

MYSTIC EAST

...an unexplored horizon

A Bi-monthly Magazine by HRAEI | Vol 10 | Issue 4 | July - August 2024



Welcome
GEN Z
Rethinking strategy
for new generation



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.





PRESIDENT'S NOTE

In recent years India has been witnessing a significant increase in spiritual tourism, which received a big boost after the opening of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya early this year.

According to the data of the Ministry of Tourism religious tourism has generated a revenue of 1.34 lakh crore in 2022 and it is expected to generate a revenue of 59 billion by 2028. It is also expected to create 140 million temporary & permanent jobs by 2030.

It is estimated that more than 60 percent of domestic travel undertaken in India is for spiritual and religious purposes. The surge of religious tourism gains support from Government of India's two schemes launched in 2014-15: the Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual and Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD Scheme)

and the Swadesh Darshan Scheme.

Keeping an eye on the burgeoning revenue eastern region of the country has geared up to draw more and spiritual tourists. Three of the largest pilgrimage circuits in eastern India are centred around Puri-Bhubaneswar in Odisha, Bodhgaya-Nalanda in Bihar and Kamakhya in Assam. These three circuits draw both domestic and international tourists almost year round. In addition, the Durga Puja celebration in Kolkata – recognised by UNESCO as a cultural heritage – also attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims and tourists.

Sudesh Poddar

President, HRAEI

EDITOR'S MESSAGE



“

The industry must always try to minimize ecological footprints

With the rise of luxury tourism that focuses more on guest comfort and luxury hospitality, environmental consciousness and sustainability sometimes gets neglected. In an effort to make stay in heritage luxury hotels a memorable experience, eco-friendly practices must never be overlooked.

Looking at the miserable state of the planet's health, responsible tourism beckons hospitality brands to rise beyond the allure of financial gains and invest in practices that champion sustainability. Not just brands, but guests or travellers must also help nurture responsible tourism. The hospitality industry isn't just a business, it's intricately woven with threads of culture, nature and human warmth.

On the one hand, the stewards of the industry must follow the practices that help minimize our ecological footprints. This involves energy-efficient power supply to efforts of water conservation, from usage of sustainable materials to implementation of waste reduction strategies.

By championing practices that prioritise sustainability, the industry creates a legacy of profound impact.

MYSTIC EAST

A BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE BY HRAEI
Vol 10 | Issue 4 | July - August 2024

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'Mystic East' magazine is printed and published by Atikram Gupta on behalf of Hotel and Restaurant Association of Eastern India.

Printed at CDC Printers Private Limited, No.45, Radha Nath Chowdhury Road, Tangra Industrial Estate-II, Kolkata, West Bengal 700 015

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

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The hotel industry is the seventh pillar of the country

One of the biggest economic challenges for the new government at the centre is unemployment. To solve the problem, the government will surely focus on sectors such as infrastructure, manufacturing and government sector. But these sectors may not yield quick results while millions of disgruntled youth join the rank of unemployed. The only sector which can help create jobs quickly is the hotel and tourism industry, expected to add at least 5 million jobs in the next five years.

To enable the industry to create massive employment, the government must immediately accord industry and infrastructure status to the sector. The hospitality industry is also expecting a more lenient tax structure and an increased allocation of funds in the new budget of the new government.

The sector also expects reforms that will standardise offerings. This could involve streamlining processes, enhancing infrastructure, and ensuring a consistent and high-quality experience for tourists. Standardisation would not only elevate the overall appeal but also position the country as a more enticing destination for travellers, ultimately driving growth and sustainability in the hospitality sector.

The hotel industry is the seventh pillar of the country. There should be multiple bodies to look after the hotels for ease of business. There should be a single window for approval of our projects for faster implementation. It will create easier ways for cash flow and contribution towards the economy. In addition, easier loans will create more opportunities for the industry.

Pranav Singh

Honorary Secretary, HRAEI

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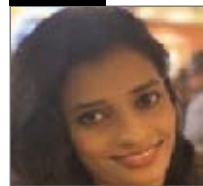
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RISE REVPAR

Here are 9 proven strategies to increase hotel occupancy

There are a few statistics that stay top-of-mind for any hotel manager. Occupancy rate, or the percentage of rooms that are full on any given night, is one of the big ones — and with good reason. Your hotel's occupancy rate is an indicator of the health of your business, along with revenue per available room (RevPAR), and overall profitability. There will of course be seasonal and event-based fluctuations in demand, but keeping your hotel as full as possible will ensure that you have money coming in through both high and low seasons. Want to learn how to increase hotel occupancy with proven strategies and techniques? Keep reading!

What is your hotel's occupancy rate?

You'll need a good understanding of your baseline occupancy rate and how it changes throughout the year before you can start improving your rates. Your hotel's occupancy rate is the number of occupied sleeping rooms divided by the number of available sleeping rooms. This can be calculated by day, week, month, or even longer, and can be compared to other similar hotels in your area to give you an idea of how you stack up against your competition.

Looking at occupancy rates can give you a good idea of demand at your hotel, indicating which days of the week and times of the year you're likely to see the highest demand for rooms. This can help you determine your pricing strategy, know when to promote special packages, and help with revenue management.

It may seem like offering discounts during low periods is a surefire way to increase hotel occupancy, but this isn't always the case. Discounts may help convert potential customers who are already thinking about traveling, but they do nothing to increase demand for travel itself. For that, you'll need creative strategies to increase value.

1. Adjust your marketing for periods of low demand.

One of the first things strategists tell you when you mention a low occupancy rate is to adjust your marketing. But that type of vague advice won't bring guests in the door. Your hotel marketing strategy for periods of low occupancy needs to be detailed and specific.

If you're seeing a drop in mid-week

demand, you need to target the types of guests that engage in weekday travel. This includes business travelers, out-of-town travelers viewing real estate, trade show and conference attendees, retirees looking for deals, and so on. Consider which of these groups match well with your hotel's amenities, location, and brand presence, and then come up with a plan to add value for each of those guest types.

In terms of seasonal demand, think about what makes your property and your location stand out during the off-season. For example, if you run a ski resort that has low occupancy in the summer months, think about what summer activities your guests might be interested in. You can then focus on that messaging when reaching out to guests who have pre-

viously visited in the winter.

You can also increase your up-sell marketing to focus on guests who have already booked with you. You may be able to entice weekend guests to stay until mid-week, summer guests to add a few days of shoulder season, and overnight guests to stay for a week with the right value and packages.

2. Increase value with specials and packages.

Throughout the year, you can increase the value of your property by introducing specials and packages. These work better than discounts for increasing demand, as they include something extra for the same price and can help you stand out from the competition.

One popular way of adding value





to your packages is to bundle various services and amenities together. If you have an on-site spa and restaurant, add a spa lunch and massage for guests who stay for three days mid-week. For guests visiting a beach location in the winter, throw in a branded throw blanket and a warming cocktail at your bar. Tailor your packages to the occupancy period and the guest type to get the highest return on your investment.

3. Invest in guest services and staff training.

If you notice that your occupancy rates are lower than your competition, seasonality and demand may be less important than your reputation. No matter the time of year, hotels with the best guest and planner experiences will almost always come out on top. By investing in staff training and guest services programs, you can impress guests and ensure that a good portion of the travelers to your area will choose to stay at your property.

Educate your staff about the different types of guests your property is targeting, and how they can create great experiences. Work with your sales and marketing teams to understand guest motivations and priorities, and clearly communicate that information to guest-facing team members.

4. Add in-demand amenities.

Hotel amenities go through fluctuations in demand just like locations do. Take a look at your utilization rates for the different amenities you offer so that you can understand



how demand for your amenities changes over time. Double down on high-demand amenities in your sales and marketing communications, and consider special packages promoting the lower demand amenities to guests.

If you notice that guests are asking for certain amenities a lot, either in your hotel's reviews or in reviews for other area properties, consider adjusting your offerings. For example, if a lot of reviews in the area mention a lack of highchairs and cribs, you can capture a new audience segment by being the hotel that caters to travelers with kids. By listening to what your guests want, you'll find ways to increase demand and, in turn, increase hotel occupancy.

5. Focus on repeat guests.

Guests and planners who have

chosen your hotel in the past — particularly those who had a positive experience — are much easier to market to than ones who have never heard of you. Take the time to build email lists for each audience segment so you know when to reach out to that group with specific promotions.

Remarketing ads are shown to people who have visited your website, viewed social media content, stayed at your property, or joined your email list in the past. These are powerful tools to reach people who already have an interest in your property. For example, you can serve ads to guests who have visited in your high season with your latest packages so they can see what your location is like in the low season as well.

Your loyalty program is also an im-

portant piece of the puzzle for repeat customers. Make sure the program is personalized, rewarding, and treats guests like the valuable customers they are. You may even want to add specific loyalty packages for repeat guests who stay with you during periods of low occupancy.

6. Work with a revenue manager.

A professional revenue manager can turn the tide on low occupancy rates, helping you reach the right guests with the right offers at the right time. Revenue managers use historical hotel data to forecast future demand and recommend actions to increase revenue. Their focus is less on occupancy rates themselves, and more about how those rates fit into a larger picture of your hotel's revenue.



Revenue management used to be solely focused on reacting to the past, but technology has changed the game in recent years. Automated systems can now show managers how they're performing across market segments, channels, and properties on a daily basis. This huge amount of data, and the business intelligence that comes with it, gives hotel revenue managers the ability to understand which customers to target and when.

7. Manage your online reputation.

Your reputation online, including reviews, search results, social media posts, local press, awards, and photos from corporate events, play a major role in guests deciding where to stay. Much of your online reputation is out of your control, but there are a few things you can do to engage with guests online and ensure that they see you in a positive light.

For starters, respond to all negative feedback online in a timely manner, offering constructive steps forward and personalized communication with guests. You can listen for negative reviews using social listening software with alerts set for your hotel and brand name.

Combat negative information by posting frequent social media updates, highlighting positive guest experiences, and engaging with influencers. Showcase top corporate events, recent updates to your hotel, and great team members on your website, social media, and through partnerships with bloggers. By improving your hotel's reputation online, you'll be more likely to increase occupancy and maintain target rates during periods of low demand.

8. Think location, not property.

Sometimes a shift in focus can be the key to improving your hotel's occupancy. Think beyond your individual property to the wider lo-

cation, and you may come up with some great ideas for growth. Engage with your local CVB or DMO to see how they're drawing travelers to your location, and how you can partner with them to market specific activities or amenities. Speak with local businesses to see if you can collaborate on events, feature their products in guest welcome baskets, or create co-branded experiences.

9. Create engaging events for specific audiences.

Events are great for drawing in a crowd, and the right event can result in a substantial increase in both demand and occupancy. But events should never be one size fits all. Think back to the target groups and the marketing you're already doing to reach them. Is there an event that fits in with the marketing strategy for each group? For example, if you've decided to target retirees for mid-week travel, can you hold an event where a local author speaks about financial planning in retirement? Or can you target house hunters by teaming up with a local real estate agent who can offer home buying tips?

By creating targeted events for specific audiences, you can measure their impact on occupancy rates by segment and make sure that you're getting a good return on your investment. You'll also develop a positive reputation with a new segment of guests, fueling other strategies like mailing list outreach, repeat guest promotions, and adding value through special packages.



MARKETING

PERFECT GUEST EXPERIENCE

Guest experience is about ensuring hotel guests feel welcomed, satisfied, enriched, and that they got value for their money. It's important that the guest experience feels authentic and unique to every individual, so that it creates a lasting memory for the customer. Guest experience in hotels include the entire customer journey, from researching and booking all the way through to post-stay.

When it comes to pleasing guests, 'personalisation' is as buzzed as a word can get, but for good reason; there's no excuse not to be taking a more focused approach to customer interaction. However, optimising the guest experience and ensuring guest expectations are met is a constantly evolving challenge for hoteliers.

With a veritable banquet of options at their fingertips, travellers are demanding more than ever before. It makes life harder for hotels, but also gives them a greater opportunity to deliver an experience guests will never forget. The collection and use of customer data will allow a hotel to effectively personalise their service for guests.

Why is guest experience important?

Guest experience is important because it directly influences your hotel's reputation, customer loyalty, and revenue. A positive guest experience leads to repeat business, positive reviews, and word-of-mouth referrals, all of which are critical for your hotel's long-term success. Guests who have memorable and enjoyable stays are more likely to become loyal customers, contributing to a steady stream of income for the hotel.

Much is discussed in regards to guest experience in today's travel world, but often the guest experience and hotelier experience are inextricably linked. Both inspire



and feed each other through demand, expectation, and satisfaction. In contemporary society, hotels are facing complex distribution, pricing, and guest contentment challenges.

It sees them fighting to balance their own business needs with the increasing and dynamic nature of travel technology, and the savvy, resourceful attitudes of travellers. As a result, hotels need to be led by traveller behaviour. The majority rules. Early adopters are typically well-educated, have high incomes, and are willing to take risks. Hotels are realising they need to be in many places at once, with constant visibility being a cornerstone of booking success.

What are the three aspects of guest experience?

Guest experience is all-en-

compassing for your hotel, but focusing on 3 critical aspects will cover off most of what you need to succeed:

Improved consistency of room facilities

A key aspect of guest experience is ensuring that room facilities are consistent across all accommodations. By standardising rooms during a modernisation programme, hotels can deliver a uniform standard, removing the stress for guests of trying to book the 'best' room. This could include features such as king-sized beds, complimentary WiFi, spacious desks, TVs with multiple channels, and complimentary bathroom toiletries and hot beverage making facilities.

By creating consistent guest expectations and focusing on uniformity, hotels can ensure

that every guest knows they're getting a high-standard room. Consider the facilities you could make consistent across your property. It pays off, and the proof is in the online reviews. As a result of this focus, many hotels see improved ratings and reviews on platforms like TripAdvisor.

Strengthened direct booking strategy

Strengthening the direct booking strategy is another crucial aspect. For many hotels, direct bookings can account for a significant portion of revenue, particularly considering the fact that direct bookings avoid OTAs taking a chunk out of your bottom line via commission.

Increasing conversions with a simple guest booking experience is much easier than you think – and not just for big brands. Online booking engines, such as SiteMinder's booking engine, can deliver a seamless two-step booking process for guests. These booking engines can be branded to suit your hotel's website and enable you to upsell a more personalised stay for guests. Best of all, SiteMinder's direct booking engine is mobile-optimised, so you can launch booking via mobile app with a high conversion rate with no added work involved.

Focused on a new food and beverage offer

Enhancing the food and beverage offering adds significant

value to the overall guest experience. By focusing on improving staple menu items and introducing high-quality options, hotels can see a positive impact on customer satisfaction and sales. Offering a variety of vegetarian options, organic products, and premium coffee are examples of improvements that can resonate well with guests.

When looking at your food and beverage offer, think about where you can make some quick wins and improvements. Start by speaking to your chefs and ask them what changes they would make in order to improve your hotel's breakfast menu. Then take your ideas to your food and beverage suppliers who can help you make the right choices for the right price. Overwhelmingly, you should trust your gut (pun definitely intended!) and think about the kind of breakfast you would like to eat as a guest. Value for money is crucial here and a few Google searches for the best hotel breakfast will help inspire you.

The hotel guest experience journey

The hotel customer journey is a comprehensive process that involves multiple stages, from initial dreaming and planning to post-stay engagement.

For guests, the process of booking travel really is a journey. Personal service is not something that appears, but something that is nurtured over time. Guests will respond better if they have personal support before, during, and after their stay.



How many points of contact are there in a guest's experience?

There are seven main points of contact in the guest experience, ranging from the first dreams of a holiday (aptly named the Dreaming stage) through to the inevitable Return stage due to an excellent experience.

Each stage plays a crucial role in shaping the overall guest experience and determining customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Dreaming stage: Guests begin their journey by envisioning their ideal vacation, often influenced by social media and online content. Hotels can capture interest through captivating images and engaging descriptions of their properties.

Planning stage: Once inspired, guests start researching destinations and accommodations, comparing reviews and amenities. En-

suring a strong online presence with positive reviews and detailed information helps hotels stand out during this stage.

Booking stage: A seamless and user-friendly booking process is essential. Providing clear pricing, easy navigation, and multiple booking options, including a mobile-friendly platform, can significantly enhance the booking experience.

Preparation stage: After booking, effective communication with guests through confirmation emails, local guides, and tips for their stay can build anticipation and provide valuable information, enhancing the pre-arrival experience.

Experience stage: The actual stay is where expectations are met or exceeded. High-quality service, well-maintained rooms, and personalised experiences are key to ensuring guest satisfaction.

Sharing stage: Post-stay, guests often share their experiences online. Encouraging positive reviews and engaging with feedback on platforms like TripAdvisor can influence future guests' decisions.

Return stage: Maintaining contact through loyalty programs and personalised offers encourages repeat bookings, completing the customer journey cycle.

All hotels are looking for ways to increase turnover. The more revenue a hotel can generate, the more options they give themselves to create profitable business strategies. Obviously converting as many bookings as possible is a core component of this plan, but getting existing guests to spend more is also a great option.

How to improve guest experience in a hotel

Guest experience can seem like a daunting endeavour, with a huge number of different strategies that work (or don't) depending on your hotel, its guests, your staff, and your USPs. It can feel tempting to let guest experience simply appear 'naturally' – after all, if you're doing a good job everywhere else, surely guests will have a good experience simply as a matter of course?

The reality is quite different. Guest experience is a discipline unto itself, and too many hotels fall into the trap of complacency.

Changes have to happen now, and quickly. Failure will result in a business that isn't operating at all.

On top of complying to any government and industry instated requirements, hotels will need to look

closely at what travellers might be coming to their area, what they're looking for, and what services can be provided to them.

Take into account: Flexible booking policies

Many guests will be hesitant to book too far in advance and also may be forced to cancel reservations at short notice. The waiving or relaxing of cancellation fees is widespread across the industry for hotels, OTAs, and airlines. It will help to ensure guests needs are met and future loyalty by offering empathy through flexibility.

Cleanliness and hygiene

Travellers will naturally be health conscious when they travel in the immediate future so you need to make assurances that your hotel is undertaking best practice in this area. Assess which areas of your property need improvement and increased precautions.

Shared spaces (lobby, bar, restaurant, pool etc)

Overcrowding should be avoided at all costs as many guests will be concerned about this – and it will likely be illegal. Again, assurances will need to be made that you have this under control. Intensify cleaning procedures, especially in high touch areas like these.

Contactless check-in, room entry, room service etc

These are requests that travellers have been leaning towards for some time prior to the pandemic,

but will become much more of a demand now. Not only will it save the guest time and inconvenience, it will now make them feel safer. Hotels should access industry specific apps to help with check-in and room functionality.

Wellness services and amenities

The psychological effects of a global event like this shouldn't be understated. Travellers will be looking for body and soul restoration, to feel healthy, clean, and normal again. Many will be eager to escape the surroundings they have just spent in lockdown to find calmer experiences.

Surge in adventure/active holidays

Being cooped up for weeks and months on end will have travellers craving adventure, exploration, and fun new experiences. Hotels should look at what packages they can offer for this group. It's the perfect time to connect with local companies to broaden your offering.

Local health facilities

Even when all the restrictions have dissipated, the fear won't. Guests will be making sure local health services are close to where they are staying and are reliable, to ensure the safety of themselves, family, friends, and colleagues.

To aid guests, update information on your website, including room descriptions and use guest messaging apps to make communication easier and more personalised.



TECHNOLOGY

BIG AI BOOM

Here's what you need to know about Artificial Intelligence in the Hospitality Industry

AI is rapidly evolving with new use cases for hospitality every day. A recent report from Accenture estimated that AI could potentially double annual economic growth rates by 2035. This has been validated by a study by PwC estimating that AI could add \$15.7 trillion to the global economy by 2030. Needless to say AI is already having a massive impact on society and every industry should take note.

Despite all of this positive growth there are also downsides of AI on the economy, particularly in terms of job displacement. A report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimated that 14% of jobs across 21 countries are at high risk of automation. Another study by McKinsey Global Institute projected that up to 800 million jobs could be displaced by automation by 2030, although they also stated that new jobs will be created by AI.

Hotel Tech Report recently surveyed 400 hotel guests for our annual State of Hotel Guest Technology Report 2024. Our research uncovered some extremely interesting data around guest perceptions of AI in hotels such as:

- 70% of guests find chatbots helpful for simple inquiries but prefer human interaction for more complex requests
- The #1 reason guests prefer a chatbot at a hotel is when asking for the Wi-Fi password, followed by #2 scheduling wake-up calls and #3 checking hotel facility operating hours
- 58% of guests feel that AI improves their hotel booking and stay experiences



- *65% of travelers want the tech in their hotel to be cooler than the tech in their homes

Understanding the balance between automated assistance and human touch is crucial in hospitality. Many guests appreciate the efficiency of a hotel chatbot for straightforward tasks like checking service hours or scheduling wake-up calls.

It's important to understand that this is a two-sided coin. Hoteliers who understand how to leverage AI tools to become more efficient and effective will become more valuable than ever. Those who don't educate themselves may find themselves in a more challenging situation.

Hotel industry professionals need to understand the latest trends in artificial intelligence because it can significantly impact the way we operate and provide service to guests. AI can automate repetitive tasks, allowing hotel staff to focus on more strategic activities such as building relationships with key clients and providing personalized service to guests. Predictive analytics can help hotel professionals to analyze data and forecast customer behavior and market trends, allowing them to make data-driven decisions and develop more effective marketing strategies. AI-powered personalization and recommendation engines can provide more targeted and personalized experiences to individual guests based on their preferences, past behavior, and demographics. AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants will



allow hotel staff to interact with guests in real-time and provide personalized recommendations and assistance. Smart room technology integrated with AI can provide guests with a more comfortable and convenient stay. AI can also be used to monitor and predict maintenance needs in hotel rooms, optimize pricing and inventory decisions, forecast demand and adjust room availability accordingly, optimize energy efficiency, and reduce the costs associated with managing and operating the hotel. By understanding these trends, hotel industry professionals can stay competitive and provide better service to their guests.

Now let's dive into how each department within a hotel is being im-

pacted by artificial intelligence.

Hotel Operations: Artificial intelligence (AI) can greatly improve hotel operations by automating repetitive tasks such as booking and contactless check-in processes, freeing up staff to focus on providing personalized service to guests. AI can also enhance customer service through the use of chatbots and virtual assistants that can assist guests with booking reservations, answering questions, and providing recommendations. Additionally, AI can improve housekeeping room assignments and maintenance by using sensors and cameras to monitor and control the temperature, lighting, and security of guest rooms, optimizing pricing and revenue management through data

analysis and predictive modeling, and improving energy efficiency by using smart building systems. AI can also improve the overall efficiency of hotel operations by using AI for forecasting demand, inventory management, and logistics optimization, ultimately enhancing the guest experience by providing more personalized recommendations and experiences.

Hotel Revenue Management: Artificial intelligence (AI) can significantly enhance hotel revenue management by using predictive modeling to analyze historical data and predict future demand and revenue, optimizing pricing and availability via revenue management software to maximize revenue. AI can also assist in setting dynamic

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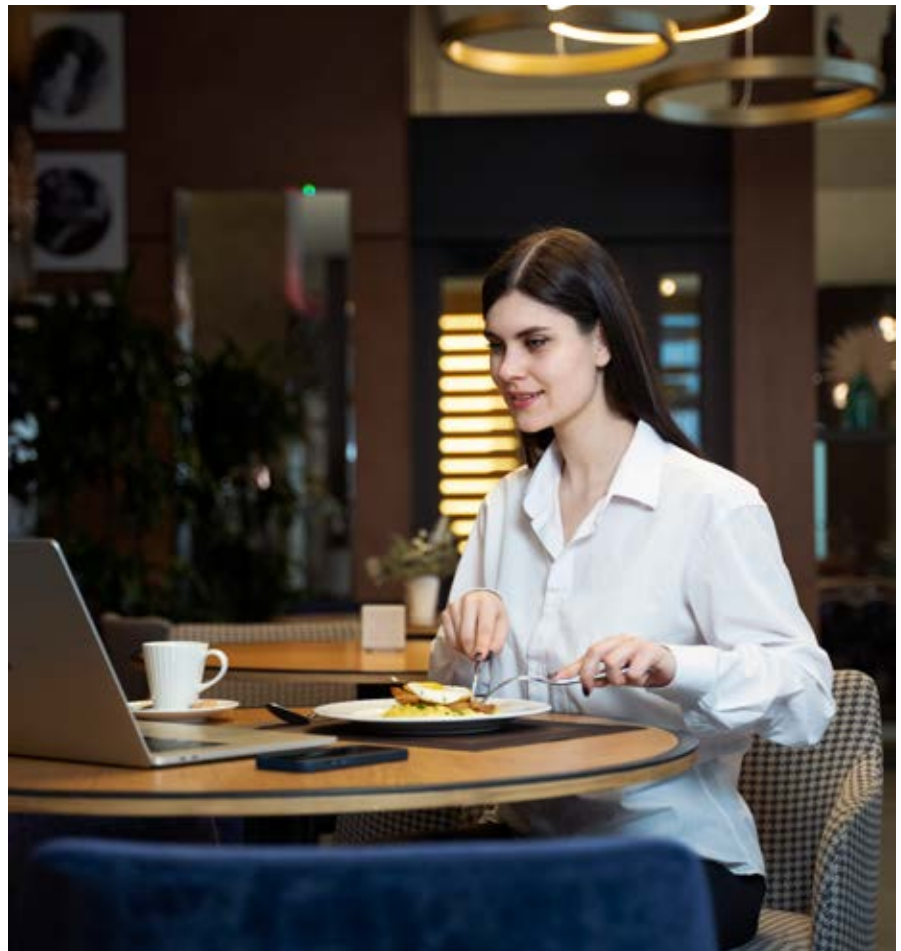
pricing based on demand, occupancy and other factors, increasing revenue by charging more for rooms during peak periods and less during off-peak periods. AI can also optimize inventory management by forecasting demand and adjusting room availability accordingly, resulting in increased revenue by selling more rooms at higher prices during peak periods and reducing unsold inventory during off-peak periods. Additionally, AI can personalize pricing and offers to individual guests based on their preferences, past behavior, and demographics, allowing hotels to increase revenue by targeting the right guests with the right offers at the right time. Furthermore, AI can identify opportunities for upselling and cross-selling to guests, and optimize pricing and inventory decisions in real-time based on market conditions, guest behavior, and other factors. AI can help hotels to identify patterns and anomalies in revenue data that can reveal new revenue opportunities and trends.

Hotel Marketing: AI is expected to change hotel marketing by enabling more targeted and personalized marketing campaigns based on individual guests preferences, past behavior, and demographics. AI will automate repetitive and time-consuming tasks such as data analysis, customer segmentation, and campaign management, allowing hotel marketers to focus on more strategic activities. Additionally, AI will enable hotel marketers to analyze large amounts of data and use predictive analytics to fore-

cast customer behavior and market trends, resulting in more effective marketing strategies and data-driven decisions. Chatbots and virtual assistants will become more prevalent in hotel marketing, allowing hotels to interact with guests in real-time and provide personalized recommendations and offers. AI will play a role in identifying and targeting the most effective influencers for hotel campaigns, and assist hotels in monitoring social media platforms and identifying customer feedback, sentiment, and brand mentions to respond promptly and improve the guest experience. AI

will allow hotels to automate and optimize their digital advertising campaigns, by identifying the most effective channels, audiences, and times to advertise, resulting in more efficient use of advertising budget.

Hotel Sales & MICE: Hotel group sales managers can use artificial intelligence (AI) to bring in more business travelers by leveraging predictive analytics to forecast future demand for group sales, allowing them to proactively target potential business travelers and anticipate changes in demand. AI-powered personalization and recommendation engines can assist in creat-





ing customized sales pitches and packages tailored to the specific needs of business travelers. AI can automate repetitive tasks such as data entry, follow-ups and lead generation, allowing sales managers to focus on building relationships with key clients and closing deals. AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants can provide 24/7 support to business travelers and assist with booking reservations, answering questions, and providing recommendations. AI can also help manage and analyze customer data, identifying the most valuable business traveler segments, and providing insights into how to best target and engage with them. AI can assist in real-time analytics to track the performance of group sales and identify areas for improvement, and in optimization by making real-time decisions based on market conditions, guest behavior, and other

factors, and identify new revenue opportunities.

Guest Experience: Artificial intelligence is set to revolutionize the hotel guest experience in the next 10 years by providing more person-



AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants can provide 24/7 support to business travelers and assist with booking reservations, answering questions, and providing recommendations

alized and efficient service through the use of personalization and recommendation engines, automation of repetitive tasks, virtual assistants, smart room technology and concierge services. AI will also enhance safety and security by monitoring for potential threats and proactively providing guests with the services and amenities they desire. Additionally, AI will be integrated with virtual reality and augmented reality to provide guests with immersive experiences such as virtual tours, virtual room selection, and virtual events. Furthermore, AI will enable automated check-out, allowing guests to check out from their room using their mobile device or voice commands and receive their bill via email or text message.

Human Resources and Labor: Artificial intelligence (AI) is expected to change recruiting, labor and human resources in the hotel industry



in several ways. One way is through automating repetitive tasks such as screening resumes, scheduling interviews, and conducting background checks. This will save time and resources for human resources professionals, allowing them to focus on more strategic activities such as building relationships with key clients and providing personalized service to guests. AI can also be used to analyze data and use predictive analytics to forecast employee behavior and market trends, allowing hotels to make data-driven decisions and develop more effective recruitment strategies. AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants can also be used to interact with job applicants and pro-

vide personalized assistance and information about open positions and the application process. AI can also be used to optimize scheduling and workforce management by forecasting demand and adjusting staffing levels accordingly, resulting in more efficient use of hotel resources. AI can also be used to analyze employee performance and provide feedback, identify training needs, and track employee engagement. By providing insights from data analysis, hotels can implement programs to improve employee retention and satisfaction. AI can be used to enhance the safety and security of employees, by monitoring for potential threats and alerting hotel management in

case of emergency. The integration of AI in recruiting, labor, and human resources in the hotel industry will bring more efficiency and effectiveness, providing better service to guests while also supporting and developing employees.

Large Chains: Artificial intelligence (AI) is expected to have a significant impact on large hotel chains in several ways. Automation will be one of the key areas where AI will be implemented, as it can automate repetitive tasks such as data entry, inventory management, and customer service, freeing up hotel staff to focus on more strategic activities such as building relationships with key clients and providing personalized service to

guests. Predictive analytics will also be used to analyze large amounts of data and forecast customer behavior and market trends, allowing hotel chains to develop more effective marketing strategies and make data-driven decisions. Personalization will also be enhanced through the use of AI-powered personalization and recommendation engines, which will allow hotel chains to provide more targeted and personalized experiences to individual guests based on their preferences, past behavior, and demographics. AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants will also become more prevalent, allowing guests to interact with the hotel in real-time and receive personalized recommendations and assistance. Smart room technology will be integrated with AI, allowing guests to control the temperature, lighting, and other features of their room with voice commands or through a mobile app. Predictive maintenance will also be used to monitor and predict maintenance needs in hotel rooms, allowing hotel staff to proactively address any issues before they become a problem for guests. AI will also be used to optimize pricing and inventory decisions based on market conditions, guest behavior, and other factors, resulting in increased revenue. Inventory management will also be optimized through the use of AI, by forecasting demand and adjusting room availability accordingly, resulting in more efficient use of hotel resources. AI will also be used to optimize energy efficiency by managing lighting, heating, and cooling systems, resulting in

reduced energy consumption and costs. Ultimately AI will assist large hotel chains in centralizing all operations, allowing them to manage multiple properties and locations, and improve guest experiences across the entire chain.

Small Independents: Artificial intelligence (AI) is expected to have a significant impact on small independent hotels in several ways. Automation will be one of the key areas where AI will be implemented, as it can automate repetitive tasks such as data entry, inventory management, and customer service, freeing up hotel staff to focus on more strategic activities such as building relationships with key clients and providing personalized service to guests. Predictive analytics will also be used to analyze data and forecast customer behavior and market trends, allowing small independent hotels to make data-driven decisions and develop more effective marketing strategies. Personalization will also be enhanced through the use of AI-powered personalization and recommendation engines, which will allow small independent hotels to provide more targeted and personalized experiences to individual guests based on their preferences, past behavior, and demographics. AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants will also be used to interact with guests in real-time and provide personalized recommendations and assistance. Smart room technology will be integrated with AI, allowing guests to control the temperature, lighting, and other features of their room with voice commands or through a mobile

app. Predictive maintenance will also be used to monitor and predict maintenance needs in hotel rooms, allowing hotel staff to proactively address any issues before they become a problem for guests. AI will also be used to optimize pricing and inventory decisions based on market conditions, guest behavior, and other factors, resulting in increased revenue. Inventory management will also be optimized through the use of AI, by forecasting demand and adjusting room availability accordingly, resulting in more efficient use of hotel resources. AI will also be used to optimize energy efficiency by managing lighting, heating, and cooling systems, resulting in reduced energy consumption and costs. Additionally, AI can help small independent hotels to reduce the costs associated with managing and operating the hotel, allowing them to be more competitive with larger hotel chains.

Self educate hoteliers: Hoteliers who do not educate themselves about artificial intelligence (AI) risk falling behind in the hospitality industry. With the increasing use of AI in the hospitality industry, hoteliers who fail to embrace this technology will miss out on the benefits it can bring to their business. For example, chatbots and virtual assistants, such as Alexa and Siri, can be used to provide concierge services and enhance the customer experience through real-time, personalized recommendations and assistance. AI can also be used to optimize pricing and revenue management through data analysis and forecasting, giving hotels a competitive advantage in the market.



TUSHAR NAGAR, GM, COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT SHILLONG

OUR APPROACH IS TO OFFER CURATED LOCAL EXPERIENCES

global standards of service. Our strategic location, coupled with our commitment to sustainability and innovation, allows us to offer a uniquely immersive experience. We strive to create a sanctuary where guests can enjoy modern comforts while connecting with the rich heritage of Shillong.

With over 14 years of combined experience across Operations Management, Quality Management, Training and Development, Client Management and Team Leadership, Tushar Nagar was appointed as the General Manager at Courtyard by Marriott Shillong, the debut property of Marriott International in the Northeast region of India.

Nagar has climbed the corporate ladder and has held multiple positions at top tier hospitality brands after acquiring an industrial exposure at Le Meridien Jaipur. He has pursued a Diploma in Hotel Man-

agement from IHM Varanasi and B.Com from Jagatpur PG College, Varanasi. He has served various touted brands like The Oberoi Amarvilas Agra, JW Marriott Chandigarh, Park Hyatt Chennai, Hyatt Regency Ludhiana, The Westin Pune and Marriott International.

He spoke to Mystic East in an exclusive interview. Excerpts:

What sets Courtyard by Marriott Shillong apart in the competitive hospitality landscape?

Courtyard by Marriott Shillong is distinct due to its integration of local Khasi culture with Marriott's

How does the hotel address the evolving expectations of modern travelers?

We understand that modern travellers, especially millennials and Gen Z, seek more than just a place to stay; they seek experiences. Our approach is to offer curated local experiences, seamless technology integration, and personalized services that cater to the individual preferences of our guests. We also place a strong emphasis on sustainability, which is increasingly important to today's conscientious traveller.

Any particular guest experience that exemplifies the ethos of your hotel? How do you see the future of hospitality evolving, and how is the hotel positioned to stay ahead of these trends?

One experience that stands out is when we hosted an international artist who was inspired by the natural beauty and cultural richness of Shillong. Our team curated a personalized itinerary that included visits to local artisans, nature walks, and a private concert in the hills. The artist left not only with a deep appreciation for our region but also with a lasting connection to our hotel and its people.

The future of hospitality is increasingly centred around personalized experiences, sustainability, and technological integration. Courtyard Shillong is well-positioned to lead in these areas by continuously

innovating our services, investing in eco-friendly technologies, and staying attuned to the desires of the modern traveler. We aim to not just meet but exceed the expectations of our guests, making each stay memorable and meaningful.

How do you navigate the increasing importance of technology while ensuring that it enhances rather than detracts from the guest experience?

Technology in hospitality should enhance the guest experience without overshadowing the human touch that is so vital to our industry. At Courtyard Shillong, we use technology to streamline processes and offer conveniences, such as mobile check-ins and smart room controls. However, we ensure that these innovations are balanced with personalized service, so that our guests still

feel a strong connection to our staff and the warmth of our hospitality.

What strategies are you employing to ensure the mental well-being of your staff, especially in the high-stress environment of hospitality?

The well-being of our staff is paramount, especially given the demanding nature of the hospitality industry. We have implemented several initiatives to support mental health, including stress management workshops, access to counseling services, and creating a work environment that encourages work-life balance. We also foster a culture of openness where staff feel comfortable discussing their challenges and are supported in finding solutions. We follow J. Willard Marriott's advice: Take good care of your employees, and they'll take good care of your customers, and the customers will come back.





COVER STORY

**FUTURE
OF
TRAVEL**

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Gen Z is poised to become the future of travel. So it's time to separate the hype from the reality. It's also time for hoteliers to level up their design and marketing games.

Too many hoteliers are waiting for Generation Z — the cohort born

hospitality gap by embracing these individuals as they are, welcoming them, and creating ways for them to connect.

Another theme: Gen Zers in many countries are likely to have a relatively low rate of independent

Digital Natives in Social Media

Post-millennials are the first people to have always had round-the-clock internet connectivity. They see the physical and digital worlds as a seamless spectrum, expect connectivity at all times, and crave

All over the world, the **Gen Z** is influencing hotels to rethink strategies

roughly between 1997 and 2012 — to get more spending power. But they shouldn't wait. The savviest hotel brands are already preparing for the post-millennial demographic's rise.

Most definitively, Gen Z grew up in an age of always-on broadband internet. That will likely mold their assumptions and expectations for years to come.

Another trait likely to define Gen Zers, even as they age, is a craving for community. That's remarkable, given that youth is a peak time for socializing. So hoteliers can fill a

living compared to earlier generations. The inadequate housing supply in many cities is a problem that won't be solved overnight. As people in this demographic start families later or buy homes later, they may retain their lifestyle of owning less and experiencing more.

Yet another trait likely to endure is the post-millennial consciousness of the climate emergency. Gen Z is relatively the most exposed of all of us to the forecasted perils of the coming decades. Surveys suggest that this demographic cares more about sustainability than any past generation.

authenticity. While it's not surprising that social media is a key resource for them, there are nuances in how Gen Zers use social media that many hoteliers miss.

With millennials, there's a lot of representing your own image on social media, which is very much a one-way street. This generation has been a little bit overexposed to this one-way social media communication. So they're much more about dialogue.

Gen Zers typically hunger for what comes off as genuine because they crave authentic emotional and

intellectual expression — even if the content is created in synthetic ways and with repurposed material — as a relief from a world filled with fakery.

When it comes to traveling, Gen Z prioritizes authenticity and living in the moment. They don't only share the most picture-perfect photos. They appreciate the funny, silly, real moments that make a trip truly memorable.

Gen Z enjoys discovering things first and being part of an active peer community that shares new social experiences and adventures.

Social media is a strong tool for brands to reach this generation. The propensity to turn to social media for travel information and inspiration is definitely there for this generation. Things like 'hidden gem' and local food reviews are two of their favorite types of videos, convenient and centralized locations where activities, food, and photo spots are aggregated.

The Gen Z cohort tends to like social media influencers, too. These don't have to be celebrities. They look at video aggregators to find documentary evidence of stay at fancy hotels. It appeals to them, especially if it's someone they actively follow. Gen Z effectively takes on the role of being their own travel agent to curate personalized unique experiences. This group relies on reviews and relatable travel opinions to incorporate multiple viewpoints in their research and decision-making for trips.

Gen Z often see travel as a set of experiences that help shape who they are. Smart hoteliers help trav-

elers find like-minded people. Having a sense of exploration is key for Gen Z. In her work as a linguist, Sarah Ogilvie at the University of Oxford has compiled a data bank of 70 million words posted online by post-millennials called the iGen Corpus. Analysis reveals that this group uses words emphasizing authenticity much more than older people on average. Popular Gen Z words include relatable, real, true, and honest.

This pattern has an implication for the hotel sector. Post-millennials often show more desire to connect with local communities than past generations, and traveling has become part of their self-expression and self-discovery in a nuanced way.

Emotion, the new brand

While millennials focus on self-actualization for living with the best experiences, Gen Zers are more about self-transcendence, which translates to more soul searching and exploring alter egos in their travels. This follows the pattern of Gen Zers hoping to align ethics and values with their spending decisions.

Yes, that's been true for young people in many eras. But greater loneliness is reported by Gen Z than by earlier generations. So hotels need to make emotion the new brand standard. Hotels can help compensate for some of the loneliness next-gen travelers may feel by creating welcoming spaces where they can connect with others, including locals.

While 3-star and 5-star hotels still



Gen Z enjoys discovering things first and being part of an active peer community that shares new social experiences and adventures



To appeal to Gen Z, traditional hotels may want to consider fine-tuning the narratives they tell about themselves

rank in the top accommodation types that Gen Z frequent, hyper-social hostels and rental lodgings are also winners. This may point to a shift in the types of experiences of these rising cohort values.

To appeal to Gen Z, traditional hotels may want to consider fine-tuning the narratives they tell about themselves. For example, a hotel at Washington, D.C., is themed entirely around women's empowerment — with some of the design inspiration coming from the Gen Z daughter of its designer.

Young people in every era have always focused on self-discovery. Still, the internet has exposed Gen Zers to

an endless array of personality types and sub-groups of interests, enabling them to draw more nuanced and finer distinctions than previous generations.

Some hotel groups have taken note. In Australia, Hilton has taken a few approaches toward LGBTQIA+ inclusiveness, such as staff training with the help of advocacy group Minus18 and support for that group's program that runs an alternative school formal where queer teens can be their true selves.

Hotel marketing will more likely gain traction if it matches Gen Z inclinations. Marketing campaigns that deliberately show real-looking people in real-looking situations work. When

COVER STORY

they're being told that they can be cared for however they want to be cared for, that's a really powerful message for Gen Z, in particular. It's the idea of no matter who you are, no matter how you want to show up, you will be seen and valued.

Making it seamless for hotel guests to stream their content from their accounts with video and music services is becoming table stakes. Another new Gen Z expectation is making it easy for guests to order food from external delivery services. Marketing partnerships with Gen Z favorite brands through "col-labs" and "drops" can also help.

Even updating how your service is delivered for a more informal generation can be an evasive action long-established brands can take to stay relatable.

One research has found that Gen Zers like lots of hooks and pegs on the wall to hang their belongings and that they typically don't want doors to the closets in the guest rooms because they like to see all their stuff.

Loyalty programs are another area ripe for a refresh. As we think about the future of loyalty, we think about Gen Z because of its typical focus on individuality and identity, because we want to connect more on the emotional level..

Gen Z Seeks Experiences

Co-working is important to some Gen Z travelers in an age of blended, or bleisure, travel and hybrid working. Selina La Fortuna in La Fortuna, Costa Rica, offers co-working. Selina runs the Remote Year program, too. The Omo





brand of hotels in Japan aims to appeal to next-generation travelers. The Broken Shaker cocktail bar at the Freehand Hotel, frequented heavily by Gen Z, in New York City. Source: Freehand Hotels. Co-working is important to some Gen Z travelers in an age of blended, or bleisure, travel and hybrid working. Selina La Fortuna in La Fortuna, Costa Rica, offers co-working.

One long-term reality facing Gen Z is a housing affordability crisis in many cities, which can make young people treasure travel even more. Many Gen Zers may live longer with parents or in group houses and small apartments compared to past generations. For example, in the UK, an intergenerational commission forecasted that people born after 1980, on average, might need to take six times as long to save for an average house deposit as those born earlier.

Access versus ownership is one theme we watch as a lens on the emerging generation. We've seen greater mobility and fluidity in Gen Z because many of them are taking advantage of the ability to blend work with travel. As a result, we've been contemplating things like, what if you could live with us anywhere around the world full-time for a while. We're looking at our current products and thinking how we could make that easier or how we market merchandise differently.

That said, tighter finances can mean choosier travel decisions. While people aged 40 or older

tend to tick things off a bucket list, Gen Z tends to explore their identities even if it means repeated visits to favorite haunts. You're much less likely to hear about "1,000 Things to See Before You Die" on TikTok than on Facebook, the platform for the olds.

This is a generation that isn't just happy being in a place and looking at it, they want to personally be part of hotels' stories — interactive. They want to feel like they're doing something — that they're relevant — because they're living at home and can't afford to live otherwise. So Gen Z spends its money on experiences, but they want those experiences to be educational and have values that support their beliefs.

To find good Gen Z travel examples, look to Utah, where Gen Z comprises the largest age group. It's home to a new adventure-themed Evo Hotel in Salt Lake City. The future of hotel building is really about building community. A hotel should amplify an emotional response to a location — and to activity."

There are spaces throughout what Evo calls its "campus" — a sprawling complex meant to inspire connections among guests: fire pits with benches, a coffee shop, a rock climbing wall, and design-forward lounges that push traditionally pristine, uncomfortable hotel furniture to the side.

It was very intentional that we have some pieces that are already worn-in because Salt Lake City has a great scene for vintage



India is the youngest demography in the world. Roughly two-thirds of its residents are under age 35

furniture. The fact that they're already worn-in adds to the comfort.

India story of Gen Z

India is the youngest demography in the world. Roughly two-thirds of its residents are under age 35. To appeal to this crowd, Thomas Cook India has been striving to be savvy about adding experiential components to trips, rather than relying on traditional flight-and-lodging packages. Add-ons have included food tours, deep-sea diving, and hot-air ballooning. Thomas Cook India's latest ad campaign is told in 15-second bites to adapt to the short-form video trend.

In Johannesburg, South Africa, Curiosity Maboneng helps Gen Z connect with other travelers and locals through a mix of communal lounges and co-working spaces. It also offers connections to experiences around town, ranging from skateboarding to a "family dinner" that offers local kasi cuisine.

Portland, Oregon, is another place that continues to draw in Zoomers for its green spaces, liberal culture, and affordability. The city was named top in the U.S. in the 2022 Gen Z City Living Index.

Gen Z comprises the largest portion of guest stays at The Hotel Zags in Portland, said Zoe Hamilton, director of sales and marketing. Guests get access to "the shed," which includes free use of GoPro and

Polaroids cameras, cruiser and mountain bikes, walking sticks, fishing equipment, binoculars, and yoga mats. There are also board games and sets for bocce ball and cornhole.

The Yunik Hotel in Chengdu China has a lobby experience that mingles with a bar and retail atmosphere to greet its core Gen Z clientele. Cultural connection is important to Gen Z. Every floor of the Hotel Indigo Dubai Downtown was curated by a different local artist. The hotel has more than 200 pieces of art telling the neighborhood's story. Here is one guestroom. At their early-career stage, Gen Zers have a heightened awareness of costs. Hotels can help find creative ways of making experiences more accessible.

Some hotels have added installment payments, where you can pay for a trip over, say, six months, as an option for direct bookers. It's been popular with Gen Z. In general, budgets will become less of a restraining influence on travel decisions with age. Yet Gen Z's philosophy toward researching trips may last a lifetime.

So hotel brands could learn a trick or two from Hopper, the online travel agency claiming to have a higher share of Gen Z users than its main rivals do.

Social commerce especially resonates with Gen Z. Think gamified discounts. Earning cashback or vouchers for performing certain activities, such as interacting with a game,



sharing a mobile app, or booking trips repeatedly.

Social commerce is underpinned by what's called mounting loss, which essentially means you play games and earn credit that's only redeemable within one app, boosting conversion. A study on Gen Z behavior by Oliver Wyman described next-gen travelers as part of the "swipe-and-buy" squad due to their "always-on" purchase behavior. Gen Zers generally display less brand loyalty as they are often comparison shoppers, at least at this stage of their emergence. To the extent that they're loyal, they prefer brands that provide options, hyper-personalization, and a sense of community.

Some critics will look at such behavior and call Gen Z "fickle." Yet

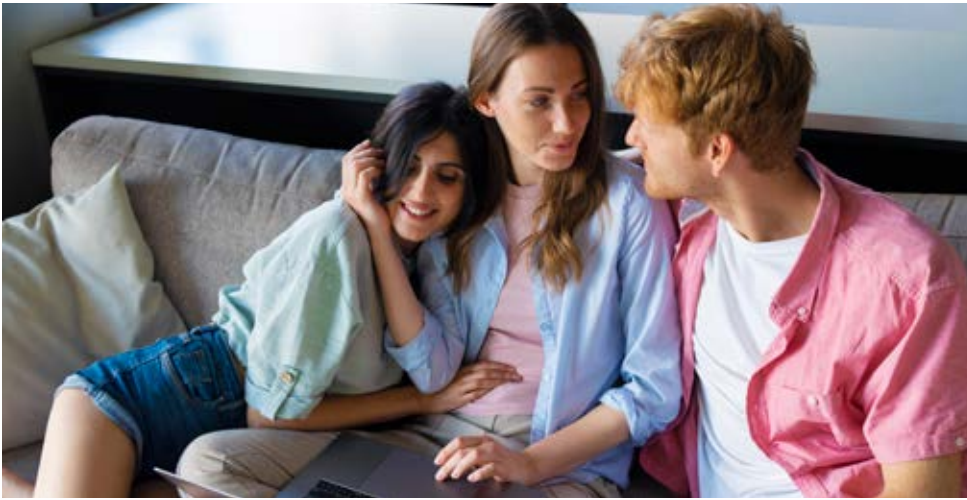
it's not new for young people to be early adopters or to quickly drop something if the experience disappoints. The point is that some types of friction for Gen Z remain overlooked by hoteliers or have yet to be addressed.

In APAC [Asia Pacific], younger travelers go to a market and stay in a Marriott for two days and then stay next door at the Ritz-Carlton for one night to get a selfie. It's almost like they're building their own collab. Could hoteliers help post-millennial guests achieve their goals, perhaps through partnerships with photography services like Flytographer and experiences-booking agencies like GetYourGuide, KKDay, and Klook?

At an operational level, hotel companies may want to find ways to

reduce the friction Gen Zers experience. IHG's brands have invested successfully to have a best-in-class service recovery time on social media of four minutes or less. If you let us know on social media that you're staying with us for something exciting, like a birthday or because you love the view, or if you let us know about an issue or a service request like needing an extra pillow, we'll respond to you and sort that out very rapidly.

Ultimately a big-picture way a hotel group can respond to an emerging demographic's new tastes is to ensure its mission and brand platform are in sync with them. Both millennials and Gen Zs often want to align themselves with brands that share their values. For many brands, this includes our belief that



true luxury is not about rigid, impersonal service.

Redefined personal wellness

“Wellness” has tended to mean “spa” to previous generations of hotel-goers. But Gen Z has redefined wellness as well-being, given the burnout it’s often experiencing at an earlier age. Gen Zers generally show a greater willingness to explore health more holistically than just physical fitness, setting aside that it has a higher rate of obesity than comparable past youth cohorts.

Whether it’s hiking or herbal, wellness took on an entirely different meaning for young people after the pandemic’s clampdown on socializing led to a renewed emphasis on living life to its fullest.

We’re seeing Gen Z interest in getaways that include forest bathing, fruit harvesting, and cooking courses that involve plant-based ingredients. For many Gen Z students, the pandemic was the catalyst behind taking a gap year – typi-

cally a semester abroad to travel as life education. As the world moves to online learning or hybrid models, the proportion of students seeking travel seems to grow.

As more members of Gen Z travel, they’re redefining wellness to be more than just massage treatments. A hotel’s comprehensive approach to wellness appeals to Gen Z in particular, especially its focus on sleep and nutrition. Gen-Z is a generation that focuses on the importance of self-care and the idea that an individual can truly have it all. They’ve pushed for wellness in the workplace and are strong proponents of a work-life balance, and inspired sober-curious movements worldwide.

Gen Z travelers are more compelled to embrace non-traditional and one-of-a-kind travel offerings, like glamping, traveling cross-country in a car for a year, and culturally immersive exploration activities. Organic dining, yoga, art classes, meditation sessions, and painting classes attract the generation.



Both millennials and Gen Zs often want to align themselves with brands that share their values. For many brands, this includes our belief that true luxury is not about rigid, impersonal service

COLD STAR[®]



*One Stop
Hospitality
Solution*

Deals In

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The multibillion-dollar new hospitality trend is booming as more people travel to rest in tech-powered beds and suspended cocoons

Going on a vacation might seem like a rather unconventional way to try to improve your sleep habits. But sleep tourism has been growing in popularity for a number of years, with an increasing amount of sleep-focused stays popping up in hotels and resorts across the world.

Interest has skyrocketed since the pandemic, with a number of

high profile establishments focusing their attention on those suffering from sleep-deprivation.

According to Hilton's third annual trends report, this year will be marked by a pronounced emphasis on wellness travel, with "rest and relaxation" identified as the pivotal trend shaping the travel landscape for 2024. Beyond the traditional offerings like spas, yoga classes at sunrise, and fitness centers with the latest equipment, the pursuit of personal wellness has undergone a significant transformation. As a result, today's travelers, whether embarking on a business trip or a leisurely vacation with friends or family, are placing a growing emphasis on prioritizing sound sleep and rest.

Sleep tourism is a new phenomenon that refers to the increasing trend of travelers seeking destinations and accommodations that specifically cater to enhancing the quality of sleep and overall well-being during their travels. From curated sleep packages to innovative amenities dedicated to improving sleep quality, the hospitality industry is witnessing a transformative wave as travelers want to sleep better, especially when away from their homes and stressors that don't always allow them to get a good night's rest.

Yet, a crucial question emerges: how exactly can hoteliers guarantee a stay that places a premium on a guest's sleep and be more mindful of their habits? To cultivate an atmosphere of comfort and cater to those in pursuit of a revitalizing night's (or day's) rest, hoteliers



should begin by focusing efforts on enhancing the features found in guest rooms.

But first, we must understand what led to the rise of sleep tourism and prioritizing sleep health.

Why is Sleep Tourism in High Demand?

The rise of sleep tourism can be attributed to a confluence of factors that reflect evolving trends in travel and wellness needs. In response to the increasing importance placed on holistic wellness, there has been a surge in this type of tourism, with travelers seeking destinations that not only offer all of the amenities they love and use during a typical stay but also, unique and rejuvenating sleep experiences to take part in. This shift reflects a growing awareness of the crucial role sleep

plays in maintaining good health and productivity, coupled with a desire for unique and thoughtful experiences centered around relaxation and serenity.

With so many people not getting the recommended eight hours of sleep a night, quality of sleep has always been an important conversation topic that has now penetrated the hospitality industry as it has become a paramount factor influencing travel decisions. Travelers understand the vital link between restful sleep and overall wellness. Just as they try and practice getting eight hours of sleep at home, when guests travel they also want a soundful and uninterrupted rest period. This evolution has prompted the hospitality sector to respond with tailored offerings meeting the growing demand for destinations to

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prioritize the rejuvenation of mind and body through a tranquil and revitalizing sleep environment.

In response to the growing awareness of the crucial connection between restful sleep and overall wellness, the hospitality sector has evolved to address travelers' needs for a tranquil and revitalizing sleep environment. To meet this demand, hotels are now offering specialized sleep amenities that go beyond the conventional. Guests can indulge in the luxury of premium mattresses, pillows, and bedding to enhance comfort and support. Personalized sleep concierge services assist in tailoring the sleep environment to individual preferences, while blackout curtains ensure a dark and quiet space for undisturbed rest. Innovative features like white noise machines, aromatherapy, and sleep-inducing technology contrib-

ute to creating the perfect ambiance for a restful night.

Furthermore, hotels may provide customizable room features, such as adjustable lighting and temperature controls, to cater to diverse preferences. With offerings like specialized sleep programs, hypoallergenic options, and natural sleep remedies, the hospitality industry is prioritizing the rejuvenation of both mind and body, making sleep an integral part of the travel experience.

Additionally, advances in sleep technology and a heightened awareness of the significance of quality sleep for overall health have further fueled the development of travel offerings that incorporate innovative sleep solutions. As stress and burnout management become mainstream conversations in society today, destinations offering

relaxation and sleep improvement programs are quickly gaining traction and booking far out in advance. The evolving landscape of sleep tourism reflects a broader societal shift towards prioritizing comprehensive well-being while people make their travel plans. Whether in a luxurious hotel or at a wellness resort, offering a package of comfort and relaxation is key.

The Impact of Indoor Air Quality on Sleep

One commonly overlooked aspect that can influence one's sleep quality is air quality. In fact, clean air is a major player in determining guests' comfort levels. Traditionally, concerns about air quality have revolved around outdoor pollutants like smog, allergens, and smoke, which are particularly problematic for those with respiratory issues.



However, the significance of indoor air quality cannot be overlooked, and it may even surpass the importance of outdoor concerns, especially for travelers as indoor environments harbor potential threats like mold spores, bacteria, and fragrances intended to enhance ambiance but capable of causing irritation to guests.

Beyond providing a clean breathing environment, improved air quality actively and greatly contributes to guests' health and wellbeing. Having healthy air quality not only reduces stress, but it also promotes relaxation and enhances sleep in a way many may not realize as we typically don't think about indoor air quality. Optimal air quality facilitates easier breathing, aiding the body in transitioning to a restful state and facilitating entry into REM sleep. Unburdened by the need to

combat airborne particles, the body can achieve a state of rest more efficiently, ensuring guests wake up feeling refreshed and rejuvenated. A good night's sleep is imperative for travelers facing important meetings and presentations, early morning exams, or adjusting to time zone differences. This positive impact on sleep quality holds paramount significance for the overall wellness of any hotel guest during their stay.

Additionally, a guest room with access to purified air can be transformative for guests dealing with allergies and asthma, impacting even those not typically sensitive to allergens when traveling. For instance, someone usually immune to allergic reactions might experience sensitivity to regional plants, like cactus flowers in Arizona. Moreover, elevated airborne particle levels in-

crease the risk of carrying harmful viruses or bacteria. Enhanced air quality not only bolsters comfort but also reduces the likelihood of airborne illnesses among guests. In the post-pandemic era, where travel hesitancy prevails, prioritizing air quality provides guests with peace of mind and makes them want to come back and stay at a property that keeps their health top of mind.

Allergen Protection for Optimal Sleep Environment

To complement this, hoteliers should also consider incorporating hypoallergenic mattress protectors and pillow encasements to shield against dust mite allergens. This additional layer of protection ensures that guests wake up feeling refreshed and revitalized by minimizing the body's efforts to fend off airborne particles, particularly those to which they may not be

TREND

accustomed. The dual focus on air quality and allergen protection underscores the commitment to providing guests with a restful sleep environment. Addressing allergens and irritants in the sleep environment becomes pivotal in breaking the cycle, promoting rejuvenating sleep, and contributing to the long-term well-being of guests.?

The dual emphasis on air quality and allergen protection underscores the commitment to creating an optimal sleep environment which is crucial for breaking the cycle, promoting not only restful sleep but also contributing to the long-term health of guests. Aligning with the growing demand for holistic well-being experiences, this commitment reflects a strategic approach to guest satisfaction and recognizing the interconnected nature of sleep and overall health. By recognizing and investing in improved air quality, hoteliers can strongly commit to wellness, fulfilling the increasing demand and setting their properties apart in the thriving wellness tourism market.

Looking Ahead

According to Grandview Research, the global wellness tourism market was valued at \$814.6 billion in 2022 and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 12.42% from 2023 to 2030. As the wellness tourism market continues its upward trajectory, hoteliers are uniquely positioned to elevate their guests' experience by improving air quality. Educating associates on the topic and continuing the conversation is

also important. It is vital hoteliers train associates to understand the importance of air quality, how to maintain it, and how to communicate its benefits to guests.

Well-informed staff can serve as ambassadors for your hotel's commitment to wellness. They also can continue the conversation with guests and get feedback, allowing hotels to keep improving and staying on top of wellness offerings. In addition to overall guest satisfaction, offering wellness benefits also can improve a hotel's bottom line.

In the evolving landscape of contemporary travel, the rise of sleep tourism signifies a transformative shift in preferences, with an increasing number of individuals seeking experiences centered around rejuvenating sleep. In response to the growing recognition of the integral connection between restful sleep and overall wellness, the hospitality sector is adapting to meet these evolving demands.

Today's travelers, actively prioritizing destinations and accommodations that offer optimal sleep experiences, no longer settle for merely comfortable accommodations. Wellness travel extends beyond plush robes and fine dining; it delves into creating rooms so pure that relaxation and sleep come naturally, meeting the wellness needs of every traveler. This strategic approach reflects not only a commitment to guest satisfaction, but also an acknowledgment of the interconnected nature of sleep and well-being in today's fast-paced world where one's health is a top priority.



Aligning with the growing demand for holistic well-being experiences, this commitment reflects a strategic approach to guest satisfaction and recognizing the interconnected nature of sleep and overall health



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STATE SURVEY: NAGALAND

A LAND OF MYSTERY

The Government of Nagaland recently released Tourism Policy 2024 opening up immense opportunities for the hospitality sector

N

Nagaland came into being on 1st December, 1963 as the sixteenth state of the Indian Union with Kohima as her capital. With a geographical area of about 16,579 sq km, she shares her borders with Assam in the North and West, Myanmar and Arunachal Pradesh in the East and Manipur in the South. The topography of the state is nearly all hilly, the highest peak being Saramati (3841m) in the district of Kiphire. Many rivers cut through this mountainous terrain, like sharp swords slicing through rocks, the main ones being Dhansiri, Doyang, Dikhu, Milak, Tizu and Zungki.

The climate of Nagaland is nothing but perfect. With pleasant summers when temperatures do not cross 31 degrees C and in winters when they don't dip below 4 degrees C, the place is a 'perpetual holiday destination'.

A land engulfed in mystery, inhabited by vibrant people zealously guarding their culture – dancers,

warriors, head-hunters; mountains, valleys, forests – all these form the portrait of Nagaland the moment the word is uttered. But, from extreme mystery to hosting a globally famous cultural festival, Nagaland has come a long way over the years and etched a name for itself in the world's tourist destination map.

Nagaland's tourism resources are immense. Natural beauty in its varied forms is the State's major asset. Lush green vegetation having interesting flora and fauna, deep valleys with glistening streams, natural lakes, hill agriculture and pleasant climate throughout the year are unique natural features of the State. Additionally, its history, ethnic tribal culture reflected through folk dances, music, festivals, handicrafts and the mysticism associated with the customs and ways of its hill tribes has been the source of great curiosity to not only Indians but people all over the world. It is a land of charm, diverse in landscape, cul-

ture and offers opportunities for a whole range of tourism activities, which to date has remained largely untapped.

The Department of Tourism in the State was created in 1981. Since then, tourism has been experiencing a slow but steady growth. The available tourists' statistics show that during the last 5 years, the number of domestic tourists has ranged from 97,000-1,25,000 per year, while foreign tourists have ranged from 2000-5000 approximately, so far. The State Government having realized the importance of tourism for the socioeconomic development of the State has declared Tourism as a 'Priority Sector' under the State Industrial Policy of Nagaland, 2000. Nagaland, no doubt, still has a long way to go towards developing tourism in the State and has its own constraints due to the general perceptions regarding security and law and order conditions. Though, marketing and promo-



tional measures can partly prevail over this image, ultimately it is the visitor's experiences that matters. As amply proved elsewhere, it is necessary to recognize the importance of tourism as an activity for socio-economic development for the State. A comprehensive tourism policy highlighting the objective of tourism development in the state needs to be promulgated by the Government, and this policy enunciation precisely aims to point towards that direction.

Tourism product development and diversification

Nagaland Tourism Policy will strive to identify areas and investors with investment potential. The State will accordingly follow a destination with centric approach to planning and development of tourism. Potential areas of future development of tourism products in Nagaland are:

A) Wildlife/Eco-Tourism - Eco-tourism focuses on volunteering personal growth and learning new ways to live; typically involving travel to destinations where flora, fauna and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. An integral part of ecotourism is in the promotion of recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation and creation of economic opportunities for the local communities. Nagaland has a vast potential for ecotourism development and therefore, the Department's policies and activities are framed in the line of eco-tourism. Khonoma, Dzulekie, Dzukou valley, Mt. Saramati, Green Dikhu Project, Benreu, Sendenyu Biodiversity Conservation are some



of the popular ecotourism spots in Nagaland. The State is also a viable location for promoting Cinematic tourism in the near future.

B) Agro-Tourism - Agro-Tourism is a form of niche tourism that involves any agriculturally based operation or activity. People have become more interested in going back to the basics, leading a rustic life, and in how their food is produced etc. They want to meet farmers and processors and talk with them about what goes into food production, they see

the source of their food, be it a dairy cow, an ear of corn growing in a field, or an apple they can pick right off a tree. This form of tourism can prove to be a popular concept for a State like Nagaland where over 70% of the population is still entirely dependent on agriculture as their main source of income. The Apple Festival in Thanamir, Kiphire; Kiwi Farms in Phek District; Pineapple Plantation in Medziphema etc; are some of the few examples that can be promoted under this genre. The Dragon Fruit and other tropical fruit farms in the

foothills of Nagaland can also come under this form of tourism.

All we need is to build basic farm houses with modern amenities like showers, clean linen, European type commodes, solar lighting etc. to accommodate the prospective tourists.

C) Adventure/Sports Tourism - Nature has blessed Nagaland with lofty mountain and terrain and spiraling trekking routes which makes the State ideal for adventure and sport tourism such as mountaineering, trekking, zip lining, gliding, and



mountain biking, cycling, rafting, angling and rock climbing. Some of the identified potential spots for adventure sports in Nagaland are Dzukou Valley, Dzuleke, Mt. Japfu, Mt. Saramati, Satoi Range etc. Doyang and Tizu rivers are ideal spots for river sports. You will find varieties of fishes like local Trout, Indian Mahseer and Salmon. Both in terms of culture of natives and natural terrain, tourists have something new and exciting to look forward to in

Fairs and Festivals not only reflect the rich cultural heritage of Nagaland, but have also become the biggest attraction for tourists

near future. Paragliding has been recently introduced in Pfutsero and Khezhakeno region of Phek District, Nagaland. The Department should collaborate with the Department of Youth Resources to promote this sector.

D) Heritage Tourism - Nagaland does not have many heritage sites compared to other States in the Country. Therefore, it is the State Policy to develop important sites

of historical importance. Some of the few identified historical sites are:- The War Cemetery, Kohima; Medieval Kachari Kingdom Ruins, Dimapur; Khonoma Village, Kohima District; historical site at Naginimora-Mon District; Chungliyimti,

Molungyimsen & Impur- 1st Baptist Mission in Nagaland at Mokochung District; Naga Heritage Complex, Kisama at Kohima, Skull Stone Cist and stone monuments associated with head hunting among the Konyaks, Pot Burial sites at Laruri and Mimi Village, pre-historic caves and rock shelter sites of Mimi region, etc.

E) Cultural Tourism/

Fairs & Festival - Fairs and Festivals not only reflect the rich cultural heritage of Nagaland, but have also become the biggest attraction for tourists. The Government will endeavour to tie up with the NEZCC and the Department of Art & Culture to organise and promote these traditional festivals and take tourism to all tourist destinations of Nagaland. It will also be the Government policy to accord priority for the infrastructural development, improvement and marketing of such places.

F) Music Tourism - Music is an integral part of the life of the Nagas. The Naga oral tradition is kept alive through the media of folktales and songs. Nagaland is the first State in India to have introduced 'Music as an Industry'. The Music Task Force of Nagaland was created by the Government to encourage Naga musicians to take up music as a profession rather than a hobby.

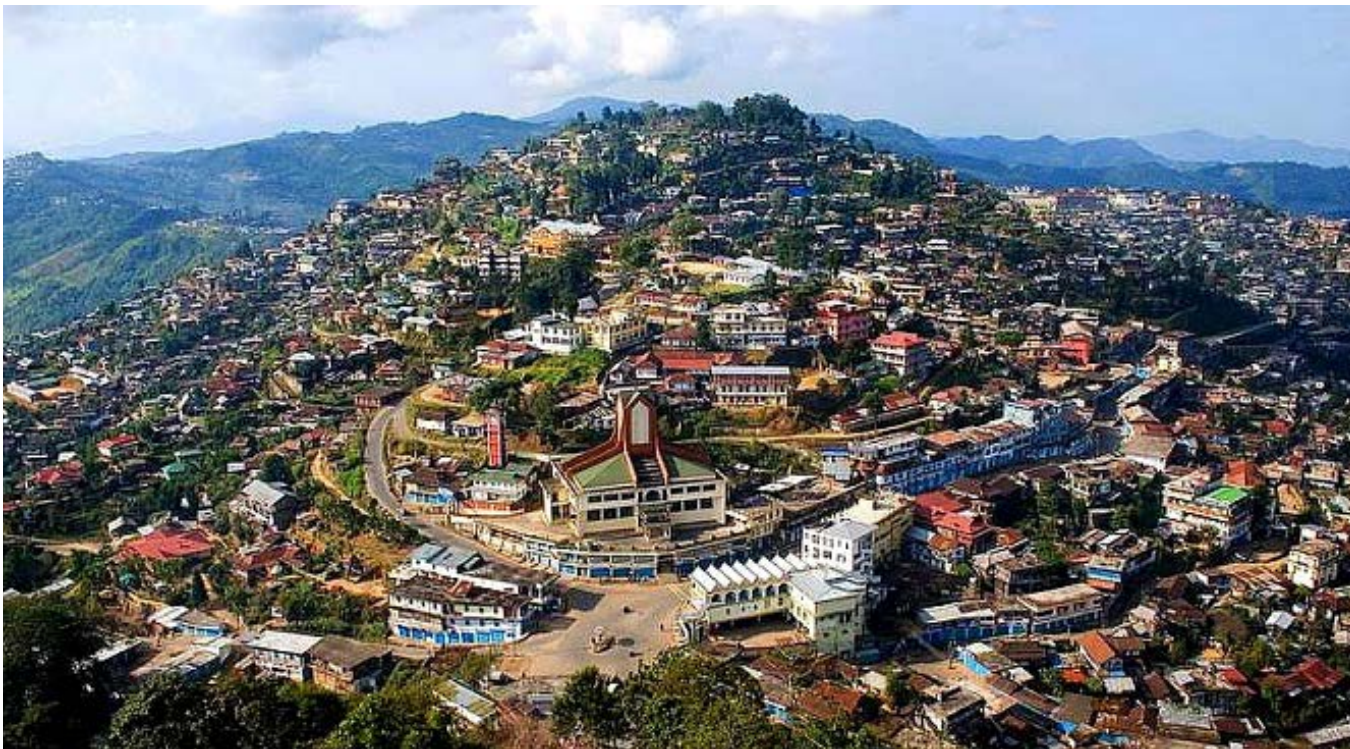
The Hornbill National Rock Contest is an integral event of the Hornbill Festival. It is a National-level contest and boasts of being the longest music festival in the Country.

g) **MONSOON TOURISM** - Nagaland has a largely monsoon climate with high humidity levels. The region looks the best in monsoon when everything is so green and drenched. If one doesn't mind a little rain, can visit Kohima which looks splendid during monsoon, when the place is completely covered with lush grasses and lilies, and the spellbinding streams and valleys running in between. Then,

there are few waterfalls like Triple Fall at Seithekema and Phesama and Khonoma, Dzukou Waterfall that look exquisite in monsoon besides the evident nature gifted landscapes and beautifully set terrains.

h) **CULINARY TOURISM** - Culinary Tourism forms an integral part of local life and is forged by the history, culture, economy and society of a territory. Nagaland's diverse and fascinating food offers a captivating culinary journey into the heart of the region's rich traditions. Naga cuisines are an extraordinary blend of unique flavors' and ingredients. Every Naga tribe contributes its dis-





tinct culinary identity resulting in a diverse array of dishes showcasing resourcefulness through traditional cooking techniques. Along with authentic, traditional and innovative experiences, this form of tourism may also involve other related activities such as visiting the local producers and local homestays, participating in food festivals and attending cooking classes providing immersive experiences.

I) Wellness/Herbal Tourism - Forests of Nagaland are one among those having rich bio-diversity especially in terms of flora. Located in one of the 25 hotspots regions of the world in terms of biodiversity with forests covering an area of 13,318 sq.km, Nagaland possesses a vast variety of herbal and medicinal plants.

This exotic feature creates a great potential for promotion of Wellness Tourism in Nagaland. This form of tourism is currently being practiced on a small scale by indigenous people in the remote regions of Nagaland

Leveraging its distinct identity, Nagaland has the opportunity to showcase its beauty and cultural richness to a global audience, leading to economic growth.

having the innate knowledge for herbal medicines and massages that provide holistic healing and rejuvenation.

J) Experiential/Rural Tourism - “Experiential or immersion travel/experience”, is a form of tourism which allows people to experience a particular place by connecting to its history, people and culture by living it. It emphasizes different areas of local life-culinary, culture, history, shopping, nature or social life and can herewith be the basis for a holistic travel experience. Development of Rural Tourism is one of the few activities which can provide a solution to promote these various types of tourism. The increasing levels of awareness, growing interest in heritage and culture and improved accessibility, environmental



consciousness are some factors which are shifting the trend towards rural tourism. The Tourism Policy aims to implement such a form of tourism through Village Tourism Development Board (VTDB).

k) TEXTILE TOURISM - Nagaland is popularly known for its vibrant handicrafts, predominantly textiles but also woodcarving, lacquer work, and handlooms. Over the years, the interest of the tourist is undergoing a paradigm shift from leisure to a more sustainable way of life. Having said this, Textile Tourism is the most promising new tourism product which can be tapped for promotion and preservation of the arts and crafts of Nagaland. The Department will strive to revive rural arts and crafts, and involve women

and skilled artisans to give unique experiences to the tourist by conducting immersive themed handicraft tours to Nagaland.

L) Mice (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences And Exhibitions)

Tourism is also one of the fastest growing in the global tourism industry. The potential for MICE in Nagaland is enormous. However, at the same time, the State faces numerous challenges, of which the most critical is lack of proper infrastructure, accommodations, access and connectivity and amenities. The Department will take steps for setting up modern conventions facilities wherever possible destinations have potential.

M) Golf Tourism - Of late, Govern-

ment of India is encouraging and promoting golf tourism because of its economic, social and environmental impact having prospects for generating large employment & revenue. Golf represents the largest sports-related travel market and it is estimated that over 50 million Golf tourists travel the world to play on an estimated 32,000 golf courses. Recognizing this potential to develop Golf as a niche tourism product for attracting both international and domestic tourists. The game of Golf can be introduced to the Nagas. The foothills of Dimapur; Lowho Lake at Khezhakeno Village, Phek District and the spontaneous valleys and pristine landscapes of Nagaland offer incredible scope for development of golf tourism. Linking Golf Tournaments with Hornbill Festival calendar can be a concept that can be introduced. Golf Tournaments can be planned and organized in consultation with Indian Golf Association (IGA) and its units such as Northeast/Assam/Upper Assam, Meghalaya Golf Associations etc). Specific calendar dates can be blocked to host Golf tournaments according to the Hornbill Festival Week.

N) Cinematic/Film Tourism - Nagaland holds immense potential for developing film tourism due to its rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and unique traditions. The State's picturesque mountains, lush forests, and vibrant tribal communities offer a captivating backdrop for filmmakers. By focusing on film friendly policies, infrastructure development, and strategic marketing,



Nagaland can attract filmmakers and tourists alike. Leveraging its distinct identity, Nagaland has the opportunity to showcase its beauty and cultural richness to a global audience, leading to economic growth, job opportunities, and sustainable development in the region.

O. Medical Tourism - The prospects of medical tourism in Nagaland are promising, as the state has been gradually gaining recognition for its healthcare facilities and traditional wellness practices. With a focus on holistic healing and a rich cultural

heritage, Nagaland offers a unique blend of conventional and alternative healthcare options. The state's serene landscapes and diverse tribal culture also contribute to the appeal for wellness seekers. As Nagaland continues to develop its healthcare sector and with the establishment of a new medical institute in Nagaland, the state has the potential to attract visitors seeking specialized treatments, rejuvenation, and a culturally immersive healthcare experience.

Overall, the combination of a new medical institute and effective promotional strategies could sig-

nificantly boost medical tourism in Nagaland.

Human Resource Development:

Tourism is a labour intensive activity and skilled manpower is an important requirement for sustained tourism development. It will, therefore, be the State Policy to adequately lay emphasis on this vital aspect of tourism and manpower development. Training will be given due weightage to ensure efficient service and management of tourist facilities for maximum returns of investments made.



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