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Dear Friends

The world's largest travel trade show ITB Berlin, despite global crises and Lufthansa and rail strikes, attracted 100,000+ attendees as the travel fraternity made their annual pilgrimage to Berlin. ITB Berlin again tasted success with more than 5,500 exhibitors from 170 countries occupying all 27 exhibition halls at the Berlin Exhibition Grounds. It truly highlighted that it remains the leading international platform for business, innovation and networking.

During ITB, Berlin we had the pleasure of interacting with the dynamic and visionary Michael Henssler, Chief Operating Officer (COO), Centara Hotels & Resorts. With 30+ years of industry experience, Michael Henssler has proved his acumen across Europe, Middle East, and China when he was with Kempinski. Now as COO at Centara, Henssler will lead the commercial, operations, and development divisions, aligning with Centara's ambitious goal of doubling its portfolio and positioning itself as a top 100 global hotel operator by 2027.

BWH (Best Western Hotels) is an iconic hotel brand that boasts over 70 years of legacy and experience. It comprises of three hotel companies – WorldHotels, Best Western Hotels & Resorts and SureStay Hotels. The global network has approximately 4,700 hotels in over 100 countries and territories worldwide. With 19 brands across every chain scale segment, from economy to luxury, BWH Hotel Group suits the needs of developers and guests in every market.

In a freewheeling talk Ron Pohl, who has been instrumental in repositioning existing offerings and launching new brands to diversify the company's portfolio, highlighted the company's growth and development plans.

MEX Frankfurt is where the global meetings, events and incentive travel industry comes together annually for the largest trade show of its kind in Europe. With 3,800-plus global meeting planners connect with 2,900 suppliers from across the world it remains the top notch event for MICE industry.

Exhibitors include national and regional convention bureaus, hotel groups, venues, cruise lines, airlines, spa resorts, tech providers and event management specialists. Attendees include meeting planners, event agency heads, association executives, incentive travel buyers and in-house event experts.

IHG Hotels & Resorts which believes in 'True Hospitality for Good' has an amazing global presence with 6,363 hotels (2,016 in pipeline) with 946,203 rooms (296,954 in pipeline). These figures include IHG's 128 unbranded, PAL and InterContinental Alliance hotels (40,592 rooms), and 10 hotels in the pipeline. In India also the group is rapidly growing and we had the opportunity of covering all three IHG hotels based in Chennai – each from a different category - InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort, Holiday Inn Chennai OMR, Holiday Inn Express Chennai OMR.

With the recent opening of Enrise by Sayaji, Lonavala, Sayaji group has expanded its portfolio in Maharashtra with its presence in 6 locations Pune, Kolhapur, Nashik, Aurangabad, Sarola and now Lonavala. But its flagship hotel is Sayaji Hotel, Pune, a nine storied hotel has created a reputation of outstanding service accompanied by delicious food. The excellent ambience and spacious rooms with warm hospitality make it a desirable property for both leisure and MICE. Taking the group a notch up is Ajay Kanojia, the dynamic and innovative GM at Sayaji Hotel, Pune who has been a driving force in this expansion. In a tête-à-tête with our editor he spoke about his hotel and the growth in the state with great passion.

Deloitte and the Retailers Association of India (RAI) recently released a joint report titled "Future of Retail: Profitable growth through technology and AI" at the Retail Leadership Summit 2024, advocating how Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed from being mere tools to being the bedrock of profitable growth for India's consumer retail business.

According to the report, by 2025, 20% top global retailers will use distributed AI systems to achieve holistic results, revolutionising sales, marketing, supply chains, and operations, and around 45% marketing leaders plan to invest in GenAI in the next 12-24 months.



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Annual Subscription Rates - India: Rs. 1200; Overseas: US\$ 60 (Rates include airmail charges).

Printed and Published by Chandragupta Amritkar on behalf of Global Features B-701, Customs Colony, Military Rd, Marol, Andheri(E), Mumbai-400 059 and Printed at Sumangal Press Pvt. Ltd. "Sumangal" G-8 Cross Road "A", Near Marol Bus Depot, MIDC, Andheri (East), Mumbai - 400 093.


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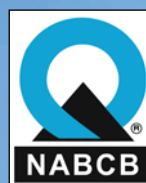
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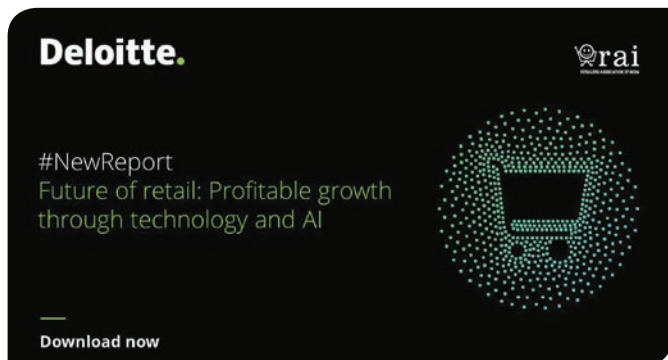
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Tech and AI to bring the next wave of growth in retail: Deloitte–RAI report



Deloitte and the Retailers Association of India (RAI) recently released a joint report titled “Future of Retail: Profitable growth through technology and AI” at the Retail Leadership Summit 2024, advocating how Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed from being mere tools to being the bedrock of profitable growth for India’s consumer retail business.

According to the report, by 2025, 20% top global retailers will use distributed AI systems to achieve holistic results, revolutionising sales, marketing, supply chains, and operations, and around 45% marketing leaders plan to invest in GenAI in the next 12-24 months.

The digital revolution has therefore transformed retail into phygital or omnichannel experiences, disrupting traditional models where brands are using technology to enhance customer experiences and garner greater ROI.

Anand Ramanathan, Consumer Products and Retail Sector Leader, Deloitte India, said, “The retail industry is experiencing a significant turning point, driven by changes in the global economic environment that are fundamentally reshaping consumer habits. Technology is pivotal in this transformation, no longer merely a tool but the essential foundation upon which retailers must build to meet the expectations of modern consumers and guarantee the success of their investments. AI is revolutionising retail, offering personalised recommendations and solutions, with 71% consumers expecting tailored experiences. This signals a move towards experiential engagement beyond mere transactions across consumer touchpoints. By focusing on enhancing operational efficiency, improving customer experiences, and making informed decisions, retailers can secure a competitive advantage.”

Kumar Rajagopalan, CEO, Retailers Association of India (RAI) said, “As we embrace the digital revolution in India's retail sector, this report highlights the crucial role of technologies such as AI and IoT. These innovations are not just trends; they are the building blocks for future-proofing our retail industry. The insights in this report not only showcase the transformative power of emerging technologies but also provide a roadmap for retailers to navigate this new era.”

With India’s booming economy bringing more purchasing power and choice to tech-savvy consumers, forward-thinking retailers must craft superior shopping experiences.

AI, IoT, mixed reality, and advanced analytics have the potential to streamline operations, personalise experiences, and even redefine our understanding of what shopping means.

Key trends leading to emerging retail technologies:

- **Personalisation and customer experience enhancement:** Retailers use AI and advanced analytics to provide personalised shopping experiences. AI algorithms analyse customer data to tailor product recommendations, marketing messages, and even in-store experiences.
- **Supply chain optimisation:** Adoption of IoT and AI to optimise supply chains. IoT devices track inventory in real time, providing valuable data for inventory management, while AI assists in predictive analytics for demand forecasting. This trend is fuelled by the need for retailers to reduce costs, minimise waste, and respond swiftly to market changes.
- **Automation and efficiency:** Robotics technology is becoming more prevalent in both customer-facing and backend operations in retail. Smart robots are being used for inventory management, cleaning, and even as shopping assistants. This trend is driven by the need to enhance operational efficiency, reduce labour costs, and improve customer service.
- **Omnichannel integration:** Retailers integrate AI and IoT technologies to create seamless omnichannel experiences. By synchronising online and offline channels, retailers can offer a consistent and convenient shopping experience, which is important as consumers move fluidly between online stores and physical stores.
- **Data-driven decision-making:** Advanced analytics and AI enable retailers to make more informed decisions. By analysing large volumes of data, retailers can gain insights into customer behaviour, market trends, and operational efficiency.
- **Enhanced security and fraud detection:** AI and advanced analytics are employed for security and fraud detection. These technologies can identify suspicious transactions and prevent theft, both online and in physical stores, thereby protecting profits and enhancing customer trust.

The report also enlists the following innovative business models for retailers to stay relevant, capitalise on digital transformation opportunities, and align with shifting consumer preferences:

- **Subscription-based services:** Include personalised subscription boxes using AI algorithms to predict customer preferences. This fosters customer loyalty and generates steady revenue streams.
- **Retail-as-a-Service (RaaS):** Enables small brands to use your retail infrastructure, from physical space to e-commerce platforms, creating new revenue streams while providing a broader range of products to customers.
- **Experience and community-focused retail:** Transforms retail spaces into experience hubs, offering workshops, product demonstrations, and community events, driven by customer data insights to enhance engagement and brand loyalty. Connect customers with shared interests and local vendors.

IMEX Frankfurt 2024: Global Meetings Hub



Come May and the MICE fraternity across the globe head to Frankfurt for the annual jamboree.

IMEX Frankfurt is where the global meetings, events and incentive travel industry comes together annually for the largest trade show of its kind in Europe. With 3,800-plus global meeting planners connect with 2,900 suppliers from across the world it remains the top notch event for MICE industry.

Exhibitors include national and regional convention bureaus, hotel groups, venues, cruise lines, airlines, spa resorts, tech providers and event management specialists. Attendees include meeting planners, event agency heads, association executives, incentive travel buyers and in-house event experts.

With a global range of exhibitors, learning sessions that dig into today's most pertinent issues and opportunities to build new connections, IMEX Frankfurt 2024 is set to be a show with impact.



Ray Bloom, Chairman, IMEX Group and
Carina Bauer, CEO, IMEX Group

For corporate event organizers and meeting planners tasked with delivering top-notch events for clients, prospects and employees, there are several trends set to impact how future events are designed, measured and funded.

Exclusively Corporate, taking

place on Monday, May 13 at IMEX Frankfurt, meets these trends head-on in a series of learning and networking sessions specifically designed for in-house planners.

From recent meetings with buyers and suppliers across Europe and beyond, the IMEX team knows that planners have constraints on their resources and budgets and have become much more intentional about how they spend their time, money, and energy.

"In planning IMEX Frankfurt, we've been more intentional too. We've taken a close look at our attendees, what they want, and why they want it," explains IMEX CEO, Carina Bauer. "Doing business will sit front and center of the show, along with opportunities for

event professionals to broaden their global connections. A visit to IMEX Frankfurt will be an efficient and enjoyable experience from start to finish, and one that enables planners to supercharge their desired results."

The Asian market is growing significantly with Macau, Malaysia, Korea and Singapore all expanding their presence at the show. They join a broad range of European destinations from Croatia, Finland and Ireland to Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

The area of the show floor devoted to technology is set to see a flurry of activity with Cvent increasing its space and new additions including TranslateABLE. Alongside the global destinations, all the major hotel groups will be present including Hilton, Hyatt, IHG, Marriott, Radisson and – new to the show - Langham.

IMEX's learning program begins the day before the show, on Monday 13 May, with specialist education for event professionals from associations – Association Focus - and in-house – Exclusively Corporate.

With burnout on the increase (according to the latest Freeman Trends Report 2024), Exclusively Corporate speaker Mike Ford, founder of Grateful Lemon, is set to tackle the crisis head on in his session - "Energized or exhausted: Master the dance between stress and recovery".

He explains: "We can learn some really vital lessons from the world of sport – athletes are unapologetic about their need for recovery. In many ways, we're no different as event planners! You could say we're 'corporate athletes' and have the same need to factor in recovery time!"

The curated content continues during the show with She Means Business, brought to you by IMEX and tw magazine, supported by MPI. This program explores aspects of diversity, gender equality and female empowerment including a practical session on how to negotiate equal pay.

First-timers to IMEX can make the most of a 'welcome package' of activities before and during the show.

New learning formats including themed guided tours will shed a fresh light on the show. Also new for 2024 are focused panel discussions with speakers unafraid to tackle tough subjects - more details will be revealed soon.

IMEX Frankfurt takes place at Messe Frankfurt from 14 - 16 May 2024

A nostalgic Sunday@ Radisson Blu Mumbai International Airport



What was initially planned to be a laid-back Sunday swiftly transformed into an entertaining one, all thanks to our wonderful visit to Radisson Blu Mumbai International Airport says **Pooja Amritkar**.

The dynamic and soft spoken GM, Harkaran Singh has made the Radisson Blu Mumbai International Airport more than just a place for Sunday brunch and probably one of the most happening place in Mumbai with numerous events be it artistic brunches, live stations, live music, kids activities, wine tasting, salsa evenings, vintage cars, beauty contests etc. As per the GM, the whole aim is to curate unique and immersive experiences for guests. And this Sunday was no different

We reached the hotel with an eager stomach, excited to try their Sunday brunch and become a part of their 'Brunch Club' - a delicious affair with a variety of tempting options ranging from Indian to Italian cuisine. It's the best place to taste the finest elements of culinary delights. I especially loved the wide range of delicious starters and the red sauce Penne Pasta. Along with live music, there was boutique, artisanal wine straight from the wine capital of India – Nashik. VINODeBella meaning 'A Beautiful Wine', invited the hotel guests to try their finest collection of wines. The Syreeta-Shiraz is a single vineyard wine crafted exclusively with 100% handpicked Shiraz grapes with hints of dark fruits and a glorious spice finish. The well-balanced rich dark red wine paired perfectly with my meal.

But no brunch experience is complete without indulging in mouthwatering desserts and Radisson Blu undoubtedly offers options that will leave you craving more. The spread of desserts was so huge that it had to be set up in the lobby. Feeling fruity? Try the Kiwi cake. Need a chocolate release – try the chocolate pastries. The season of mango also called for some much-needed delicacies such as mango milkshakes and aamras, a refreshing treat on hot summer afternoons.

Every weekend comes with a new theme, this brunch was the Vintage and Classic Cars Edition presented by one of the oldest and foremost vintage & classic car clubs of India - The Vintage & Classic Car Club of India (VCCCI). It transformed everyone into an era of timeless elegance and

unparalleled craftsmanship. Rows of vintage cars and motorcycles stood proudly, each telling its own story of adventures and glory days on the open road. We gushed over some of the classic cars like Mercedes Benz W115 and Ford Model A along with the collection of rebellious Harley Davidson bikes. I was struck by the passion and dedication of the collectors and enthusiasts who have cared so affectionately for these heritage cars and bikes for years.

Later that evening, we were thrilled to secure front-row seats and witness the grand finale of Miss & Mrs. Persona of India Season 2, founded and conceptualized by the esteemed Debashree Chakraborty and Directed & Choreographed by Mohit Kapoor. The national beauty pageant was hosted by the well-known international anchor and emcee, Simran Ahuja, and it celebrated the resilience and power of women from diverse backgrounds, providing them with a remarkable platform to grace the runway and display their fashion and glamour prowess. Listening to the relatable stories and lives of the participating women simply proved - you don't have to be a model to walk the ramp!

The ten constants, elegantly striding in stunning Indian lehengas and evening ball gowns, creations crafted by visionary designers, went through two evaluation rounds before the Chief Celebrity Guest, Sara Khan, crowned the beautiful and well-deserving winners. The 2024 edition represented a magnificent endeavour to combat and overcome cancer, intertwining a noble humanitarian mission with elegance and allure. It was a stage for women to not only showcase their talents but also a way to feel empowered - challenging stereotypes and breaking barriers. We felt delighted when the GM was called on the stage and the hotel was acknowledged as Mumbai's best lifestyle wedding hotel.

As the curtain fell on the day, we retreated to our luxurious suite. From the exquisite brunch to the fascinating displays and the awe-inspiring fashion show, it was a Sunday to remember!





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ITB Berlin: Back in full force



The world's largest travel trade show ITB Berlin, despite global crises and Lufthansa and rail strikes, attracted 100,000+ attendees as the travel fraternity made their annual pilgrimage to Berlin feels **Chandragupta Amritkar**

ITB Berlin again tasted success with more than 5,500 exhibitors from 170 countries occupying all 27 exhibition halls at the Berlin Exhibition Grounds. It truly highlighted that it remains the leading international platform for business, innovation and networking. The world's leading tourism trade show was once again a meeting place for politicians and diplomats from all over the world. In addition to numerous delegations, almost 80 ministers and state secretaries as well as 72 ambassadors visited this year's ITB Berlin.

It also provided an exciting glimpse into the future of the hotel industry with artificial intelligence (AI) being showcased across most hospitality and travel departments.

"ITB Berlin once again mirrored industry developments. The mood among exhibitors, visitors and speakers was very positive throughout. They generally agreed that people's desire to travel is not just satisfying pent-up demand after the pandemic, but that it will remain basically stable. Neither inflation nor high energy prices appear to be curbing demand", commented Dr. Mario Tobias, CEO of Messe Berlin.

Proof of the fact that the industry is a driving force for innovation was given not least by the ITB Berlin Convention, which took place parallel with the three-day show and featured high-profile attendees and a total of 400 leading international speakers at 200 sessions and 17 theme tracks discussing trends and innovations. All in all, around 24,000 attendees came to the panels, discussions, keynote speeches and lectures, again acknowledging the convention as the industry's leading international think-tank.

For the first time, the ITB Berlin Convention hosted a dedicated AI Track. Glenn Fogel, CEO of Booking Holdings, was certain that "generative AI can be of more assistance than real humans when customers are making their travel plans." Charuta Fadnis, SVP, Phocuswright also acknowledged the growing importance of AI and personalised travel apps. Generative AI is already improving sales, while in Fadnis' view, using virtual agents

and combining AI with blockchain technologies will be key to preventing misuse in the future. The convention participants also agreed that it was impossible to ignore climate justice and the skills shortage, for which there were promising solutions however. Jeremy Sampson, CEO of the Travel Foundation, appealed to the tourism industry to aim for net zero by 2030. His study entitled 'Envisioning Tourism in 2030 and Beyond' outlines a dynamic path with a focus on regulating air travel and 40 measures in six categories for achieving sustainable tourism by 2050.

AI was also a big topic for the ITB Innovation Radar, which this year celebrated its second edition. The focus was on 16 forward-looking innovations presented by industry visionaries. They ranged from B2B services for the hospitality industry and travel industry professionals to sustainable concepts. The innovations offered a glimpse of future trends.

This year's host country Oman made a strong showing, doubling its display size in Hall 2.2 to more than 800 square metres. H.E. Azzan bin Qassim al Busaidi, Undersecretary of Tourism of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in Oman, highlighted the success of his country in building a tourism infrastructure and praised the cultural heritage and natural attractions of the Sultanate. In 2023 Oman registered four million visitors, a 22 per cent increase over 2022. 231,000 came from Germany, an increase of 182 per cent. Great care was being taken to take sustainability and diversity into account with the expansion of the tourism infrastructure, he said.

(Albania, an emerging destination with great potential will be the host country of ITB Berlin 2025)

"Despite all the euphoria and the positive outlook, the participants were all aware of the huge challenges also and in particular facing the travel industry. The 'Together' in this year's slogan underlines the fact that only community action can master the travel industry's challenges", Dr. Tobias said.

ITB Berlin 2025 is scheduled from 4 to 6 March 2025 in Berlin



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COMO Cocoa Island: Your Tranquil Oasis

Nestled in the South Malé Atoll, COMO Cocoa Island is a hidden gem known for its serene atmosphere and unique overwater villas. Arrive in style with a 40-minute speedboat transfer from the Malé international airport.

Indulge in the allure of 33 overwater villas, including the iconic Dhoni Villas, reminiscent of traditional Maldivian fishing boats. With their high ceilings, airy interiors, and expansive windows, these villas provide a seamless connection to the surrounding turquoise lagoon.

The COMO Shambhala Retreat, spanning a third of the island, is a holistic haven offering yoga, Pilates, meditation, and spa treatments to rejuvenate your body and soul.

From diving and snorkelling to sunset and night fishing, adventure awaits at COMO Cocoa Island. With more than 20 dive sites within a short boat ride, explore the mesmerizing marine life in crystal-clear waters.

COMO Maalifushi: Tropical Elegance

Embrace the unspoiled beauty of Thaa Atoll at COMO Maalifushi, a luxury escape accessible by a scenic 60-minute seaplane journey from Malé.

Be captivated by the allure of 33 overwater and 32 beach accommodations, providing unrivaled views of the Indian Ocean. Relish culinary delights at Tai, the Japanese seafood restaurant, or savour tropical flavours at Madi, where Maldivian, Mediterranean, Indonesian, and Thai influences converge. Unearth adventure with diving, swimming alongside gentle whale sharks, or riding the waves at renowned surf breaks. For an intimate escape, venture to the private island of Lavadhoo for a romantic picnic under the stars.

Rediscover serenity at COMO Shambhala, where signature treatments and open-air yoga pavilions await. Families are welcomed with the Play by COMO Space, offering purposeful activities for children aged four to 12. retreats promise an unforgettable escape.

Embrace paradise today. Experience the unmatched allure of COMO Cocoa Island and COMO Maalifushi in the Maldives.

Among the Maldivian island resorts, COMO Maalifushi (above) and COMO Cocoa Island stand apart with their understated style, captivating the spirit of the Indian Ocean and barefoot chic ambiance.



Centara Hotels & Resorts: On an expansion spree



During ITB, Berlin we had the pleasure of interacting with the dynamic and visionary **Michael Henssler, Chief Operating Officer (COO), Centara Hotels & Resorts**. With 30+ years of industry experience, Michael Henssler has proved his acumen across Europe, Middle East, and China when he was with Kempinski. Now as COO at Centara, Henssler will lead the commercial, operations, and development divisions, aligning with Centara's ambitious goal of doubling its portfolio and positioning itself as a top 100 global hotel operator by 2027.

“We have 95 properties either operating or in the pipeline, across all major Thai destinations covering 12 countries and six diverse brands.

Last year the group celebrated its 40th anniversary with several new openings including the 515-key Centara Grand Hotel Osaka, which marked the group's debut in Japan, and the 224-key Centara Ayutthaya. In pipeline for 2024 is the 100-key COSI Vientiane Nam Phu, Laos, which becomes the first location outside Thailand for COSI, the affordable lifestyle brand, the 145-key Centara Mirage Lagoon Maldives with an underwater theme. Two of Centara's flagship hotels – the 335-key Centara Karon Resort Phuket and 553-key Centara Grand Mirage Beach Resort Pattaya – are set to open following comprehensive renovations in 2024.

As hotels go tech savvy Henssler said, “Technology will be a driving force, enhancing guest experiences through AI, AR, voice tech, and contactless services. Green initiatives will continue to take centre stage.”

The group is already working towards several important environmental targets, including the elimination of single-use plastic by 2025, achieving Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) certification for all its properties by 2025, a 20% reduction in energy, waste, water and greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, and overall net zero emissions by 2050. In 2023 and 2024, 24 hotels and resorts were certified by GSTC, the world-leading organisation dedicated to sustainability and social responsibility and one hotel was certified by Green Key.



Globally we have presence in Maldives, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, China, Japan, Oman, Qatar, Cambodia, Turkey and the UAE. Our six brands include Centara Reserve, Centara Boutique Collection, Centara Grand, Centara, Centara Life and COSI Hotels. The latest addition has been Centara Reserve brand as a luxury collection starting with Centara Reserve Samui. Our range includes luxury island retreats like in Maldives, family resorts, affordable accommodation satisfying most guest needs,” said Henssler.

The six different brands cater to the needs of different segments. While majority of the groups hotels are located in leisure destination while two of our hotels, Centara Grand in Centre of Bangkok (Centara Grand & Bangkok Convention Centre at CentralWorld, and Centara Grand at Central Plaza Ladprao Bangkok) see more of business travellers visiting. Centara also operates state-of-the-art convention centres – the one at CentralWorld is most popular (I have been here for several events and have always stayed at the Centara Grand & Bangkok Convention). The group also has its own award-winning spa brand, Cenvaree.

Being a family run business every Centara property aspires to create a sense of belonging with care, inspiring togetherness among friends and family. The group hopes to deliver new hotel management contracts in dynamic destinations and exciting new international markets, through Centara's collection of six brands and new sectors. “We get the maximum bookings from Retail which is 54 per cent, which includes, the hotel website and OTAs. The wholesale bookings are about 37 per cent; group 7 per cent and corporate 2 per cent,” said Henssler.

Centara's global loyalty programme, Centara The1, reinforces their loyalty with rewards, privileges and special member pricing. Members enjoy a 15% discount on hotel rates and exclusive access to special privileges and offers.

Centara Hotels & Resorts is already a well-known brand in India, thanks to many Indians visiting Thailand. “India is a very important market for us and statistics show that Indian tourists rank among the top nationalities across most of our properties. It is fast emerging as a significant market for Centara Hotels & Resorts as we witness a steady influx of Indian travellers. I am sure through your publication, Global Features we will not only build our image but also attract more tourists,” said Henssler.

When queried on the possibility of a Centara in India, Henssler was positive that it will happen soon as we Indians await their gracious presence.

“We all recognise India as a potential market and a land of opportunities”

When my trip to ITB was scheduled I received a meeting request from Joanna Becker-Birck, Director PR & Communications, WorldHotels GmbH to meet **Ron Pohl is President of International Operations for Best Western Hotels and Resorts and President of WorldHotels.** In spite of a busy schedule (always during ITB) and not wanting to miss the opportunity of meeting him, we scheduled the meeting a day prior to ITB opening.



BWH (Best Western Hotels) is an iconic hotel brand that boasts over 70 years of legacy and experience. It comprises of three hotel companies – WorldHotels, Best Western Hotels & Resorts and SureStay Hotels. The global network has approximately 4,700 hotels in over 100 countries and territories worldwide. With 19 brands across every chain scale segment, from economy to luxury, BWH Hotel Group suits the needs of developers and guests in every market.

In a freewheeling talk Ron Pohl, who has been instrumental in repositioning existing offerings and launching new brands to diversify the company's portfolio, highlighted the company's



growth and development plans. Excerpts



How do you plan to attract new hotels/greenfield projects to your portfolio?

Systematic development is key to our growth. I feel it's very important for developers to recognise the difference that we offer at WorldHotels. For any project we analyse the business. We have a worldwide sales team, a revenue management team and a digital marketing team that does that analysis. A report is prepared and presented to the developer/owner of how we think we can impact their business, both from revenue and cost savings level. Most of the new development today is happening in Asia. We have a number of hotels there which are new projects. We are also just signing a greenfield projects in the Middle East. I would like to advise new projects to seek our involvement at the earliest so that we can guide them properly.

What about your loyalty programme?

Our WorldHotels rewards programme is quite popular. The biggest advantage for guests is that it is also connected to the Best Western Rewards programme, where we have over 50 million members. In future we will merge both to create one unified programme.

How do you look at India as a market?

I have been several times to India. And we all recognise India as a potential market and a land of opportunities. We've been in the Indian market for around 17 years and I think we are a great fit for the culture of the country. Infact I relish your authentic Indian food. In India we have master licensee here, Sorrel Hospitality led by Atul Jain and his team who are doing a great job.

As I mentioned earlier our unique experiences inspire travellers. For e.g, we have a hotel that's less than 500 metres from the Golden Temple. We foresee great potential in secondary and tertiary markets and want people to opt for extended stay.

How has the acquisition of WorldHotels made a difference?

The acquisition of WorldHotels in 2019 expanded the company's global offerings and reach, adding brands in the upper upscale and luxury segments in key destinations. WorldHotels has more than 250 luxury independent hotels and resorts in its collection, across 175 global destinations. These hotels sit under one of four brand tiers: Luxury, Elite, Distinctive and Crafted. As more customers are turning to lifestyle and boutique hotels, Elite and Crafted are our two most popular brands with Crafted being more boutique.

What attracts guests to your hotels?

I think everybody is looking for something a bit more different. Most guests like to visit unique hotels and we have quite a few hotels that have a unique offering. For e.g. our b'mine Frankfurt Airport hotel has a CarLift that transports guests and their cars right upto their room from the 1st to 10th floor," said Ron Pohl (I am scheduled to experience this property after IMEX).

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GITM focuses on Regenerative Tourism

Goa International Travel Mart (GITM) 2024 now in its fourth edition showcased Goa's sunny side and focussed on Regenerative Tourism.



GITM attracted 250+ national and international buyers and 300+ sellers spanning across 15 sectors. The event offered a plethora of opportunities for fruitful engagements and partnerships along with knowledge-sharing sessions providing invaluable insights. It provided an opportunity to connect with a diverse array of industry professionals, including destination management companies, travel agents, tour operators, MICE specialists etc to a global audience, bringing together industry leaders, stakeholders and enthusiasts from across the globe.

Regenerative tourism was the focus as Goa became the first state to focus on regenerative tourism (many confuse that regenerative tourism is just a rebranding of sustainable tourism but its not so as regenerative tourism not only includes sustainable tourism but goes beyond it aiming for transformation and growth).

While addressing to august audience Suneel Anchipaka, IAS, Director Tourism said, "With a steadfast focus on sustainability and responsible travel practices, we envision a tourism sector that is not just economically prosperous but also environmentally and socially conscious. Our commitment to Regenerative Tourism goes beyond mere preservation; it encompasses a holistic approach that seeks to regenerate and rejuvenate our ecosystems, communities, and cultural traditions. Our vision for Goa's tourism sector is one that harmonizes with nature, respects local cultures, and fosters meaningful connections between visitors and our communities. By embracing Regenerative Tourism, we not only enhance the visitor experience but also ensure the long-term sustainability of our tourism industry."

Another major was the potential of MICE tourism in Goa especially for corporate gatherings and international conferences. Plans are afoot to have a new convention centre. Goa also plans to introduce co-working spaces.

The second day witnessed a riveting panel discussion and sessions by panellists G B Srithar, Head of Tourism Services,



VFS Global, Carl Vaz, President, SKAL International India and Chairman & CEO, Charson Advisory Services, Jack Ajit Sukhija, President-Elect, Travel & Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG), and Ajay Prakash, President, Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI). An interesting session was 'Development of Skills for the Tourism sector in Goa'. It was a multifaceted endeavour aimed at enhancing the professionalism, expertise, and service quality within the industry. The Session focused on the development of skills for the tourism sector in Goa. Experts discussed strategies for nurturing talent and equipping the workforce with the necessary skills to meet the evolving demands of the tourism sector.

During the event lots of MoU were signed. These included four



Mr. Suneel Anchipaka, IAS, Director, Tourism & Managing Director, GTDC with Mr. Gautam Aggarwal, Division President, South Asia at Mastercard

MoU with Department of Tourism, Government of Goa with Just Udo Aviation Private Limited to Transform Tourism Landscape, with Mastercard to strengthen Tourism in the State, with All India Institute of Ayurveda to elevate Wellness and Medical Tourism and partners with Yoska Event Solutions LLP to boost Sports Tourism.

As per the report from the sellers, over 3000 meetings took place, facilitating invaluable connections and partnerships within the industry. The sellers recorded business prospects, estimated at over 10 million Dollars, underscoring the event's significance as a platform for strategic partnerships and driving economic growth within the tourism sector.

"GITM stands as a testament to our shared commitment to innovation, collaboration, and sustainable growth. With a notable attendance of buyers, visitors, and enthusiasts, the event has facilitated a vibrant exchange of ideas and fostered significant networking opportunities. It has been an honor to witness the forging of new partnerships between like-minded individuals and businesses alike, all united in their dedication to showcasing Goa's unique charm to the world. As we bid farewell to another successful 4th edition, I am filled with optimism for the future of our tourism industry. The momentum and enthusiasm generated by GITM leave me confident that Goa's potential as a premier destination for regenerative tourism will continue to flourish," concluded Suneel Anchipaka, IAS.



AI Product Range



Laptop



AIO PC




Tablet PC

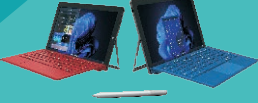


Mini PC


AIoT Product Range




OPS 1.0 / 2.0
(Options for Intel Core i7 / Core i5 / Core i3)



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Panel PC

Design Manufacturing



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- The Make in India Scheme, IT Hardware PLI 2.0
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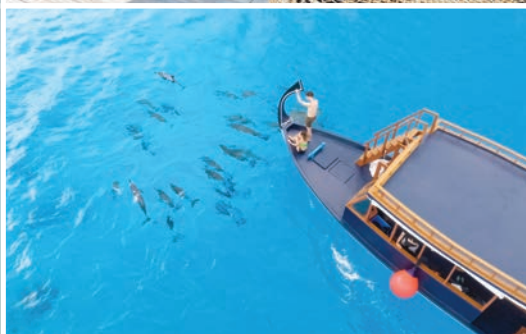


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A serene sanctuary



Maldives has several luxury resorts, a recent addition is Madifushi Private Island in Meemu Atoll and it was truly a serene experience feels **Chandragupta Amritkar**

Co-ordinating with the dynamic Steve Ng, Group GM, Madifushi Private Island, Hulhule Island Hotel and Maldives Inflight Catering and the delightful Sofia, Revenue and Reservation Manager, I planned the trip to the resort that believes in providing guests to unwind and reconnect with nature while rejuvenating and relaxing in tranquillity.

While I have been to Maldives 6 times, I have been trying to cover at least two resorts on my visits since COVID. This visit was to cover two resorts (COMO Maalifushi and Madifushi Private Island) and an island hotel (Hulhule Island Hotel). This was the first time I was going to fly on a seaplane – surprisingly to both resorts. As the property can be reached by seaplanes, the transfer was arranged by the hotel. The seaplane is totally a different experience and the new sea terminal is quite beautiful. The new seaplane terminal is just a 5 minutes' drive from the International airport. I was amazed to see the seaplane terminal (was informed it can accommodate more than 50 seaplanes) as seaplane is the

preferred mode of transport several resorts for those located in outer tolls. The four-story building has spacious lounges many dedicated to particular luxury resorts, arrival lobbies and boarding gates. The seaplane takes approximately 40 minutes from the terminal. The window seat helps one in admiring the archipelago from a bird's eye perspective.

Arriving by the seaplane at the hotels private jetty, I was received by the staff. Check in was smooth and I was led to my Serene Pool Villa. The room was spacious, with great views. This coastal getaway features a total of 80 beach and overwater villas. The island's forefront is surrounded by 26 Serene Pool Villas, 3 Two-Bedroom Serene Pool Villas and 1 Grand Madifushi Serenity Pool Villa. In addition they have 46 Aqua Pool Villas, 3 Tranquil Aqua Pool Villas and 1 Grand Madifushi Aqua Pool Villa. The size of the villas range from 1,324 square feet / 123 m2 to 4,768 square feet / 443 m2. All villas and suites are complete with a terrace that leads to a private pool with access to the palm-fringed beach or perched over the Indian Ocean with either a sunset or sunrise view.

The resort is an expansive turquoise lagoon. These intimate sanctuaries are complete with a terrace that leads to a private pool, with access to the palm-fringed shore or perched over the Indian Ocean with either a sunset or sunrise view. The resorts accommodation types ensure that all travellers find the retreat

Don't forget to complete immigration through IMUGA - the online platform, which is used for immigration services. All travellers are required to submit the Traveller Declaration within 96 hours to the flight time, during arrival and departure.



that's right for them, from families to, from romantic getaways for two to stress-free solo travels. For one night I moved to the Aqua Pool Villa, a beautiful overwater villa.

Gastronomy

The resort has many delicious dining options, from beachfront bites to exquisite private dining, for an authentic flavour of local and international cuisines. Serving breakfast and dinner with a



beachfront view, chefs prepare tasty meals in an open kitchen providing a choice with Italian, Indian, Mediterranean and Asian fare.

I relished daily buffet breakfast at their all day dining Bluefin restaurant and was able to enjoy several Indian delicacies as the resort has Indian chefs. There was free flow of selected beverages (Alcohol/Non-Alcohol) from 2pm - 7pm at Splash Bar. The trend for floating breakfast at such luxurious resorts is quite popular and at Madifushi Private Island one can relish it.

Activities

The resort offers an array of thrilling activities - exploring the pristine waters around Madifushi Private Island on a high-speed watercraft. One can go snorkelling or visit a sandbank or on a dolphins tour or a marine tour. There are several water sports that are quite popular with guests like Jet ski Tours, Wakeboarding, water skiing or knee boarding. Guests can put up a mask and glide into the water with the electric waterjet or Fly over the water with our state-of-the-art equipment from Zapata and Seadoo.

For the naturalists and environment lovers who love to relish underwater wildlife can go in for scuba diving. The resort has a PADI 5-star diving centre with highly qualified scuba instructors who offer courses to beginners and divers of all levels. Daytime snorkelling trips offer guests the chance to explore the reefs around the resort's crystal blue water.

Sunset Cruise on a Maldivian traditional Dhoni to view the sunset while sipping a glass of wine and watching out for dolphins. Island Hopping is another option as you visit a local island to experience the local way of life.

Madifushi Private Island stresses a lot on sustainability and environmental practices. "We are committed to sustainability and have implemented numerous eco-friendly practices. In such a short span we have already got lot of appreciation and won Awards too," said Omer Songur, GM, Madifushi Private Island.

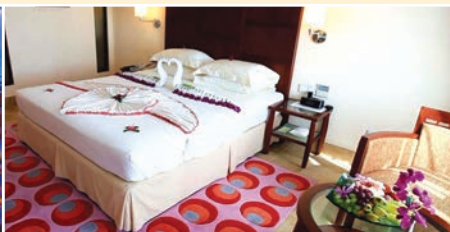
Mandara Spa

Madifushi Private Island is home to unique spa experiences. Mandara Spa offers guests a total sensory experience with all-natural treatments drawn on the ancient health and beauty traditions of Asia. Facilities include dry and wet saunas, a spa boutique, a relaxation lounge and treatment rooms with highly trained experts to guide you in your wellness journey.

Hulhule Island Hotel – Maldives

On my return from Madifushi Private Island, I decided to spend a night on the groups Island hotel – Hulhule. The location is ideal for tourists who have an early next day flight or when your flight arrives after the last resort transfer of the day or you want to just have a stopover on the way home as it's less than a km from the terminal.

The hotel is quite impressive and provides amazing views from the rooms overlooking the beach. It has 130 + Rooms with a mix of king size and twin beds and intimately designed 3 Suites (that includes a living room). The swimming pool looks pleasingly attractive and a perfect place to unwind and enjoy refreshing cocktails. The hotel has a restaurant, a bar, a spa along with free airport transfers.



For F&B Uduvilaa, located on fourth floor, is the hotels fine dining restaurant with an extensive menu showcasing local flavours blended with western influences. They have an Indian thali which is not only yummy but also provides a wholesome meal. They have a Champs Bar too, but which was closed during my visit.

On the MICE front there is the huge Ras Maalan Ballroom (that can also be divided into two functional rooms) and a boardroom, Rani Kotari, that can accommodate 10 guests in a pre-set arrangement. Both are located on the ground floor.

On my departure day had the pleasure of interacting with Steve Ng and gaining valuable insights from his 30+ years' experience in the hospitality industry.



“We have noticed tremendous growth potential in tier two cities”

With the recent opening of Enrise by Sayaji, Lonavala, Sayaji group has expanded its portfolio in Maharashtra with its presence in 6 locations Pune, Kolhapur, Nashik, Aurangabad, Sarola and now Lonavala. But its flagship hotel is Sayaji Hotel, Pune, a nine storied hotel has created a reputation of outstanding service accompanied by delicious food. The excellent ambience and spacious rooms with warm hospitality make it a desirable property for both leisure and MICE. Taking the group a notch up is **Ajay Kanojia, the dynamic and innovative GM at Sayaji Hotel, Pune** who has been a driving force in this expansion. In a tête-à-tête with our editor he spoke about his hotel and the growth in the state with great passion. **Excerpts**

You now have recently added Lonavala to your portfolio.

True. We have been doing extremely well across numerous locations in India and expansion in tier 2 cities is on our agenda. Currently we have 3 hotel brands – Sayaji, Effotel by Sayaji and Enrise by Sayaji under our umbrella.

We have noticed tremendous growth potential in tier two cities. There is plenty of untapped business opportunities and requirements of hospitality services in these regions. Pune region is no exception. Our aim is to get a foothold in the region.

Since our flagship hotel Sayaji Hotel, Pune is already well known for its par excellence hospitality and magnificent fine-dining experiences I think we are on the right track.

As hotel markets are witnessing traction in Tier – 2, we are also in an expansion spree. We are in the process of coming up with all our three brands (Sayaji, Effotel by Sayaji and Enrise by Sayaji) in different cities in Maharashtra.

One of the first steps is our penetration in Lonavala, which is already a well-known hill station globally.

How has the business been in last FY?

It's been good a year for most Pune hotels. Revenge travel is truly taking shape (post covid) as both leisure and business tourism has picked up. Marriages are happening on a grand scale and MICE is generating good business. We had a 74% occupancy last year and an ADR of Rs.5,600/-.

The recent opening of a mall has helped us increase our



occupancy. The mall with plenty of retail outlets located just behind our hotel has also helped us a lot. I and my team have been regularly interacting with the outlets and most of the senior managers prefer to stay at our hotel. We have also held a lot of get-togethers, functions on our premises.

For Sayaji group it's been a rocking year and in my region we have opened two hotels one in Sarola and one in Lonavala. Sarola is a 50+ room hotel with board rooms, a spacious banquet hall and the Saaj Lawn ideal for hosting lavish weddings and large gatherings. The lawn is spread over 40,000 sq ft and can accommodate 2500 guests.

Apart from this we are in pre-opening stage of two more hotels in Khandala and Dahisar. In Pune apart from our flagship hotel Sayaji Pune that has garnered iconic status amongst the 5-star hotels of Pune, we also have Enrise by Sayaji Pune. The total room capacity of all hotels put together will be 400+ rooms.

What are the USP of your properties?

Quite a few plus points. First it's our F&B followed by our superior service. While the ADR has improved in the entire city and two more hotels have opened in close vicinity, I can proudly say that our F&B has not been impacted at all. And this is where I feel quality of food matters a lot. We have a fabulous





and a huge spread for our buffet – and one of the few to have a lunch buffet too. Our prices are also very competitive. As our team serves live snacks on the table it has been much appreciated.

We are also setting our sub brands at industrial hubs and corporate belts

were corporates are on the lookout for comfortable accommodation services away from city. We will be having MICE facilities too so corporate can have their meetings and events in our premises.

We have also improved our room service controls, so none of our orders are missed or delayed (I experienced this service for not just room service but also housekeeping). We have also renovated all the rooms and the next step is our restaurants.

Another major USP is that most of our forthcoming properties have presence in leisure destinations.

Which are your popular rooms at Sayaji, Pune?

We currently have 5 categories of rooms - Grande Room, Studio Room, Premium Grande Room, Suite Room and Premium Suite Room. Our studio rooms are quite popular among our long staying guests especially expats and foreigners as we have tried to provide all necessary amenities including a kitchenette. The suites are another popular option for high end MICE and destination weddings.

Sustainability is the buzz word. Your views?

It's our top priority. I have always believed that sustainable practices make hospitality organizations stand out. The goal of sustainability is to minimize your hotel's impact on the region by reducing their environmental impact through green best-practices. Post COVID many travellers don't mind spending more to support an eco-friendly hotel, as long as the hotel also delivers a top-notch guest experience.

We have a strong vision to shift our operations towards sustainability. Many things we have scaled up our operations with decomposition methods of wastage, bottle crushers installed for recycling the plastic waste, and saving on electricity. The EV charging stations for guests has become quite popular.

Any CSR initiatives?

Plenty. During road safety week in co-ordination with the traffic police we created helmet awareness and those who were without helmets we provided them with helmet from our side. When we make new uniforms for our staff, the old ones, without logo, are distributed to poor people. We invited blind school kids over lunch to give them a feel of a hotel. Blood camps are also done regularly.

Staff welfare is a priority and apart from normal care, we have started a monthly cafeteria festival where a set of staff plan, design, decorate and create a themed meal. This brings forward their creativity. Periodically we have day trips with staff and seniors are sent for relaxation and to better connect among themselves to other destinations.

What about MICE and wedding?

With such a huge inventory we are the best option in PCMC area. But we have become selective so we don't have to compromise on our ADR as well as on maintaining our superior services and F&B. Our halls Pearl and Ruby can cater to 1000+ people and is quite popular for evening events. Parking is not an issue as we have 50,000 sq.ft. area including valet parking.

We are known for our banquets and food, so guests have better options on such locations for comfortable stay. We are also setting our sub brands at industrial hubs and corporate belts corporates are on the lookout for comfortable accommodation services away from city. We will be having MICE facilities too so corporate can have their meetings and events in our premises.

On the wedding front we did numerous weddings which included a substantial residential wedding. This also shows our popularity in Pune region. Our hotel is conveniently located from Mumbai, right on the highway and can be also a destination wedding. Our Subh Vivah by Sayaji is a one-stop solution for dream destination weddings. Our wedding venues include beautifully decorated Outdoor and Indoor wedding halls, signature Food and memorable services. Also, Pune weather is much pleasant

How is competition in your segment in PCMC area?

Most of our hotels are located in the best area giving us a competitive edge. Having a strong presence from 15 years in market our patrons prefer us. If we talk about PCMC (Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation) area the average inventory of branded hotels is 150 while we have the highest inventory 240 rooms among our competitors.



Sustainability initiatives at Sayaji Hotels Pune Ltd –

Waste Management -

- a. OWC for wet garbage
- b. Bottle crusher Machine

Energy Conservation –

- a. Solar & Wind

Water Conservation –

- a. Rain Harvesting

Green Energy –

- a. EV Charge station

Food Practices –

- a. Wet & dry garbage segregation



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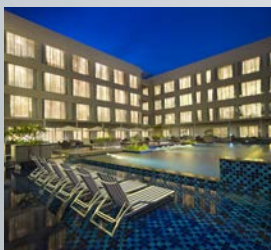
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IHG Hotels & Resorts@Chennai

IHG Hotels & Resorts which believes in 'True Hospitality for Good' has an amazing global presence with 6,363 hotels (2,016 in pipeline) with 946,203 rooms (296,954 in pipeline). These figures include IHG's 128 unbranded, PAL and InterContinental Alliance hotels (40,592 rooms), and 10 hotels in the pipeline. In India also the group is rapidly growing and we had the opportunity of covering all three IHG hotels based in Chennai – each from a different category - *InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort*, *Holiday Inn Chennai OMR*, *Holiday Inn Express Chennai OMR*.



InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram

“The resort ensures that more than 65% of the total area is open space”



On my recent visit Nelson Sumit Gomes, Assistant DoM, InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort had taken me around and it's a resort to fall in love - its layout and design that reflects a contemporary interpretation of the stone-hewn temples of Mahabalipuram, its F&B outlets like the beachside KoKoMMo Tiki Shack, its 15,000 square feet spa etc. With over 29 years of experience in hospitality **Anand Nair, GM, InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort** highlighted the positives of the resort. Excerpts.

With so many resorts in Mahabalipuram what's so unique about your resort that it stands out?

What distinguishes our resort is our architectural homage to the UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Mahabalipuram Shore Temple in Tamil Nadu. The resort creates a culturally rich atmosphere where modern luxury seamlessly integrates with the ancient stone-hewn temples of Mahabalipuram, providing guests with a distinctive and immersive experience.

Furthermore, our dining options cater to a diverse range of tastes, ensuring that every guest discovers something to tantalize their palate. Whether enjoying the contemporary Chinese cuisine at Tao of Peng, indulging in the sea-inspired delights at The Melting Pot: Market Cafe, or unwinding at the beachside KoKoMMo Tiki Shack with its Polynesian flair, each culinary experience guarantees a unique and memorable journey.

In addition, our resort serves as a haven for relaxation and revitalization with our exceptional Amrtam Spa. Encompassing 15,000 square feet, our spa offers a variety of local and international treatments.

Any particular design elements that you would like to highlight?

One of the most notable features is the Kalpavruksham, or 'The Sacred Tree,' which symbolizes the eternal connection of life to heaven and the underworld. Inspired by Hindu lore, this design element adds a touch of mystique and tradition to our resort, as it is believed to grant wishes.

The architectural style of our resort pays tribute to the Mahabalipuram Shore Temple, utilizing granite blocks sourced from Kancheepuram. This design reflects a contemporary interpretation of the stone-hewn temples of Mahabalipuram, offering guests a serene and culturally immersive experience.

As guests enter, they are greeted by an entrance porch inspired by Ardh Mandapam, leading to the high-roofed vestibule (Antarala) and the central courtyard where guest rooms are located. The courtyard features a circular path adorned with Athangudi tiles, showcasing the local craft of Athangudi village and adding a traditional touch to the resort's design.

The landscaped courtyard includes a temple tank style Swimming pool, a dancing platform for evening performances above a large pond, an alfresco terrace, and a sunken lounge. These elements,



designed in orthogonal shapes, create a harmonious connection between public spaces, providing guests with a tranquil and inviting environment.

Rooms on the southern side overlook the Temple Style Swimming pool, while rooms on the northern side overlook the performance pavilion situated in the middle of the lotus pond. The lotus pond, crafted in the central courtyard, has a cooling effect on the warm breeze, enhancing the overall ambiance of the resort.

Other architectural highlights include the Nanday-varta Stone Art in the Samasthi-Lobby, inspired by Indian city settlements, and the Ramayana Bridge, modelled after the Great Corridor of the Meenakshi Temple, symbolizing the Axial Connection of East to West.

Additionally, the resort features the Pranna Bio-Pond, a self-sustainable water body with a natural bio-filtration system, and the Sun Temple, inspired by the Konark Temple of Odisha, known for its healing properties and historical significance.

What about sustainable practices in your resort?

Our resort is deeply committed to sustainable practices across its operations, including thoughtful design and construction that harmonizes with the surrounding landscape and architectural style. The resort ensures that more than 65% of the total area is open space, aiming to minimize disturbance to the natural site condition, reduce heat islands, and minimize stormwater runoff.

In terms of culinary responsibility, the resort's team is dedicated to reducing food wastage by 33% monthly through data-driven methods and staff training. This not only benefits the environment but also leads to cost savings and improved resource efficiency.

To manage energy more sustainably, the resort utilizes renewable energy solutions and closely monitors energy consumption to optimize resource allocation. Smart tech systems and data analytics play a crucial role in ensuring efficient operations and reducing the environmental impact.

Moreover, the resort's commitment to carbon reduction extends to creating an eco-friendly environment for travellers and advocating for sustainability on a global scale. The resort's vegetable and herb garden not only provide fresh, organic produce for its culinary offerings but also promotes sustainable agriculture practices.

How do you look at international guests?

The InterContinental brand is committed to enhancing the allure of international travel, drawing on over seven decades of experience, confidence, and expertise to deliver luxury travel experiences. We warmly welcome international guests, recognizing Mahabalipuram's appeal as a destination that captivates visitors worldwide. Understanding the diverse needs and expectations of international travellers, the resort is dedicated to providing exceptional experiences that showcase the best of Indian hospitality and culture.

Mahabalipuram itself is renowned for its UNESCO World Heritage-listed monuments, rich history, and stunning coastal views, making it a captivating destination for international tourists. The resort leverages this appeal by offering experiences that highlight Mahabalipuram's unique charm, such as guided tours of ancient temples and monuments, cultural performances featuring traditional music and dance, and curated culinary experiences showcasing local flavours and ingredients.

To ensure a comfortable and memorable stay for international guests, the resort provides a range of amenities and services. These include multilingual staff, currency exchange services, transportation assistance, and personalized experiences tailored to their interests. Additionally, the resort's luxurious accommodations, world-class dining options, and wellness offerings offer international guests a taste of luxury and relaxation amidst the beauty of Mahabalipuram.

On a personal front what drove you to pursue a career in hospitality?

My initial drive to pursue a career in hospitality stemmed from my passion for food and beverage. I've always believed that creating memorable dining experiences is a powerful way to connect with people and leave a lasting impact on their lives. As I've advanced in my career, I've come to realize that qualities like resilience, adaptability, and a willingness to think outside the box are crucial in this industry.

With over 29 years of experience in hospitality, I've learned that the industry is constantly evolving and presenting new challenges. It's essential to be able to adapt to these changes and find innovative solutions. I've also learned the importance of standing out rather than fitting in, and I strive to bring a unique perspective to everything I do in hospitality. These qualities have helped me navigate the dynamic and competitive landscape of the hospitality industry, shaping me into the hotelier I am today.



Holiday Inn Chennai OMR IT Expressway

“Delicious food, exceptional service, and a captivating ambiance create a positive impression”



It was while having a conversation with my dear old friend (and also an par excellence poet) Vineet Verma, MD, World Trade Center - Bengaluru, Kochi, Chennai and Director Brigade Hospitality Services Limited that the topic of Holiday Inn Chennai OMR came up and as I was visiting Chennai Vineet Verma was kind enough to extend local hospitality. He then connected me to the soft spoken **Divakar Shukla, GM, Holiday Inn Chennai OMR** interacting with whom was a pleasure. It's a lovely hotel centrally located with excellent F&B options. **Divakar Shukla spoke fondly of his property. Excerpts.**

Being centrally located is the hotels focus more on corporate business?

Yes, our location at Old Mahabalipuram Road (OMR) near Chennai's IT Hub and our large room inventory gives us a distinct advantage with corporate clients who prefer staying with us for ease of access as also the warm hospitality and delectable dining.

Who are the properties key target markets?

Our key target markets include key metro cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru.

Gastronomy is important for the growth of any hotel. Your views.

Absolutely! Delicious food, exceptional service, and a captivating ambiance create a positive impression that extends beyond comfortable rooms. A delightful dining experience not only fosters lasting memories but also enhances guest satisfaction and builds loyalty. In a competitive market, it sets us apart, simultaneously contributing to the hotel's overall revenue. For instance, at Holiday Inn Chennai, our corporate guests from Northern India really appreciate the North Indian food we serve and keep coming back to us for the familiar comfort and flavours.

How do you and your team cater to expectations of the new gen customers

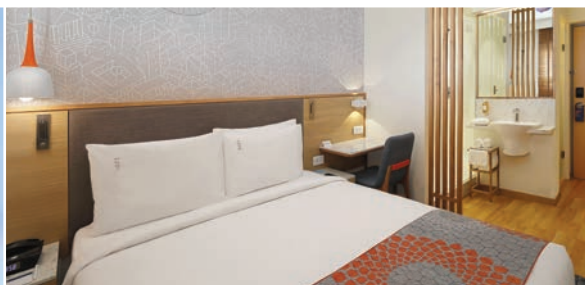
New-gen customers seek more genuine and immersive experiences while staying connected at all times. At Holiday Inn Chennai, we are dedicated to meeting these expectations by seamlessly blending both aspects. Our hotel offers efficient Wi-Fi connectivity, vibrant public areas, a strategic location in proximity to the IT Hub, and a diverse culinary experience with healthy menu options—all delivered with genuine warm hospitality. The inviting ambiance, perfect for downtime, is complemented by attentive yet unobtrusive service. This unique combination of efficiency, connectivity, and genuine hospitality sets us apart, consistently exceeding the expectations of the new generation of travellers.

What motivated you to go into the hotel industry?

During my application for a hotel management entrance, I was uncertain about what it had in store for me. However, having been a part of the industry for over two decades now, my motivation is derived from the daily dynamic challenges in hospitality, the meaningful connections with people, and the relationships built over time. These factors drive me to consistently strive for excellence in the field.

Holiday Inn Express Chennai OMR

“it’s a contemporary hotel providing excellent value for travellers”



It was a true delight reconnecting with the affable, delightful and charming **Anjana Manohar, Hotel Manager, Holiday Inn Express Chennai OMR**. It is a wonderful property located in the IT zone of Chennai. While the major difference between a Holiday Inn and a Holiday Inn Express is that one is full service, while the other is more limited. But both provide excellent service and I am sure the price difference will be vital in the guests mind. I was surprised to know that among all IHG Hotels & Resorts, Holiday Inn Express has the maximum presence globally - 3,171 hotels and 336,317 inventory. To gain more insights we spoke with the guest friendly Anjana Manohar. **Excerpts**



Location is very important. Your views

That has been our major plus point. We are strategically located in the IT hub. Apart from this we are close to World Trade Centre, Elcot SEZ, Ascendas & Tidel Park, Apollo Hospital, Gleneagles Global Health City, Gem Hospital, The Marina Mall, ECR Beach and ISKCON Temple. Just an hour’s drive from here is Mahabalipuram, a UNESCO Heritage site and we do have another hotel from our group - InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort.

What’s unique of your hotel?

Quite a few USPs. Firstly it’s a contemporary hotel providing excellent value for travellers. Our rooms at 145 sqft are quite comfortable for guests as they can work and relax in their own space. All our guests are provided with an all-inclusive express start breakfast or those who are on the move with limited time in the morning can opt for the Grab and Go option. Our buffet breakfast which includes a mix of south Indian, north Indian as well as continental is quite popular among guests. In spite of being an economy brand we do have a fitness centre and a self use washing machine and drier on the 1st floor. Our regulars love it.

So you get a lot of business travellers?

True, we do get a lot of business guests. But a fair share of leisure guests. Those who come with families we can provide

them with connecting rooms. We do have a good inventory of 149 rooms.

Our day-use offer has become quite popular. It is ideal for those looking out for a short break to get refreshed or just to crash for a few hours. Our staff is fully committed to our guests.

Do you have meeting spaces too?

Yes we do have a meeting room of around 600 sq.ft. that can accommodate around 40 people at a given time. In this area we have a lot of clients using it regularly. We also have facilities such as projector screen and tele-conferencing equipment.



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