

MYSTIC EAST

...an unexplored horizon

A bi-monthly magazine by HRAEI | Vol 2 | Issue 6 | November - December 2016

COVER STORY

BYE BYE CASH TRANSACTIONS

DEMONETISATION HAS HIT THE HOSPITALITY
INDUSTRY FOR THE TIME BEING BUT IT WILL
BOUNCE BACK SOON





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Dear Fellow Members,

Until last November, the hospitality industry had been doing brisque business in these parts of the country. However, the gains got somewhat reversed after the demonetisation drive. Over the short and medium terms, this will have varied effects on sections of the hospitality industry in the country, but in the long-term, it will positively impact the growth of the hospitality sector.

Often, the strong season for the hospitality sector in the country extends from October to March, which to a large extent, defines the success for the industry in any given year. The lack of available currency forced some hospitality customers to either postpone or cancel their travel and accommodation or to use hospitality products that easily allow the use of the other modes of payments.

Smaller businesses, F&B, QSRs and home deliveries bore the brunt, as there has been a tremendous loss of opportunity.

Despite the early setback, there is a silver lining across the dark clouds. The vibrant and innovative hospitality industry is expected to bounce back with creative ways to deal with the impact, from electronic payment modes to value additions, to special offers and shifts in spending patterns.

Sudesh Poddar
President, HRAEI

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Vol 2 | Issue 6 | November - December 2016

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SECRETARY'S MESSAGE



“

the hospitality industry needs to be prepared for even more disruptions that lie ahead. And to be prepared, it's clear hotels need to look beyond the boundaries of their own industry to take stock of what's happening

”

Dear fellow members,

So, what will this year's trends in hotel guest experience bring? This is a question many of us in hospitality industry must be facing at the moment. Well, when it comes to our industry, trends can be both ephemeral and everlasting. Some are just a flash in the pan; others have a staying power that last for decades.

LEAN LUXURY: The new trend in luxury is about offering travelers a more authentic, genuine luxury experience unfettered by specific brand or quality standards. It's personalized service, craftsmanship and a story to tell. They just need to have a story behind their brands to communicate to travellers.

THE SMART HOTEL EMERGES: That's simply a given, especially as hotels continue to make large investments in beacon technologies, messaging, streaming in-room entertainment, and other smart hotel concepts.

MORE BRANDS: Maybe Marriott won't be adding any more brands to its portfolio of 30 anytime soon, but when it comes to its peers, Hilton included, there's certainly room to grow. In 2017 we should also expect to see even more non-traditional hotel brands entering the hospitality space.

MINE THE DATA: Now that we've advanced enough to know how to collect or mine data, it's up to the industry to know what to do with that information. We need to get really smart around data science. It helps us personalize choices as you have personal access with mobile now.

In 2017, it's clear that the hospitality industry needs to be prepared for even more disruptions that lie ahead. And to be prepared, it's clear hotels need to look beyond the boundaries of their own industry to take stock of what's happening, not only in travel, but the greater world beyond it

Pranav Singh
Secretary, HRAEI

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PRESS RELEASE



In view of roll out of GST in place of current indirect tax system of Centre and States, Service Tax Zone Kolkata has flagged of mobile help centre. The help centre will tour the various part of Kolkata jurisdictions to sensitize the various stakeholders about the GST Scheme and also to prepare them to streamline the business process, ERP and IT so as to be compatible with the GST network. The GST network (GSTN) is frontend system developed by the Government of India as single interface for GST rollout.

The MOBILE HELP CENTRE, which is a mini office equipped with laptop with internet facility operated by conversant and trained officers, will help the stakeholders in obtaining the registration on SPOT for the new registrants and help the existing tax payer operating under Service Tax and Central Excise for their transition to GSTN.

The Service Tax Zone has been conducting GST outreach seminars at various places having large number of tax payers. So far, many such seminars have been organized beyond the city limit of Kolkata.

In addition to the above, GST MIGRATION SUVIDHA KENDRA has been opened in room no. 243A, of Kendriya Utpad Shulk Bhawan, at 180, Shantipally, Rajdanga Main Road, Kolkata - 700 107. The helpline no. of the Suvidha Kendra is 2441-0042.

It is expected that taxpayers will take advantage of this outreach programme to equip themselves for the switch over from current indirect tax system such as Central Excise, Service Tax and VAT to unified GST system.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. K. Panda'.

(S. K. PANDA)
Chief Commissioner, Service
Tax, Kolkata Zone

SERVICE CHARGE ADVISORY WILL CREATE CHAOS



THE apex body of hotels and restaurants in India the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) has written to the Department of Consumer Affairs, asking it to withdraw an advisory making service charges optional, saying there was nothing illegal about levying the fee.

Making service charges discretionary will create chaos and disrupt the smooth functioning of restaurants across the country and lead to unnecessary litigation between them and consumers, said FHRAI.

The department said on Monday that service charges billed by restaurants are optional and it is up to customers to pay them. The department cited complaints that hotels and restaurants are levying an additional 5 to 20% in bills in lieu of tips, regardless of the kind of service provided.

In its letter to the department, FHRAI said service charges – an amount paid to the staff of a restaurant or other establishment by customers and guests – are lawful and that it is up to an establishment to decide whether and how much to collect. FHRAI members met officials in the department on Tuesday and were told the matter would be looked into, said Pradeep Shetty, chairman of FHRAI's legal matters subcommittee.

“We regret that the department came out with such an advisory, which pits consumers against the industry. While consumer rights are paramount, the rights of individual establishments should not be impinged upon,” Shetty said.

FHRAI said in its letter that service charges are “considered a beneficial payment since it is meant for the benefit of the staff of the establishment...The service charge is disclosed in advance and the same is clearly included as a separate heading in the bill as a charge not as a tax. Thus, there is complete transparency with regard to the amount, the rate and the purpose of the charge.”

Citing previous rulings, FHRAI said the practice of collecting service charges has been upheld by the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission. “We request you to kindly withdraw the subject mentioned press note as there is nothing illegal or unlawful – much less unfair – in an establishment collecting a service charge from its guests,” it added.

Industry officials said the practice was critical to incentivise staff. The guidelines from the government should be clear with the processes that need to be followed. Customers and hotels should have clarity on how we reward service by the staff. It's a huge motivation for the staff and makes the staff put in extra efforts rather than being transactional. Also levying service charge is an established practice of several years and it has even been upheld in the court of law.

Most of money collected goes to the staff and is an integral part of their incomes. Discontinuation of the same at this stage will adversely impact millions of workers and therefore we plan to continue levying the service charge as before.

GST COUNCIL MEET REMAINS INCONCLUSIVE

ONE more round of GST Council Meet concluded on January 4 in New Delhi with differences cropping up on issues like administering the taxes of territorial waters, states participation in administering the GST, control over smaller traders and businesses up to the turn over of Rs 1.5 cr., etc. As days are ticking, doubts are being raised about meeting the deadline of implementation of the GST.

Speaking to media after the GST Council Meet, Dr Thomas Issac, Finance Minister of Kerala said that “the differences seem to be widening” as days are ticking by on the issue of GST. He said that the centre’s stand on current powers being administered by the States on territorial waters up to 12 nautical miles cannot be accepted. He also said that agreement is yet to arrive on the issue of IGST.

Kerala, he said, has raised the issue and sought clarity on “rate split” from the Centre under the GST. He said that the issue got the support of many

States. He demanded the imbalance in sharing the taxes between the Centre and the States needed redressal under GST. Instead of 50:50 sharing of the taxes under different slabs, Kerala demanded 60:40 sharing in favour of States under the GST. ‘We see this as a historic opportunity to correct the financial imbalance being meted out by States since independence,’ he said.

Commenting on the vexed compensation fund for States, Issac observed that with the deceleration expected in the economy due to demonetization, the compensation fund of Rs 55,000 cr would fall inadequate as States are bound to suffer revenue losses in the coming months. He said that therefore the States have been successful in adding required clause in the draft law. With this, apart from the Cess that will be pooled for compensation, GST Council is empowered to look for other sources for compensating the States in the eventuality of any revenue loss.

COMMERCE MINISTER BATS EXEMPTIONS UNDER GST FOR TOURISM & HOSPITALITY SECTOR

Union Commerce & Industry Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman in her meeting with the Union Finance Minister, Arun Jaitley yesterday has suggested exemptions under GST (Goods & Services Tax) for export sensitive sectors including Tourism and Hospitality. She also asked for 100% exemption or lower slab of 5% for labour intensive sectors like plantations, leather manufacturing, etc. under the GST.

According to reports, the Union Commerce Minister also suggested a review of the current EPCG (Export Promotion of Capital Goods Authorisation) Scheme where importers of capital goods and raw materials has to claim the refunds of tax paid upfront which makes the process cumbersome. She asked simplification of the process as the refunds generally takes months. Such imports need not to be taxed upfront.

Hotels currently enjoy the EPCG scheme for importing capital goods required for hotel projects in the country.



DOMESTIC TRAFFIC IN INDIA COULD GROW BY NEARLY 25% IN 2018



AVIATION Consultancy CAPA's comprehensive 200-page India Aviation Outlook Report FY2017/18, to be released in Feb-2017 at the CAPA India Aviation Summit stated that the domestic traffic could grow by nearly 25% in FY2018 and approach 130 million passengers in India. The next financial year is expected to be the third consecutive year of domestic growth above 20%. Growth could be as high as 25% but may be tempered by 3-5% because of the impact of demonetisation.

However, the purchase of air travel using some withdrawn denominations was permitted until the first half of December 2016 which may result in a delayed impact in the first half of FY2018. As of now, it is difficult to fully factor in what the impact may be, if any. The introduction of the GST next year may possibly also have a short-term negative impact on economic growth for a couple of years until more positive results emerge.

Based on aircraft deliveries, competitive dynamics and the positive outlook for the economy, domestic growth at 20% or higher could continue for up to a further two years. The pace of aircraft inductions in FY2018 will be one of the key drivers of traffic growth. This is however subject to deliveries of A320neos proceeding as scheduled and operators being able to deploy the equipment as planned, as some operational challenges have been experienced.

With LCCs taking delivery of the clear majority of narrow body aircraft coming into the market (an estimated 50

out of 65 inductions), their share of the domestic market is expected to rise from around 65% today to reach 75-80% within two years.

The last time that LCCs had a similar market position was in early 2011 when their share stood at over 70%. However, on that occasion it was as a result of a blurred demarcation between the full service and low cost operations of Jet Airways and Kingfisher. Airline business models in the market are better defined today and LCCs will have a clearly dominant position.

International traffic is expected to expand at 10-12% in FY2017 and FY2018, but bilateral restrictions preclude achieving true potential. Most of the ten largest international carriers are achieving year-round average load factors of 90% or higher, indicating constrained capacity. Without India's unhelpful restrictions, international growth could be in the region of 15-17% per annum which would result in international traffic volumes doubling within five years. However, demonetisation could negatively impact demand for short haul tourist destinations such as Dubai, Singapore and Thailand.

Several Gulf and Asian carriers are seeking additional entitlements to the tune of up to 150,000 weekly seats. Bilaterals have become a key issue in India's geo-political relations with markets such as the UAE, Qatar, Turkey, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. The Indian government may only agree to more modest incremental expansion in seats than is being sought by some countries.

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DESPITE increase of 9.3% and 23% year-on-year in foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) into India and domestic passenger traffic, respectively, in the month of November, share prices of aviation and hospitality companies have corrected sharply since demonetisation. They have declined in the range of 10-20% compared with 5% fall in Nifty 500 since November 8. Data for December is awaited but analysts are quite confident that it will be robust. According to Mayur Milak, Analyst at Anand Rathi, the industry load factor (capac-

ity utilisation) improved by 460 basis points to 80.2% from 75.6% a month ago, despite recent capacity addition (at the beginning of the strongest quarter).

Despite adding six aircraft to its FY16 fleet size, Spice Jet continued to report PLF of above 90%. Indi-go's PLF came in at 87.3%, up 290 bps m-o-m. Including JetLite, Jet Airways' PLF was 77.6%, up 430 bps m-o-m. Abhinil Dahiwal, Analyst at Motilal Oswal said increase in PLF has come at the cost of yields as companies cut fares to maintain market

share. Besides, crude prices have been rising since September after OPEC decided to cut production and formally did the same in November. ATF price worry Average aviation turbine fuel (ATF) prices were hiked by a steep 7.3% m-o-m in November following a cut of 3.7% in December, and then again hiked by 8.6% in January.

ATF forms around 40% of the operating costs of aviation companies. Brent crude hit an 18-month high on Tuesday at USD 58.37. Better days ahead for hotels since December quarter is the strongest for aviation companies, their financial performance is not expected to come under too much pressure. However, companies will disappoint in the current quarter as the full impact of higher crude prices and hike in ATF prices become fully visible, according to some analysts. Growth in FTA has been 10.4% y-o-y between January and November.

During April- November, the aviation sector registered 23% growth y-o-y in passenger traffic. Yet, occupancy rates for hotels in India have been a concern (subdued) in some large (important) pockets due to a situation of oversupply, according to an analyst at an unlisted brokerage subsidiary of a large private bank. However, things are looking up for the sector as there have been no greenfield expansion for a long time, which augurs well for occupancy rates and average room rents. Comfortable debt position of large players, such as Indian Hotels, EIH, Taj GVK and Hotel Leela (to some extent) coupled with cut in interest rates will help lower losses or boost profitability of respective companies.

Source: The Hindu Business Line

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STAYZILLA STRENGTHENS PARTNERSHIP WITH TOURISM BOARDS IN THE EAST



STAYZILLA, a platform for verified homestay and alternate stays announced its strategic partnership with Department of Tourism, Odisha to reinforce its association with Government Tourism Boards in the East. The MoU was signed in the presence of Ankit Rastogi, Vice President Marketplace, Stayzilla and Dr. Nitin B. Jawale I.A.S, Director & Additional Secretary at Department of Tourism, Odisha.

After strategic tieups with seven state tourism departments across India in 2016, Stayzilla, gets on board with Department of Tourism, Odisha for the joint promotion and development of Homestays in the state. Stayzilla has signed an MoU with Assam Tourism Development Corporation last November and was the first aggregator to

enter the North East market.

Under this agreement, Stayzilla and Department of Tourism, Odisha will jointly boost homestays aiming to provide unique stay experiences to the travellers visiting Odisha. Stayzilla will lend its expertise to Department of Tourism, Odisha to conduct verification procedures and this partnership will enable verification and training of these New Homestays being developed right from the start, headed by Regional Office of Kolkata.

Commenting on this announcement, Ankit Rastogi, Vice President Marketplace, Stayzilla said, “With this MoU signing we look forward to enhancing the experience of tourists visiting Odisha by involving local communities at the helm of tourism by getting them to open up their homes. We are also hap-

py to announce that this is the second largest association with the government tourism in the North East after Assam.”

“Odisha hosts Konark Festival which is a big celebration that attracts many tourists. Accommodation becomes a big issue during this time as we do not have enough facilities and this partnership is aimed to resolve such issue in the state. Through this MoU we want to promote lot of other parts of Odisha which are unexplored beyond the regular Cuttack and Bhubaneswar. With Stayzilla, we look forward to enrich the tourism experience and also to open up new channels of livelihood for the residents as they are going to be the hosts,” said Dr. Nitin B Jawale IAS, Director and Additional Secretary, Department of Tourism, Odisha.



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MAKEMYTRIP'S RIGHTSTAY TO JOIN HANDS WITH ASSAM TOURISM



ASSAM Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) today signed a MoU with Rightstay, an alternate accommodation marketplace by India's leading travel company, MakeMyTrip, to promote the concept of homestays in the state. The MoU was signed between ATDC and Rightstay in Guwahati.

In order to promote Local Tourism in the state, ATDC intends to encourage organised, community based, environmentally and socially responsible Homestays across the region. Homestay is any traditional accommodation available/constructed aesthetically with best amenities and highest safety norms for the tourists. The objective to encourage such Homestays is so as to create a participative, sustainable eco-system which provides an alternate source of income for the locals and enhancing their livelihoods without straining their existing resources, thereby creating sustainable livelihood and creating large scale employment.

Under this agreement, Rightstay will lend its expertise to the state's tourism body to jointly promote homestays and enhance tourism in the state through packages for Assam. Assam Tourism Development Corporation will also work with MakeMyTrip to develop custom packages with MMT which will be promoted to enhance tourism in the state.

Homestays opened and promoted under this agreement will conform strictly to the high qualities and standards set by Assam Tourism Development Corporation Ltd. All Homestays registered with the ATDC will receive technical support in the form of inventory management and software applications to ensure seamless booking procedures, from

Rightstay. Both the ATDC and Rightstay will also jointly conduct educational and training sessions for registered Homestays on best practices such as hospitality, skill training online usage, content management, operations and expense management.

Speaking on the partnership, Deepak Tuli, Senior VP – Growth Business, MakeMyTrip said, "It is our honor to be associated with Assam Tourism Development Corporation. The state of Assam has 200 plus properties listed on our platform and homestays account for 40% of the total properties on the Rightstay. We look to grow aggressively in Assam and become the first OTA to heavily promote upcoming regions and homestays in the state. The state is a travel-friendly destination around the year and we look forward to making it one of our top markets for Rightstay. We have already had a head-start with more than 12,000 properties across 200 cities live on Rightstay with plans to end the year with 100,000 plus properties."

Anurag Singh, MD, ATDC Ltd said, "Assam Tourism will focus on quality homestays in the entire state. The rural Assam is a right place for tourists to experience the Assamese flavor of culture, nature and hospitality. Tourism Department of Assam has already launched a rural homestay scheme called "Aamaar Aalohi" on December 24, 2017. The focus area is to encourage rural and semi-urban people to participate in tourism and self-generate income by managing a homestay. We are happy that MakeMyTrip has come forward to engage with us to promote homestays and also develop good package for Assam."

Rightstay has recently signed MoU's with Andhra Tourism Development Board, Kumon Mandal Vikas Nigam towards strategic promotion of homestays and other government owned properties as well as a higher promotion of upcoming tourist destinations in these regions.

Rightstay is an independent platform from MakeMyTrip and the application is currently available on Android and web. It provides alternative stay options like villa, residential apartments, homestays and guest houses and enables customers to rent unique places that offer great, authentic experience at affordable prices. In search of authentic experiences, travellers are now looking for diverse accommodation options and with Rightstay, MakeMyTrip offers a 'home away home' experience to the customers. The objective is to also leverage the demand, traffic and brand advantage that MakeMyTrip has created in the travel market and its unique position in the alternate accommodation category.

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ROOMS APLENTY

With demands for space for hosting MICE travellers, there's a huge potential in banqueting and three to five star rooms in Kolkata

KOLKATA is all set to add two to three hotels in the 'mid-market upscale' to 'super-luxury' segments with approximately 2000 rooms added by the next year. Global

"JW Marriott has already started operating with 180 rooms. At least two major hospitality projects (Westin and Holiday Inn) are also expected to open their doors in the next few months," said Sudesh Poddar, the president of Hotel and Restaurant Association of India and treasurer of the Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Association of India (FHRAI).

But that's not all. With nearly seven hotels to become operational in the next three to four years, Kolkata is set to double the room capacity in the four to seven star segments. All the projects are in various stages of construction.

Moreover, there are more projects awaiting clearances to start construction. Will the increased supply bring down tariffs in city hotels?

According to a report by consulting firm HVS, based on data sourced from apex industry association (FHRAI), the average rates in 2014-15 were Rs 4,867, lower than Rs 5,230 in 2013-14. Occupancy rates have also gone down to 67.7 per cent in 2014-15 from 70 per cent in 2013-14.

According to HVS, these new rooms, adding to the existing inventory of around 2,530 rooms, will put pressure on rents in the short-to medium-term. In other words, both occupancy and average rate may be under pressure, but gradually the city will absorb the additional rooms and gradually improve its performance in the long-term.

Nationally, the hospitality industry, which has seen a slight recovery in occupancy in 2014-15 after a stagnation in the preceding two years, is expecting the improving trend to continue in 2016-17 as well. But net income will remain constrained by the growing

supply of rooms and rising expenses.

And is Kolkata really ready for so many swanky ultra-luxury hotels? Top hoteliers say it is both a challenge and an opportunity and will rebrand the city as an attractive convention destination. Some believe Kolkata is going to be the next big thing among India cities with respect to corporate movement and tours.

"But despite so many new rooms Calcutta's average occupancy per se hasn't dropped. This indicates that new business is happening," says Pramode Bhandari, GM, The Park Hotels. He points out that air connectivity is better with more flights and more new destinations added to itinerary of travellers in this area. "Ever since the new terminal of the airport in Calcutta opened, there are so many new flights, such as Dragon Air and Novoair, that have started operation here. There are even two weekly flights to Yangon (Myanmar)! Obvi-

ously business is looking up, otherwise why will all these airlines come."

According to him, all the new properties that are coming up now actually kicked off five-six years back. They are coming to completion now. "There may not be tremendous growth, neither there will be a bloodbath due to tough competition but the growth opportunity will be neutralised by the addition of new rooms. I am not worried at all, on the contrary, feeling happy and excited that this is going to bring in more business for us."

Chennai, too, had gone through a similar phase in 2012, when 1,200 super-deluxe rooms were added at one go. Industry experts feared occupancy would plummet, but the reverse happened. Shift of MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions or events) from Mumbai and Hyderabad to Chennai owing to cheaper room rates spurred the growth.

The same is forecast for Kolkata,



► Several projects are at different stages of construction in the city

PRICE WAR



only it is expected to draw the MICE business from Delhi and Gurugram. Ranju Alex, GM of JW Marriott Kolkata, said: "Kolkata, with its unique character and soul, is a significant addition to the MICE map globally . Our property could now be a new destination for global conferences and in that sense, it is a huge leap for the business sector and beyond." Also the hotel is heavily banking on weddings as almost all slots booked months ahead.

Echoes Bhandari, "I am also a bit more optimistic with the new banqueting facilities and the huge conference venues coming up in the the New Town area. More conferences will translate into more business travellers. And they will need more rooms to stay overnight. The MICE segment is really going to be hot here," he says.

Dilip Mishra, resident manager, Lalit Great Eastern, also feels they'll not be hit much by the competi-

tion."We won't be much affected by the price war because we are a heritage hotel. We offer a unique experience to our customers who look for special care. Our customers belong to a group who look for specific services that only we can offer."

Even heads of non-luxury hotels are not that worried. Said Vinay Thakur, GM, Pride Hotel, "I don't think tariff will go down because still there is a huge demand of rooms in the city. Especially in the peak season —say November to February—the hotels run in sold out rates. The demand is far greater than the supply. I don't think tariff will go down in upscale hotels. Moreover, since these new hotels belong to the luxury category they may create some pressure on the rents of similar hotels (such as the Taj Bengal and ITC Sonar). However, if we have hotels with 100 room inventory this won't make a difference. There's still a huge demand of rooms in this category."

Kolkata, with its unique character and soul, is a significant addition to the MICE map globally. Moreover, the new banqueting facilities and the huge conference venue coming up in the the New Town area will surely draw more business travellers

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WALK THE TECH

Technology is playing a key role in powering the housekeepers' role as the newer design concepts make their lives easier



A RESEARCH from Europe reported that almost 70 per cent of hotel guests say that cleanliness and hygiene are the most important factor they consider when selecting a hotel. Even new hotel startups in India are now aggressively promoting themselves with the 'cleanliness' tag. Photos of guest rooms showcasing hygiene and cleanliness has been one of the most important deciding factors for guests while choosing to stay at any proper-

ty. Guests often associate the cleanliness of common areas with the possibility of getting an equally spick and span guest room. On the other hand, the same hotels could lose business if guests are exposed to the dusty lobby floors and damaged chandeliers. To keep a hotel clean is a continuous process that has to take place as subtly as possible. Hotel guests look out for a pleasant experience during their stay at the hotel.

In today's era where the hospitality

industry is facing several challenges such as shortage of labour and skills, ensuring consistent delivery as per the brand promise is prime objective. The solution lies in the fact that one must deploy right software tools to minimise risk management and make guests feel comfortable and safe. Thus, today when technology is making big strides in all the segments of the hospitality business, the housekeeping department is no exception. With such a significant role on the

shoulders of the housekeeping staff, they are continuously adopting and upgrading technology for their own good. The clipboards have been replaced by housekeeping mobile apps along with other technological innovations which is easing the professional lives of housekeepers.

The future is all set to be governed by the technological revolution. Realising the same, the hotels are hugely investing in improving its technological adaptation. From hard broom to manual sweeping machine, from wet mop to wet vacuum cleaner, from cobweb brush to back pack vacuum cleaner and from carpet brush to dry vacuum cleaner, all are fine reflections of the transition that the technological advancement has brought about in the hospitality industry.

Driving force

Recent technological innovations also include the introduction of gondola to clean high-rise building glasses, battery run wireless vacuum cleaner machines to clean busy banquet areas and restaurants, without disturbing guest and leaving no chances for the guests to trip and fall. The initiation of the software in mobiles which help floor supervisors to change the status of rooms and trace the location of the floor attendants without the help of the housekeeping desk, is a revolutionary change.

The most important technological trend which has made a difference is the ease of communication with a group of people through apps such as Whatsapp and the likes. Communication has taken a leap into the future from the fixed phones to Whatsapping. This has made communication simpler by sharing in groups. One tap and all are informed!

On a safer side, the introduction of Radio Frequency Identification Reader in the laundry operations is helping in reducing manual laundry sorting by providing an accurate wash count



► Hygiene and cleanliness are key factors for most guests

records and reducing loss and theft. The use of live chip to track the linen movement is another commendable example of technological assistance. Linen inventory which is a tedious task becomes live and so does tracking of those guests who try to take the linen home.

Time saving

Earlier housekeeping was about high staff turnover caused by a repetitive and physically demanding job

and pressure to deliver clean rooms quickly at the lowest possible cost. But today the technological revolution has taken the housekeeping operations to a new level of ease altogether. Housekeeping divisions are utilising technology to save time and in bringing clarity in processes. Tech-savvy hotels are using tab-based in-room solutions, maintenance slips have been replaced by the 'Triton', RF-ID systems are being used to track linen and mini screen displays have



Some of the technology leveraged by the housekeeping departments has been iPads and smart phones with specific applications, kiosk-based stations and text message modules to address guests' grievances

► **Mobile apps assist in real-time monitoring**

replaced door bells, thus saving time and energy.

Mobile apps are assisting in real time control and monitoring, helping in saving time and increasing efficiency by eliminating day-to-day double entries. Room history too, is now being maintained in the IDS software along with complaints management to eliminate recurring issues. With such efficient use of technology, the housekeeping divisions in the hotels are delivering service and managing manpower, making cleaning 10 - 20 times faster and managing manpower productively and effectively.

Some of the technology leveraged by the housekeeping departments has been iPads and smart phones with specific housekeeping applications, kiosk-based stations and text message modules to address guests' requests and grievances rapidly. Complaints from guests are now addressed faster through text messages rather than through staff stationed at a desk.

Changing designs

With newer designs and eco-friendly setups taking centre stage, hotels are constantly striving to ensure that an

optimum balance is achieved between design and functionality. There are a lot of innovations in the last decade or so which have made the life of housekeeper more relaxed. Moreover, any innovation which is introduced somewhere globally reaches the other part of the world swiftly in this age of internet. Currently, the trend in the hotel industry is to keep the rooms and public areas as clutter-free as possible and we practice the same at our hotel. However, this is possible when the hotels are designed keeping emphasis on simplicity and elegance in design coupled with maximum practicality, which surely has optimised housekeepers' work..

The changing design concepts of guest room and public areas of hotels have definitely impacted the operational aspects. Lesser furniture, more compact rooms have made maximum utilisation of space. Replacement of bed covers by duvets have simplified bed-making and has contributed towards reducing the turnaround time of hotel rooms and increased productivity. Similar transformations have happened in public areas too. Concrete, wood, limestone and sandstone

have got replaced by glasses, stainless steel and man-made floorings, she highlights. While replacement with glasses and stainless steel has increased the work load again, the introduction of man-made floorings has made cleanliness and maintenance easy and more cost-effective.

From a housekeeper's perspective, the changing design concept of guest rooms and public areas in a hotel has definitely reduced the work load. "With the escalating use of latest technology adopted by hotels globally, the work burden for the housekeeping staff has become more efficient and well-organised. In the era that we live in today, technology has become an integral part of our lives. All industries, big or small, depend on some form of technology to increase the productivity of their businesses. The hotel industry is among the most prominent industries to make use of modern technology to bring ease into their day-to-day assignments. While the housekeeping department's daily responsibilities can be monotonous and tedious, the rapidly changing design concepts undertaken by the hotel are certainly making their jobs easier.

Seven exciting destinations



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WAR ON CASH

THE GREAT 8/11 KNOCK

Demonetisation has surely affected the hospitality and tourism sector in the short term. But eventually the industry is expected to bounce back and flourish

HOTEL bookings down, despite reduces package rates. Year-end travel plans go for a toss due to demonitisation. MoT claims inbound tourism & earnings unaffected by demonitisation. 50% drop in tourism to Kodai-kanal due to demonitisation. City hotels introduce 'Marry Now Pay Later' scheme. OTAs launch Mega 'Cashless Travel Carnival'. Demonitisation: Hotel industry earnings drop by 50% in Mysuru. 37.4% travellers choose plastic money over cash, says OTA survey.

These news headlines culled from newspapers, online news sites and hospitality periodicals reflect the impact of demonitisation in the hospitality sector quite succinctly. There is no denying that the Prime Minister's "surgical strike" on unaccounted cash in the country has had an unprecedented collateral damage on the hospitality and tourism sector. But in the midst of black clouds of crises a silver linings of opportunity can be

spotted in the horizon.

Since a major part of the unorganised sector--small hotels and restaurants-- operate through cash transaction the impact was hard on them. Star hotels and big travel agents didn't suffer much because they've shifted to cashless transaction quite a few years back. However, food and beverage business got affected across the board.

"Until this November, the hospitality industry had been doing brisk business in these parts of the country. However, the gains got somewhat reversed after the demonitisation drive," says Sudesh Poddar, President HRAEL. "Over the short and medium terms, this will have varied effects on sections of the hospitality industry in the country, but in the long-term, it will positively impact the growth of the hospitality sector."

In other words, with more flow of cash the stress on the business will certainly ease out to some extent. However, some customers are moving to the organized sector

Time to expand?

- Since much of the country's real-estate transactions have been conducted on a largely cash basis to avoid taxes, property sales have taken a beating across the country. With many buyers now on the sidelines, huge price discounts are expected when the market gets its bearings back with more liquid cash flowing in.
- The demonitisation move has certainly hit the real-estate market. According to PropEquity, a real-estate data and analytics provider in India, uncertainty and the sharp decline in demand will likely push down the values of property in the country's top cities by up to 30% over the next year. The cash crunch also creates a headache for many home builders who have borrowed heavily from private lenders at interest rates as high as 20 % a year. The developers typically rely on sales of new apartments to generate cash needed to service their debt. If sales slow, builders might need to slash prices to generate cash.
- The crisis in real-estate sector can turn into an opportunity for wannabe investors in the hospitality sector. They will get opportunity to buy property at a vastly reduced price.
- However, for existing players in the unorganised sector the situation is completely different. Demonitisation has hit them hard, especially in the food and beverage business that depend heavily on cash transactions. Also smaller hotels that largely deal in hard cash has yet to recover from the demonitisation tsunami.
- Usually the winter months—the festivity, weddings and year end bash—is their peak business time. But this year, the middle class customer has been busy standing in the queue in ATM or bank counters for hard cash. Naturally small and medium players in the hospitality sector wants the average customer to be back on the table and the counter.
- So for an average hotelier—who make the majority of our members in the region—are still reeling in cash crunch. Investment in the real estate or expansion of existing business is not in his mind at the moment.

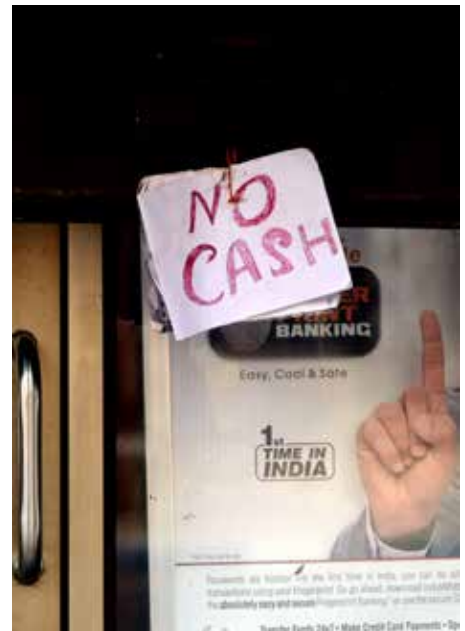


► No respite from long queues at ATM

due to ease of alternate modes of payment. Also the organized banqueting business is witnessing growth, as customers are shifting to the almost cash-only unorganized sector of standalone party venues and farm houses to hotels for want of non-cash means of payment. On the plus side, weddings business is returning to Indian hotels from their overseas counterparts, as unofficial channels for offshore transfers of cash have dried up, forcing the cancellation of many Indian weddings from foreign locales back to hotel

venues in India.

The hospitality and the tourism sectors provide a large number of direct and indirect jobs in the country. The unorganised section of the industry also happens to be the largest job creator. Says Poddar, "The vibrant and innovative hospitality industry is also quite resilient. So we expect to bounce back with creative ways to deal with the impact, from value additions, offers and shifts in spending patterns." Mobile phone based payment is already turning out into a norm in the sector.



Shadow on GST

- Demonetisation's shadow loomed large over Goods and Services Tax (GST) roll out discussions as states drew a hard bargain demanding extra compensation to offset tax revenue losses in wake of the currency culling move.
- Under law, the Centre will have to fully compensate states for any revenue loss for five years after migrating to the new tax system. The Centre estimates total compensation to states for losses arising from a transition to GST to be around Rs 55,000 crore in the first year.
- This will be met through a corpus generated by the levy of the clean environment cess on coal, also cesses to be levied on demerit goods such as tobacco, luxury cars, pan masala and aerated drinks.
- Many states are now pushing the Centre for a grand bargain of sorts, seeking higher compensation for revenue loss on account of demonetisation. States have argued that the economy-wide cash-crunch following the unexpected ban on Rs 500 and Rs 1000 currency notes in November has hurt their revenues.



E-WALLET

TAKE THE TECH LEAP

It's time to learn to love the mobile wallet. Wave goodbye to your wallet, chuck out your change, cut up your credit cards.

TWO months ago Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared that the currency notes of 500 and 1000 denominations would no longer be legal tender post midnight on that day. Since the demonetisation announcement, a lot has happened and it wouldn't be wrong to say that almost every single citizen of this country has been affected by this decision. While some have been in full support of the demone-

tisation, some have expressed their doubts and some have gone as far as to call it an outright mistake. But there is no denying that technology has played a key role in this entire month - be it through digital payments, mobile wallets, locating an ATM with cash or helping people express their opinion about this decision.

But has it all been beneficial? If yes, how much? Let us have a look

at some of the most significant tech milestones and statistics from the past two months.

Mobile wallets and Digital payments

Without cash in the people's hands, the only way to go immediately was electronic payments. Now, those two words encompass a wide array of payment methods like debit or credit cards, mobile wallets, online transfers and more. Needless to say, in most cases, retail stores have mostly been using cards. In fact, as revealed by RBI there are nearly 75 crore electronic cards in the country out of which 72 crores are debit cards. These are mostly used by the general populace to withdraw money from ATMs. The most common way these are used for digital payments is at PoS terminals at retail stores. Now, these retail stores obtain these (Point of Sales) PoS machines from their banks, which normally charges them an MDR (Merchant Discount Rate) which in the end gets charged to the customer. But to encourage card payments during this period, banks have waived off such charges associated with card payments.

When it comes to mobile wallets, the effects were almost immediate. According to Paytm, the company registered a 200% hike in a number of app downloads and 250% surge in the number of overall transactions and transaction value within hours of the announcement on November 9. The number of Saved Cards also grew by 30% during that time, pointing at a strong set of repeat customers the platform has now acquired. The company had noted 1000% growth in money added to the wallet and 400% growth in the transaction value of offline payments at the same time. All of this culminated to the over



► **Cards, ATMs and PoS will also be redundant**

435% increase in Paytm's overall traffic within hours on Nov 8. One wouldn't be too wrong in saying that while there are a lot of options and alternatives when it comes to mobile wallets, Paytm does seem to be the popular choice, which could be due to their prolonged presence in the market coupled with their aggressive marketing across all platforms.

Big risks

But on the other hands, these numbers and accomplishments are to be taken with a bit of salt. According to recent numbers released by RBI, it does appear that mobile wallets have been bloating the numbers before announcing them. For example, according to Paytm, they are registering about 32.5 lakh transactions worth ₹60 crores daily. However, according to RBI in the initial days of December, 8 mobile wallets and payment services had approximately 25 lakh transactions worth ₹60 crore made across them.

Also, while these platforms do claim to be secure at multiple levels, it is true that online transactions, even more so on the mobile, do come with their own share of risk and you should be extremely careful about which network you are on when you are using, say, your bank's mobile app. Needless to say, download these apps only from official sources like the Google Play Store or the App Store. At the same time, it's encouraging to see that apps and service providers are taking steps to secure their apps. At the time of writing this PayTM just announced an app password feature on their mobile app that lets you set a secure Pin, Password, Pattern or Fingerprint to use the app.

Offline India

But the immediate question that arises is - how will the offline India, the part that has no access to the internet or maybe even a smartphone, get themselves out of this? The answer once again lies

within technology. Take Tonetag for example. They have a sound based model of payments between smartphones which they recently expanded to feature phones as well. All a user needs to do is to call a toll-free number and register their card details for the first time, and when they are at a Tonetag enabled vendor, they need to call the toll free number. The merchant will then play a specific tone from his Tonetag enabled phone which will be processed by the IVR servers behind the call, which in turn will process the payment - all without internet from the customer's side. Paytm has also implemented an offline payment method via a phone call that works on your existing Paytm wallet.

Advice to hoteliers

It's time to learn to love the mobile wallet. Wave goodbye to your wallet, chuck out your change, cut up your credit cards. But, before you do all that, make sure you keep

your mobile phone.

Why? Because, in the future your mobile device may be how you pay your way via your 'mobile wallet'. For the hospitality industry this includes hotel rooms, room service and all sorts of ancillary services from spa treatments to cabs to and from the airport.

To put it simply, mobile payment transactions using mobile wallets have exploded.

West side story

According to Gartner research, mobile wallet payments were roughly \$171.5bn in 2012, a 62% rise from \$105.9 billion in 2011. In 2012, roughly 212 million people worldwide made mobile payments, up 32% from nearly 160 million users in 2011.

The leaders when it comes to facilitating mobile wallet technology are the retailers, with companies like Starbucks and McDonald's already building in capabilities in response to customer demand.

It's time for hoteliers to sit up and take notice. Gartner also states that it expects mobile transactions to be worth more than \$600bn with more global users than there are people living in the USA by 2016.

The growing importance of mobiles (and the release of 4G) is not something that hoteliers are choosing to ignore. Most hoteliers will tell you that while mobile is the channel experiencing the greatest increase for browsing, the challenge is converting browsers to bookers.

Making mobile wallets work for the hospitality industry is a two way street – customers need to have confidence in mobile payment systems and hoteliers need to make payment processes simpler.

The good news is that mainstream payment methods from brands like

Google (Wallet), Barclay's (Pingit) and PayPal have already signed up tens of millions of users. It is also worth noting that WEVE (a collaboration between EE, O2 and Vodafone) is planning to launch a mobile wallet. Apple's Passbook should not be ruled out either.

The next step for hoteliers is to address mcommerce and make

TYPES OF E-WALLETS

In general, as per the RBI, there are three kinds of e-wallets—closed, semi-closed and open

- Closed wallet: A closed wallet is one that a company issues to its consumers for in-house goods and services only. These instruments do not carry the advantage of cash withdrawal or redemption. Several online shopping portals such as Flipkart, Jabong and MakeMyTrip offer such closed wallets. It is basically an account where money gets credited in case of a refund due to cancellation or return.
- Semi-closed wallet: In the payments space, companies such as Mobikwik, PayU and Paytm offer semi-closed wallets. As per the RBI, a semi-closed wallet can be used for goods and services, including financial services, at select merchant locations or establishments that have a contract with the issuing company to accept these payment instruments. Semi-closed wallets do not permit cash withdrawal or redemption by the holder as well.
- Open wallet: Such wallets can be used for purchase of goods and services, including financial services such as funds transfer at merchant locations or point-of-sale terminals that accept cards, and also cash withdrawals at automated teller machines

their websites more mobile payment friendly.

However, it is important that existing systems are not just mobile-enabled – a mobile strategy needs fresh thought particularly when considering privacy and security.

Interestingly, Gartner research states 60% of companies will have no mobile strategy in 2014, a statistic we hope will improve as awareness levels grow, particularly of the commercial benefits.

Once they have taken this crucial step, hoteliers will be able to integrate their services and market anything from restaurant deals to exclusive spa promotions direct to guests.

Mobile payments can also be linked with back-office tools such as a hotel's property management system (PMS) or customer relationship management (CRM) system, allowing hoteliers to see what preferences guests have and be much more tailored in terms of what they offer.

Only a few hoteliers who have achieved this level of success, however, it is on the horizon for many. Whether mobile wallets will become as ubiquitous as credit cards in a few years is yet to be determined.

But as we move into 2017 it will be interesting to see where customers place their bets, and how hoteliers will take advantage of the new technology.

Next year's Hospitality Technology Europe hopes to address these challenges from both a commercial and a technological point of view.

As the industry matures, it is imperative for the key stakeholders to address these challenges to ensure growth in customer base, transaction volumes and business.

BENGAL IS SHOWING THE WAY



Mr Pramode Bhandari is regarded as the leading light among the top star hotel general managers in the city who graduated from Institute Hotel Management at Taratala in the early 1990s. Mr Bhandari, who started his career way back in 1992, as an operational management trainee in The Taj Bengal Hotel, has now gradually risen to the top of one of the finest hotels in India. Mr Bhandari, General Manager, The Park Hotels discussed the status of hospitality sector and more with Mystic East in an exclusive interview.

Nearly 2000 rooms are going to be added to the hotel inventory in Kolkata in the coming months in all categories (basic to luxury). Is there a market for such a growth spurt?

Certainly a lot of rooms are being added. But you have to look at this from a broader perspective of the country. In the last few years, 'India Story' is making a lot of waves across the world. The economy in the country has been quite robust—with GDP over 7 per cent—and there's been a positive vibe when compared to financial scenario in the rest of the world. Corresponding to this Bengal story is also positive.

You may not find big ticket investments but the overall mood is positive with a stable government in the state. Because of all these an organic growth is happening in the market. For instance, JW Marriott recently opened its doors with 180 rooms in the luxury segment. Westin and Holiday Inn are ready to open doors. More properties are coming up in 3-4star categories too. But despite all these Calcutta's average occupancy per se hasn't dropped. This indicates that new business is happening.

Also the domestic market in India has gone up. As per data domestic hotel consumption market has grown 6-8 per cent. This is because the middle class people are travelling more frequently; they have more disposable income. Air connectivity is better with more flights and more destinations. So all these factors have definitely left an

impact in Bengal also. Ever since the new terminal of the airport in Calcutta opened we have so many new flights—Dragon Air, Novoair, Golden Myanmar and so on. We have two weekly flights to Yangon! Obviously business is happening.

Besides, all the new properties that are coming up now actually kicked off five-six years back. They are only coming to completion now. There is certainly a market; there may not be a tremendous growth but you can expect a steady one. In the long run, there will be good business.

Can you give us some statistical figures that prove Bengal is indeed showing the way?

Well, Rs 6000 crores investment is going live in FY 2016-17 with more than 800 rooms being added to Kolkata's hospitality space. Furthermore Rs 1500 crores are ready to go live in 2018-19 with the country's largest Convention Centre coming up in Rajarhat. Bengal is fifth across India in terms of foreign tourist arrival, according to the Ministry of Tourism data. The state also ranks among the top 10 states in terms of domestic tourist footfalls

Won't it set off a tariff war among most of the players in the hospitality sector?

Tariff war always happens in the market, especially when the demand goes down. On the flip side, because of technology hotels are able to better strategise on their price; you can forecast better. We use ARR and RevPar—

two common yardsticks to better strategise aided by latest data science.

We look at this over a period and not just one or two days. A period of months, six months, or a quarter. Price war will always be there in a competitive market.

So you feel the the impact on ARR and occupancy will be okay, despite tough competition?

Believe me, things are going to stabilise. And there will be organic growth. I don't think the market is going to crash or there will be any bloodbath. Nothing like that.

For instance, during the summer months—the off season—rates go down. There is a dip in occupancy, but later it just shoots up. It stabilises.

How is demonetisation affecting the hospitality sector in the state and the rest of the country?

There is definitely an impact on the food and beverage business and banqueting. At least 15–20 per cent of the business has been hit. But rooms—NO. Because most of our business is online these days. Payments are online. Corporate travellers use plastic money and travel cards. However, many low-end hotels still do a lot of cash transaction. Overall impact can be felt in the F&B side in all categories.

However, as more cash is being dispensed the problems in the F&B sector is also going to be eased out soon. I hope in the next three months there will be enough cash in the market. And we should come back to normalcy on all fronts.

What is your general outlook in Eastern India, considering the huge untapped potential in the North Eastern side?

A large swathe part of Eastern India

Room bookings haven't been hit hard by demonetisation effect in the luxury segment as cashless transaction has been happening for quite some time. But the F&B sector has certainly been hit for the time being. With more cash flow things are expected to ease out

is still a virgin destination for tourists from across the world. I believe all the north eastern states must get their act together and go for a combined marketing campaign to take it to the next level. For instance, the West Bengal government – I mean the tourism department of the state—has been extremely active in the space for the last few years. Perhaps it's been 20 times more aggressive than it had been before. The Beautiful Bengal campaign and the allied developments have been spectacular. Now they have hired Shah Rukh Khan as their brand ambassador. They are also attending all important international markets—trying to reach out to the global traveller.

Some states in North Eastern India is doing this in pockets, but not as aggressively as Bengal. I think all the states—in the East and North East—must get together to market themselves in a better way. For instance, our MD Mr Vijay Dewan is the tourism committee chairman of at Confederation of Indian Industries

(CII). CII works aggressively on the theme 'Destination East' which will happen in February. There are 102 international buyers who have confirmed their attendance in this meet. And it's not just about North East—the entire East will be projected. And Bengal is taking the lead. This shows things are moving ahead fast. But lot more needs to be done.

We guys at the hospitality sectors are the partners in the development. We also need a lot of incentives. For example, not just hotels, it holds true for the airlines too. We have been asking the government to reduce the price of Air Traffic Fuel (ATF) so that airfare comes down a little more. This will encourage more airlines to arrive in eastern India and bring in more travellers and tourists.

How can tourism and hospitality work in tandem?

Bond between these two sectors have been strengthened by technology. A traveller can now book her airticket and hotel conveniently through a smartphone. She can find, book and pay with just a few taps on her phone. These things also have helped a lot to increase the business a lot of both the sectors.

So you think the year 2017 will be a good one?

I think this is going to be a stable year; there's nothing to be sad. The hospitality sector in Calcutta has done on an average 68 per cent business last year. City will maintain this level. Mumbai's figure is 74, Delhi, 65-64. We are like average. I am also a bit more optimistic with the new banqueting facilities and the huge conference venue in the city. More conferences will translate into more business travellers. And they will need more rooms to stay overnight. The MICE segment is going to be hot.



GENDER GAP

WOMEN'S RISE ON TOP

Today, women form an intrinsic part of the hospitality enterprise's operations. They're breaking out of the paradigm and taking charge as some of the top officials of the industry

THE hospitality experience would prove to be quite incomplete, without the charming smile of a woman. It is undeniable that women have excelled in this sector not only in India, but all over the world. The feminine touch indeed lends grace and elegance to the hospitality industry. In fact, it would only be fair to say that the industry today holds more potential for women than ever before.

One might think that being a woman might be a disadvantage in a work arena where long hours, steep stress levels and crisis management are common place. However, women have come out trumps, and worked twice as hard to do a better job than their male peers. Women now enjoy prominent positions in what was once perceived to be a man's domain. "Hotels demand long hours because our guests are arriving at all hours. This specially happens when you are just starting out in your career and that is when most women drop out into their home keepers or an alternate career. Moreover there used to be a certain taboo in our country regarding women working in hotels. A lot has changed in the past two decades and we are now waking up to the need to have more women working in hotels," says Ranju Alex, General Manager, JW Marriott Kolkata and Multi Property Vice President, East India.

When ability, instead of your post, commands respect, gender becomes irrelevant. It's important to convince your staff of your competence. That done, being a woman makes no difference," adds T.S. Walia, vice president Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associationn of india.

Shoulder to shoulder

Women are a growing part of the work force. According to an analysis of female employment by the International Labour Office, over the past several decades, a larger percentage of wom-

There used to be a certain taboo in our country regarding women working in hotels. A lot has changed and we are now waking up to the need to have more women working in hotels

en have joined the workforce: 33 per cent in 1960, 43 per cent in 1980 and 45 per cent in 1990. In 2003, 40 per cent of the world's 2.8 billion workers were women. Between 1995 and 2015, the global female labour force participation rate decreased from 52.4 to 49.6 percent. The corresponding figures for men are 79.9 and 76.1 percent, respectively. Worldwide, the chances for women to participate in the labour market remain almost 27 percentage points lower than those for men. Since 1995, women's employment in services has increased from 41.1 percent to 61.5 percent.

According to the ILO, women make up over 90 per cent of all employees in the catering and accommodation operations. It's about time then to give women their due — acknowledge and appreciate their contribution to the global travel and hospitality industry.

"A hotel kitchen is considered to be primarily a male dominated place. It is probably one of the most stressful places as well, but I think that gender biases belong in history books.

If you're tough enough, the world is your oyster," adds Walia.

Moreover, the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has finalised a broad-based action plan designed to highlight and uplift the role of women as employers, employees and travellers. At a forum convened at ITB Berlin in March 2008, a special UNWTO Women in Tourism initiative was started. This initiative is designed to raise and maintain awareness about the social and economic opportunities that tourism can offer to women; stress the need for appropriate policy frameworks to promote women's empowerment and protect women's rights in tourism, and encourage the public and private sectors to facilitate the achievement of gender equality in tourism development. However, regardless of these improvements, women continue to be inequitably hired, promoted and rewarded.

The glass ceiling syndrome

The glass ceiling syndrome refers to invisible artificial barriers that prevent qualified women from advancing within their organisations and reaching their full potential. Though this term was popularised in the 1980s, when it became a significant concept in the United States, its application to this day is apt.

The concept describes a tendency for women to be over represented at lower levels of the industry, and under represented at senior levels. Therefore, women must re-invent the wheel and prove themselves time and again, in order to make a mark in the competitive industry.

While women comprise almost half the work force, the number of women in mid-management level is still low. This is where the term glass ceiling comes from. The authors of the book 'Breaking with tradition: Women and Work', describe this phenomenon through the management pyramid by showing the representation that



► **Women executives agree there is a lack of a level ground amongst the HR leaders in the industry**

women have at different levels of management in any industry.

Gender bender

Although most top management and decision makers in the industry have been increasingly sensitive to the issue of women executives in the workplace, they remain hesitant in changing the corporate profiles of their top management to reflect a greater diversity of thinking and building an innovative mix of professionals.

According to section 30 of the Punjab Excise Act, 1914, “No person who is licensed to sell any liquor or intoxicating drug for consumption on his

premises shall during the hours in which such premises are kept open for business, employ or permit to be employed either with or without remuneration, any man under the age of 25 years or any women in any part of such premises in which such liquor or intoxicating drug is consumed by the public.” However, what is of interest is that the bar on women got struck down as being unconstitutional, when the Delhi High Court decided the case Hotel Association of India and others vs. Union of India on January 12, 2008.

Two of the petitioners of this case were graduates of hotel management,

looking for a career in the hospitality industry. They had challenged that section 30 imposed unconstitutional restrictions upon the rights of women to pursue their profession in hotel management and other facets of the hospitality industry.

Women executives today agree that there is a lack of a level ground amongst the HR leaders in the industry. However, their claim is that the increased pressure on them to perform only makes it more interesting. “Every career can be challenging to a woman, but it is up to you to step up to the occasion and work past the biases,” says Vinaay Malhotra, vice



► **With changing times the traditional gender roles have undergone a relative change**

president, Hotel and Restaurant Association of Esatern India (HRAEI).

Women perceive sexual harassment in the work place as an ongoing problem. Women are sometimes forced to leave the hospitality industry due to gender discrimination and sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is simply not just about the employment decisions based on an individual's acceptance or rejection of sexual advances. It also includes constantly being present in an environment of flirtatious and suggestive advances, and a casual attitude towards respecting the other.

However, it's interesting to note that women have smartened up today. "They recognise that it is all a part and parcel of their job, and on their part probably only play acting, rather than real life," says Sylvia H Chant, in her book, 'Women of a lesser cost'. She explains with an example: A waitress who has just finished an embarrassingly lengthy conversation with a group of middle aged men, turns around, gives me a wink, and exclaims 'these men are all the same'.

It's obvious from this scenario that

the woman in question seemed to be considerably aware that she was subscribing to stereotypical behaviour as part of her job. Although she was not particularly comfortable with this idea, it was clear that the customers — instead of her — were the ones being taken in.

Caring for the comfort of others, preparing and serving food are quintessentially gender-based stereotypical 'women's activities'. These activities call for the exercise of implied skills widely assumed to reflect the 'inherent aptitudes' possessed by women. The cultural mindset in a country like India is that of a male dominated work environment. Sometimes, this is also considered as the reason for a wage gap between male and female employees in the industry. Lower wages account for the movement of women to better paying and more 'respectable' professions and higher paying fields.

The concept is also closely related to the employers' perceptions of economic advantage, rather than gender preferences. They want cheap workers and are not bothered about the

gender of the employees. However, it is interesting to note that low-paid and part time workers are women, more often than not.

It is a misconception within the industry that women have a preference for part time work and are willing to accept jobs that provide them less than subsistence wages. In fact, when it comes to women, the hospitality industry is notorious for high labour turnover levels.

The gendered categories of occupations are those prescribed by patriarchal perceptions. The social dynamics which reinforce the recruitment to and the exclusion from these occupations are what make women the nurturers and men the patriarchs.

It is the done thing in our patriarchal society, if men do not spend as much time as women on domestic chores. However, with changing times, the traditional gender roles have also undergone a relative change. Men today actively support the female counterparts in their families to work outside the house. However, according to a study on 'Women's Perceptions of Glass Ceilings in Private Organisations', this may well not be true. While a majority of men (40 per cent) claimed that they were supportive of their wife's occupations, only 21 per cent women accepted that their husbands were supportive of their career choices. It is no wonder then, that on an average women take much longer compared to men to grow within the industry.

The juggling act

Women in the industry are constantly faced with work-family conflict. Hospitality management is not a nine-to-five job. Success in the industry demands long hours, a great deal of stress management, and problem solving. Their commitment to family and children has hampered the growth prospects of women in the past. However, women are juggling



Percentage of women employees across the organisation

Senior (1.6%) Management	Women = 3%
Upper (10.9%) Management	Women = 11%
Middle (29.7%) Management	Women = 26%
Entry-Level (57.8%) Management	Women = 50%

both comfortably.

Unlike in the west, most women in India don't even get adequate maternity leave; nor do they have access to good crèches and conveniences. Nonetheless, the spirit of the Indian working woman is salute worthy. Women in India leave home early, and manage work shifts as well as household chores.

"The key to the cycle lies in effective use of one's time. From there on, it just takes care of itself," says Walia. The need of the hour is to understand as employers that both men and women bring different qualities to the table. Every individual is different, so classifying them on the basis of gender is also not fair. It's all about igniting the spark of leadership in each employee.

There prevails today a positive attitude towards women's advancement and professional growth. Though the socio-cultural set up of our society has played a large part in women's profes-

sional backwardness in this industry, most women will not let family be an obstacle to their careers.

Changing tradition

Thus, if women are addressed by policy and programme, their presence as the major contributors to growth in industrial production and household savings is recognised, and their participation ensured in the designing aspect of planned development of the sector, it would strengthen the achievement of the overall objectives of growth that this industry has set for itself.

Women in the sector are changing perceptions and age old ideas that the hospitality industry is not a 'decent' sector to be in. To survive in this industry, a woman needs to more than just good looking and charming. Hence they are welcoming every challenge. They meet interesting people from a wide range of backgrounds, observe their behaviour at a close range, and thus make more critical assessments of their own positions. They use the opportunities they get to travel around the world, and expose themselves to new environments. Women have now understood that if they prove their mettle, they have a great scope for promotion within the industry.

Says Ms Alex, "Women have a natural charm and grace which fits well for this profession. Marriott International has taken a lot of steps to ensure that more women join our workforce."

Today's woman expects no concessions on the basis of gender and has made light work of glass ceilings. She believes that the pathway to success for men as well as women is paved with talent, hard work and ambition. The fast paced industry is no less than a gladiatorial arena, complete with competition and theatrics and women are showing that they are as tough, if not more, than the boys.

Today's woman expects no concessions on the basis of gender. She believes that the pathway to success for men as well as women is paved with talent, hard work and ambition



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WATCHDOG ON A ROLL

After cracking down on noodles and milk, central food safety watchdog FSSAI is now turning to alcoholic beverages with plans to set up standards for drinks including beer and whiskey



► **FSSAI states that the ethyl alcohol in alcoholic beverages shall be of agricultural origin**

FOOD Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) recently released the draft standards for alcoholic beverages wherein it defines each type of beverage and cites separate regulations for them. The draft also touches upon the process through which a beverage can be obtained.

While defining an alcoholic beverage, the draft states, “Alcoholic beverage means a beverage or a liquor or brew containing more than 0.5 per cent ethyl alcohol (ethanol) by volume/ volume as the active agent.” It states that the ethyl alcohol used in the production of alcoholic beverages

shall be of agricultural origin.

The draft mentions the two processes through which beverages can be obtained - distilled and undistilled, where distilled means a distilled beverage, spirit, or liquor containing ethanol that is made by distilling ethanol produced by fermentation of cereal grain, fruit, vegetables, molasses or any other source of carbohydrates. The undistilled means fermented undistilled alcoholic beverages such as beer, wine, cider and toddy.

A N Panchal, food safety officer, food department, Rajkot Municipal Corporation, said, “FSSAI has done its job well. The scientific panels have

to be credited for these standards as they are well drafted giving specifications of each type of the alcoholic beverage and further narrowing down to the sub-types of each of them. The FSSAI has given time to the stakeholders to give their views in this regard before October 9.”

“The labelling requirements specified in the draft have also asked to state standard drinks that the package or container could make and also specify allergens for some types of alcoholic beverages,” added Panchal.

The draft identifies and defines various kinds of alcohol such as brandy, cognac, whisky (bourbon, Irish whis-



► **Ensuring chef-guest interaction has become an important criteria while**

ky, single malt, blended malt, Scotch (in detail) gin, vodka, fenny and ar-rack. The draft widening its scope has even laid down standards for various country spirits.

Further, with regard to labelling, the draft demands mention of the number of standard drinks, best before or use by date.

In case of imported alcoholic beverages, the information regarding the name and address of the importer shall be allowed to be affixed in the custom bonded warehouse in the form of an additional sticker in a manner that it does not overlap or cover the original information of the

label in any manner while the FSSAI logo and licence number is also mandatory.

SAMPLE CLASSIFICATION Standards for Beer

4.1 Beer: It is an un-distilled alcoholic beverage made from any malted grain, but commonly from barley malt, with hops or products obtained from hops to impart a bitter flavor and sometimes added with adjuncts like wheat, maize, corn rice and sugar. Beer may contain additives permitted under the Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulations, 2011.

4.2 Depending upon the ethyl alcohol content specified in Table-3, Beer can be classified under following four types:

4.2.1 Light – (0.5 to 4%)

4.2.2 Standard – (4.1 to 5%)

4.2.3 Strong – (5.1 to 6%)

4.2.4 Super strong – (6.1% to 8%)

4.3 Beer shall be of following types:

4.3.1 Lager: Lager beers are prepared by using bottom fermenting yeast and aged; may have low or high alcohol content and can be found in a wide variety of colours from light to dark. It is stored for a specified period before being bottled or canned.

4.3.2 Pilsner: A type of lager beer which is light with 3.0–3.8% alcohol and has a medium hop flavour.

4.3.3 Ale Beer: Prepared by using top fermenting yeast and usually lighter in colour, prepared from pale malt and has a medium bodied flavour.

4.3.4 Stouts and porters: These are dark beers made using roasted malts or roast barley, and typically brewed with slow fermenting yeast. Page 13 of 21

4.3.5 Root beer: These are beers containing an infusion of various roots, bark and herbs.

4.3.6 Draught Beer: Beer with all types (lager, ale, stout, pilsner etc.; mild and strong beers) may or may not be pasteurized and shall comply with the requirement as specified in Table -4.

4.3.7 Flavoured Beer: It is a beer-based beverage with added natural or nature identical flavours.

4.3.8 Blended beer: It is a beer-based beverage blended with small quantities of spirits in any form to get unique flavours.

4.3.9 Irish beer: The beer produced in Ireland is known as Irish beer. It can be either lagar, stout or ales type.

4.3.10 Wheat beer: It is brewed with a large proportion of wheat although it often also contains a

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significant proportion of malted barley. Wheat beers are usually top-fermented. Wheat provides a soft character to beer and is sometimes hazy or cloudy with a touch of spice notes.

1.4 Other Requirements:

4.4.1 It should have clarity with characteristic colour, taste, bouquet and form of its type. Beer shall be bottled canned or kegged and effectively pasteurized.

4.4.2 Beer shall be free from chloral hydrate, ammonium chloride, diazepam, paraldehyde and/ or any other types of narcotic, psychotropic substances* including caffeine which, when mixed with alcohol, are injurious to health.

4.4.3 It shall be free from coliform and other pathogenic microorganisms.

4.4.4 Beers shall comply with the requirements as specified in Table-3.

2.8 Whisky/ Whiskey

Whisky is the alcoholic beverage made from neutral grain spirit, or rectified grain spirit, or neutral spirit or their mixture or is made by distilling the fermented extract of malted cereal grains such as corn, rye, barley; or molasses. It shall be with or without caramel colour or additives permitted under the Food Products Standards & Food Additives Regulations, 2011. It shall be any of the following types:

2.8.1 Bourbon: It must be made in the USA in accordance with laws applicable thereto and may not be distilled to more than 80 per cent alcohol by volume from a fermented mash of not less than 51 percent corn and must be stored at not more than 62.5 % alcohol by volume for at least two years in charred, new oak barrels.

2.8.2 Rye whisky: It shall be whisky distilled in Canada/USA as in accordance with the laws applicable thereto in Canada/USA.

2.8.3 Irish Whisky: The whisky distilled in Northern Ireland or in the Republic of Ireland as Irish whisky in accordance with the laws applicable thereto in Northern Ireland or in the Republic of Ireland.

2.8.4 Malt or Grain Whisky: It is the alcoholic distillate produced from fermented mash of malted or unmalted cereals or a mixture of both with or without other natural enzymes. It should have a distinct aroma and taste derived from the natural volatile principals already present in the raw materials or formed during fermentation. Malt whisky is made primarily from malted barley and Grain whisky is made from any type of grains.

2.8.4.1 Single Malt Whisky: It is the alcoholic distillate produced from fermented mash that uses only one particular malted grain or malted barley, distilled in pot still only and produced from a single distillery.

2.8.4.2 Blended Malt or Grain Whisky: It is a mixture of at least 2 per cent malt or grain whisky with whisky or it is a mixture of single malt whiskies. Blended whiskies are typically made from a mixture of malt and grain whiskies often along with neutral spirits/rectified spirit, caramel, and flavouring.

2.8.5 Scotch Whisky: It is distilled and matured in Scotland in accordance with laws applicable thereto in Scotland.

2.7.5.1 Blended Scotch Whisky: It is a mixture of Scotch Whiskies in accordance with laws applicable thereto in Scotland.

2.8.6 Tennessee Whisky: It shall be a straight bourbon whisky produced in the state of Tennessee in accordance with the laws applicable thereto in Tennessee.

2.8.7 Vatted Malt Whisky: It is blended from malt whiskies of different distilleries.

2.8.8 Other Requirements:

2.8.8.1 Whiskies shall have the



► The draft identifies and defines various kinds of alcohol



► **It is an undistilled alcoholic beverage made from any malted grain**

characteristic taste and aroma. To enhance the characteristic flavor of the product, natural/ nature identical or artificial flavor permitted by the Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulations, 2011 may be used except in case of single malt whisky.

2.8.8.2 Malt or Grain whisky, when labelled as matured, shall be matured for a period of not less than one year in wooden oak, wooden vats or barrels.

2.8.8.3 Blended malt whisky, when labelled as matured, shall contain malt or grain whisky matured for a period of not less than one year in oak vats or barrels in the blend.

2.8.8.4 Whiskies shall be free

from chloral hydrate, ammonium chloride, diazepam, paraldehyde and/or any other types of narcotic, psychotropic substances* including caffeine which, when mixed with alcohol, are injurious to health.

2.8.8.5 The ethyl alcohol content of Whisky shall be in the range of 36 to 50 per cent by volume at 20 degree C when determined according to the method prescribed in FSSAI Manual of Method of Analysis of Food 2015 - Alcoholic Beverages. The tolerance limits for ethyl alcohol content shall be + 3.0 per cent by volume of the declared strength.

2.8.8.6 The water used for dilution to bottling strength should be as per IS 10500.

2.8.8.7 It shall also conform.

Highlights

Rum when labelled as "matured" shall be blended with rum spirit matured for not less than six months in oak vats or barrels.

Brandy when labelled as "matured" shall be matured for a period of not less than one year in oak vats or barrels. It shall possess the characteristic aroma and taste of brandy.

In case of package containing more than 10 standard drinks, accurate to the nearest whole number of standard drink.

The label of a package of a beverage containing more than 0.5 per cent alcohol by volume must not include the words 'non-intoxicating' or words implying similar meaning.

An alcoholic beverage which contains more than 8.0 per cent alcohol by volume shall not represent as a "low alcohol beverage."

Alcoholic beverages which have less than 10 per cent. alcohol shall mention the date, month and year of expiry on the label, in that order and preceded by the words 'Expiry date' or 'Use by.' However, the manufacturer may use the expression 'Best before' as optional or additional information. Wines stand excluded from this regulation.

This move by FSSAI has expanded its regulatory ambit to another direction which will help bring in clarity.



TAXATION

A big blow? Or, a soothing balm?

The hospitality, travel and tourism sectors are still pondering over the impact of GST

THE Constitution (122nd Amendment) Bill, 2014 known as Goods and Services Tax (GST) Bill got passed by the Rajya Sabha on August 3, 2016 and went on to for final approval to the lower house. Presently, the bill is being ratified by the states (till date 21 states have done so). The bill is likely to become law by April, 2017. The Indian Government has brought GST return filing forms to disclose in front of professionals.

Now, let's see the impact it could make on the hospitality and tourism Industry. As per the highlighted draft GST Bill, the definition of Export of Services does not include the tourism and hospitality sector. Therefore, the definition needs to be updated in order to showcase the benefits on the hospitality and tourism sector.

The tourism and hospitality industry has pointed out amendments to the draft Goods and Services Tax law that supports exception for tourism and hospitality businesses, and put them under 6-8 per cent tax slab just similar to other countries. Several federations representing the industry has been in talks with the finance ministry and governments of various states on the GST draft law.

Says an industry captain, "We are the sounding board of the government for the sector and we feel the single biggest game changer in tourism will be GST. It is therefore important for us to make the government realise how important it is and at what slab we are put in. We are therefore doing a lot of work around GST."

In addition to the proposed VAT and luxury tax which currently have a set off in the draft law, the federations' other demands include a GST set-off which subsumes inter state levies on transportation, state electricity cesses and liquor tax, and making an exception for the sector in the classification of export services.

The service tax got operational way back in 1997 and we are still struggling with consultants in understanding the abetment procedure which is why there are a number of cases still pending. We don't want the same story to be repeated

Right direction

Sudesh Poddar, President of Hotel and Restaurant Association of Eastern India (HRAEI) has called it a step in the right direction and further adds, "We are a segment of the economy which is overtaxed and we are paying high double-digit tax at various levels. If the government wants our sector to be a high driver of growth, then it is time to think differently. Tourism and travel cannot be perceived as luxury anymore."

It is also being said that the unified taxation system under the GST regime will work under the 'One Nation One Tax' notion. After the implementation of GST, the GDP is expected to improve by up to 2 percent and India will be seen as a single market.

Says Pranav Kumar Singh, secretary, HRAEI, "GST Bill has been passed in the Rajya Sabha but we need to figure out on how it will connect the service tax to GST. Now the onus lies on us to understand the bill and what effect it will have on the travel and

tourism industry. Simultaneously, we are keen to spread awareness on this new policy among our members."

Travel agents hope that GST will do away with the multiple taxes that are levied on them. Unlike the time of service tax introduction, they expect there will be clarity in understanding the bill, reasonable tax rate and the tourism sector will be conferred on the export status.

Apprehension

"The service tax got operational way back in 1997 and we are still struggling with consultants in understanding the abetment procedure which is why there are a number of cases still pending. We don't want the same story to be repeated," said one agent.

Federations have highlighted the above concerns and will be approaching the government soon with specific solutions. As a leading trade association, our major action would be to understand the bill once it is finalised. We also hope that the government empathises with the much talked about travel and tourism sector. The hopes are high and the common refrain is that the multiplicity of taxes would be reduced. As of now the law is being amended and it is too early to talk about what effect it will have on the inbound tour operators, most believe. "We believe it will streamline the tax regime for good. We hope things to get better in our domain as multiple taxes will be a thing of the past. Now on, collectively as the premier association of domestic tour operators we will try to understand and analyse its repercussions on our segment and will make appropriate representation if needed," says a leading travel agent.

Aviation Turbine Fuel is currently treated separately from other petroleum products for claiming modvat credits and if ATF is not brought under the GST regime there would be substantial cost impact on ATF used



► 15X year-on-year growth sounds too good to be true

Exhibit 1: Indirect taxes pertaining to the Hotel Industry

On Rack rate	Tamil Nadu	
	Rate	Amount in Rs.
Rack rate	-	7,000
Actual rate paid [A]	-	5,500
Luxury Tax [i]	12.5%	875*
Service Tax [ii]	9.0%@	495#
Total taxes [B=i+ii]	24.9%	1,370
Gross bill payable [A+B]	6,870	
GST	#18%	
Reduction under GST	7%	

Source: ICRA research; * Luxury tax computed on rack rates; # service tax on actual tariff; @ includes 40% abatement
Other similar States include Delhi, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh

in our member aircraft due to cascading duties leading to price increases. There is also hope that in order to low-

er compliance cost, network industries like express industry, banks, etc. will only need to do single centralised

registration under the GST regime as is the case with service tax registration presently.

“The much anticipated passage of the GST Bill brings in a new era in fiscal reforms in India. Tax rates across various states will be uniform. The consumer will benefit from lower taxation, as there will be no tax on tax at different levels. Input credit on GST ushers in a whole new world of taxation,” says T.S. Walia, a senior member of HRAEI.

Some captains of the industry believe it is going to be one of the biggest pillars of reforms which will take up India’s ranking in ease of doing business by several notches. This will impact e-commerce players and aggregators too.

With the facility of winding up the individual taxation system into a single entity, the new optimised tax system will help in enhancing the business running in the country. The consequences could be seen after the core implementation of the GST next year.

Under the GST regime, it is believed that various cost components of the tour and hotel services will be included in single tax. This will reduce the cascading effect and benefit the travellers. The credit will flow through the B2B supplies and will be made completely transparent. However, for this benefit to play out effectively, it is necessary that all the B2B supplies are made fully creditable and the credit flow is seamless across the states.

Benefits to all

Hospitality and luxury industry experts have said implementation of the goods and services tax (GST) will benefit the sectors by lowering costs for consumers and facilitating seamless movement of products across the country.

According to experts, companies specialising in food and beverages operations could be the biggest bene-

Exhibit 2: Indirect taxes pertaining to the Hotel Industry

On Actual rate	Maharashtra		Kerala	
	Rate	Amount in Rs.	Rate	Amount in Rs.
Rack rate	Not Applicable		Not Applicable	
Actual rate paid [A]		5,500		5,500
Luxury Tax [i]	10.0%	550	12.5%	688
Service Tax[ii]	9.0%	495	9.0%	495
Total taxes[B=i+ii]	19.0%	1,045	21.5%	1,183
Gross bill payable[A+B]		6,545		6,683
GST	#18%		#18%	
Reduction under GST	1%		3.5%	

Source: ICRA research

Exhibit 2: Indirect taxes pertaining to the Hotel Industry

	Tamil Nadu/Kerala		Maharashtra/Delhi	
	Rate	Amount in Rs.	Rate	Amount in Rs.
Food & beverage bill[A]	14.5%	123	12.5%	106
Service Tax[ii]	6.0%	51	6.0%	51
Total taxes[B=i+ii]	20.5%	174	18.5%	157
Gross bill payable[A+B]		1,024		1,007
GST	#18%		#18%	
Reduction under GST	1.5%		0.5%	

Source: ICRA research# indicative rate

Exhibit 4: Indirect taxes pertaining to the Hotel Industry

Source: ICRA research

ficiaries of GST within the hospitality sector. Food and beverages bills have multiple components and can inflate the bills by 30-35%. A single-slab tax will benefit consumers and should lead to savings of 10-15% on the overall bill,

The restaurant industry has been burdened with high and multiple

taxations. NRAI has been advocating for reduction / simplification of the same. We Welcome the Centre's move for introduction of this much awaited reform. We would need to look at the GST details as and when finalised,

However, liquor should be included in GST. Exempting it defeats the very purpose of bringing in a uniform

single tax structure. This allows states to have their own taxes without a cap with separate accounting requirements and results in double compliance for the restaurant industry. This is neither beneficial for 'Ease of doing business' nor for the customers.

According to a projection by credit rating agency ICRA, GST will be neutral to marginally positive for the Indian hotel industry, depending on the state and service provided. The projections also show banquets will become cheaper and impact on room revenues and restaurants largely neutral.

Everybody likes consolidation of taxes as it leads to greater transparency and will help guests and buyers understand overall costs. Some states have luxury tax and that impacts room rates. If India aspires to be competitive, then the tax structures too need to be competitive.

NOSTALGIA ON PLATTER

EXECUTIVE Chef Atin Das planned the puja platter at The Pride Hotel, Kolkata, keeping nostalgia in mind. “Bengalis are nostalgic about everything—their culture, literature, politics and food. So while planning the puja menu I included recipes from the past. Especially some of these have been recreated from the age of Bengali renaissance.” Thakurbarir Panchmisheli is a mixed vegetable dish taken from the kitchen of the famous Tagore family in Jorasanko. Rajnandini Pulao is another one revoking Zamindari tastebuds.

The buffet serves a different type of pulao every day. The kachuri and potato combination also changes daily. There are four non-vegetarian items, including prawn and a fried fish. A traditional savoury like Dimer Devil, Fowl Cutlet or Fish Kabiraji are also served. “I adapted this recipe from central Kolkata restaurants like Basanta Cabin. Very few star hotels serve these.”

Even the dessert section has a lot of variety with five items. Hiranik is a dessert created out of cottage cheese and khoya kheer. Doodh Puli and Kheer Mohan were also on offer on different days. “These items too will remind a foodie of yesteryears when these items were household dish in Bengal,” he told.

Das started his career at Radisson Blu, New Delhi, after having graduated from IIHM, Chennai. He was a member of the 'opening team' in 1996. After a four year stint there, he joined as founding member of a few other hotels like Hyatt Regency in Kolkata. He's been at The Pride Hotel, Kolkata, for the last two years.

His Durga Puja platter during five days of the celebration has been a big hit. He shares a unique recipe with the Mystic East team.



RECIPE: GHATE BHAPA CHINGRI



INGREDIENTS

Prawn -- 200gm
Mustard seeds -- 45gms
Green chilly -- 5gm
Mustard oil -- 30gms
Curd -- 50gm
Salt -- to taste
Turmeric powder -- 2gm

METHOD

- Wash prawn and peel prawn with the tail and head on
- Give a slit on the back to take out vein

- Marinate prawn with salt, turmeric
- Leave it for ½ an hour
- Make a mixture of mustard paste, curd, green chilly paste, salt, turmeric and mustard oil
- Mix marinated prawn with this mixture and leave for 2 hrs
- Then place prawn along with mixture in earthenware pot and place in a tray with little water
- Place tray in moderated hot oven for 30mins
- Garnish with green chilly slit
- Special Note:- Prawns with intense earthy flavour, cooked in mud-pot.

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▶ Aizawl is a beautiful and bustling city set on ridges of steep hills

THE LAND OF BLUISH HILLS

Mizoram has a huge potential that waits to be tapped by the tourism and hospitality industry

MIZORAM is a mountainous state nestling in the southern tip of the north-eastern region of India, sandwiched between Myanmar and Bangladesh. The Tropic of Cancer runs through the heart of the state. Mizoram has a pleasant climate throughout the year, and is a land of great natural beauty having rich variety of flora and fauna. The scenic landscapes of bluish hills and mountains, steep rocky cliffs, serene lakes and deep valleys of gurgling rivers with its spectacular waterfalls makes the state an ideal destination for nature lovers. The fantastic array of wildlife especially the bird is an added attraction. To the more adventurous spirit, the rugged terrains and swift flowing rivers are ideal for various outdoor sports and adventure activities.

The People

Mizoram is the land of the Mizos or the Highlanders who belong to the Mongoloid race. The Mizos are divided into several sub-tribes, viz. Luseis, Lais, Maras, Kukis etc., each of which have their own customs, social practices and dialects enriching the tribal cultural heritage of the state. Though animism was the traditional religion of the Mizos, most of them have now embraced Christianity which the Christian missionaries have propagated to them along with formal education which eventually resulted in the Mizos becoming one of the most literate communities in the country.

Though mostly Christians and greatly influenced by the Western lifestyle, the Mizos cling to their rich cultural heritage, colourful customs and lively traditions. The festivals and dances of the Mizos have a unique tribal flavour. Other than Christmas and New Year's Day which are the most popular festivals, Chapchar Kut, a festival marking the end of the laborious clearing of jungles for the year's cultivation during the first week of March, is another oc-

casation celebrated with much gusto. The most popular dances of Mizoram are Cheraw (Bamboo Dance), Khual Lam (Dance for Guests) and Chheih Lam (Dance of Joy).

The Mizos are a gregarious, simple, carefree and peace-loving people. Since the days of the chieftains they have always been a close-knit society with moral values based on Tlawmn-gaihna, or essentially, selfless service for others, a rare principle which goes well with Christianity.

Social Life

There is practically no status or class distinction amongst the member of the Mizo society, enabling even a fourth-grade employee of the government to chair a social gathering or a church service attended by officers of high ranks, the privilege being accorded to any active volunteer or worker. Moreover, the local communities, now largely represented by the Young Mizo Association, voluntarily assume the responsibility of helping the needy and the poor. The Mizos are proud to say that hardly any beggar is to be found in the streets.

Endowed with a rich and colourful culture, the Mizos are passionately drawn to dance and songs. They have a rich repertoire of community dances and songs reflecting their mirthful nature which has been handed down for generations. In fact, the Mizos are a singing community and still prolific with new songs and Christian hymns to this day. Festivals, weddings, death of a person and calamity are occasions involving the whole village community.

Economy

Agriculture is the main occupation of the Mizos who practice jhum or shifting cultivation. The government has now introduced new and modernized systems of cultivation with the intention of weaning the people over to permanent cultivation. Mizoram is

famous for its production of fibreless ginger which thrives well in the state. Paddy, maize, mustard, sugarcane, sesame, potatoes and grapes are the main crops produced in the state.

The young state of Mizoram is economically weak and is entirely dependent on its agriculture. Inefficient infrastructure and poor connectivity are the major deterrents for tourists. The entry permit formality for both domestic and international tourists is another hurdle for tourists. However, the State Department of Tourism has developed satisfactory tourist facilities, within a short span of its activity. The state has excellent potential for tourism development with emphasis on eco-tourism and adventure tourism. However the success of its tourism highly depends on the infrastructure development of the entire Northeast region.

Agriculture is the major occupation of the people of Mizoram. Shifting cultivation (Jhumming) is predominantly practiced in Mizoram, which has degraded the natural forests of Mizoram to a very large extent. Presently, efforts are on to wean away the farmers from the destructive practice of Jhumming and to adopt new and sustainable agricultural practices.

The state situated in the transitional region of tropical and temperate environment is also bestowed with hills having steep slopes, deep valleys, rivers, natural lakes, plains etc. thus creating varied ecosystems in a relatively small region.

The forests of Mizoram could be broadly classified as:

North – Tropical Wet Evergreen Forest

South – Tropical Moist Deciduous Forest

East – Subtropical Pine Forest (mixed with broad leaved species)

However, for a state like Mizoram, which is blessed with natural resources, any attempt of socio-economic development has to be considered with



► Palak lake is the largest natural lake in Mizoram

utmost concern for the natural environment. And considering this factor alone agriculture and tourism could be the best alternatives for the bright future of Mizoram.

Tourism

Mission & Vision: The Department of Tourism, Government of Mizoram was bifurcated from the Department of Information and Public Relations only in 1987. Its main function has been development of tourism and its allied activities and building basic infrastructure for Tourists. The Department has a Directorate but no District office in the State. From its inception, it has been concentrating in building tourist infrastructure for accommodation as well as recreation facilities. It has developed a number of Tourist Lodges, Highway Restaurants and Picnic spots all over the State through

financial assistance from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

The Department's main thrust area has been the construction of basic accommodation for Tourists visiting the State and development of recreational facilities for tourists. In addition to this, the department has been running the various Tourist Lodges and Highway restaurants in the State, meeting the demands of accommodational needs of the Government as well as the general public and the Tourists visiting the State. The Department has now completed 42 Tourist Lodges and Highway Restaurants, which are being managed by the Department.

In spite of limited Officers and Ministerial staff as well as operational staff for manning these various Tourist Lodges and Highway Restaurants, the Department has within a short period of time,

achieved a commendable record. The name 'Mizoram' has been brought to the notice of the traveling crowd, both domestic as well as foreign travelers.

The Department with its limited allocation of fund has performed to the best of its ability in promoting Tourism. It has been working in making the State, Mizoram as the next destination of the new millennium. The rich and diverse cultural heritage, the abundance of flora and fauna, the possibility of development of Wildlife Tourism and the development of Adventure Tourism, makes Mizoram very attractive to the Tourism sector.

Tourism development: The Department's main function is development and promotion of Tourism in the State. Mizoram has been a late starter in the field of Tourism. As mentioned earlier, it was bifurcated from the Department of Information and Public



► **Scenic landscapes are an ideal destination for nature lovers**

Relations only in 1987.

Only then did it start development of Tourism in Mizoram. The main function, as of to- day, is in the field of development of basic accommodation infrastructure and recreation facilities within Mizoram. It has been developing these various tourist facilities through the liberal financing of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

Management of tourism: The Department has been running and managing the various Tourist Lodges and Highway Restaurants in the State. These facilities has been manned and managed by trained professionals from the field of Hotel Management from various Catering Colleges in India. In addition to provide employment to hotel professionals, it has also managed to providing employment opportunities to locals who has

inclination for hotel jobs and are also tourist friendly.

Infrastructure: The department has developed various tourist Lodges, Highway Restaurants and Picnic Spots in and around Mizoram. The

Nature lovers are attracted by the great variety of wildlife to be found in this remote area adjoining the Myanmar forests

Government of India has financed 74 schemes under different categories. These are:

The Department has in its 23 years of existence achieved a lot, given the time and resources available. It has developed a substantial number of facilities for tourist. As far as infrastructure is concerned it has constructed 42 units, which are functioning. It has a number of projects that are at various stages of completion.

Places of Interest

Aizawl: The capital of Mizoram, is situated at about 1132 meters above sea level. It is a beautiful and bustling 112 years old city set on ridges of steep hills. Flanked on the north by the craggy peaks of Durtlang, the hill city overlooks the valley of the river Tlawng and ranges of blue hill beyond. It is arilinked by daily flights from Kolkata and Guwahati. It is connected to Imphal by air and it accessible from Shillong, Guwahati and Silchar by road.

Champai: This is a commercial town located near Myanmar border, 194 kms from Aizawl. Set on an altitude of 1678 metres, the town overlooks a patch of flat land which happens to be the largest plain area in the state and also commands a good view of the adjoining hill ranges of Myanmar from which the forefathers of the Mizos immigrated ages ago. The breezy hills around here are lush and strewn with beautiful rhododendron blossoms. Within a few kilometers away are some villages of historical significance where the age-old Mizo way of life is still preserved.

The town is 27 kms from Zokhawthar, the border township through which the Indo-Myanmar trade is being conducted and hence Champai is an ideal shopping place for various imported goods. The town is also a convenient base for trekking and visiting landmarks and historical places in the vicinity including Rih Dil, the

STATE SURVEY: MIZORAM



► Chap char kut, the most important traditional festival, is held in March

legendary lake located 5 kms within Myanmar which is associated with the Mizo Animist religion of yore.

Lunglei: This is the second largest city of Mizoram and is also the headquarters of Lunglei district in Southern Mizoram. It is an ideal base for nature lovers for exploring the surrounding areas which are rich in flora and fauna, hamlets and landmarks linked with folklores and legends. A 175 kms drive from Aizawl, Lunglei is loftier than Aizawl, perched at an altitude of 1222 metres. An engraved image of Buddha found near Mualcheng village, about 50 kms from the town remains an enigma till date since no other Buddhist relics has been found elsewhere in the state.

Thenzawl: This is a village located at a distance of 43 kms from Aizawl. It was initially a dense forest with lots of wild animals before it was cultivated and inhabited in 1961. The Tropic of Cancer runs through this picturesque village. It is an important center of traditional Mizo handloom industry. The looms at Thenzawl produce rich and colorful varieties of handlooms. One can also

observe the indigenous weaving techniques of the Mizos here and obtain Mizo handlooms at bargain prices.

Other tourist attractions at Thenzawl include Vantawng Waterfall which is located at a distance of 5 kms south of Thenzawl, Thenzawl Deer park which has several deer in its natural environment and Chawngchilhi Cave.

Vantawng fall: Located at a distance of about 137kms from Aizawl, Vantawng khawhthla or Vantawng Fall is the highest and most spectacular of all the waterfalls and cascades in the fast flowing rivers of Mizoram. It is located in Vanva river near Thenzawl and is named after Vantawnga who was said to be an excellent swimmer. So good a swimmer was Vantawnga that he could hover in the cascading water like a fish, but unfortunately during one of such performances, a drifting log fell from above and killed him.

The height of the fall is recorded as 750 ft and though it is difficult to get close to it because of the sheer forested hillsides surrounding it, a comfortable viewing tower has been constructed by the Tourism Department.

Palak Lake: This is the largest natural lake in Mizoram and is situated near Phura village which is about 391 kms to the south of Aizawl. Oval in shape, it covers about 1 sqkm and is surrounded by lush virgin forests rich in flora and fauna.

Legends abound the origin of the lake. One version says that before the lake was formed, there used to be a big village here and a large serpent lived in a cavern in the vicinity and occasionally stole the villager's livestock. When it started stealing their children, the villagers decided to kill the serpent. Using a huge fish hook and a dead goat for bait, they managed to catch and kill the serpent and distributed its meat to every household for dinner. That night strange things began to happen. A widow living with her two children got the serpent's head as her share and started cooking it in a big pot. After sometime, when she looked into the boiling pot, she found that the eyes of the serpent was blinking, rolling and watching her. Frightened and horrified, she threw out the pot with the serpent's head still inside it. Later on, she heard strange noises and ran out of the house to find her doorsteps being flooded with water which continued to rise. She took her children and ran away just before the water submerged the whole village. All the other inhabitants were drowned while they were sleeping and the water formed a wide lake that has come to be called Palak Dil.

Legends aside, nature lovers are attracted by the surprisingly great variety of wildlife to be found in this remote area adjoining the Myanmar forests. It is a home to most of the common wetland birds and hill birds, and is believed to be a winter stop-over for migrating Pintail Duck while a few elephants still roam the surrounding virgin forests. Though a jeepable road connects Palak Lake from Phura, care has been taken to maintain and preserve the area in its pristine environmental state.

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