

MYSTIC EAST

...an unexplored horizon

A bi-monthly magazine by HRAEI | Vol 6 | Issue 1 | May - June 2020

WE ARE BACK!



What will it take for a revival of the hospitality industry after Covid-19





VISION

- ✌️ Make the Eastern Region comprising 12 States and a Union Territory a flourishing destination for domestic and foreign tourists by projecting their captivating tourism assets.
- ✌️ Promoting best industry practices and setting benchmarks for industry constituents.

MISSION

- ✌️ A common voice for hotels, restaurants and associates for unhindered progress of the hospitality industry in the country's Eastern Region.
- ✌️ Create value for members by ensuring government policies remain supportive of tourism and the industry.





T

The Indian hotels' sector sailed smoothly into January 2020, after a record year in 2019, with 2020 set to be "even bigger". The country first started feeling the ripple effects of the global COVID-19 turmoil towards the end of February 2020, which worsened at the beginning of March. Occupancy across hotels in key cities declined rapidly and as per an estimate by HVS it has declined by a staggering 45 percentage points compared to the previous year.

The Government has already taken a step in the right direction by announcing its plans to set up a COVID-19 Taskforce to undertake measures necessary to combat the economic effects of the pandemic on the country. We expect that the hospitality sector gets adequate monetary support to recover from this unprecedented situation. We need a stimulus package

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We need a stimulus package to stabilize and support the sector in the near term

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to stabilize and support the sector in the near term, including a workforce support fund to ensure that there are no job losses. The government must also provide a moratorium of around 6 – 12 months on all loans (principal & interest), including working capital payments and overdrafts.

Apart from this, we also look for fiscal support, such as a 12-month corporate tax holiday to travel, tourism and hospitality sectors. And deferment of all statutory dues such as advance tax, custom duties, excise duties, PF, bank charges etc. at central and state level for 12 months.

To revive demand some direct support is also expected for waiver or reduction of GST on products offered by the sector for at least one year. Hope the government appoints a think tank to evaluate and decide the measures necessary for the revival of the sector.

Pranav Singh
President, HRAEI



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Despite being hit hard we never refrained from our social responsibility

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Even though the hospitality sector was hit hard by Covid-19 and the lockdown that followed it, we never refrained from our social responsibility.

Immediately after the announcement of lockdown, several members of HRAEI came forward to offer pay-and use rooms to people who have been asked to live in isolation for 14 days. Over a thousand rooms of two-star, three-star and four-star hotels were offered on pay-and-use basis at a highly subsidised rates and all meals such as breakfast, lunch and dinner were provided.

Following a request from the Chief Minister we adopted Lansdowne market in Kolkata for implementing hygienic practices to combat the pandemic. The HRAEI took over the market for proper sanitisation awareness campaign to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus. We organised handing over of gloves, masks and sanitisers, liquid handwash, to the shopkeepers and buyers in the market. We installed four small water tanks at entry points of the market and made proper hand-washing arrangements for stall owners and customers.

“The world is affected by a pandemic. We decided, till they find a cure, let us show some care,” summed up Mr T.S. Walia, President Emeritus, HRAEI.

MYSTIC EAST

A BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE BY HRAEI
Vol 6 | Issue 1 | May - June 2020

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THIS ISSUE OF MYSTIC EAST CONTAINS 56 PAGES INCLUDING COVER AND BACK COVER

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The hotel sector at large has been the biggest casualty of the COVID-19 shock, with demand at an all-time low across the globe. As the sector continues to build contingency plans to alleviate the fallout of the crisis, hotel operators should also look to extend the hand of solidarity to their owners by providing certain relief measures. For instance, there should be a one-time waiver or reduction in base and incentive fees. The relief should be in the form of a one-time waiver or reduction in base and incentive fees as well as distribution, technology and reimbursable costs, measured by correlating the total impact of the crisis on the hotel to the return of normalcy in operation post-COVID-19.

In addition to this, all brand standard provisions that do not have a direct impact on revenues of the hotel and cannot be planned as per the revised CAPEX budget for the current year, should be deferred until such time normalcy in operation returns. While FF&E is an important fund set up by the hotel for periodic replacement and up-gradation, the funds should be released immediately and redeployed either towards initial working capital to resume hotel operations or towards the reduction in debt, as may apply to each situation.

On a different note, I happened to be part of the launch ceremony of Kolkata City Pathfinder, a useful and handy city guide. An initiative of the Jain Enterprises, this guide printed on glossy art paper has 74 categories including popular places to eat, dine and stay in the city.

Along with the information there are various colourful advertisements of different products and services. To have a glimpse you can log on to www.kolkatacityinfo.com. The hard copy is available at a moderate price of Rs 30 in several outlets.

Mr Sudesh Poddar
Honorary Secretary, HRAEI

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HRAEI fights the pandemic



April

HRAEI offers isolation rooms to the State Government

To help the West Bengal government manage cases of Covid-19 pandemic, several hotels in Kolkata and nearby Rajarhat-New Town areas have forward to offer pay-and use rooms to people who have been asked to live in isolation for 14 days. A total of 640 rooms of 32 two-star, three-star and four-star hotels were offered on pay-and-use basis at a highly subsidised rates and all meals such as breakfast, lunch and dinner will be provided there.

The Hotel and Restaurant Association of Eastern India (HRAEI) had an internal meeting after it received requests from the Health Ministry, and decided to extend their full support to the state government in this hour of crisis. A list of hotels and availability of rooms has been sent to the West Bengal government and a request made for imparting medical training to staff in handling those who want to stay in isolation. "In the wake of COVID-19, we had a discussion with the state tourism and health department. We have been asked to

request all our hotel owners/members to come forward in allocating rooms for the purpose of self-isolation and self-quarantine for those who want to stay in hotels to avail facility," Sudesh Poddar, the Honorary Secretary of HRAEI, said.

"Following the request, we decided to offer nearly 640 rooms mainly in three and four star hotels. A total of 31 hotel owners agreed to provide rooms and soon we will make a list of our hotel staff, who will be trained by the health officials in handling the guests who want to avail hotel isolation



► Sanitisation drive by HRAEI at Lansdowne Market in Kolkata

facility,” said Pranav Singh, President, HRAEI. He said, “The training will be given as per WHO norms like how to serve food, which food should be served, how to sanitise the rooms and their personal items, etc. This is a challenging task but we are ready to take this task because we feel that we must stand with the state government in this crisis.” “The state health department has promised to provide us all kind of help. Please convey the message that only asymptomatic guest will stay in isolation for 14 days. In case someone develops any symptoms,

then they will be handled as per government guidelines,” added Mr Poddar.

Besides providing comfortable isolation, HRAEI has also initiated dialogue with the state government for assisting them in distributing dry food items like breads, banana and puffed rice to the needy. “We have arranged a delivery van and requested the state government to allow us to distribute it as we will be needing police permission due to the lockdown. We will start distributing this to all the poor and hungry,” said

Mr Poddar.

May HRAEI holds sanitisation drive in a market complex

Following request from Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to adopt local markets for implementing hygienic practices to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, leading business chambers and industry bodies have started sanitisation drive in over a dozen markets across the Kolkata.

The Hotel & Restaurant Association of Eastern India adopted Lansdowne



market for sanitization. The HRAEI took over the market in central Kolkata for proper sanitisation awareness campaign to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The HRAEI heads Pranav Singh, the President, Sudesh Poddar, Honourary Secretary, and T.S. Walia, President Emeritus, organised handing over of gloves, masks and sanitisers, liquid handwash, to the shopkeepers and buyers in the market. The market committee and local police station helped in the effort. "The markets have been sanitised and masks and hand sanitisers were distributed to the shopkeepers through the respective market management," said Mr Singh.

The Association installed four small water tanks at entry points of the market. Proper hand-washing arrangements were made for both stall owners and customers. HRAEI representatives urged people to follow proper hygiene protocols to help prevent the spread of the virus in the community. "We also asked people to maintain the social distance measures and prevent gathering and crowding," said Mr Poddar. In a rush many shop owners and buyers tend to ignore the basic norms. Especially the fish and vegetable markets have the biggest crowds in the peak hours of buying and selling in the morning. HRAEI representatives painted





► **Sanitisation drive by HRAEI at Lansdowne Market in Kolkata**

circles on the floor and urged people maintain the mandatory 2- metre distance from one another.

“The world is affected by a pandemic. We decided, till they find a cure, let us show some care,” said Mr Walia.

JUNE

Vande Bharat Mission offers a mix of business and CSR for hotels

After inclusion of Kolkata in the Vande Bharat Mission—Central Government’s endeavour to bring stranded Indians home amid the Covid-19 lockdown—more than 2600 rooms in Kolkata hotels were opened up for paid quarantine of citizens who are arriving from abroad. In the first batch of arrivals on May 17, the hotels got 27 bookings

All those flying into the city are required to get into compulsory institution quarantine for 14 days; home quarantine is not an option. The returnees can either pay and get quarantined at earmarked hotels or

opt for free quarantine at government facilities. The state government, which had initially reserved 750-odd hotel rooms for quarantine, had asked the Hotel and Restaurant Association of Eastern India (HRAEI) to add another 650 rooms to the quarantine inventory to prepare for a large number of returnees from abroad.

“The additional rooms are in luxury hotels like Taj Bengal, Hyatt Regency, Novotel, Swissôtel, Vedic Village Spa Resort, The Elgin Fairlawn, Lemon Tree Premier, Ibis Kolkata, The Sonnet Kolkata, and Pipal Tree. We have negotiated a discounted rate of over 50%,” said HRAEI President Pranav Singh. “The tariff will include meals. Earlier, Lalit Great Eastern, Holiday Inn, Pride Plaza, Westin, Stadel, Vivanta and Fairfield by Marriot had agreed to rent rooms for paid quarantine service,” he added.

Those opting for hotel quarantine could hire app cab services at the airport to travel to the hotel while

those who wish to stay at government quarantine centres for free will be transported to the facility by bus.

“All the rooms are in luxury and good hotels. We (HRAEI) have negotiated a discounted rate of more than 50% considering the current pandemic situation. It is a mix of business and CSR for hotels. They are charging much less than usual. On the other hand, it is getting some business as well,” said HRAEI secretary Sudesh Poddar.

As more and more flights from the Middle East, southeast Asia and the UK fly in, more and more people may go for paid quarantine. Top executives of some of the hotels by the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass and those closer to NSCB Airport have received queries from possible customers who are intending to fly to the city, according to T S Walia, President Emeritus of HRAEI. However, there haven’t been many confirmed bookings, managers of the hotels said.

“

I ATTEND EVERY SINGLE REVIEW BY OUR GUESTS AND TAKE QUICK REMEDIAL ACTION IF THEY FIND SOMETHING AMISS

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HAPPY TO BE OF FIVE PRO EASTER



MR NAVIN SUCHANTI

– CEO and MD, *Sinclairs Hotels Limited*

MR NAVIN SUCHANTI, CEO and Managing Director, Sinclairs Hotels Limited has nearly five decades of diverse experience spanning advertising, public relations, hospitality, administration, finance and taxation. He has held various important positions as committee member of several industry bodies which include Assocham, the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry and HRAEI. He was also a member of Tourism Advisory Council of Government of West Bengal.

Sinclairs Hotels Limited owns and operates hotels and resorts at seven places. Gangtok will be soon added to the chain. Also there is a plan to build a 114-key property in New Town, Kolkata. He spoke to Mystic East in an exclusive interview.

Q: How did you get into the hospitality business?

We already owned a very successful advertising and PR agency with countrywide presence, Pressman Advertising. Pressman had built strong brand equity and its forte was high quality service and customer-

BE OWNERS PROPERTIES IN N INDIA

“
TODAY MANY HOTEL
COMPANIES HAVE FALLEN
IN A DEBT TRAP; NEW
ENTREPRENEURS MUST LEARN
FROM THEIR MISTAKES
”

centric approach.

The opportunity to acquire a hotel company came our way some time in the late 1980s. Both my brother Dr Niren Suchanti and I thought that this was a good fit with our existing business by way of sustained high quality service and focus on customer delight. In March 1990, we acquired Sinclairs with two hotels at Siliguri and Darjeeling.

Q: How many hotels do you own at this point and how many do you manage (but not owned by you).

Since acquiring Sinclairs, the number of hotels that we own has grown into seven. These are at Burdwan, Darjeeling, Dooars, Kalimpong, Ooty, Port Blair and Siliguri. Gangtok will soon be added to our chain.

Darjeeling, Siliguri, Ooty and Port Blair were acquired as sick properties making losses and there were default in payment of bank and institutional loans. We invested in refurbishment of these properties and introduced new management and operational systems to make

them profitable. Resort hotels at Burdwan, Dooars and Kalimpong are greenfield projects and they all are destinations of delight for domestic and foreign guests.

Today I am happy to state that the company has no debts and each of the seven units are profitable.

Every time we build a resort property, we pay a lot of attention to make it blend seamlessly with the surrounding environment. The way we go about planting trees and designing flower beds as part of our green initiative come in for much appreciation of our guests.

Come April this year, we will commission a 60-room boutique hotel property – Sinclairs Gangtok. The eighth property in our chain is a leased property, as you may be aware that under Article 371F of the Indian Constitution, non-Sikkimese cannot buy properties in Sikkim.

Q: How do you identify a location of a hotel?

Quite a few factors will be in play when it comes to taking a decision

about where you want a new property to be located. Connectivity, that is, ease of getting into the destination by guests is one important consideration. We are primarily in leisure section of tourism. Our aim is to choose a place with natural bounties so that our visitors can unwind the stress they go through in everyday life and return refreshed and rejuvenated.

When we built the Burdwan property, our consideration was that between Howrah and Asansol, you don't have a good hotel. Burdwan also lacked in high quality banqueting facilities till we arrived.

Q: What is the USP of a Sinclairs hotel?

To me it's of paramount importance that any guest staying in a Sinclairs property must return with memories to cherish and share with others. The management challenge then is to build a culture among the staff to offer a kind of service to guests from the point of arrival to departure that will delight her or him.

You will have an idea of how good is



► Kanchenjunga Room at Sinclairs Darjeeling

the service by doing a periodic review of guest feedback at every property. I personally see what guests have to say about their stay experience. This gives me an insight into guest likes and dislikes. In fact, every single review is attended to by me. The important thing here is to take quick remedial action if guests find something amiss.

What gives me much satisfaction is all the seven Sinclairs resorts and hotels enjoy high ranking by TripAdvisor, the bellwether of tourism industry. While properties at Burdwan and Dooars have got top ranking, the one at Port Blair and Kalimpong is placed second and Darjeeling third. Siliguri is ranked seventh while Ooty is ninth ranked.

Q: Most of your hotels are in eastern India. What are the advantages or disadvantages of running a hotel in these parts of the country?

We are quite happy to be owners of five of the seven properties in this part of the country. And soon we shall be commissioning the Gangtok hotel and that will complete the circuit. Whatever may be the misgivings about the region in some quarters, we have done well here and our experience with the local governments, district and other officials has been excellent. We find the government in the state and local authorities responsive to our needs. Being born in Kolkata and having lived here, I know the region and its potential pretty well.

Q: Do you think that north-eastern part of India has a huge untapped potential in the hospitality sector?

I can't agree more. Riches of nature in north-east and distinctive cultures and many unique local crafts in the region will always be a big pull for tourists. What, however, stands in the

way of realising tourism potential of north-east is connectivity issue and infrastructure that needs development. On more than once occasion, Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi has spoken about the need to promote tourism in that part of the country.

Q: What is the status of your upcoming hotel in New Town Kolkata? Tell us something about this new property.

We have the land in a strategic location. The plan was to build an upmarket 114 room business hotel for which we already have a sanction. The hotel is designed by a leading Architect firm from USA. But because of the large inventory of rooms built up in the last few years, we have put our New Town project on hold. We are waiting for the right opportunity to give shape to the project.

Q: Do you prefer to set up



► **Burra Sahib Kothi at Sinclairs Retreat, Doors**

greenfield projects? Is this the right time to invest in such projects in India?

The country has so much tourism potential unexplored that it offers immense scope for hospitality groups to build greenfield properties as also go for acquisitions. Both offer good scope. The centre and the states are keen to promote tourism for revenue generation and creation of jobs requiring a variety of skills. India offers a diverse portfolio of niche tourism products from leisure to business to adventure to medical tourism. As domestic and foreign traffic for each niche segment will grow, the hotel industry will have to be ready with sufficient numbers of rooms as also all supportive infrastructure.

We are in the process of identifying locations for a couple of greenfield projects. We take up a project when we find the location ideal and cost

optimal. Anytime is good time to do a new hotel project.

Q: How do you handle labour problems or attrition in your business?

To me labour problem is a misnomer. At Sinclairs, everyone is treated as a member of a big family and she or he is given respect. When an individual has the sense of belonging, they will put the best foot forward. I have always believed that more than money people want respect and recognition for good work. They also want their career to progress in an ideal work environment, which Sinclairs offers.

Attrition is a challenge. In our case, however, the attrition rate is lower than the industry average. What has worked to our advantage is the presence of a unique family culture. To give you an idea of the high retention

level at Sinclairs, 40 per cent of the total staff members have clocked in ten to 20 years with us.

Q: What is your advice to a budding entrepreneur in hospitality?

This is a growing industry which offers opportunities to new entrepreneurs. But they have to be very careful in reviewing any projects that they may take up, especially location and cost. These should be thoroughly analysed and then only the project should be implemented. The financial mix to invest in the project is also important and leveraging should be very conservative. Today many hotel companies have fallen in a debt trap and it is therefore necessary for the new entrepreneurs to learn from their mistakes. Having said that I must say that Indian hotel companies have a great future as there is still a huge untapped potential in the tourism sector.

SINCLAIRS RETREAT DOOARS

Located at Chalsa Hilltop is spread over 20 acres of verdant green. Built in complete harmony with nature, the resort is ideal for those seeking rest, rejuvenation and adventure.



SINCLAIRS BAYVIEW

Located right on the waterfront, this is Port Blair's only hotel to offer spectacular views of The Bay of Bengal from almost all its rooms

SINCLAIRS SILIGURI

Situated in Pradhan Nagar, at the heart of the city, this is a luxury hotel equipped with modern amenities



SINCLAIRS RETREAT OOTY

Enveloped by the clouds at 8,000 feet and situated exactly where the "Queen of Nilgiris" was discovered, it is the highest located resort in South India



SINCLAIRS BURDWAN

Situated at High Street 1 in Renaissance Township, this is an upscale tourist resort offering finest accommodation, club and banquet facilities



SINCLAIRS RETREAT KALIMPONG

Nestled in the virgin green surroundings, the retreat prominently stands out over five acres of aesthetically landscaped green.





SUBHASH SINHA

– General Manager, *The Westin Kolkata, Rajarhat*

SUBHASH SINHA has been appointed as the General Manager of The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat. A veteran in the business of hospitality, he has enjoyed exponential success in all the top-notch properties he has served in an illustrious career spanning more than two decades now. He is reputed for his appetite for the culinary arts which he has married with his nifty managerial skills to successfully lead and inspire highly performing teams. An authority in the fields of operations, sales and marketing, he has also gained the reputation of successfully handling

challenging markets vis-à-vis the finance department.

At The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat, the astute and perceptive Subhash brings to the table a dynamic energy in all the areas of operational activities in accordance to his pivotal designation. His dynamism, passion for the industry and leadership qualities are driving the hotel to greater achievements. He is focused on generating impeccable personalization and guest recognition, besides maintaining the competitive edge and re-strengthening the brand presence. Additionally, this inspirational

leader is involved in formulating, administering, coordinating and directing activities of all departments to develop result-oriented goals for growth and profitability. Motivating, team building and supervision are also some other key responsibility areas associated with his work.

Prior to joining The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat, Subhash has achieved outstanding results in his role as General Manager of Marriott Suites Pune. He led this property boasting of 199 suites since it was launched in May 2016. Before this, he was associated with the Oakwood Group of Hotels as the General

CALCUTTA HIGHEST R GROWTH L



WITNESSED ROOM REVENUE LAST YEAR



Manager for two properties in Pune, namely Oakwood Premier & Oakwood Residence Naylor Road, successfully managing a total of 287 keys.

He has also worked as the Director of Operations at JW Marriott Pune, in charge of all rooms and food & beverage operations. He has been a part of two pre-opening teams of Marriott in Pune, The Marriott Hotel and Convention Center and the Courtyard by Marriott, as an Executive Chef, where he has instrumental in setting up the critical Food and Beverage arm across both the properties.

Armed with a Diploma in Hotel Management from IHM, Kolkata with a specialization in Catering Technology, his honesty and sincerity have been the stepping stones for the northward ascent in his career. In fact, his keenness for the industry was recognized early in his career when he was awarded with Marriott Global Chef of The Year Award 2012 and Award for Culinary Excellence 2011.

Outside the workspace, Subhash is social and fun-loving. A fitness aficionado, he enjoys cycling and also passionate about travelling the world and loves reading books. He spoke to

Mystic East in an exclusive interview:

Q: What are the typical challenges you generally face while operating in your market?

Kolkata as a city is emerging as a destination of large events and conferences. However, there is a disconnect in supply and demand. Approximately 60 per cent supply has increased over the last couple of years attracting bigger players in the market. The flight connectivity is a matter of concern as well. International connectivity plays a major role in the IT and ITES segment which is lacking

at the moment. Rates are another major factor and with the mid-scale and budget brands entering the city, the ADRs needs to be watched going forward.

Q: How do you face such challenges to stay ahead in the race?

We are abreast with the events happening in the city and ensure ourselves ahead of the competition. As a company, we have set tools and mechanisms which help us to track competition and maximize on events and days when required. With the help of Marriott Intl, we do get connected on a larger platform nationally and internationally which assists us being one step ahead of the competition always.

Q: Considering the peculiarities of the market what kind of innovation you brought into your products, especially F&B, and services including banquets?

We are the only Westin in the East which resembles the wellness brand. We as a Hotel have unique and state of the art offerings. We have the highest club in the East (31 32) which is located at a height of 152 meters serving the best of drinks and cuisine. We also have one of the finest Pan Asian restaurants in the city called Nori with breathtaking views of the Eco Park. Vedic, our recent addition traces us back to our culinary heritage which is one of the most unique concepts in the city. With a magnificent pool and 30,000 sq. feet of banqueting space including lawns, The Westin Kolkata becomes a destination in itself to host big events and hold activities for different periods of the year. We do take advantage of the connectivity we have with Biswa Bangla Convention Center and the Eco-park to host activities and cater to large events



► The Westin, Kolkata

in the vicinity. Our expert panel in banqueting also helps us to target big outdoor catering events and delivering the best Westin experience.

Q: What is your future plan to generate more revenue/profit?

Westin as a brand promotes wellness and we keep ourselves ahead in the game. Exploring new tertiary markets like Bhubaneswar, Guwahati, Siliguri, Jamshedpur, Bokaro and Ranchi is on our agenda already while we hold expertise in delivering the best service and experience to our guests. We also promote ourself as a culinary destination of Kolkata bringing in the best flavours to the city. With the help of Marriott Intl, we are in the process of forming tie-ups with bigger players to facilitate large events and outdoor caterings.

Q: What is your advice to budding managers in your market?

Smart work clubbed with learning is the key to success. We need to keep ourselves updated every moment in this ever-changing world whilst

we learn something new every day. Keeping a close eye on the competition and the emerging trends is crucial.

Q: How is the hospitality sector doing in the current economic scenario? What is the status of the sector in Eastern India?

Kolkata as a city is experiencing growth in the hospitality sector with an influx of new additional inventories to support large conferences and events. As a city, it has noted a tremendous growth of 10.3% in rooms sold and 12.1% in Room Revenue growth over last year which is the highest in the country.

Q: Would you like to comment on your expectations and reaction on Union Budget 2020?

The tax bracket plays a major role in deciding rates in both rooms and banqueting services. A flat tax bracket on hotel services would help the sector to grow more in terms of revenue thereby adding to the GDP of the state.

GOVT. APPROVED
NEW LAUNCHED
GOVT. CERTIFICATE

LIQUOR MEASURES

As per Legal Metrology (General) Rules, 2011 • Sixth Schedule • Part III
A Treatise on Legal Metrology Act, 2009
Liquor Measures

- General**
This Part deals with the requirements for liquor measures.
- Type**
Hand operated
- Denominations**
The denominations of the types of liquor measures shall be as given below:-
Hand operated : 60 ml. and 30 ml.
- Material**
The body of the liquor measures is brass sheets with silver plated in both side inside as well as outside. The minimum thickness of the sheet for liquor measures shall be 1.2 mm.
- Shapes and dimensions**
The shapes and nominal dimensions of hand operated liquor measures shall be as given in Figs.

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EASTERN REGION IS A FAST DEVELOPING DOMAIN



“
**WE EXPECT A
HUGE BOOM IN
THE HOSPITALITY
SECTOR IN THE
REGION**
”

SWISSÔTEL KOLKATA, part of Accor group, announced the appointment of Jameson Solomon as the new General Manager in December 2019. A seasoned professional, Solomon has more than two decades of experience in Hotel Management, Pre-opening, Strategic Planning, Client Relationship, Training & Development.

Prior to joining Swissôtel Kolkata, Jameson Solomon worked with Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts as Head of Operations, where he headed the project of pre-opening an exclusive

luxury residential development in the heart of South Mumbai. He had been associated with the Sheraton Grand Bangalore at Brigade Gateway, Bengaluru, Grand Hyatt Mumbai, Park Hyatt Dubai and Hyatt Regency Dubai.

Jameson believes it's challenging and lonely at the top. Focus on work-life balance and staying connected with industry peers is the key to success. He spoke to Mystic East in an exclusive interview:

Q: What are the typical challenges you generally face while operating

in your market?

There is an influx of inventory, from 5-star hotels and independent properties, who work with aggregators and OTAs. In this scenario, it is competitive and occasionally quality loses out to lower pricing as is evident from ADR trend.

Q: How do you face such challenges to stay ahead in the race?

Social Media is playing a major role in revenue generation and this is purely by creating awareness of the brand and also engaging the

customer to create brand loyalty. OTAs will continue to be a major contributor and in a market where everyone is trying to increase their share, it is extremely important to keep a check on rate parity.

Q: Considering the peculiarities of the market what kind of innovation you brought into your products, especially F&B, and services including banquets?

It is most important to understand the preference of guests and engage in terms of F&B offerings and services. It is important to showcase ourselves displaying modern trends in terms of innovative set ups and thematic food and beverage presentation.

Q: What is your future plan to generate more revenue/profit?

To leverage the vast possibilities of Digital Marketing and Accor's ALL Loyalty programme which is based on augmented hospitality concept and provides multiple experiences not just restricted to stay. We would focus on targeting the premium business travellers. As per current market studies on Kolkata about 75 per cent of room demand for premium segment comes from business travelers. Our aim would to be the preferred Premium hotel in our operating market by providing multiple experiences and services as per individual need with the support of our very talented Operations team.

Q: What is your advice to budding managers in your market?

It's a challenging and lonely at the top, focus on work- life balance and be connected with industry peers.

Q. How is the hospitality sector doing in the current economic



► **Swissotel, Kolkata**

scenario? What is the status of the sector in Eastern India?

Eastern region is a developing domain and has lot of focus from Central Government. The infrastructure (new hotels coming at rapid speed about 1700 plus rooms added per year since 2018), connectivity (ongoing contraction of Indo – Bangladesh and Thai Road) and tourism remain at the centre of it. More and sports and cultural events

are getting organized in eastern region these days.

Q. Would you like to comment on your expectations and reaction on Union Budget 2020?

It's a balanced budget, where government has allotted INR 2,500 crore for tourism promotion. 100 more airports to be opened which will enable seamless travel between tier 2/3 cities and urban cities.



SABRINA DEY
– Director of Operation,
JW Marriott Hotel, Kolkata

THE EAST SEEMS POISED FOR A NEW AGE OF GROWTH

RECENTLY JW Marriott Hotel, Kolkata, announced the appointment of Sabrina Dey as Director of Operation. In her current role, Sabrina will be seen effectuating strategies to support business growth, revenue generation through up-selling of products and services and creation of value through designing new products.

In a career spanning over 12 years, Dey has perfected her art, while enhancing customer satisfaction and maintaining the standards of the establishments she has been associated with. Having graduated from St. Xaviers College, Kolkata in 2005, she went on to complete her Diploma in Hotel Management from The Oberoi Centre for Learning and Development in 2008. Dey initially started her training at The Oberoi Centre for Learning and Development and officially kick started her career with The Oberoi Mumbai as Assistant Manager, Food and Beverage, where she was also a recipient of the FLO GR8 Award for Bravery 2009 for

her commitment to guest relations during the 26/11 terror attack at the hotel.

After a one year stint, she joined The Oberoi Grand Kolkata with the same position. Her core leadership role included revitalising internal groups, building and managing guest relationships, training and mentoring teams to outperform themselves and competition. Following her tenure in Kolkata, Dey moved to Agra at The Oberoi Amarvilas as Food and Beverage Service Manager, in 2012, where she was managing the restaurant, bar, in room dining and special dining experiences at the resort.

In 2014 she joined The Oberoi Grand Kolkata where she managed restaurant, bar, in room dining and banqueting operation for the 209 room property. She also spearheaded the task force in opening the all-day dining restaurant and Bar Threesixtythree° at The Oberoi Grand Kolkata. She spoke to Mystic East in an exclusive interview:

Q. What are the typical challenges you generally face while operating in your market?

Kolkata is a very discerning market, where clients come in with extremely high expectations, especially in the luxury hotel space. Our guests are well travelled and are familiar with the most recent trends in hospitality, including food and beverage, internationally. They often want to experience the same things back home, particularly during special occasions. For hotels to recreate these is sometimes a challenge, especially if the ingredients or technology are not presently available in the city. It is however a pleasure to work with such challenges, as it only helps us get better at what we do.

Q: How do you face such challenges to stay ahead in the race?

The only way to face any challenge is head on. We try to constantly innovate and develop new concepts to stay ahead of the curve. Sometimes that can mean working with suppliers

to develop products which give a local edge to an international concept. At other times, we use new technology to change the game. While the possibilities are endless, there is only one constant that helps keep us relevant – great service and the ability to deliver exceptional value to our patrons.

Q: Considering the peculiarities of the market what kind of innovation you brought into your products, especially F&B, and services including banquets?

We keep experimenting with new ideas in the food and beverage space. From Chef's tables inside the kitchen, to avant garde presentations of food during sit down dinners, to recreating local market places and Kolkata heritage spots inside the banquet venues. The idea is to give visitors, or even locals a slice of nostalgia, along with their meals, as we transform the surroundings into areas one would frequent to experience the best of street food during their college days.

Q: What is your future plan to generate more revenue/profit?

The plan is to keep challenging ourselves, pre-empting what guests want and deliver that proactively, coupled with great service. We feel that quality will speak for itself and will organically lead to greater revenue and profits.

Q: What is your advice to budding managers in your market?

Focus on the basics and invest in your core competency. There is actually no substitute to working and learning as much as you can, while still finding time for your passions. It is so important to remember to keep investing in yourself, whether through knowledge or self care. In short, keep



► JW Marriott, Kolkata

'sharpening the saw'!

Q. How is the hospitality sector doing in the current economic scenario? What is the status of the sector in Eastern India?

The hospitality industry in the East seems poised for a new age of growth. With more and more brands and different products coming into the region, we can look forward to resources, which were earlier scarce, becoming more available. There are several suppliers with high end products, who were reluctant to build

operations in the East due to the relatively fewer hotels in the luxury and premium space. We therefore had to ship them from a Delhi or a Mumbai. I see these challenges reducing in the future as the number of hotels grow.

Q: Would you like to comment on your expectations and reaction on Union Budget 2020?

Not in particular. We are optimistic for a great year for the industry as a whole.

TRULY INDIAN, TRADITIONALLY LUXURIOUS, PURELY PRIDE



BINAY THAKUR
– AVP,
Pride Hotel, Kolkata

BINAY THAKUR is an experienced Associate Vice President at Pride Hotels in Calcutta with a demonstrated history of working in the hospitality industry. Skilled in Hospitality Industry, yield management, pre-opening, food & beverage and hotel management, Thakur is a strong professional with a DHMCAN focused in Hospitality Administration and Management from Patna. He spoke to Mystic East.

Q. Would you like to comment on your expectations and reaction on Union Budget 2020?

Currently India is in 34th position on tourism ranking formerly was on 65th. Government initiative will surely help to improve the rank in coming years. Rs 9000 crore has been allocated to roads to key heritage site, 100 more new airports are to be activated. Private train program are to be accelerated and development of

heritage sites and museums have also got focus. These are really appreciable steps. Rs 2500 crore budget allocation for development of tourism and hospitality industry will seem to be fruitful in long run, no immediate effect we can expect.

Q. What is your advice to the budding managers in your market?

Managers should be more proactive towards the team as they are towards their guest. If the team is happy surely they will keep the guests also happy. The basic motto should be together we achieve the best among the rest.

Q. Where does Kolkata figure in the hospitality map of India?

About 75 per cent of room demand for premium segment comes from business travellers. Kolkata is driven primarily by commercial activity emanating from PSUs, PSBs, manufacturing, IT/ITeS, engineering, medical activity and the telecom

industry, while room night demand had not witnessed noteworthy change, demand from the commercial and extended-stay segments witnessed organic growth, proportionate to that of commercial/industrial activity in Kolkata. Leisure demand has witnessed marginal improvement in this market, because of initiatives such as the recent introduction of river cruises which attract foreign tourists to the city. The only segment to exhibit healthy growth is the meeting and group segment primarily due to social events, weddings and a few city-wide conferences.

Q. What are your views on competition?

We always believe in healthy competition, even though a lot of international brands are coming up in Kolkata but we still believe that if we are providing the best services to our guests and keep them happy they



► **Pride Hotel, Kolkata**

will always come back to us. Pride Plaza Kolkata believes in Truly Indian Traditionally Luxurious Purely Pride!

Q. What are your plans for expansion in the eastern region of India?

Recently we have added a new property in our inventory based out of Gangtok and also looking out for potential market in eastern zone for Brand Expansion such as Guwahati, Darjeeling, Sikkim etc.

Q. What according to you the role of F&B in getting business for a hotel?

F&B plays a crucial role in brand promotion in that particular region. Guests sometimes connect to the hotel through this only. Innovative food festivals and food promotions are good ways to reach to guests. As a whole we can say visibility of the brand gets prominent through F&B.

Q. What are the important

challenges in hospitality industry these days?

Attrition is a major challenge as millennial are always in move they hardly spend one year in a company. To maintain the balance between the service deliveries according to brand promise is sometimes challenging. Industry is recently facing steep competition from online booking agencies in terms of booking & revenue management.

THE AVERAGE ROOM TARIFF ROSE SIGNIFICANTLY IN THE CITY

“

CHANGE IN GUEST EXPECTATIONS IS PERHAPS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE

”



BILASH DAS

– General Manager, *Fern Residency, Kolkata*

BILASH DAS, General Manager of The Fern Residency, Kolkata, is a hospitality professional with over 19 years of experience in operating and managing hotels and restaurants. He spoke to Mystic East in an exclusive interview:

Q: What are the typical challenges you generally face while operating

in your market?

First challenge is in hiring and retaining the staff. Lack of skill in fresh graduates is a teething problem. Secondly, price inflation of daily use products, eatables and other amenities have risen steeply in the last few years. Change in guest expectations is perhaps the biggest challenges in hotel industry. Free WiFi, entertainment

system, unique stay experience and swift check-in check-out services are the top demands. One of the major challenges in our hotel industry is that many hotels are facing the credit menace. Dealing with parties who pay after a period of 30, 60 and 90 days or even later is a big hassle. Furthermore, many payments are extremely delayed or go in bad debts.

Q: How do you face such challenges to stay ahead in the race?

One needs to train the new workforce properly. Retaining a qualified staff requires us to employ a few tactics. A feeling of belongingness needs to be created among the staff that allows all the members to stay emotionally attached with the hotel and provide them perks and higher responsibilities.

Keeping control on stock, strategic purchase and reducing the wastage is the primary agenda for saving on the cost incurred on a daily basis. To meet the guest expectations we can provide a self-service guest portal which will facilitate quick check-in check-out services, map location guide to our hotel, request for pick-up and drop-off services. And the most important is our guest remains updated with the expenses incurred on a daily basis. So, we just need to approve the valid request of our guest and be rest assured of the best hotel experience.

Online marketing campaign attracting direct bookings and bookings from other online channels majorly with advance payment that provide a quick return of investment. This way, we can save on hiring extra personnel for payment collection. Thus we get to pay grocery, electricity and maintenance bills on time. In short, we can have an ample cash reserve as working capital.

Q: Considering the peculiarities of the market what kind of innovation you brought into your products, especially F&B, and services including banquets?

Food and beverage is not a science, and just like in any art form, trends in the food service world are constantly shifting to reflect the changing interests and needs of our guests and consumers. Besides, being a fun



game, keeping up with these trends is important to F&B directors and the hotel GMs.

When we suggest self-service in the same sentence as in-room food and beverage, it's easy to revert back to the traditional model the hotel mini-bar. However, the self-service model that we anticipate to take over the F&B segment in the coming years, is a far cry from the overpriced, under-performing mini-bar. While they do tap into the basic principle of self-service, but modern guests crave enhanced autonomy over their experience, mini-bars simply aren't equipped to succeed, that is, at a reasonable cost to the guest, or a reasonable profit for the hotel.

A popular movement relating to in-room, self-service is being implemented as high-end, self-service amenities. Specially the inclusion of Netflix, Smart TV, and voice-activated technology are becoming popular add-ons.

With 'Grab & Go' style service within hotel, guests can grab a small, pre-packaged or easy to prepare meals on their own schedule and terms.

Q: What is your advice to budding managers in your market?

Be an innovator. It is not necessary to be a radical innovator. Being an incremental innovator is more useful as a manager. Little innovation in processes and dealing with the team and clients can make a big difference in success and career trajectory.

How is the hospitality sector doing in the current economic scenario? What is the status of the sector in Eastern India?

There is unquestionably a surge in business in the hospitality sector. The city witnessed the substantial figures in room occupancy in star category hotels over a period of few months despite of economic slowdown. Thanks MICE, especially the Biswabangla convention centre, the average room tariff also escalated up significantly. The average daily rent room in Kolkata went up from 5.1k to 5.2k in 2019 in comparison to the year before, even after addition of almost over 1000 rooms across all segments of star rated hotels.

BIG BLOW

The impact of the pandemic on Indian hotel sector is deep, but there's a silver lining in the dark clouds



TO analyze the impact of COVID-19 on the hospitality industry, HVS published a detailed report on how to tackle the situation and be on the safe side after the virus is contained.

THE WORLD is still coming to terms with the COVID-19 outbreak and there is no doubt that the pandemic will change the world as we know it. Closer at home, the Indian hotels' sector has been hit hard, grappling with significantly low demand, with very few future bookings. Essentially, all transient demand has completely vanished – the remaining is largely on account of either a few long stay guests or hotels having been prescribed by the Government for the international travellers returning

to India. With the number of cases rising sharply on a daily basis, even if the pandemic is contained soon, the ripple-effects will be felt across the world well into the year, pushing all major economies into a possible recession.

The Travel & Tourism Sector across the globe is undoubtedly the biggest casualty of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several countries have issued travel advisories and are in lockdown mode, with all major global business, social and sporting events getting cancelled since February.

- IATA estimates that global airlines need an emergency fund of up to US\$ 200 billion as they fight for survival
- According to the World Travel

and Tourism Council, the COVID-19 pandemic could slash 50 million jobs worldwide in the travel and tourism industry, reflecting a 12-14% reduction in jobs

- International travel could be adversely impacted by up to 25% this year, equivalent to a loss of three months of travel
- The industry could take up to 10 months to recover after the outbreak is over.

COVID-19 & IMPACT ON THE INDIAN HOTELS SECTOR

The Indian hospitality industry is undoubtedly one of the biggest casualties of the COVID-19 outbreak as demand has declined to an all-time low. Global travel advisories, suspension of Visas, the imposition of Section-144 (prohibition against mass gatherings), India like most other countries is on lockdown, the ramifications of which are unprecedented.

- Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) into India (particularly leisure travellers) started softening in February, as the spread continued its unabated movement to other countries.
- Following suit, the Indian Government suspended travel visas (with a few exceptions) till 15th April 2020, which in all likelihood will be extended. Even if it is not, the paranoia surrounding the events will continue to have a major impact on travel.
- Demand from FTAs is not expected to pick up any time soon. In our opinion, travel bans across the globe will fully roll down only by the end of the year, even though such a process will commence much sooner.
- Furthermore, the majority of the future travel bookings for winter i.e. October-March – the strong season for our industry - are done in the summer months, have largely evaporated.



DOMESTIC TRAVEL WILL BE KEY TO THE REVIVAL

With new confirmed cases being reported daily, the penetration of the COVID-19 virus in India has caused mass hysteria, the reverberations of which are expected to continue well into the second quarter of the calendar year 2020. Demand segments such as MICE, business, social and sporting events have been cancelled or deferred indefinitely for the foreseeable future.

The silver lining to such devastation is that it has brought multiple representative bodies from Travel, Tourism and Hotels to collectively make representations to the Government and the Prime Minister's Office. As we go to print, in all likelihood the Government should announce measures to revive and support the distressed sectors, with specific focus to the hospitality sector, among others.

THE IMPACT ON THE INDIAN HOTEL SECTOR WILL BE SIGNIFICANT

The Indian hotels' sector sailed smoothly into January 2020, after a record year in 2019, with 2020 set to be "even bigger". The country first started feeling the ripple effects of the global COVID-19 turmoil towards the end of February 2020, which worsened at the beginning of March. Occupancy across hotels in key cities declined rapidly and as per our estimates has declined by a staggering 45 percentage points compared to the previous year. Such a steep decline in such a short period of time has never been witnessed by the sector.

The report predicts the second quarter of the year to be the worst hit. Hotels will be unable to drive rates and may even seek to attract business at deep discounts.

The overall occupancy in the branded hotels segment in 2020 is estimated to

decline by 16.7 – 20.5 percentage points over 2019, while ADRs are estimated to decline by 7% to 8% for the year. As a result, RevPAR will witness a significant decline of 31% to 36.2%.

Therefore, the overall revenue of the Indian hotel sector is set to decline by anywhere between US\$ 8.85 billion to US\$ 10 billion, reflecting an erosion of 39% to 45% compared over last year. Besides the actual business loss, the hotel owners will also incur losses due to fixed operating expenses, debt repayments, interest payments and several other compliances required to be undertaken as part of the sector.

THE WAY FORWARD RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

Monetary Support:

- Stimulus package to stabilize and support the sector in the near term, including a workforce support fund to

HOW TO FIGHT BACK

S t a n d a r d

Operative Procedure on preventive measures in Hospitality Units to contain spread of COVID-19, by Government of India, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

Background: All hotels and other hospitality units must take suitable measures to restrict any further transmission of COVID-19 while providing accommodation and other tourist services. The SOP aims to minimize all possible physical contacts between Staff and Guests and maintain social distancing and other preventive and safety measures against COVID-19.

Scope: This document outlines various generic precautionary measures to be adopted in addition to specific measures to be ensured in hotels and other hospitality units(henceforth, 'hotels') to prevent spread of COVID-19.

Hotels in containment zones shall remain closed. Only those outside containment zones will be allowed to open up.

GENERIC PREVENTIVE MEASURES:

(A) Persons above 65 years of age, persons with comorbidities, pregnant women and children below the age of 10 years are advised to stay at home, except for essential and health purposes. Hotel management must advise accordingly.

(B) The generic measures include simple public health measures that are to be followed to reduce the risk of COVID-19. These measures need to be observed by all (staff and guests) in these places at all times.

THESE INCLUDE:

- i. Physical distancing of at least 6 feet to be followed as far as feasible.
- ii. Use of face covers/masks to be made mandatory.
- iii. Practice frequent hand washing with soap (for at least 40-60 seconds) even when hands are not visibly dirty. Use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers (for at least 20 seconds) can be made wherever feasible.
- iv. Respiratory etiquettes to be strictly followed. This involves strict practice of covering one's mouth and nose while coughing/sneezing with a tissue/handkerchief/flexed elbow and disposing off used tissues properly.
- v. Self-monitoring of health by all and reporting any illness at the earliest to state and district helpline.
- vi. Spitting shall be strictly prohibited.
- vii. Installation and use of Aarogya Setuapp shall be advised to all.

ALL HOTELS SHALL ENSURE THE FOLLOWING ARRANGEMENTS:

- i. Entrance to have mandatory hand hygiene (sanitizer



dispenser) and thermal screening provisions.

- ii. Only asymptomatic staff and guests shall be allowed.
- iii. All staff and guests to be allowed entry only if using face cover/masks. The face cover/masks has to be worn at all times inside the hotel.
- iv. Adequate manpower shall be deployed by hotel management for ensuring social distancing norms.
- v. Staff should additionally wear gloves and take other required precautionary measures.
- vi. All employees who are at higher risk i.e. older employees, pregnant employees and employees who have underlying medical conditions, to take extra precautions. They should preferably not be exposed to any front-line work requiring direct contact with the public. Hotel management must facilitate work from home wherever feasible.
- vii. Proper crowd management in the hotel as well as in outside premises like parking lots–duly following social distancing norms shall be ensured. Large gatherings/congregations continue to

remain prohibited.

viii. Valet parking, if available, shall be operational with operating staff wearing face covers/ masks and gloves as appropriate. A proper disinfection of steering, door handles, keys, etc. of the vehicles should be taken up.

ix. Preferably separate entry and exits for guests, staff and goods/supplies shall be organized. Physical distancing of a minimum of 6 feet, when queuing up for entry and inside the hotel is a must. Specific markings may be made with sufficient distance to manage the queue and ensure social distancing in the premises.

x. Number of people in the elevators shall be restricted, duly maintaining social distancing norms. Use of escalators with one person on alternate steps may be encouraged.

xi. Details of the guest (travel history, medical condition etc.) along with ID and self declaration form must be provided by the guest at the reception.

xii. Posters/standees/AV media on preventive measures about COVID-19 to be displayed prominently.

xiii. Hand sanitizers must be kept at the reception for guests to use. Guests to sanitize hands before and after filling relevant forms including A&D register.

xiv. Hotels must adopt contactless processes like QR code, online forms, digital payments like e-wallet etc. for both check-in and check-out.

xv. Luggage should be disinfected before sending the luggage to rooms.

xvi. Guests who are at higher risk i.e. those who are older, pregnant or those who have underlying medical conditions are advised to take extra precautions.

xvii. Guests should be advised not to visit areas falling within containment zone

xviii. Required precautions while handling supplies, inventories and goods in the hotel shall be ensured. Proper queue management and disinfection shall be organized.

xix. Appropriate personal protection gears like face covers/ masks, gloves and hand sanitizers etc. shall be made available by hotel to the staff as well as the guests.

xx. Detailed guidelines issued for restaurants shall be followed.

a. Seating arrangement in the restaurant also to be made in such a way that adequate social distancing is maintained.

b. Disposable menus are advised to be used.

c. Instead of cloth napkins, use of good quality disposable paper napkins to be encouraged.

d. Contactless mode of ordering and digital mode of payment (using e-wallets) to be encouraged.

e. Buffet service should also follow social distancing norms

among guests.

xxi. Room service or takeaways to be encouraged, instead of dine-in. Food delivery personnel should leave the packet at guest or customer's door and not handed directly to the receiver. The staff for home deliveries shall be screened thermally by the hotel authorities prior to allowing home deliveries.

xxii. For room service, communication between guests and in-house staff should be through intercom/ mobile phone and room service (if any) should be provided while maintaining adequate social distance.

xxiii. Gaming Arcades/Children play areas (wherever applicable) shall remain closed.

xxiv. For air-conditioning/ventilation, the guidelines of CPWD shall be followed which inter alia emphasises that the temperature setting of all air conditioning devices should be in the range of 24-30°C, relative humidity should be in the range of 40-70%, intake of fresh air should be as much as possible and cross ventilation should be adequate.

xxv. Effective and frequent sanitation within the premises shall be maintained with particular focus on lavatories, drinking and hand washing stations/areas.

xxvi. Cleaning and regular disinfection (using 1% sodium hypochlorite) of frequently touched surfaces (door knobs, elevator buttons, hand rails, benches, washroom fixtures, etc.) to be made mandatory in all guest service area and common areas.

xxvii. Proper disposal of face covers / masks / gloves left over by guests and/or staff should be ensured.

xxviii. Deep cleaning of all washrooms shall be ensured at regular intervals.

xxix. Rooms and other service areas shall be sanitized each time a guest leaves.

xxx. In the kitchen, the staff should follow social distancing norms at work place. Kitchens area must be sanitized at regular intervals.

xxxi. In case of a suspect or confirmed case in the premises:

a. Place the ill person in a room or area where they are isolated from others.

b. Provide a mask/face cover till such time he/she is examined by a doctor.

c. Immediately inform the nearest medical facility (hospital/ clinic) or call the state or district helpline.

d. A risk assessment will be undertaken by the designated public health authority (district RRT/treating physician) and accordingly further action be initiated regarding management of case, his/her contacts and need for disinfection.

e. Disinfection of the premises to be taken up if the person is found positive.

ensure that there are no job losses.

- Provide a moratorium of ~ 6 – 12 months on all loans (principal & interest), including working capital payments and overdrafts.
- Ensure that Credit Rating agencies do not down-grade ratings of businesses, due to the expected volatility of the business in the short to medium term.
- With the fall in oil prices, subsidies on Heat-Light-Power (HLP) costs should be extended, as HLP is among the largest fixed cost for the sector.

FISCAL SUPPORT:

- Provide a 12-month corporate tax holiday to travel, tourism and hospitality sectors.
- Defer all statutory dues such as advance tax, custom duties, excise duties, PF, bank charges etc. at central and state level for 12 months.

DIRECT SUPPORT TO REVIVE DEMAND:

- Appoint a think tank to evaluate and decide the measures necessary for the revival of the sector.
- Waive / Reduce GST on products offered by the sector for a one-year period
- Incentivise travel by introducing a one-time opportunity for Leave Travel Allowance to be part of the new income tax slabs.

POLICY SUPPORT:

- Annual renewal of licenses paid for in 2020 should be extended till the end of 2021 without an incremental fee or charges.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE OPERATORS

The hotels' sector at large has been the biggest casualty of the COVID-19 shock, with demand at an all-time low across the globe. As the sector continues to build contingency plans



to alleviate the fallout of the crisis, hotel operators should also look to extend the hand of solidarity to their owners by providing certain relief measures.

ONE-TIME WAIVER OR REDUCTION IN BASE AND INCENTIVE FEES

The relief should be in the form of a one-time waiver or reduction in Base and Incentive Fees as well as Distribution, Technology and reimbursable costs, measured by correlating the total impact of the crisis on the hotel to the return of normalcy in operation post-COVID-19.

DEFER CERTAIN BRAND STANDARD PROVISIONS

All brand standard provisions that do not have a direct impact on revenues of the hotel and/or cannot be planned as per the revised CAPEX budget for the current year, should be deferred until such time normalcy in operation returns. While FF&E is an important fund set up by the

hotel for periodic replacement and up-gradation, the funds should be released immediately and redeployed either towards initial working capital to resume hotel operations or towards the reduction in debt, as may apply to each situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HOTELS

According to recent reports, over 90% of domestic hotels in China had resumed operations at the end of February 2020, just 2 months after the first COVID-19 case was reported in the country. Hotel bookings have also been increasing with business travellers accounting for the largest segment. Hotels located in proximity to transportation hubs have been the popular choice.

All the above news comes as a silver lining as it provides the Indian hotels' sector with a window to look for in the future, as it comes to terms with COVID-19 related travel restrictions and cancellations.

Source: HVS

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NOTES ON TRADITIONAL MILK PRODUCTS

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India created a guidance document to identify adulterants in desi milk products

FSSAI has created this guidance document to help Food Business Operators ensure basic hygiene and sanitation in manufacturing and sale of milk products particularly sweets. It also suggests a line of action to the food safety regulatory authorities to prevent adulteration in milk products and ensure effective regulatory compliance for food safety in milk products. It focuses on enhanced declaration by sellers [Shelf Life, made of ghee/vanaspati], guide test for detection of adulteration, quality assessment by observation of flavours, body texture, colour and appearance etc. It will increase consumer awareness about food safety and empower them with knowledge and grievance redressal avenues available to them.

Traditional dairy products such as khoa, chhana, paneer and khoa/chhana based sweets have been produced and marketed in India for centuries. The manufacture and trading of these products is largely confined



► Basics of hygiene and sanitation is missing in traditional milk industry



► **Manufacture of traditional sweets is confined to halwais**

to halwais. Such dairy products are more susceptible to adulteration during festive season particularly due to mismatch in demand and supply. To avoid adulteration and to ensure food safety requires concerted efforts by Food Safety Regulatory Authorities, Food Business Operators and Consumers, are required.

KEY CHALLENGES

Use of non-permitted colour, flavour or other ingredients, use of raw materials of poor quality for sweet manufacturing, repeated use of oil in preparation, leading to increased level of trans-fat, adequate knowledge of hygienic practices by people involved in manufacture of traditional dairy products (Halwais), lack of packaging and labelling systems that severely

limit the shelf life, lack of legal standards and quality assurance systems, lack of training sessions and audits in place are some of the key challenges in the sector

RESPONSIBILITIES OF FOOD BUSINESS OPERATORS

The general hygiene and sanitary requirements as specified under Schedule IV of FSS (Licensing and Registration of Food Businesses) Regulations 2011 should be scrupulously complied with. In case of pre-packaged milk products, the list of ingredients and the date of manufacturing and best before or use by date should invariably be mentioned as prescribed under the FSS (Packaging and Labelling) Regulations, 2011. In case of non-packaged/loose

sweets, the container/tray holding the items at the outlet should display the following information:

- i) Best before or use by date (ii) Whether Oil/ghee/Vanaspati used (iii) The record of source of dairy based products should be maintained (iv) FSSAI License/Registration should be prominently displayed at the unit (v) Use of non permitted colors and repeated use of oil should be avoided (vi) For sale of savouries, sweets or other articles of food, the notice board should indicate whether (vii) Articles which have been cooked in ghee, edible oil, vanaspati and other fats for the information of the consumers

GUIDANCE NOTE ON MILK PRODUCTS

Shelf life of sweets

The Indian sweets use a variety of



ingredients such as khoya, ghee, flours, dry fruits, sugar etc. The shelf life of sweets depends upon the ingredients used. For example, the Khoya Burfi has shorter shelf life than Boondi Ladoo. In this regard, an illustrative list of sweets with their shelf life is given below:

Shelf-Life Item

- i) To be kept at room temperature and consumed on the same day: Kalakand and its variants like Butterscotch Kalakand, Rose Kalakand, Chocolate Kalakand.
- ii) To be kept in refrigerator and

consumed within 2 days from date of manufacturing: Milk Products and Bengali Sweets such as Badam milk, Rasgulla, Rasamalai, RasMalai, RabriRasmalai, ShahiToast, Rajbhog, Cham Cham, Sandesh, Malai Roll, Bengali Rabri,

Hiramani, Gur Sandesh, Hari bhog, Anurodh, Anarkali, madhuri, Pakiza, Raskadam, Gur Kaccha Gola Sandesh, RasKatta, KheerMohan, GurRasmalai, Gur Rabri, Gur Rasgulla.

iii) To be consumed within 4 days from date of manufacturing: Ladoo and Khoya Sweets such as Milk Cake, Mathura Peda, Plain Burfi, Milk Burfi, Pista Burfi, Coconut Burfi, Chocolate Burfi, Safed Pedo, Boondi Ladoo, Coconut Ladoo, Lal Ladoo, Motichoor Modak, Khoya Badam, MewaBatti, Fruit Cake, Khoya Til Fruit Cake, Kesar Coconut Ladoo, Small Malai Ghewar, Vrat Kesaria Coconut Ladoo, Small Mewa Ladoo, Pink Burfi, Sev Badam Burfi, Til Bugga, Rewari Burfi, Dry Fruit Tilbugga, Shahi Ghewar, Khoya Kesar

Badam Roll, Til Bati, Kheerkadam, Kheera Beej burfi, Khoya Coconut Burfi, Moti Pak.

iv) To be consumed within 7 days from date of manufacturing: Sweets with ghee and dry fruits such as dry fruit Ladoo, Kaju Katli, Ghewar, Sakkar Para, Gur Para, Shahi Ladoo, Moong Burfi, Aata Ladoo, Besan Ladoo, dry fruit Gujia, Moti Boondi Ladoo, Kaju Kesar Burfi, Kaju Baked Gujia, Badam Laung, Balusahi, Badam Burfi, Kajuanjeer Roll, Kesar Big Malai, Chandrakala, Chhak Mitthi, Kesar Gujia, Maida Gujia, Kajukhazoor, PistaLaung, Small KesarGhewar, KesarChandrakala, Anjeer Cake, Kaju apple, KajuGujia, Kaju Honey Dew, Kaju Kalash, Kaju Kesar, Kaju Ladoo,

Kaju Roll, Kaju Samosa, Dil Khushal Burfi, Kaju Rose Katli, Kaju Baked Gujia, Kaju Ladoo, Besan Burfi, Kaju Rose Katli.

Quality Check

The consumers should observe the flavour, body and texture, colour and appearance of milk products and decide the quality and freshness of the product. In this regard, indicative flavour, body and texture etc.

Quick Tests

Consumers can test common adulterants in the milk products using Quick Tests as given below.

Coal Tar Dyes (used in Ghee, cottage cheese, condensed milk, khoa, milk powder etc.)

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Add 5 ml of dil. H₂SO₄ or conc. HCl to one teaspoon full of melted sample in a test tube. Shake well. Pink colour (in case of H₂SO₄) or crimson colour (in case of HCl) indicates coal tar dyes. If HCl does not give colour repeat once after dilution with water.

Vanaspati (used in sweet curd) Take a teaspoon of curd in a test tube. Add 10 drops of

hydrochloric acid. Mix the contents by shaking the test tube gently. After 5 minutes, examine the mixture. Red colouration indicates the presence of Vanaspati in the curd.

Blotting paper (used in Rabri): Take a teaspoon of rabri in a test tube. Add 3 ml of

hydrochloric acid and 3 ml of distilled water. Stir the content with a glass rod. Remove the rod and examine. Presence of fine fibres on the glass rod will indicate the presence of blotting paper in rabri

Starch (used in khoa, chhana and paneer and its products): Starch Boil a small quantity of sample with some water, cool and add few drops of Iodine solution. Formation of blue colour indicates the presence of starch

Vanaspati or Margarine (used in Ghee or butter): Take one tea spoon full of melted sample of Ghee or butter with equal quantity of concentrated Hydrochloric acid in a

stoppered test tube and add to it a pinch of sugar. Shake for one minute and let it undisturbed for five minutes. Appearance of crimson colour in lower (acid) of Vanaspati or Margarine. The test is specific for sesame oil which is compulsorily added to vanaspati and margarine. Some coal tar colours also give a positive test. If the test is positive i.e. red colour develops only by adding strong Hydrochloric acid (without adding crystals of sugar) then the sample can be deduced to be adulterated with coal tar dye. If the crimson or red colour develops after adding and shaking with sugar, then alone vanaspati or margarine is present.



Mashed Potatoes, Sweet Potatoes and other starches (used for Ghee): The presence of mashed potatoes and sweet potatoes in a sample of ghee can easily be detected by adding a few drops of Iodine, which is brownish in colour turns to blue if mashed potatoes/ sweet potatoes/other starches are present.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF FOOD SAFETY REGULATORY AUTHORITIES

Food Safety Commissioners of States/ UTs should ensure compliance and food safety for milk products. Special drive should be conducted frequently to ensure freshness and quality of sweets

sold in retails including sweets shops, halwai shops etc.

A vigil should be maintained on sweet shops to eliminate the chances of adulteration particularly in milk products. In case any violation is found, stringent action should be taken as per the provisions of FSS Act, 2006 and Rules/Regulations made there under.

Surveillance activities should be undertaken regularly, and the data so obtained should be analysed to identify the hot spots which should be intensely targeted.

Intensify surveillance during festive seasons when demand of milk and milk products increase.

The prolonged tenure of FSOs at the same or nearby stations as well as any conflict of interest, with self or family business of sweets shops/halwais, should be avoided. States may follow a policy of periodic transfers.

Generate local intelligence regarding the malpractices. The supervising officer must take action to ensure neutrality.

Consumer awareness programme should be conducted to apprise consumers about common malpractices, train them in performing quick tests, inform about avenues to file their grievances

They should also reassure public in case of any panic.

PEOPLE, PLANI

Hospitality entrepreneurs in the region can follow the Environm



► Anurak Community Lodge

Adjacent to the rainforest of Khao Sok National Park in southern Thailand, Yaana Ventures has built a 20-key ecolodge dedicated to implementing the principles of responsible and sustainable tourism. The park, and its adjoining nature reserves, is home to an amazing array of wildlife such as elephants, tiger, hornbills, leopards, sun bears, otters, gibbons – 48 mammal species in all, plus 311 different species of bird, some 200 flora species per hectare covering 3500 square kilometers (1350 square miles) of mostly pristine forest.

In 1982 the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand built the Rachabraphah Dam in the southern end of the sanctuary. The dam created the 165 sq. km (64 sq mile) Chew Larn

lake reservoir. It submerged many valleys leaving tall limestone cliffs and peaks rising sheer from the water. In a tale of unintended consequences, the flooding created a visually stunning landscape akin to the Guilin Li River karst mountain water paintings made popular in China from the 15th century.

Cheow Larn Lake, part of Khao Sok National Park, is now a major attraction for ecotourists who combine hiking and wildlife spotting in the forest with kayaking and overnight stays in floating bungalows on the lake. Activities on the lake and in the national park are closely controlled by national park authorities. The result is a wonderful ecoadventure playground for hikers, kayakers, bird watchers, wildlife enthusiasts, and

people seeking to commune with mother nature at its best.

Inspired and awed by the setting, Willem Niemeijer, travel and hospitality business entrepreneur, opened Anurak Community Lodge at Surat Thani province in 2016. It was created as a low impact ecolodge operating on the principles of conservation and sustainability. (The name “Anurak” in Thai translates as “conserve”.) The goal is to lead by example and not just respect the physical environment around us, but to honour local culture and contribute to the rural community in this remote area of Surat Thani province.

Indeed, many of the principles that have guided Niemeijer in the successful Anurak ecoadventure will motivate

ET AND PROFIT

ental Best Practices of a small ecoproperty in southern Thailand



► Ecotourists combine hiking and wildlife spotting in the forest

hospitality business operators to implement changes in their own hotel operations, especially in several wooded locations of eastern India. Furthermore, being environmentally sustainable is increasingly good marketing, especially for an ecolodge in the region.

The guests at Anurak, typically educated, middle class Europeans, North Americans, expats in Asia, and millennial adventure seekers from large Asian cities, appreciate responsible green operators. They seek an immersive nature experience as an antidote to urban life. The younger age group love the adventure activities and older guests enjoy simpler hikes and admire the stunning views of the forest-clad mountain landscape.

RAINFOREST RISING

As one walks into Anurak Community Lodge it is a bit like walking into a small unkempt botanical garden. It is not for lack of care that the gardens have a slightly wild look about them. It is all part of Anurak's "Rainforest Rising" reforestation program. Within the lodge's total area of 23,000 square metres, we are in the process of returning about 1000 square meters of palm oil plantation back into indigenous vegetation cover. Our ultimate aim is to make the entire former commercial plantation indistinguishable from native forest in adjacent Khao Sok National Park itself.

In the last few decades palm oil, used as a biofuel and in food products, has become a major sector

of Thailand's agricultural economy. However, palm oil trees consume large amounts of water, need vast amounts of chemical fertilizer which ends up in streams and causes harm to a healthy eco system. Palm oil plantations, like rubber tree ones, are sterile monocultures. Birds, insects and mammals prefer a diversity of species for a variety of fruit, leaves and habitat.

When Anurak was built, choosing an oil palm plantation to build on made environmental sense. By constructing on agricultural land, they didn't face the dilemma of cutting indigenous hardwoods to build an ecolodge. While the process of replacing the remaining palm oil will take time, a large number of palm oil trees have been removed from Anurak's grounds already.



► **Cheow Larn Lake reservoir has a visually stunning landscape**

The choice of building materials was important in the construction phase. Anurak’s 12 villas on stilts that offer guests 18 spacious rooms and two safari tents – were designed and constructed from light, prefabricated materials. The various sections were pre-made in Bangkok and transported to the site to be assembled on

stilt foundations, reducing the construction footprint to a minimum.

Once building was completed, Anurak’s reforestation efforts got underway. We soon realized we needed advice. Accordingly, they are now collaborating with the Forest Restoration Research Unit (FORRU), part of Chiang Mai University,

which has a project and nursery in neighbouring Krabi province. FORRU has created a program of phased replanting for us. They recommend a variety of species and plan the density and sequence in which seedlings should be replanted.

In the ‘Rainforest Rising’ program guests choose from 17 different species of indigenous rainforest saplings to plant. By taking part, guests return home with the knowledge that they have helped the environment in a small way and helped offset their vacation’s carbon footprint.

However, interaction with the natural surroundings doesn’t stop there. Our back of house operations have been designed to uphold responsible and sustainable hospitality best practice.

ONSITE RECYCLING

As part of Anurak’s Sustainability Management Plan, site infrastructure, policies and procedures are guided by our ethos of reduce, reuse and recycle. Guests and staff are encouraged to save energy and water. Single-use plastic, styrofoam, cardboard plates, etc are banned. Plastic straws have been replaced with metal and bamboo ones. An onsite recycling station has been set up, along with a composting area. A gray water treatment filter system for laundry wastewater is currently being installed. That water will be used to irrigate Anurak’s onsite vegetable garden and for the Rain Forest Rising project.

Yaana Ventures has also developed a hotel management platform that will go a long way in taking Anurak Lodge paperless. When fully implemented, by the end of this year, the aim is to do away with restaurant chits, housekeeping forms and most of our paper reporting. Menus are printed on



recycled paper. Worn towels, sheets and tablecloths are donated to charity, while damaged towels and sheets are converted into cleaning rags.

Beyond the physical environment, community relations are a vital part of Anurak's culture. Their 24 full-time staff are mostly recruited from neighbouring villages. Through environmental awareness training and experience from working with the Anurak concept, they have become de facto environment ambassadors within the community. They spread the word about the benefits of simple, day-to-day sustainable practices that can be used at home as well.

Working at Anurak is now seen locally as a big step up from working on the rubber and palm oil plantations, where profits are typically channelled

to large corporations and villagers are, in effect, forced off their land to work for a minimum wage as labourers in fields that were once theirs.

Winning trust and support for Anurak among local communities continues to be a crucial element in the ecolodge's success. Anurak began as a concept for community-based business; a model that would one day be primarily managed by the local community – establishing a new mindset and empowering villagers with a say in their own future.

The day when Anurak falls under local management is still some way off. However, that community ethos plays an integral role, especially in hiring the majority of our staff from local areas and providing them with competitive salaries and hospitality career skills.

The estimate is that Anurak annually generates upwards of US\$220,000 (Euro 200,000) within the community for services, activities, excursions, supplies and salaries.

LOW CONSUMPTION

Historically speaking, the hospitality industry has had a dramatic impact on the environment with high energy and water consumption, the use of consumable and durable goods, and the generation of solid and hazardous waste. Hotels consume a huge amount of energy for HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) operations, lighting, fuel and many other power needs, not to mention water consumption for bathrooms, F&B and laundry.

However, despite these factors,



► River rafting at the lake; and (below) Villas are constructed with light, prefabricated materials

many in the industry are hesitant to seriously commit to sustainability programs, believing that green operations are more expensive and guests are unenthusiastic about sustainability – believing it compromises quality. The opposite is in fact true, according to Cornell University’s Center for Hospitality Research, which demonstrates that recent advances in technology related to renewable sources of energy, such as solar, geothermal and wind, have improved the economics of using renewable energies at property level.

There’s little doubt that today’s modern traveller wants to experience spectacular new surroundings in a way that’s both environmentally friendly and socio-economically responsible. Guests want to see that hotels provide positive benefits for local communities. Seeing these benefits at work is all part of the modern holiday experience.

Ecolodges like Anurak Community Lodge (and others that YAANA



Ventures operate) strive to take a holistic people, planet, profit approach to lodge creation, management and marketing. They try to constantly adapt our practices and services to new developments and technologies. It’s not about hugging trees. It’s a mindset that opens up new and creative ways of lodge management.

In June, Anurak Community Lodge won the 2019 SKAL Asian Area Award – Environment Category. They were also selected by National Geographic Traveller (UK) to be part of their prestigious Earth Collection – a compilation of 36 ecolodges around the world that are leading by example in responsible tourism.

HOW TO BUILD AN ECO LODGE



An Ecolodge as defined by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), is a tourist lodging designed for the expressed purpose of ecological and cultural conservation. Key for any Ecolodge are its water, power and disposal systems being built for efficiency and waste reduction. An Ecolodge also is designed to fit in with its surroundings by being built of (where possible) local materials and in architectural styles that blend into the local culture. Local expertise and involvement is highly encouraged.

DESIGN: Consult with your architectural engineer to ensure that they know of your intention to build an Ecolodge as opposed to a standard inn, mentioning the requirement for low-impact, high-efficiency building systems. As far as building design considerations go, make sure you stay culturally relevant. For example a ranch style inn on the great plains

of North America would be fine, but an authentic nod to the plains Native Americans would be better. Similarly, cultural Ecolodges are often mirrored to look like the ruins that draw visitors to the locations themselves. Try to use green technology, like wind, solar and geothermal for power systems and heating when possible. Incorporating clever architectural aspects can also reduce the energy cost of air conditioning in extreme heat climates, with air conditioning being acceptable as long as its powered by green sources and well maintained. Before beginning work, be sure to consult with all levels of government to ensure that local laws and standards are met and any taxes are understood beforehand.

CONSTRUCTION: Have the construction foreman or estimator consult with an environmental impact specialist when choosing building materials. This will ensure that the use

of ecologically dangerous chemicals is avoided in the building process. Often innocuous items like varnish can be very hazardous. In cases where the use of harsh chemicals cannot be avoided, ensure that strict containment procedures are in use, and that construction staff is fully prepared to deal with any potential spills. When possible, have such tasks done in a controlled shop setting off site. If large machines or vehicles must be used in the construction process, plan out the ideal way to minimize the number of trips and reduce terrain damage. Having helicopters airlift staff and materials into a location instead of felling forest for a construction road would be preferable for example.

After you have obtained the rights to build on a given location, bring in both your preferred environmental experts, as well as local building contractors to ensure that the construction process of your lodge is both locally authentic and preserves the low ecological footprint requirement of an Ecolodge. Once both groups are familiar with the needs of the project, give the go-ahead for construction.

STAFFING: Building an Ecolodge, due to its unique nature extends beyond the scope of erecting the structure itself; with strict guidelines being in place as to staffing and employee practices before you can actually call your facility a true Ecolodge. Hire the majority of facility staff locally when culturally acceptable, making use of local guides while providing on-the-job training. Offer expanded educational opportunities for staff when possible, particularly language studies to assist them in interacting with visitors. Contributing to the overall health and wellness of the indigenous community also is par for the course in Ecolodging.

CLEAN, GREEN AND O

Traditional monasteries of Tibetan Buddhism co-exist with Hindu mountain kingdom of yore



Sikkim has become a highly valued responsible tourism destination with tourism contributing significantly to the State economy while conserving its natural and cultural heritage. The state has now transformed itself into a world class tourist destination. Be it

in agriculture, cleanliness, health and education, it has set a benchmark for other states to follow and tourism is no exception. As testimony to this, Sikkim has been receiving awards and recognition both at the national and international level. A credit largely attributed to the dynamic leadership

of the Hon'ble Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling, the state today has nurtured an environment highly conducive for tourism industry to foster. It is a matter of pride for all of us but this achievement also sets before us great challenges to maintain our position to be amongst the best

ORGANIC

shrines in this



► **Temi Tea Garden amidst cherry blossoms and mountain view**

tourist destinations in the country. Moreover the complexity of the industry, as a result of involvement of independent sectors like transport, accommodation and the fragility of our resources, demands a careful approach to maintain a balanced and sustainable path of development.

A dire need was hence felt of a document that could be a guiding force to regulate the

tourism industry of Sikkim. Such a document needed to be based upon a participatory approach consolidating the collective views

of all stakeholders. The “Sikkim Tourism Policy 2018” thus is an outcome of a series of brainstorming and successive meetings with the tourism stakeholders, scholars and officers from various line departments wherein the best of suggestions have been incorporated to make this document meaningful. Excerpts from the document:

THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES SHALL GUIDE THE TOURISM SECTOR IN SIKKIM:

Environmental Sustainability: Tourism development will not be at the cost of degradation of the environment and natural resources of the state.

Cultural integrity: Tourism development will ensure appreciation, promotion and conservation of Sikkim’s diverse culture.

Equity, Inclusiveness & Social Justice: Opportunities and benefits of tourism shall not exclude those disadvantaged by gender, remoteness and poverty, and tourism practices shall ensure the upholding of human rights and justice.

Atithi Devo Bhava: Tourism development shall focus on providing quality experiences and services for all visitors and ensure their safety and satisfaction.

GOALS

In line with the need for tourism to contribute significantly to the UN Sustainable

Development Goals, the five main goals that the policy objectives of tourism development in Sikkim will achieve are:

- Develop tourism as a key sector in Sikkim’s economy
- Promote low impact sustainable tourism for the State
- Make Sikkim a prime round the year destination for nature, adventure



► The Sikkimese worship Mt Kanchenjunga as their guardian deity

and culture

- Tourism benefits are broad based to support local, social and economic development in Sikkim and also ensure social justice.

- All tourism infrastructure and services shall be of the best standards and quality

delivering a consistent high level of satisfaction and hospitality to tourists.

KEY TOURISM PRODUCTS

Sikkim's main attraction is its nature and cool climate which makes it a perfect getaway for travelers. The richness of the State's diverse culture and tradition with strong bonds with

nature and religion also add to the attraction. To address the policy goals of promoting cultural and natural heritage of Sikkim for developing high value low impact tourism in the State the key seven products are proposed as:

Conventional Leisure based Tourism: This pertains to that section of tourists who come with the prime purpose of sightseeing and recreation, to enjoy Sikkim's natural scenery along with its cool climate and peaceful atmosphere. They are the casual holiday makers and currently comprise the bulk of the tourists who visit Sikkim. This form of tourism with high volumes and limited spending is the main driver

of the tourism industry. However this sector has high impact on the environment and local resources in the form of high generation of waste, high consumption of energy and water, high pollution from vehicles and traffic congestion.

This form of tourism shall be encouraged but with a close watch on numbers and with a designed shift to higher value tourism with softer footprints and through improved quality of services. Such measures taken to upgrade the infrastructure and services with a resultant hike in tariff can serve as a disincentive for the unchecked rise in high volume



► Giant prayer wheel at Tathagata Tsal in Ravangla, South Sikkim

tourism. Further this will be backed by regular carrying capacity studies to determine negative impacts and peak capacities of tourist traffic permissible in all high tourist density areas and mechanisms to ensure that the recommended capacities are not exceeded.

Nature based tourism or Ecotourism: Nature and natural scenery forms the main draw for tourists to Sikkim. According to the

International Ecotourism Society (TIES) "Responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and which provides benefits to local communities while

ensuring enriched experiences for visitors can be termed as ecotourism." The Forest Environment and Wildlife Management Department has prepared the Sikkim Ecotourism Policy 2011 which advocates for certain strategies and guidelines for ecotourism development particularly for protected areas and also to bring consensus on the concept of ecotourism.

For serious nature lovers, Sikkim has a host of products to offer such as birding, butterfly

watching, botanical and zoological excursions, nature walks and soft trekking around protected areas.

Sikkim's wealth of biodiversity that include some of the most enigmatic species of flora and fauna can be leveraged to attract researchers, students and hobbyists for high value tourism, with development of specific action plans.

Adventure based tourism: Sikkim with its stupendous mountains, gorges and valleys, glaciers, snows, lakes and rivers, forests and altitudinal and topographical diversity, has tremendous potential for development of adventure tourism which would also be in alignment with the tourism policy goals of bringing in high value tourists to the State. Some



► **Rumtek Monastery, or Dharmachakra Centre, is a gompa located near Gangtok**

of the key adventure tourism products are trekking, mountaineering, paragliding, mountain biking, rafting/ kayaking, zip-lining. With the establishment of the Indian Himalayan Centre for Adventure & Ecotourism (IHCAE) at Chemchey, there is an excellent opportunity to develop high class training and certification within the state. There is a need to have long term comprehensive planning, high quality infrastructure, encouragement of local stakeholders, improvement of standards and training with strict regulation and aggressive marketing

in adventure sports. Focused efforts to improve and promote tourist traffic in routes other than the already popular ones such as the Yuksom-Dzongri-Goechela route.

Culture based tourism & village homestays: Sikkim with its plethora of ethnic communities has tremendous potential for offering tourists a multidimensional cultural experience. At the heart of the rural experience are the homestays spread across the state which provide a glimpse into the village lifestyle and culture. Village based resorts catering to the high end

tourists are growing in number. Ethnic cuisine and food products, organic produce, ethnic songs and dances, traditional dresses, handicrafts, vernacular architecture, festivals, traditional medicines, folktales, are some of the items on offer in the cultural basket. There is a growing concern that rapid development and modernization is slowly eroding these cultural treasures and tourism can play a major role in its conservation. The Tourism Department's project to create over 1500 homestays in villages across the state and the State's organic

HOW TO SPREAD THE WORD

Lonely Planet's recognition for Sikkim as the top region to visit in the year 2014 and the New York Times' 52 destinations to visit was helpful in catapulting the state into the international scene. The opening of Mansarovar Yatra through the Nathula Pass in East Sikkim and the declaration of Khangchendzonga National Park as a World Heritage Site has also expanded possibilities for attracting more tourists. Other factors which will contribute to increased flow of tourists to Sikkim are widening of the NH10 to Sikkim linked with the completion of North-South- East - West highway corridor project and Sikkim being linked by air with the commissioning of the airport in Pakyong and by rail

link. It is also observed the impact of global warming is resulting in increased flows of tourists from the hot plains to the mountain areas of India.

Sikkim has the potential to see a substantial increase in tourist inflows, which is targeted to be around 20-25 lakhs by 2020. However given the environmental impacts of mass tourism, marketing efforts for the future shall be focused at attracting high value low impact tourism.

Marketing and publicity efforts of Sikkim both at national and international levels have been very low key. This situation needs to be changed with focused attention on marketing high value products to up market clients in targeted domestic and foreign markets.

Fund crunch: One of the major constraints in tourism marketing for Sikkim has been the lack of adequate funds and a sustained and robust marketing strategy for the

state. Adequate and sustained funding for marketing and promotion of Sikkim must be arranged both through government sources, including the market research division of MoT and private sector participation. Besides the regular schemes of the Central Government, the department shall explore innovative means to generate the necessary funds for marketing and promotion.

Campaign: A professionally designed and sustained long term marketing campaign supported by high quality publicity materials and strategies such as the use of a Brand Ambassador, Mr A R Rahman and a wide media presence shall be prepared and executed.

Online presence: The marketing plan shall maximise use of information technology to ensure that Sikkim has a strong online presence through websites, portals, mobile applications and social media with well-researched and up to date information.

Travel marts: There shall be strong participation of Sikkim in national and international travel and tourism trade marts with a clear strategy and long term marketing plan.

Promotion as all-season destination: Festivals, events and competitions shall be held all year round to highlight and promote Sikkim's unique tourism products. A calendar of such items shall be drawn up a year in advance and promoted extensively through trade bodies, government agencies websites and various other media.

Swadesh Darshan: In alignment with the national policy of Swadesh Darshan, opportunities for local people of Sikkim to travel to rural areas of the state shall be developed.

mission shall support the culture and rural based tourism provided linkages are developed.

Religion-based Tourism: Sikkim has wide acceptance as a place for understanding Mahayana Buddhism as practiced by the Karmakargyudpa and Nyinmapa sects and owing to the strong association it has with Guru Padmasambhava and Lhatsun Chenpo. The Nay-Sol, a religious scripture, details and describes Sikkim as a sacred landscape and is like a travel guide for location of the sacred sites in the State.

Buddhism in Sikkim while retaining the basic principles of Mahayana Buddhism has assumed a characteristic distinct from that of Tibet by its amalgamation with the Bon religion practiced by the Lepchas the original inhabitants of Sikkim in the pre-Buddhist period. Buddhist Monasteries and numerous places of hermitage and meditation are present in all corners of the State, some dating back nearly 300 years, offering great spiritual pull for visitors. Monasteries such as Tashiding, Pemayantgtse, Phodong, Dubdi, Tholung, Ralang

and Rumtek see a constant stream of pilgrimage visitors and tourists throughout the year and especially during religious festivals. Sikkim's close association with Bhutan religiously has also drawn many visitors from the neighbouring country for religious purposes. The Namgyal Institute of Tibetology with its storehouse of ancient Buddhist manuscripts and texts and a long history of research in Tibetan Buddhism serves as an asset for the State, drawing in researchers and scholars from all across the world. Apart from this rich religious

heritage, the State Government has also developed religious monuments and religious places such as the statue of Gurupadmasambhava in Samdruptse, Tathagatha Tsal, Char Dham, etc. that are boosting Sikkim's pilgrimage tourism. Sikkim is therefore well positioned to attract pilgrims and tourists with religious interests. Char Dham or the four abodes are four pilgrimage sites in India that are widely revered by Hindus which comprises of Badrinath, Dwarka, Puri and Rameswaram. The replicas of these four sites have been constructed in South Sikkim at Solophok along with a main temple having the statue of Lord Shiva making it a unique Pilgrim Centre which

bagged the 'Most Innovative and Unique Tourism Project' from Ministry of Tourism in 2012.

MICE Tourism: In recent years Sikkim has become an important destination for the holding of Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE). Many hotels have upgraded or planned their infrastructure to include proper conference hall venues with the necessary equipments to cater to the demand for this fast growing form of tourism. Sikkim's peaceful atmosphere, salubrious climate and numerous cultural and natural attractions forms the perfect combination for institutions and companies to hold their MICE events in the state. MICE tourism also offers an excellent product to tide over the seasonality of tourism. It can also be linked with other tourism products on offer as part of the pre-/post leisure activity for such packages. Current capacity for hosting MICE events is very limited, with very few venues big enough to hold large events indeed some of these belong to the Government. Quality of the infrastructure and



► Sikkim's people and their ethnic variety is unique

supporting equipment generally needs improvement. Current customers comprise mainly the Government, local companies and institutions, though the number of companies and organizations from outside holding events in Sikkim is slowly growing. There is a strong need to build more high quality and larger MICE infrastructure to attract the corporate world.

Health and Wellness Tourism: With increasing consumer demand for wellness services and products, the global wellness market is now estimated to be around US\$3.4 trillion (The 2014 Global Spa & Wellness Economy Monitor). While a large section of visitors specifically travel for seeking wellness experiences to maintain their health, there are growing numbers of tourists who want to keep up with their healthy habits when they travel for business or pleasure. Sikkim's cool climate

and unpolluted environment makes it ideal as a retreat for those seeking recuperation and well being. Moreover, there are rich traditions in the landscape that make use of the vast treasures of medicinal plants and healing herbs that are available along with hot springs and hot stone baths (Dotho). An important part in the wellness sector Sikkim is on spiritual healing and Sikkim also has a lot to offer in this through various meditation techniques, Yogasthans and setting up of Ekanta Vaas getaways. Also a number of spas have already been established and initial capacity building exercises for this sector conducted through various agencies. The wellness industry has a strong potential for jobs in the North East Region. This is reflected in the large number of trainees graduating in this sector from the training institutes. There is a need for herbal medical centers, Yogasthan, etc.

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