuelled the spark of the growth in the Hospitality Industry. According to sources, the growth will be foreseen in 2023 across both inbound and outbound travellers. India has become one of the most popular destinations for outbound tourists due to various reasons. Also, the renewed focus on promoting domestic tourism is working wonders. During the holidays most of the popular destinations are reporting full occupancy. **Asmita Mukherjee** spoke with the industry stakeholders to understand their expectations from 2023.



2023 Reigniting the Growth Drive

“We plan to bring more brands and properties under Wyndham’s umbrella in India”

Expectations from 2023

Despite the ongoing volatility, we expect travel to pick up pace in 2023 in India. Our expansion plans are aligned with our offerings for guests and partners and we are excited about the year ahead.

Learnings from 2022

Trust the process. One of our foremost learnings in 2022 was to remain focused and continue to support and drive our hotel's performance, while also growing. That is particularly important in these evolving times. Our consistent efforts contributed to our continued growth.

Expansion and Investment Plans for 2023

We are excited to bring more brands and properties under Wyndham’s umbrella in India, where we aim to introduce nearly 30 additional hotel properties in the next three years. We are building on our mission of making hotel travel possible for all and are excited to expand our portfolio with midscale brands in tier 1 and 2 cities. We have several exciting developments that will further strengthen our presence in the Indian region.

Expectations from Government in the New Year

Various tourism bodies have recommended a balanced growth for tourism in all verticals with topics ranging from recognizing tourism’s export status, and granting infrastructure status, to having a robust forex earnings incentives scheme, creating a domestic travel tax credit policy and putting tourism on a concurrent list. Other areas of discussion include setting up a natural and cultural heritage restoration fund, developing a national seamless tourist transportation policy, enhancing global tourism branding, as well as creating an underwriting fund for travel agents and tour operators and abolishing TCS.



Nikhil Sharma
Regional Director for
Eurasia, Wyndham Hotels
& Resorts



Amruda Nair
Founder & Director of
Araiya Hotels & Resorts

“We are looking at entering the Middle East market this year”

Expectations from 2023

2023 offers an opportunity to take the learnings from previous years and upgrade from legacy systems and the traditional way of doing things to be data-driven and open to new markets and segments beyond the core markets. The blending of work and play into combined bleisure trips and remote work locations have permanently

changed the way guests use their hotel rooms and public areas and this trend will continue to lead us to constantly adapt the way we design spaces and how customers interact with them.

Learnings from 2022

We embraced change in 2022 by adapting to the latest trends in hotel technology which in turn meets the growing need for guest engagement booking until check out. By continuing to stay ahead of the technology curve, we and personalisation. By viewing the changes in trends as an opportunity we were able to leverage our tech stack to give us insights into future demand and use data to provide a bespoke customer journey right from journey planning stage. We will take a holistic approach to streamline operations

in 2023 to continue to elevate the guest experience using hyper-personalisation, automation and training that is cross-functional and focussed on social learning.

Expansion and Investment Plans for 2023

The end of 2022 saw an uptake in investor interest for new builds and green field construction and we will continue to work with local developers, particularly in the second and third-tier cities where we see the most traction, to create hotels and resorts that meet the growing need for sustainable design and efficient operations. 2023 will see the launch of our golf resort in Gujarat and spa resort in Kerala, complementing our mountain resort in Himachal. While our focus on leisure properties in untapped destinations in India continues, we are also looking at entering the Middle East market this year.

Expectations from Government in the New Year

Given the hospitality and tourism’s significant contribution to the GDP and its ability to not only create millions of jobs but also earn forex, the primary ask from the Government is to provide support and incentive to fully realise the potential of the sector by granting infrastructure status, putting tourism on the concurrent list, single window clearance for licences as well as subsidised power tariffs. The key recommendations by the various representative bodies include crucial policy changes, rationalisation of taxes and greater ease of doing business to attract investment in a critical industry.

‘Hoping that the staffing shortage will ease this year’

Expectations from 2023

We strongly believe that the superlative performance of the hotels will continue. Further hoping that inbound travel shall also come back to or exceed pre-covid levels this year. Coupled with buoyant domestic travel, if inbound travel comes to the pre-covid level, it will only help us to further improve on ARR. Hopefully, the staffing shortage that the hospitality industry faced last year will also ease out this year.

Learnings from 2022

Navigating both changing guest mix and staffing shortages, hotels will be walking a tightrope of adjustments in 2023.

Expansion and Investment Plans for 2023

While we are currently managing 90 hotels with 5000+ rooms across 75 destinations in India, we have a strong pipeline of 20+ properties which gives strong visibility to our immediate growth. While asset-light management contract relationships will continue to drive our company’s growth, we are aggressively looking to tie up with hotels under a revenue share basis as well, having concluded 4 such relationships last year itself. We are

opportunistically looking to acquire a majority stake in hotel assets as well given the right valuations.

Expectations from Government in the New Year

While the industry bodies are doing the needful in propagating the industry requirements to the Tourism Ministry at the Centre, we are hopeful that this Budget takes the much-required step of lowering the INR 200 cr investment threshold required for Hotels to get infrastructure status. Lowering the threshold to INR 20-25 cr will really give a fillip to the hospitality industry in India and give confidence to new developers / new investors to come into the trade – which was shaken to some extent by the pandemic.



Basant Sabu
Associate Vice President
- Business Development,
The Fern Hotels & Resorts

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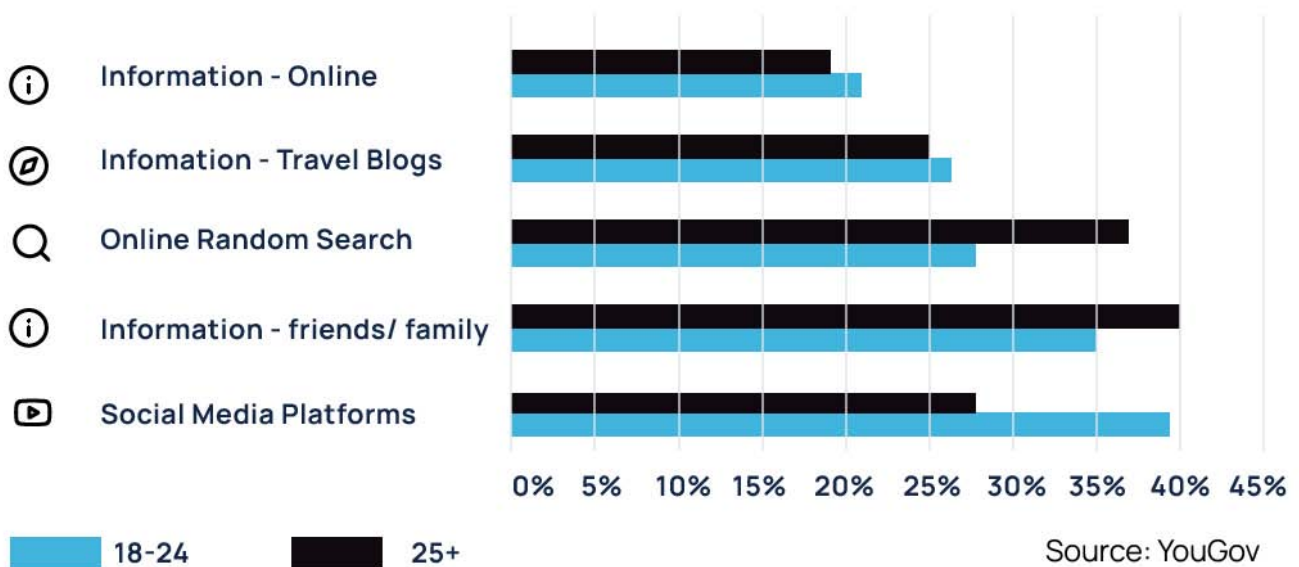
84% of hospitality leaders foresee staycations as a recurring trend in the coming decade, says NOESIS survey

HBI Staff | Hyderabad

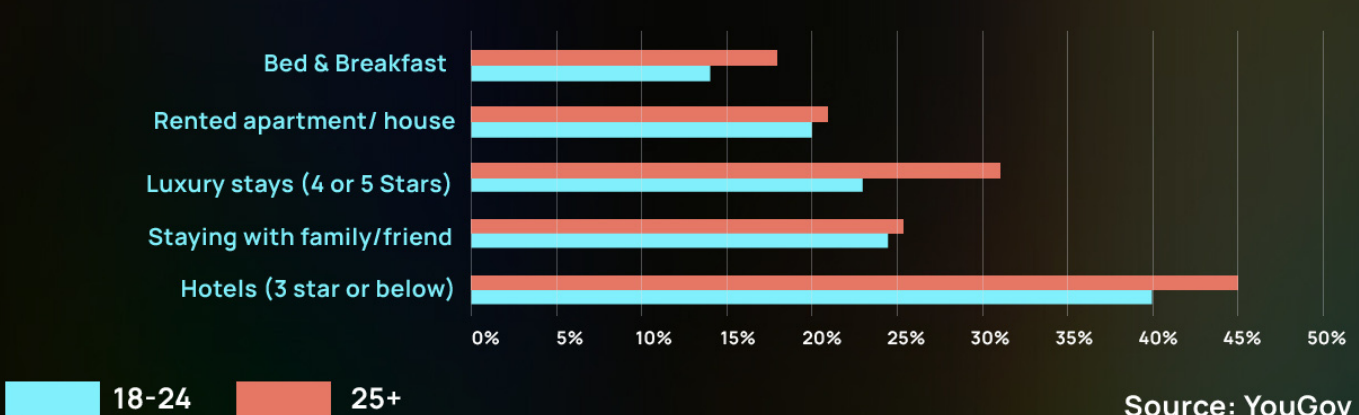
The effects of the pandemic have altered the way we travel. Travellers are becoming more concerned with their travel choices these days. Following the pandemic, various trends such as workcation, staycation, co-working spaces and so on have emerged. The “Hotel in 2032” report from Noesis Capital Advisors, offers information on an overview of the global hospitality sector and the current and upcoming trends in the hotel industry in the next decade.

Based on the “Hotel in 2032” report, between the period of 2022 and 2032 travel and tourism will contribute to the worldwide economy at an average annual rate of 5.8%, which is more than double the 2.7% average annual growth rate of the global economy. It is predicted that by the end of 2022, the contribution of this sector to the overall economy will be increased by 71% in the Asia-Pacific region, thanks to a rise in domestic spending and the return of foreign tourists. The countries that are anticipated to experience a large increase in foreign visitor arrivals include Malaysia, Japan, and Australia. By the end of 2023, the travel and

Methods used to plan the vacation



Choice of accommodation when on vacation



tourism industry in the Asia-Pacific region is anticipated to reach pre-covid levels. However, it is subject to if important source markets like China and Japan continue to impose restrictions on international travel.

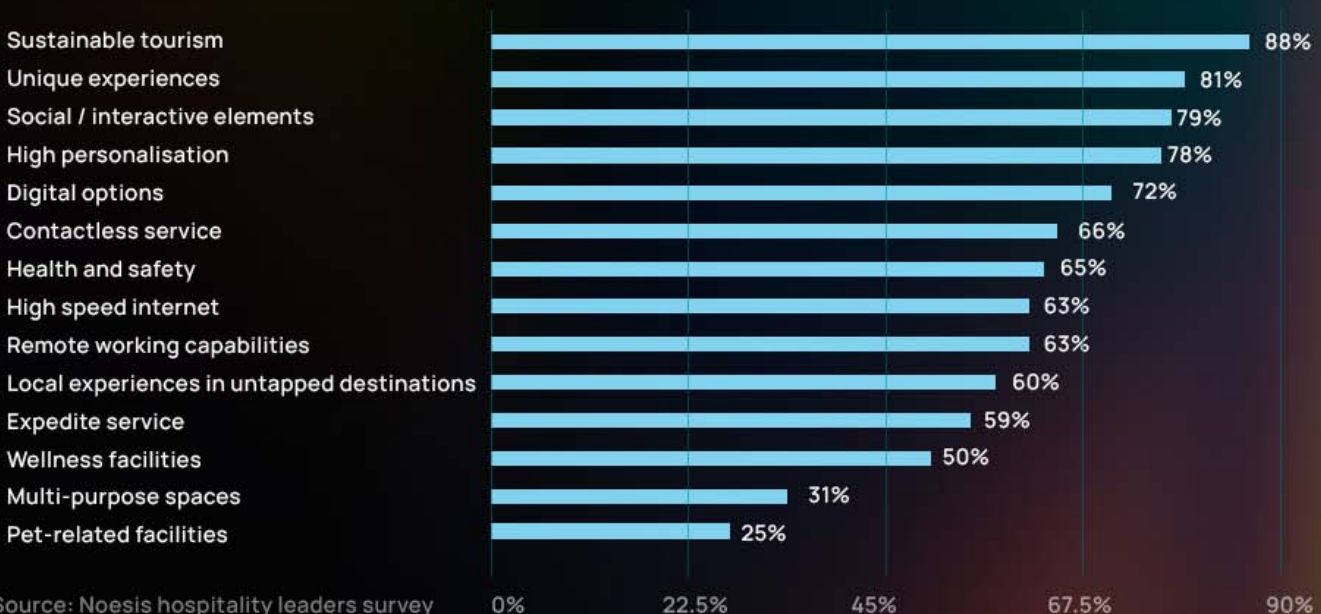
The millennial generation and generation Z are driving change in the hospitality business and it is important to understand their expectations. The incredibly tech-savvy and adaptable Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) are leading to changes in travel preferences in this digital age. For this generation, four out of five methods for planning a trip are online-based channels; thus, a shift from multichannel marketing to omnichannel marketing will be more effective. As a result, the hospitality sector must adapt to these developments. This generation is the first digital natives; They value experiences over things / material objects, giving rise to trends such as staycations and workcations.

The report goes into detail about the foregoing trends, staycations (stay-at-home vacations that don't involve much travelling) are estimated to be 15% more cost-effective than traditional vacations involving travel. According to NOESIS survey, 84% of hospitality leaders foresee staycations as a recurring trend in the coming decade. People are drawn to such trends because staycation offers convenience, less planning, specific activity experience and lesser risk of cancellation. In the report, it is also discussed how work-from-home concepts have now become work-from-anywhere thus giving rise to the trend – Workcation.



One survey found that 62% of employees believe working remotely increases their productivity. ■

What are the emerging guest preferences according to the hospitality leaders?



Hospitality Industry 2023 Budget Expectations

The hospitality industry has undergone a lot of turmoil over the last two years but gradually the industry has bounced back due to resumed travel and bookings. To regain a stable footing, the industry has been hoping for continuous support from the government. However, the industry is highly miffed about the high Goods and Service (GST) tax put on hotel rooms as it has gained little government support during the tiring times. As the industry looks forward to a good pipeline of booking it also anticipates a positive Budget for 2023-2024 to fast-track the growth momentum witnessed by the industry over the last couple of months after the pandemic lull. **Asmita Mukherjee** spoke with the apex industry association heads to gauge their sentiments about and expectations from Budget 2023-2024.

SUGGESTIONS

First a mechanism for wage support to the industry to prevent job loss. Second, a pragmatic and long-term liquidity support system to enable the industry, particularly the SMEs to discharge debt and interest payment liabilities in a period of lockdown and zero business. Third, the creation of a fund or an insurance scheme or a social security system for the vulnerable sections of the industry to withstand the shock of business and job loss.

However, for the Union Budget 2023-24, HAI submitted its detailed pre-budget recommendations to the government on four major parameters dealing with rationalization, reform or changes in

- Direct Taxes
- Customs and Central Excise
- Policy related Issues
- Indirect Taxes

EXPECTATIONS FROM BUDGET ANNOUNCEMENT

HAI believes that it is time to look at the requirements of long-term growth consistent with the Vision @47 and accordingly submitted its recommendations to the Government for some key policies for the betterment of the industry as a whole which includes according infrastructure status to hotels, provision of online single window

clearance for hotel licenses, subsidized power tariffs for hotels as available to manufacturing industries and including hotel costs in the expenses in addition to travel expenses under the LTA Scheme, creation of an empowered National Tourism Board etc. Although GST related requests are not examined as part

of the Annual Budget, HAI submitted its recommendations for GST rationalisation as well, which include the reduction of GST on hotels from the prevalent 18% to 12 % and reducing the rate of GST on restaurants located in hotels to 12% with full ITC. The industry is hopeful that this year's budget will include some favourable policy announcements that will not only aid a speedy recovery of the sector but also promote the long-term growth and development of hotels.

REQUESTS MADE

The hospitality industry was the most affected sector during covid-19. The pandemic has dealt a severe blow to the Sector. The government's support is crucial to restore normalcy at a faster pace for the hospitality industry and to unleash the full potential of the sector to create jobs across skill categories as well as for women and the differently abled.

Under Direct Taxes the main proposals included allowing hotels a higher rate of depreciation, allowing business losses to be carried forward for 12 years instead of 8 years, allowing carry forward of MAT Credit and allowing CSR expenditure in computing business income

Under Customs & Central Excise, removing petroleum products & alcohol from excise & placing them under GST Act instead has been the single most important recommendation.

Another proposal relates to restoration of the benefits to hotels under the Service Exports from India Scheme (SEIS) for at least 5 years beyond 2019-20 and maintaining hotel reward points under the Scheme at 5%

WISH LIST FOR TAX REBATES

Prime Minister, Narendra Modi has identified "Tourism" as one of the 5 key pillars of Indian economic growth and development. The hospitality sector is an important aspect of tourism both nationally and internationally.

There is no doubt that the government's vision of creating



MP Bezbaruah
Secretary General,
Hotel Association of India

53 million jobs will be driven by the hospitality sector. As per a survey conducted by the Ministry of Tourism, the employment propensity in the hospitality industry is far more than that of sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, railways, and transport.

The gist of the proposals has been mentioned above. The proposals are in the form of incentives for the sector to grow in tune with the future vision of the country's growth by

creating income, employment and inclusive growth better than any other sector. HAI believes that the impact of the small incentives suggested will be to contribute manifold to economic growth and lead to a higher contribution to GDP. HAI sincerely expects that through the budget decisions, the government will provide tourism and hospitality with its due place in the future economic growth of the country.

SUGGESTIONS:

We are keeping a close eye on the developments but as of now, there is no cause for concern and most definitely, no reason to panic. However, the two years of the pandemic dealt a deadly blow to the hospitality industry and for this, our expectations from the upcoming Union Budget includes allowing set-off of business losses up to 12 years under Section 72 - In view of the monumental losses that occurred to the hospitality industry, it is requested that establishments be allowed to carry forward losses of business for up to 12 years instead of presently allowed 8 financial years.

We also demand to Increase the ECLGS loan term for the hospitality sector for the maximum period. The present 6-year period of loan repayment is too less for the hospitality sector to reap the desired benefits of an otherwise well-intended scheme. Most of the beneficiaries of the scheme had already mortgaged their properties as surety for the Principal Loan and if the ECLGS loan is not in sync with the earlier loan, it will lead to default of payments and a high volume of NPAs in the sector.

Also, continuation of the EPCG Scheme, service export benefits and granting export status to the hospitality industry. In view of the volatile economic environment created due to the pandemic, the Government is requested to continue the current benefits for the hospitality industry under the EPCG Scheme for another 10 years. We also request that the industry be granted export status to accelerate the growth of the sector.

EXPECTATIONS FROM BUDGET ANNOUNCEMENT

The recommendations which we have submitted to the Hon'ble FM for the upcoming Union Budget are granting Infrastructure Status to the hospitality industry and Classify hospitality under the RBI Infrastructure lending norm criteria for access to long-term funds to enhance quality accommodation supply and therefore, stimulate higher global and domestic travel demand. Currently, hotels built with an investment of INR 200 Cr or more have been accorded infrastructure status. This threshold has to be brought down to INR 10 Cr per hotel to give a fillip to the budget segment hotels. This will enable hotels to avail term loans at lower rates of interest and also have a longer repayment period.

We also demanded industry status and allied benefits to the hospitality industry. It is requested to classify the hospitality sector as an industry across the country and create a corpus which compensates from any notional loss. Even though industry status has been accorded to hotels by many State Governments, the incentives and privileges associated with an industry have not been conferred to the industry. The lower cost of operations spread over a higher payback period will reduce the cost of supply which will boost demand and through a higher inflow of both foreign and domestic tourists will boost further confidence

in Capex spending in tourism and will thereby add to structural employment growth.

We also have requested to place tourism in the concurrent list of the Indian Constitution for effective legislation to make tourism into a national agenda. If tourism and hospitality are declared as an industry by the Centre and put on the concurrent list, it will also incentivize all States to align their policies. It will ensure better coordination between the Centre and the State for fund allocation and implementation of projects and programs aimed at the holistic development of the tourism sector in the country.

Requests also been made for waiver of secondary condition with regard to average Foreign Exchange Earnings under EPCG scheme retrospectively from FY 2007-08 onwards is an important point according to us. We also have demanded uniform GST @12 per cent across all hotel categories and room tariffs and relaxations in Section 115JB – Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT) thereby allowing a waiver on it for two years from April 2023 to March 2025.

Extension on investment-linked benefits under Section 35 AD for brownfield hospitality projects and modification in the Leave Travel Allowance (LTA) rules to include the amount spent on hotel stays to be considered as LTA expense are some of the important points presented to the FM.

We have also requested FM to treat payments made by foreigners in INR in hotels as foreign exchange earned for the purpose of the EPCG scheme. Foreigners coming to India and staying and spending in hotels should be deemed as foreign exchange earned by hotels for the purpose of EPCG Scheme.

Extending investment linked benefits from section 35 AD to on-going Capex of hotels and resorts shall immensely benefit high quality brownfield Capex and capacity expansion and thus, accelerate investment and employment in the sector. Presently, this benefit under Section 35 AD is applicable to new 2-star hotels and above category only.

We have also demanded that the stakeholders to be allowed to set off business losses for up to 12 years under Section 72. ■



Pradeep Shetty
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Creating New Storyboards | Renewing Learning Models

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



Designing new curricula and delivering learning in current contexts, requires a modular approach. Blended approaches adopted earlier, melding traditional and virtual methods in digital delivery, have limited meaning today. Education designers in hospitality, need to shift focus and accept digital engagement strategy, as a key variable. Traditional approaches like depending on passage of time for reflection, philosophical growth and development, have new meaning in current realities. When talent paucity, job-readiness and focussed skilling - drive employment, older input approaches must accept redundancy. Technology driven techniques, can accelerate focussed learning for short term skilling and ongoing relearning, as a valid alternative.

Digitization - for development of prospective talent bases, must be guided by education for transformation, while old means and methods need change!

National, global think-tanks and committees debate new alternatives for immediate action and relief. Gaps from existing methods, could be reinforced with robust industry skilling co-creation models. Short term vocational gaps need rapid skilling solutions, while functional learning needs to kick-in, before the drudgery of repetitive tasks sets in. Exposure to organization, people and markets during work periods, creates the base capacity for higher order thinking skills. Problem solving, critical thinking and leadership skills can then be contextualized to industry realities. The value of leveraging industry strengths by compensating its inherent weaknesses, is

achieved by creating new storyboards to re-conceptualize learning. Structured creation of universal, modular, credit-driven, skilling in the short term, enabling functional growth and expertise in the mid-term, is what future leaders need.

Success in the long-term will depend on the seamless integration of learning across boundaries today.

Hospitality academics need to accept the limitations of traditional education models, where limited outcomes are achieved. Results of inconsistent adoption via virtual learning during the pandemic, without balanced skilling exposure in industry is evidenced today. Competence gaps can only be resolved through seamless learning – skilling integration using technology. If the current demand situation for hospitality careers, is an indication of the validity of traditional hospitality education models, pro-active change to secure talent, is a good priority for 2023. The ubiquitous role of technology in social dimensions, can be seen in the light of its seamless adaptation into hospitality education models. Skilling with industry input to enhance learning, can also leverage digital and social mediums for hospitality education. This is definitely the way forward as the new-year rolls out.

Selective migration of digital knowledge into learner mobile devices, is key to achieving long-term sustainability in hospitality education. Some approaches are highlighted below for story-boarding.

1. Skilling Zone: Focused credit-based on-the-job learning, is provided with broad industry involvement. Both physical in-situ and laboratory environments are deployed. The knowledge can be delivered in phygital mode using remote, self-paced learning. This learning is cemented by application during

skilling, which requires repetitive performance to gain partial mastery.

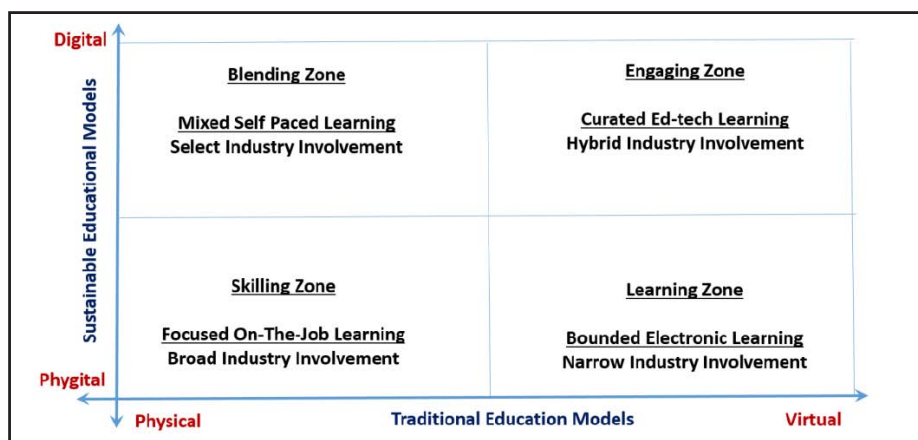
2. Learning Zone: Bounded electronic archiving, electronic research and virtual support is provided with integrated assignments, which needs only narrow industry involvement as data sources. Deployment of creative assessment strategy, virtual peer interactions can enhance functional learning concepts, through case-study applications from universal remote sources.

3. Blending Zone: Learning goal based integration of physical and digital methods, using mixed self-paced learning is outcome oriented or competence milestone based. Select industry involvement will provide the required support, while the onus of learning to gain credit shifts to the learner. The limitless power of digital knowledge resources are deployed for learning.

4. Engaging Zone: Curated ed-tech learning with hybrid industry involvement across sectors can enable high levels of cross learning. Engaged interaction and mapping of on-going enhancement in competences, is rewarding for learners. User-controlled competence building with structure, facilitates talent re-engagement, by leveraging mobile technologies.

In conclusion, the hospitality education curriculum storyboard, needs urgent re-organization. The effective deployment of learning-outcome oriented techniques, in all four zones is mooted. Smart delivery techniques, must enable an integrated approach in leveraging physical, virtual, phygital and digital modes to enhance both skilling and learning. There are adequate provisions in policy frameworks to completely re-order these elements. Yet, a vicious dogma with restricted resources renders this critical change challenging. This planned transformation needs to be executed actively, if hospitality education must gain prominence again. Hybrid sustainable learning innovations will displace redundant models sooner than later. Academic leadership must facilitate this change, despite hardship today! The integrity, value and passion of sustaining a great industry must be secured. 2023 provides yet another opportunity, to change what has limited meaning and future-proof it relevantly. ■

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



Only Earth: Disrupting the Plant-Based Food Business Scene

Asmita Mukherjee | Hyderabad

Only Earth is a plant-based milk brand started by Kunal Mutha in Singapore, in 2021 to cater to consumers who have become health-conscious due to the pandemic. Various illnesses and increasing health disorders are also prompting consumers to now shift towards Vegan based products. From a business point of view, it is a great business to be in and offers a significant export opportunity, according to Mutha. **Asmita Mukherjee** spoke with Mutha to understand their most focused sales channel which is HoReCa.

Elaborating on the inception of Only Earth, Mutha explained that Only Earth was launched to help consumers transition from a diet rich in animal products to a healthier plant-based diet. “3 years ago when I turned Vegan, I was looking for a new business opportunity as my first business got acquired just before the first wave of the pandemic hit the country. After an initial review of



Kunal Mutha
Founder, Only Earth

the plant-based industry, we found a huge gap in the market as the consumers were not satisfied with the taste profile of the products which the market had to offer. I believe that we got in at the right time with the right set of products.”

Only Earth’s product portfolio includes three types of plant-based milk - Oat Milk, Almond Milk and Coconut Milk. “In addition, we are launching 3 flavoured oat-based drinks in the month of March. Culinary Coconut Milk which is primarily used for cooking is also being launched in the coming months. We are actively exploring the healthy food category for future launches,” informed Mutha.

Mutha added that the pandemic has played a big role in the growth of demand for Vegan products in the country. “Vegan/Plant-based industry has seen explosive growth in the last few years. Covid induced health awareness has accelerated the pace of consumer trials and adoption of vegan products. Over 70 % of industry growth is attributed to Flexitarians who haven’t necessarily turned Vegan but have drastically reduced the intake of Meat and Dairy to live a healthier life,” he added.

The brand has not only received good consumer responses but has also gained B2B tie-ups with some of the elite A-listers in the hospitality industry. Mutha informed, “We supply our products to leading Hotel chains such as Taj, Oberoi, Leela, St. Regis etc. Starbucks, Tim Hortons and many other speciality cafeterias such as Subko, Javaphile use our products.”

Due to this appreciation, the company is now planning to focus on expanding into the HoReCa market. “HoReCa is one of our most focussed sales channels. We have dedicated sales teams and distributors focussed on the HoReCa channel so that we can capture the demand coming in from leading hotels and cafes across the country. The consumer is actually the one who is driving the demand indirectly by putting forward the demand for Vegan food options on the Menu. The industry is gradually adapting to the changing consumer behaviour for healthier alternatives,” he added.

While speaking about the brand targets, Mutha said that they are aggressively targeting an INR 100 crore business by the end of 2026 with 50+ SKUs. Elaborating on the execution part he said, “Majority of the targeted revenue would come from the Beverage portfolio. We have grown 400% from last financial year and we wish to continue this fast-paced growth to achieve the INR 100 cr mark by rapidly expanding our distribution in the country from the current base of 1500 stores to 6000 stores.”

Within a very short span of time, the company has made its presence in the industry. Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore are the top three performing markets for the brand said Mutha.

While speaking about their expansion plans Mutha added, “When we started we set up the company headquarters in Singapore with an aim to operate in multiple markets including India, Singapore, UAE, UK and USA for which we have already filed for Trademarks. We recently got a breakthrough with our 1st export order. However, we will be an India-focused brand as the long-term opportunity is much larger than any other potential markets we have earmarked so far for growth.” ■

asmita.mukherjee@saffronsynergies.in

Elle Glass Shower Sliding System by Häfele

Promising the highest level of tranquillity and rejuvenation, Häfele presents Elle Shower Sliding Solution. The word 'Elle', equivalent to beautiful in the Greek language is befitting for this new shower sliding system that delivers an aesthetical design, combining beauty and elegance. All the components of the system are concealed behind the track, and hence all you can see is the clean Stainless-Steel outline of the track, from the outside.

The Stainless Steel 304 material used in the construction of the different components of this system provides sturdiness; while the rollers made of Delrin featuring high tensile strength, impact, and abrasion resistance grant your shower enclosure efficiency and durability. The impressive weight carrying capacity of 80 kg and a track length of 2500 mm proves sufficient to accommodate a sizeable shower area. To ease the installation process tremendously, the top track comes with a provision to install the fixed glass panel directly onto it thus negating the need for any separate pre-installation preparation.



Bira 91 enters the Cider category with the launch of Hill Station Hard Cider Ale

Bira 91 announced its foray into beyond beers with the launch of Hill Station, a category of Hard Cider Ales. The launch is part of the company's move to bring new categories beyond beers, in congruence with the increasing demand for ready-to-drink options and a growing generation of consumers enthusiastic about experimenting with new flavors.

Hill Station Hard Cider Ales will have three flavors of hard ciders in its portfolio – Himalayan Apple Original (5.3% ABV), Himalayan Apple Strong (7.5% ABV), and Himalayan Apple Berry Twist (5.3% ABV). Hill Station These Hard Cider Ales are made from a blend of the freshest Himalayan apples and mountain barley. Their flavors are dry and mildly sweet with a hint of malt and full flavor of orchard-fresh apples. The Himalayan Apple ciders are natural and crisp.

American Standard presents their new Neo Modern Collection

American Standard has launched Neo Modern Collection, featuring tangible, ergonomic details that elevate user experience. The great design is made effortless as Neo Modern combines convenience and smart functionality to meet the user's everyday needs. The clean, crisp lines of this collection are highly versatile for many bathroom styles.

American Standard Neo Modern Collection comes with a selection of basins and faucets that can perfectly match each other to add a dose of grandeur to any bathroom setting. Smart details on Neo Modern faucets, such as an angled arc on the lever as well as smooth handle performance, promise homeowners added comfort.



ACCOR HOTELS



Manish Daya, General Manager, Sofitel Mumbai BKC

Daya brings with him over two decades of experience in the trade and hospitality industries. A hospitality professional to the core, he looks forward to spearheading operations at Sofitel Mumbai BKC, introducing further growth through innovative strategies, and managing an effective and enthusiastic team. Knowing that hospitality would be his path of choice, Daya completed his Diploma in Hotel Management

from the Institute of Hotel Management Catering Technology & Applied Nutrition Goa, before kickstarting his career. Notable appointments include stints as General Manager at properties across the country, including Lemon Tree, The Raintree Hotels in Chennai, and the Royal Orchid Hotels in Hyderabad, before joining Accor in 2013. Here, Manish reaped the benefits of hands-on experience at brands across the group, such as the Grand Mercure & Novotel Goa Shrem Resort, Mercure Hotel, and Lavasa International Convention Centre, followed by Novotel Mumbai Juhu Beach, Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre and Hyderabad International Convention Centre, as a complex general manager.



Garima Singh, Director of Sales & Marketing, Grand Mercure Bengaluru at Gopalan Mall

In her new role, she will spearhead the Sales and Marketing department of the premium 212 key five-star hotel with 10 well-appointed meeting spaces and 02 Food & Beverage outlets. She holds an experience of 11 years in the hospitality industry, catering to many premium clients across the nation. Singh began her career as a Management trainee at the iconic

Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur in 2011 after securing a Bachelor's Degree in Hospitality Management from the Institute of Hotel Management in Ahmedabad. Her business acumen and in-depth market knowledge motivated her to pivot into sales & marketing in 2014 as an Assistant Sales Manager.

RADISSON HOTELS



Jatish Ghai, General Manager, Radisson Blu Hotel & Spa, Nashik

Ghai brings in with him 2 decades of illustrious experience in luxury hotel operations with prestigious brand such The Leela palaces, Hotels and Resorts, Marriott International and Ananda In The Himalayas.

As General Manager, Ghai will oversee the strategic and financial performance of the property, curate bespoke experiences for its guests,

with key focus in creating value in the growth and success in our business across all segments by encouraging positive work culture and people development.

THE LEELA GROUP



Biswajit Chakraborty, Cluster General Manager, The Leela Kovalam, A Raviz Hotel

Chakraborty has over 35 years of experience across major Indian hotel brands like The Oberoi Hotels and Taj Hotels and has also worked for the Accor Hotel Group. Having held leadership roles in various capacities including Hotel Operations, Sales and Marketing and Pre-Openings, he brings with him a wealth of experience and astute business

acumen. Chakraborty was the opening General Manager of The Leela Kempinski Kovalam in 2005 and is returning to Kerala to lead the iconic beach destination hotel The Leela Kovalam A Raviz Hotel and launch the hidden gem of Kerala Backwaters, The Leela Ashtamudi A Raviz Hotel.

IHG HOTELS & RESORTS



Ishita Nigam, Marketing & Communication Manager, Holiday Inn Mumbai International Airport

Nigam has 9 years of experience in different aspects of marketing and specializes in brand building and digital marketing. She has worked with various groups like Marriott, Sterling Holidays and Keys by Lemon Tree. Her last stint was with Radisson Blu Hotel & Spa Nashik.

She aims to curate brand activations and foster public relations for the benefit of the property. Ishita looks forward to embracing and amplifying the offerings of the Hotel with keen focus on innovative brand campaigns, meaningful amplification stories and envisions the journey at Holiday Inn to be a game changing success story.

MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL

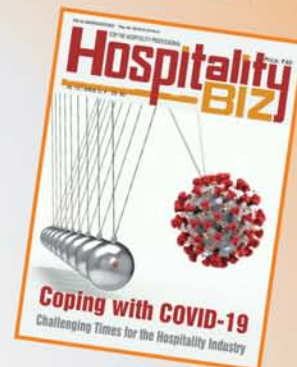


Amardeep Singh, General Manager, The Westin Rishikesh Resort & Spa

A seasoned hotelier with over two decades of extensive experience in the hospitality industry, Singh will be responsible for strategically building the hotel's vision of being the most preferred and versatile destination in the Himalayas. Having shouldered key responsibilities to develop growth tactics and plans across leading hotels, he now will bring newer perspectives to further strengthen Westin's 6

pillars of wellness. An alumni of The Oberoi Centre of Learning and Development, Singh has led multiple luxury hotels as a General Manager. He began his career in 2001 as a Food & Beverage Assistant at The Oberoi Udaivilas, followed by Food & Beverage Manager at The Oberoi Cecil and Front Office Manager at The Oberoi Grand. With his enriching experience, he has a well-rounded skill set across hotel operations, sales, marketing, revenue management, and distribution. His portfolio records his position serving as General Manager for Trident Cochin, The Oberoi Vrinda, The Oberoi Cecil, to now playing a pivotal role in the pre-opening of The Westin Rishikesh Resort & Spa.

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