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A bi-monthly magazine by HRAEI | Vol 2 | Issue 1 | January - February 2016

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COVER STORY

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Hospitality Industry
versus
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Even though the tourism and hospitality sector helps earn the country a big chunk of foreign exchange, tax burden on us rose from 12.36 % to 15 % since 2013

”

Dear Fellow Members,

The tourism and hospitality sector in the country felt grossly neglected in the Union Budget 2016. As we help earn the country a large chunk of foreign exchange, we deserved some tax cuts and incentives. On the contrary, the service tax got increased to 15% from 14.5% in the Budget.

'Krishi Kalyan Cess' at 0.5% will be levied on all taxable services, aimed at improvement of agriculture and welfare of farmers. But eventually this will lead to all paid services becoming dearer. Service tax has been consistently increasing over the past few years; it stood at 12.36% in 2013-14.

The Prime Minister had promised a lot on job creation and poverty alleviation prior to the budget and the tourism and hospitality sectors were the best engine to achieve this. Yet the Budget failed to offer these incentives to us.

Finally, an increase on the excise duty on Aviation Turbine Fuel from 8% to 14% will have some adverse impact on the sector. In short, this Budget is a big letdown for us.

Sudesh Poddar
President, HRAEI

MYSTIC EAST

A BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE BY HRAEI
Vol 2 | Issue 1 | January - February 2016

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SECRETARY'S MESSAGE



Strengthening the infrastructure will benefit the hospitality sector in the long run. This will especially enhance regional and last mile connectivity to untapped regions like the North-East and open up fresh avenues for expansion for hotel chains



Dear fellow members,

The Union Budget 2016 may not have any direct benefit for the hospitality sector, but there is one silver lining for us. The thrust on infrastructure and rural development in the Budget is good news for the hospitality sector as it will open up new avenues for expansion. The Centre has earmarked Rs 2,21,246 crore for infrastructure development, with Rs 97,000 crore for the road sector, and plans to revive 160 non-functional airports at a cost of Rs 50-100 crore each.

Strengthening infrastructure will bolster India's position as an attractive tourist destination, which will surely benefit the sector in the long run. This will especially enhance regional and last mile connectivity to untapped regions like the North-East and open up fresh avenues for expansion for hotel chains. Domestic travel, increased connectivity and accessibility will also give a fillip to outbound domestic travel from tier-II and III cities, thus offering greater growth avenues. However, there are no details about allocation for the Incredible India campaign, which is also expected to have an implication on expansion plans.

Also, though infrastructure promises to open up avenues for hospitality, tourism as a sector is not much in focus. The Finance Minister glossed over this despite the fact that tourism is one of the major foreign exchange earners in the country.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pranav Singh'.

Pranav Singh
Secretary, HRAEI

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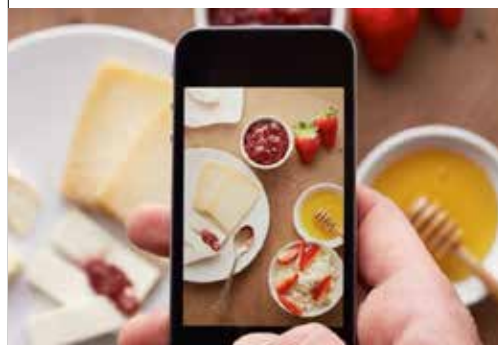
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HRAEI CORNER

ASSOCIATION SEEKS CLARITY ON REVISED TAX RATES



KOLKATA, Jan. 14: Members of the Hotels and Restaurants Association of Eastern India (HRAEI) met officials from the service tax department to obtain clarity on revised service tax rates, including the imposition of the contentious service charge.

In an interactive session with the members of HRAEI, S.K. Panda, the Chief Commissioner, Service Tax, Kolkata Zone, expressed

concern on non-compliance of tax payment by restaurants, event managers and outdoor caterers. According to him and other service tax officials, the propensity to avoid tax is prominent especially among the unorganised institutions that bill a hefty amount to the customers but do not disclose the same to the tax authorities.

Members of HRAEI, however, rued over high service tax burden on

the hospitality sector. "The service tax rate has been hiked from 12 per cent to 14 per cent, effective June 1, 2015. Subsequently, a 0.5 per cent Swachh Bharat cess has been levied from November 15," said Sudesh Poddar, the president of HRAEI. Tejinder Singh Walia, vice president, Federation of Hotel and Restaurants Association of India (FHRAI), "We don't want to evade tax. But we have concerns over certain aspects, such

HRAEI CORNER



► Kendriya Utpad Shulk Bhavan, Kolkata

as imposition of service tax on take-away food and additional beds and service charges billed by hotels and restaurants.”

Mr Panda called for improvement of compliance. He said, “From our side we are trying to create awareness. The upcoming Goods and Services Tax (GST) will also ease some of the problems as it will provide a mechanism to seamlessly pay tax and get tax credit,” said Panda. GST is yet to be implemented pending Parliamentary approval. “We expect GST to remove of double taxation on rooms (local tax and sale tax) and food (value added tax and service tax),” added Mr Poddar.

Other officials present at the meet said a threshold exemption of Rs 10 lakh is available for services rendered in a financial year. Often institutions miss the benefit of the exemption because they do not maintain proper documents. According to Mr Panda recent drives undertaken by them have garnered an additional tax of around Rs 100 crore. The service tax collection in the Calcutta zone in 2014-15 was Rs 5,181.39 crore. In 2015-16, the collection has already touched Rs 4,671.91 crore, helped partly by the recent drives of the department to collect unpaid dues.

EASE OF DOING BUSINESS

We the members of Hotel and Restaurant Association of Eastern India (HRAEI) place on record our deep appreciation for Chief Commissioner, Service Tax, Kolkata, Sri S.K.Panda for his wholehearted effort for making ‘ease of doing business’ a reality in the Service Tax Sector in Kolkata.

We urge all our members to avail this opportunity and approach his office at Kendriya Utpad Shulk Bhawan, 2nd Floor, 180, Shanti Pally, Rajdanga Main Roda, Kolkata—700 017 on any working day during working hours if they are facing any problem in Service Tax matters. Contact number of his office is 2442-5066. However, he is also available for any walk-in visitor.

SALIENT FEATURES PERTAINING TO TAXATION OF SERVICES PROVIDED BY HOTELS, RESTAURANTS, OUTDOOR CATERERS, ETC.

1. Short Term

Accommodation Service :

A. Service Tax leviable if declared tariff is Rs. 1,000/- or more per day (or equivalent).

B. Valuation-- 40% abatement on total value is available in terms of Notification No. 26/2012-ST dated 20.06.2012. Hence, effective rate becomes service tax @ 8.4% and Swachh Bharat Cess @ 0.3% of gross value.

C. Bundled service of Hotel Accommodation and Breakfast (i.e, when the rate offered to the guest is inclusive of breakfast) – entire amount has to be classified under Short Term Accommodation Service (as per Section 66F(3) of Finance Act, 1994) with the applicable abatement. This is even if the figures for hotel accommodation and breakfast are artificially bifurcated in the final bill.

D. Service Tax leviable on host of other services like laundry, internet, etc when the customer avails of these facilities and has been charged separately. Service Tax to be charged at full rate of 14% and Swachh Bharat Cess @ 0.5% of gross value.

E. Cenvat Credit is available only on Input Services.

F. Where the hotels have sublet a part of their premises on rent/lease, they are liable to pay service tax un-

der renting of immovable property service.

G. Where hotels are having convention centre facility— to be classified under Convention Service. No abatement admissible if service does not include catering.

H. The hotels should confirm that service tax has been paid by their vendors/suppliers. In case of services received from booking agents, travel agents, tour operators etc, (where the hotel has paid commission to these agents), service tax has to be paid by such agents under Business Auxiliary Service.

2. Restaurant & Outdoor Catering Service:

A. Liability of service tax is on those restaurants which are having the facility of air-conditioning or central air-heating in any part of the establishment, at any time during the year.

B. Valuation of Service portion in a Restaurant or Outdoor Catering will be done in terms of Rule 2(c) of Service Tax (Determination of Value) Rules, 2006.

The Service portion in a Restaurant will be 40% of total amount charged. Hence, effective rate becomes service tax @ 5.6 % and Swachh Bharat Cess @ 0.2% of gross value.

In Outdoor Catering, the Service

portion will be 60% of total amount charged. Hence, effective rate becomes service tax @ 8.4% and Swachh Bharat Cess @ 0.3% of gross value.

C. Cenvat Credit will not be admissible on goods classifiable under Chapter 1 to 22 of Central Excise Tariff Act, 1985. Cenvat Credit are available on other Inputs, Input Services and Capital Goods subject to the provisions of Cenvat Credit Rules, 2004.

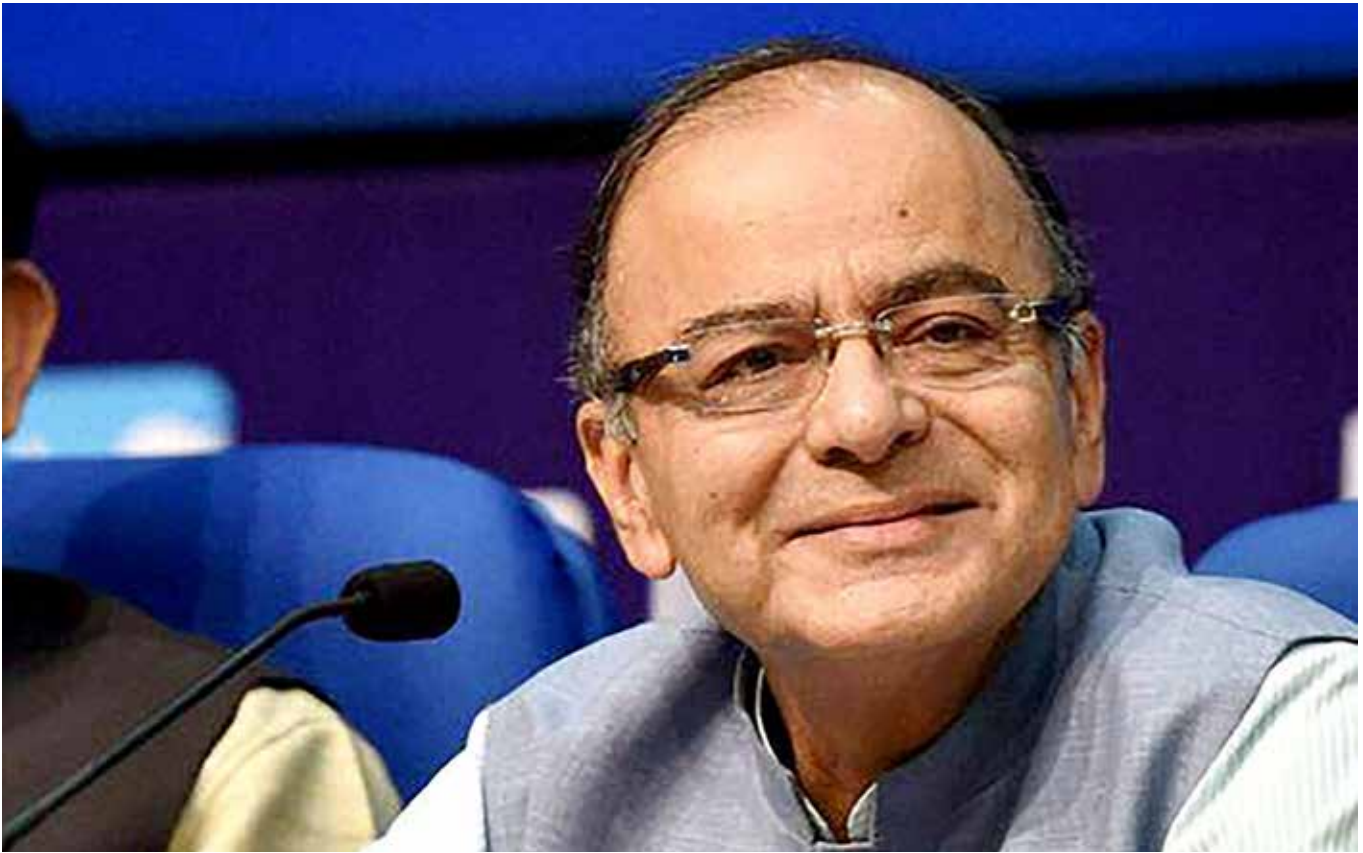
3. Bundled Service by way of supply of Food / Drinks in a premises (including hotel, convention centre, club, pandal, shamiana or any other place, specially arranged for organizing a function) together with renting of such premises :

A. Abatement of 30% is available in terms of Notification No. 26/2012-ST dated 20.06.2012.

B. Cenvat Credit will not be admissible on goods classifiable under Chapter 1 to 22 of Central Excise Tariff Act, 1985. Cenvat Credit are available on other Inputs, Input Services and Capital Goods subject to the provisions of Cenvat Credit Rules, 2004.

Source: Chief Commissioner, Service Tax, Kolkata Zone

Budget 2016 silent on hotel & tourism industry demands



THE tourism and hotel industry found no mention in the Union budget 2016-17 presented by the finance minister Arun Jaitley last month. The industry was hoping for some key recommendations on lower goods and service tax (GST) for related services, extension of eTourist visa, promotion of medical tourism and lowering the threshold of infrastructure status threshold for hotel projects to Rs 25cr, all of which did not figure in the budget.

"The PM in his initial speeches had mentioned tourism as one of the four pillars in the mandate of the new BJP Govt. The FM Arun Jaitley today in his budget speech has talked about 9 (odd) new pillars, but there was no mention

of tourism or hospitality industry," said Kamlesh Barot, past president, The Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI).

Last year, the finance minister increased the allocation for the tourism sector and announced a slew of measures to draw foreign tourists and foreign exchange to the country.

Developing infrastructure at certain important heritage sites, improving cleanliness at holy sites and setting up centres for adventure activities were some of the measures.

While the Economic Survey 2015-16 suggested several measures to boost tourism including the extension of eTourist Visa window to 180 days instead of the current 30 days

before tour and the need of a multiple entry eTourist Visa instead of the existing single entry, none of them found a mention in the budget.

Some of the other measures suggested by the survey also comprise examining the possibility of giving special incentives like taxfree bonds and income tax exemptions on profits used in reinvestment in the tourism sector, development of tourism infrastructure on public private partnership basis and by channelizing corporate social responsibility (CSR) spends into India's heritage development. However, these too have not been addressed in the budget.

This year, the hotel industry was keen to see the GST roll out as it is al-

ready saddled with multiple layers of tax including VAT, Service Tax, Luxury Tax etc. Currently, hotels in India levy taxes in the range of 25%, compared to just 5-7% in many South East Asian countries.

"The proposal to levy infrastructure and agriculture cess is retrograde as it adds another slice to a high tax burden," said Ajay K. Bakaya, executive director, Sarovar Hotels & Resorts. Riyaaz Amlani, president, National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) too said the restaurant industry will be impacted to some extent by the increase of service tax, through the introduction of 0.5% agriculture cess.

Moreover, the industry's hopes of getting infrastructure status to hotels with a project cost of Rs 25 crore as against the present Rs 250 crore, too remained unfulfilled. The hike in clean

energy cess is also likely to impact the Heat Light and Power (HLP) cost for hotels, which currently forms more than 10% of a hotel's expenses. "There could be certain impact on power bills at hotels as there is also a hike in the clean energy cess on coal to Rs.400 per tonne of coal mined from Rs.200. This hike in clean energy cess is likely to impact input cost for thermal power producers which could be passed on to end consumers," said Vikas Chadha, executive director and chief financial officer at Berggruen Hotels, which owns the midmarket chain Keys Hotels.

Industry experts said while there was no direct mention of tourism or hospitality industry in the budget, stress on infrastructure development, improvement of 160 airports, boosting regional connectivity and Swachh Bharat (Clean India programme) will

indirectly benefit the tourism industry.

"It has provided a sharp focus on building a stronger ecosystem for the travel and tourism industry. The Rs. 2,21,246 crore outlay for infrastructure development, Rs 97,000 crore investment in road sector and the intent to build as well as upgrade highways is a measure that will aid connectivity across the length and breadth of the country. Last mile connectivity is a key hurdle for tourism and travel in India, and we believe this measure will aid in overcoming the challenge," said J B Singh, president and CEO, Inter Globe Hotels.

Moreover, the announcement of 1,500 multiskill training institutes across the country is likely to address the shortage of skilled labour for the industry.

Source: The Economic Times

Economic Survey 2015-16 notes decline in Foreign Tourist Arrivals and Exchange Earnings

THE Economic Survey 2015-16 tabled in the Parliament by Finance Minister, Arun Jaitley has noted growth "deceleration" in inbound tourism into India in 2015-16 compared to the last financial year. According to Economic Survey India's tourism growth which was 10.2% in terms of Foreign Tourist Arrival (FTA) and 9.7% in terms of Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE) in 2014 decelerated to 4.5% in terms of FTAs and fell by 2.8% in terms of FEEs in 2015.

The reason for growth deceleration, according to the Survey is due to negative or low growth in FTAs from high spending tourists originating from European countries like France, Germany and UK.

Despite slow down in inbound,

the survey notes increasing appetite among Indians to travel within the country thereby supporting the sector's growth. In 2014 domestic tourism grew by 12.9%. The top five states in domestic tourist visits in India are Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. The report also explains various schemes announced by the government like Swadesh Darshan; PRASAD, etc. to boost domestic tourism in the country.

The economic survey also take note of the governments vision to tap the potential of shipping tourism in the country. A vision document for coastal shipping tourism and regional development has been prepared with a view to increasing the share of the coastal/inland water-ways transport

mode from 7% to 10% by 2019-20, the survey notes.

According to the survey, the services sector in India has remained the most vibrant sector in terms of contribution to national and state incomes, trade flows, FDI inflows, and employment. The services sector contributed almost 66.1% of its gross value added growth in 2015-16 becoming the important net foreign exchange earner and the most attractive sector for FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) inflows. Despite the slow down in the post crisis period (2010-14) India showed the fastest service sector growth with a CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) of 8.6% followed by China at 8.4%. In 2014 India's services sector growth at 10.3% was noticeably higher than China at 8.0%.



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Indian hotel industry revenues to grow 9 - 10% in Financial Year 2017



THE country's hotel industry revenues are likely to improve by 9-10 per cent in 2016-17, mainly aided by improved occupancy, rating agency ICRA said. It estimates the topline growth for the industry to be 8 per cent during 2015-16.

The panIndia average room rate (ARR) will be flat for 2015-16, but occupancy improvements of 67 per cent supports revenue per available room (RevPAR) growth of 7 per cent, it said in a report.

Room inventory in the premium category is estimated to increase by 8 per cent for 2015-16, compared to 4 per cent during 2014-15. With deferment in construction, supply addition would be lower than earlier estimates at 7.78 per cent for 2016-17.

Domestic travel, going by domestic airline Revenue Passenger Kilometre (RPKM) trends exhibited strong growth during the past 12 months indicating improving consumer confidence, it said.

However, given the muted global economic outlook, Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) growth for CY2016 is expected to be subdued.

Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) slowed down to 4.4 per cent during Calendar year 2015 (7.1 per cent during 2014). FTA segment continues to remain far below its true potential, ICRA report pointed out.

Further, it said, the per capita dollar spend by tourists declined sharply in 2015 after remaining stagnant for three years.

Source: PTI

Chef Imtiaz Qureshi honoured with Padma Shri



THE Padma Shri award was conferred upon Chef Imtiaz Qureshi, the grand master chef of ITC Hotels, for his contributions in culinary art.

It is for the first time that a professional chef has been recognised with the Padma Awards, the fourth highest civilian honour of the country. Indian Culinary Forum (ICF), since last eight years, has been consistently striving to get the culinary art to be recognised by the government. The achievement by Chef Qureshi is considered a result of the efforts by ICF under the leadership of Chef Davinder Kumar, president, ICF and Anil Bhandari, a veteran hotelier.

Bhandari said, "Our efforts have paid results at the end. We have consistently been pursuing it with successive governments and ministers for eight years. It is a good beginning, and I am really happy that a great chef has been recognised by the country."

Commenting on the achievement, Chef Kumar, said, "On behalf of the entire ICF team, I would like to congratulate Chef Qureshi for the award. I am thankful to our government to consider culinary art as one of the most important disciplines in India."

ICF has been functioning as an exclusive NGO dedicated solely to the advancement of the culinary art of India. This achievement is considered a step forward to mark the importance of the culinary industry to be chosen as a profession.

Source: The Indian Express

Ease to start hotel, Maharashtra reduces 5 permissions

TO encourage hotel and hospitality industry, the state government has decided to abolish 5 permissions related to home department. The decision was taken to promote state pet initiative 'Ease of Doing Business'.

The decision was taken by the chief minister Devendra Fadnavis in a meeting with the home department. It was decided that no need to take police's permission now if one wants to start hotel or restaurant. Also other permissions such as an eating house registration certificate, swimming pool license, place of public entertainment license A and B and a performance license.

A circular has been already issued by the state home department to all police chiefs and collectors on December 24, scrapping five licenses that hotels and bars had to take from police authorities annually. (See Box)

"This will help to reduce the hassle to start the hotel as it takes months to obtain permissions that will be saved and money as well," said an official. Earlier, aspirant restaurateurs and hoteliers had to procure shop act license, food license and police license. To obtain police approvals it would take at least six to eight months as one file of documents was sent to the police station and another to the traffic police department," said official.

He also added that though the 5 licenses related to the state home department have cancelled, the local authority like Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) licenses in Mumbai jurisdiction will remain as it is. "Hotel owner has to take licenses and NOC such as specific size for the hotel, kitchen, eating license, swimming pool license and fire brigade licenses about safety from the local authority. Only the thing is, duplication of process will be cut short," added official.



The state government recently issued a directive following complaints of harassment that prospective restaurant and hotel owners had to go through to set base in any city in Maharashtra. Top sources in Pune Restaurants and Hoteliers Association claimed that almost 8,000 restaurants had come up illegally in the city because of the hassle.

Ganesh Shetty, the president of Pune Restaurants and Hoteliers Association, told TOI that a recent government resolution (GR) said no-objection certificate or licence from the police department would not be required to open and operate a hotel or a restaurant. "The decision was taken

by chief minister Devendra Fadnavis in a recent meeting of the government's new programme 'Ease of doing Business'. The decision is a boon for new entrepreneurs, who will be able to set up establishments in weeks instead of months," said Shetty

The GR said several outdated and unnecessary permissions were required to open restaurants and hotels under the Bombay Police Act. It was then decided to strike out all such unnecessary permissions such as an eating house registration certificate, swimming pool licence, place of public entertainment licence A and B as well as a performance licence.

"Earlier, prospective restaurateurs and hoteliers had to procure shop act licence, food licence and police licence. It would take at least six to eight months to get police approvals, as one file of documents was sent to the police station and another to the traffic police department. Different police authorities would then visit the restaurant or the hotel site to check if the available parking space was in accord with the size of the establishment, which was already sanctioned by the civic body. It was thus a duplication of processes. Even renewal of licences was a tedious job," added Shetty

Praful Chandawarkar, the director of Malaka Spice, said, "Obtaining police permission to operate a food or bar enterprise, which takes four or six months and costs lot of money, is against the development of this country. So, I applaud this move by the chief minister."

Nilesh P Kolapkar, the chief executive officer of Post 91, said, "It is a tedious process to procure the NOC. It would take months to get all the formalities completed, which was time-consuming. The recent directive by the chief minister is a welcome move."

Source: *The Times of India*



Bengal Global Business Summit 2016 opens up big MoUs in tourism and hospitality sector in the state

MAJOR projects in the tourism and hospitality sectors were announced at the second edition of the Bengal Global business summit, held on January 9-10. It was learnt that major investments are expected with Mega Theme Park resorts, five-star, four-star and three-star resorts coming up at Gajoldoba near Siliguri.

The project was named “Bhorer Alo” (Light of the Dawn) by the Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. She said, “Probably the spot will offer the best view of the Kanchunjungha from the plains. You have water body, you have forests and wildlife.” This will be one of the finest tourism projects the MoU for which was signed today.

Significant announcements were made related to a new air travel link

from Kolkata-Durgapur-Bagdogra, Thimpu-Singapore. The Druk Air and Bengal Air – the main sponsors of the Andal airport project signed a MoU to this end and the prime minister of Bhutan – Mr Tshering Tobgay was present to see this happen. Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister, West Bengal, said that her government was providing tax free fuel to those airlines who are operating via Durgapur-Andal and also at other state airports.

The second edition of the Bengal Global business summit had been able to secure a whopping investment proposal of over Rs 250,104 crore. This excluded investment proposals made in 2014-15, which had totalled about Rs 2,43,000 crore out of which Rs 95,000 crore investments had ac-

tually happened and various projects were in different stages of implementation on the ground.

“It’s been a very successful business conclave, the best in India I can tell you,” said Mamata Banerjee. “There was high enthusiasm and a perceptible air of optimism over this year’s summit from all quarters,” she said. Most of the industrialists and visiting dignitaries admitted that they did not have a clear idea about the scale of improved infrastructure that the state had created in the past couple of years.

“Investments in the hospitality sector augur well for our industry. New projects will surely usher in more tourists and better revenues for the industry,” said Sudesh Poddar, the president of HRAEL.

Culinary grad from Canada beats out chefs from 67 countries to win Young Chef Olympiad 2016



DANIELLA Germond, (picture, right) a student and recent graduate of Niagara College's Canadian Food and Wine Institute, was named champion in the 2016 Young Chef Olympiad in India.

Germond, who graduated from Niagara College's Culinary Management program in 2014, advanced through all four rounds of the competition, which began in New Delhi on Jan. 26 before moving to Mumbai, Bangalore and then Kolkata for the final round on Jan. 31. Germond is currently enrolled as a full-time student at Niagara College and is working toward her Cook Apprentice Certification.

For the Young Chef Olympiad, Germond and her fellow competitors

were required to execute very specific dishes. In the final round, that included a shrimp appetizer, chicken entrée and oeufs a la neige as the dessert. The judging is based on organization, cleanliness, sanitation, cooking techniques, presentation and taste.

"I'm in absolute shock," Germond said following her victory. "There were so many talented young cooks here." She credits her chef-father when she was young to helping launch her culinary dreams. As for her post-championship plans: "I'm trying to finish school and continue to work," she said.

Her mentor, Scott Baechler, played a key role in preparing Daniella for this international competition, and

his work is a great testament to the faculty and staff's commitment to our students' success.

The second edition of the Young Chef Olympiad (YCO) was organized by India's largest hotel school chain, International Institute of Hotel Management (IIHM) and supported by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. It was held from January 27, 2016 to February 1, 2016 across the four cities of New Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and Kolkata. The event was a platform to connect young chefs globally and build bridges for talent in this field across borders. It was aimed at blending culinary cultures and making it an integral part of the participant's lives.

Government has no business to run hotels: Arvind Subramanian



ARVIND Subramanian, Chief Economic Advisor to the Government in an interview to The Hindu said categorically that the government has to get out of running hotels in the country. “Government has no business to run hotels,” he said. Subramanian was replying to a specific question on strategic disinvestment pertaining to Air India and ITDC Hotels.

Drawing a distinction between, Air India and hotels operated by ITDC, Subramanian said that while the labour is a “very big issue” with Air India, the land aspect is major issue when it comes to hotels. “When land gets involved it is a complete mess, because how do you value it and then it goes in to litigation,” he said. “We should disinvest Ashoka Hotel, but how do you value the land there?” he asked.

The Union Finance Minister, Arun

Jaitley also outlined the strategic disinvestment thrust of the government towards Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) in his budget speech today. “We have to leverage the assets of CPSEs for generation of resources for investment in new projects. We will encourage CPSEs to divest individual assets like land, manufacturing units, etc. to release their asset value for making investment in new projects. The NITI Aayog will identify the CPSEs for strategic sale,” the Minister said while presenting the budget.

“We will adopt a comprehensive approach for efficient management of Government investment in CPSEs by addressing issues such as capital restructuring, dividend, bonus shares, etc.,” he added. The government also announced the proposal to rename the Department of Disinvestment to Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM).

Hotels continue to struggle on Rates in 2016: STR Global Report

DESPITE 3.3 pts growth in occupancy, hotel rates drop half point in the last year nationally, revealed STR Global's India Hotel Review Report for 2015. As per the report, while the all-India occupancy in hotels rose by 3.3 points to 62%, and RevPAR by 5% points, the Average Room Rates (ARRs), a vital indicator of hotel performance, continued to decline due to lack of business confidence in the economy and the industry. The Rates declined by half a point nationally in 2015.

2015 saw the smallest addition to chain affiliated hotel inventory in the last seven years – only 7,853 new rooms nationally. Terming 2015 the “driest” year in terms of chain affiliation deals and new projects, the report attributes it to “lack of confidence in the sector among deployers of equi-



ty and debt capital.” In the absence of visible inbound leisure demand, it was domestic leisure and MICE+W (Wedding) became the industry’s demand core.

Like various reports in the past indicated, while room revenues continued to be under stress for the hospitality sector, F&B and banquets played a key role as significant revenue generators across hotel segments, “forcing changes in operating models for select/limited service hotels,” the report notes.

Occupancy improvement was the key feature for 2015 performance, with all but two of the key markets having positive results. At all India level, 62% occupancy is the highest in the last seven years, the Report says. Among the key cities, Mumbai and Goa registered occupancy above 70% mark. Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune and Jaipur achieved their highest city occupancy after 2008. However, Kolkata and Goa has shown marginal decline in occupancies compared to 2014.

The ARR’s in major city markets including New Delhi and Delhi NCR have shown a decline compared to 2014. The rates dropped more than 4 points in New Delhi. Despite registering occupancy growth above 70%, ARRs in Mumbai has grown just 1.25%.

Overall, the development activity in the sector will remain muted going forward in key markets, the report says. However, the same will pick up steam in markets outside the main markets. Chain affiliated inventory at the end of 2015, as per the report, was 113,000 rooms, and estimated to reach 155,000 by 2020.

Pointing out the policy level issues, the report notes that despite identifying the tourism sector as one of the vital “T’s in the development agenda of the present government, the sector is yet to receive the “rightful economic recognition” from the government.

Eye forTravel Asia Summit: Travel meet to foresee technology trends at Singapore



TRAVEL brands are being made to work harder with the shifting use of mobile, social media, sharing economies and the gradual move from offline to online across Asia.

They need to plan new strategies, develop new teams and refocus their budgets while trying to maximise ROI and build new revenue streams. But we still have to remember what makes you (and all our customers) want to travel today? The call of the sea, a life changing business deal, whistling windy mountains or maybe even the mayhem of a city? And we need to know how to service not just the booking but the trip itself.

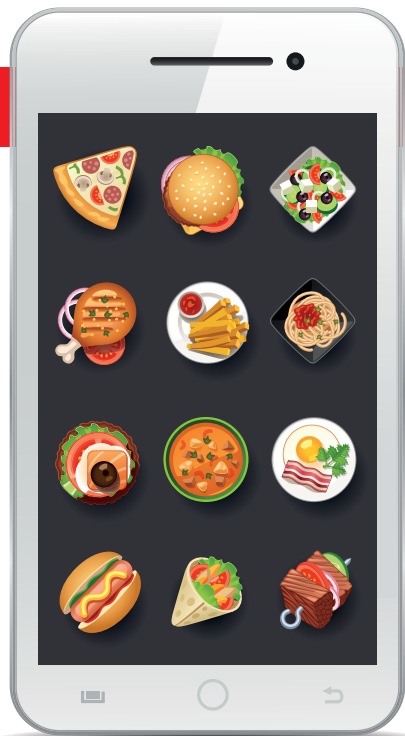
Travellers like to plan, experience, customise and have an itinerary built for just them. To shed light on the growth of the Asian market and how mobile is driving consumer engagement and numbers for travel brands, Tim Gunstone, Managing Director for Eye forTravel said “We are at a tipping point where brands can focus on the customer experience, consumer behaviour and the need to engage and build relation-

ships with these connected travellers right through the travel cycle... and at the centre of it all we have data!”

Asia has always been an important market to Eye forTravel and now in its 12th year in Singapore the event has changed angle to reflect the demands of their TDS Asia conference attendees, as well as the shifts taking place in the industry.

With this in mind Eye forTravel Asia Summit (15-16th June) is perfectly placed to bring together the key thinkers from both the traditional travel market and the new disruptive talent.

The Singapore meet will find list of speakers from heads of Booking.com, Starwood Hotels, Google, Roomorama, Skyscanner, Tencent, TripAdvisor, MakemyTrip, Scoot Airlines and many more. Topics that are likely to be covered are: the importance of analysing distribution channels and smart marketing tools to ensure on accurate pricing, understanding digital transformations, keeping customers using smart analytics.



THE HUNGER GAMES

A young industry trying to revolutionise the way India orders food - is laying off people or shutting down operations. Is this the end of the beginning of food based apps or food aggregators?

THE year 2015 was meant to be the year for food tech start-ups. Food tech start-ups were like your neighbourhood magicians, who with a wave of a magic wand would deliver anything from fresh vegetables to biryanis to your door. There were the restaurant aggregators like the Tiny Owls, and the Zomatos, restaurant services like DineOut, which lets you book a table at a restaurant in advance; and delivery companies, to deliver food to your doorstep (eg. Eat-Lo); and then Faasos kind, providing their own cooked meals to customers. Foodpanda, Swiggy, Qunito, EatOn-Go, and many others promising to solve the problems of busy, cooking hampered Indians.

Yet by the end of the year, things are going horribly wrong. TinyOwl's financial troubles have boiled over to a point where many employees who were terminated had concerns over whether their full and final checks would clear or not; Zomato has laid



► **Swiggy has over 5000 restaurants on its platform**

off around 300 staff and players like Dazo that shut shop in less than a year. Even investors, who until October (tiny owl got Rs 50 crore in October 2015 from Matrix Partners and

Sequoia Capital) rather enthusiastic about funding such ventures, are backing away.

Flush with fund

Food tech start-ups only raised \$160 million (Rs. 1,056.40 crores) this year, just slightly over two percent of all the money raised by start-ups, according to a report published by VCCEdge, a research platform for VCCircle. Most critically, most of that \$160 million was raised in April, which saw 7 deals with a total of \$74 million, or around Rs. 488.58 crores, raised (April was the month that saw hype for food tech shoot through the roof as well). By October, the total value of funding plummeted to \$11 million (Rs. 72.62 crores).

Too many players

The sudden bust to boom created a lot of buzz in India's start-up circuit, especially whether the food tech companies are doomed? "It's overcrowded," offers Saurabh Kocchar, CEO of

Foodpanda to The Telegraph, as one reason. “There are so many players in this small space, and there’s not a whole lot of innovation going on. I see a lot of people solving problems, but no one is solving problems to the next level.” In short, there’s a universal feeling that far too many people are getting into food tech without offering anything new.

And while the lack of innovation is a valid point, others point out start-ups have very little choice in the matter. “The only thing that will get you funding is a clone,” decries one entrepreneur who launched a food tech start-up last year that went bust. “Indian investors talk a big game about innovation, but in reality, they do not trust anything that isn’t a clone. Try to deviate from that model, and you’ll suddenly find yourself strapped for cash. But if we don’t innovate, we’ll end up in a bad way anyway.”

Flawed model

Food aggregators, more than any other type, are receiving the most flak (and seem to be facing the most trouble), and it’s not difficult to see why. On the surface, food aggregators don’t have an obvious revenue stream or business model to generate income. Their main function is to let users search for places to eat, and then provide a phone number or link where the user can place an order from, all for free. Mostly, they generate revenue by getting a small fee or cut of any order placed through their service. This, some point out, cannot possibly be a sustainable business model.

“We knew this model of giving only an ordering platform for readily available food was rash in India,” says Revant Bhate, Head of Marketing at Faasos, a Mumbai headquartered food delivery business. “Restaurant aggregators are trying to attract customers by giving discounts on the same product from the same restau-

rants without innovating like offering local delicacies in different cities or offering products not usually available. Secondly, the commissions made on restaurants orders are also quite less, as restaurants have their own fixed costs to overcome which makes it quite difficult for pure aggregation businesses to recoup expenses for acquiring customers as well as running operations. Maybe, in the future, one player, whoever makes it big and can generate actual demand for restaurants can reach a stage where they can charge a higher commission allowing them to have better unit economics like how its panned out in the US” .

According to Rajat Wahi, Partner, Management Consulting, Head, Consumer, Retail and Agri Sector KPMG India, unlike the USA where this business model was successful, India is full of local restaurants which deliver home as quickly and efficiently as these food aggregators. In India, local

delivery models are so strong, these food aggregators had to be innovative enough like probably provide more hi-value products like organic food, exotic foods, to give an extra advantage. Also some argue, it’s just that companies went about doing things the wrong way. One needs to something innovative, such as the way Bite Club, a Gurgaon based company does: it has tie up with chefs to create unique menus and then delivers them.

Many experts believe these tech start-ups are just going through ‘mid-course corrections’; this is not any signs of a bubble bust. They are going through a phase where companies are trying to understand what is the best way forward by creating a sustainable business model going forward.”

Not so bad

But not everyone believes that food tech is doing bad. In fact, they say



► Foodpanda is a global player in the field



► Food apps and restaurants must work together

that it's just a matter of perception. "Far from the truth," as put by Sandeep Mitran, one of the earliest (and most successful) players in the food tech arena. The fact is that all of food tech's big players raised their money late last year or early this year, which means that they are settled, cash-wise, for the rest of 2015 and ahead. They don't need to raise more money, nor do they need to strike any more deals. Number of players are up, volume of orders coming in is up, number of users is up. In addition, the number of people with smart phones and mobile Internet usage has skyrocketed, which suits them perfectly."

There have been far too many new players, and that that may have hurt the sector to some degree. What's happened is the result of compa-

Food Tech Hiccups

- TinyOwl scales down operations in four cities; fires staff
- Zomato fires 300; says its revenue hasn't kept up with the growth in its sales team
- Bangalore-based food tech firm Dazo shuts operations
- SpoonJoy merged with grocery and fresh food delivery company Grofers
- Foodpanda runs into execution issues; customers take advantage of its refund policy
- Many small food start-ups are closing down or pivoting to new business models
- Investors on a wait-and-watch mode; may not fund food tech start-ups for next six months

nies growing too fast and too soon and dishing out huge discounts to aggregate customers. There was no solid business plan. But ultimately the committed players will continue to thrive, while the rest will die out. That's the way the start-up sector always works.

Too fast, too soon

Other ecommerce industry experts also feel that this shake up should make these ecommerce firms to stop hiring furiously and expanding at break-neck speed. They have been doing this to please the investors who want some kind of returns fast. The value of these companies are based on flimsy grounds like the number of deliveries they make or the number of customers they gain.

Their valuations is not based on the core of how the business is run, on the financials and on the basic fundamentals of a business. The angel funders are also ones to blame for this. Some industry insiders believe that these ecommerce companies want to hike up their valuations to make a fast buck and exit.

This is more of a "shake up", most experts believe. It is a good time for eretailers to take stock and see what is working and tweak their business. Rather than pointlessly scaling their business, going on rampant expansion plans, they can put money into becoming technology enablers and more efficient. I guess eretailers and angel investors should get more sensible now, it is easy to fund great ideas but the success lies in the execution.

A wake-up call

Simply put, the only companies in the ecommerce space who will do well are the ones that are tracking costs, take charge of their last mile delivery and expand at a slow rate. And, the mess the food tech start ups find themselves might just be the wake up call.

A jazz band consisting of three men in black tuxedos is performing in a hallway. On the left, a man with long white hair plays a flute. In the center, a man plays a double bass. On the right, a man plays a saxophone. A large, ornate chandelier hangs from the ceiling. In the foreground, a woman is lying in a white bathtub, wearing a highly decorative, jeweled headdress. The scene is lit with warm, golden light.

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 A MEMBER OF DESIGN HOTELS

Tariff war in the offing in Kolkata?

As more rooms are going to be added to the existing inventory in the hospitality landscape of Kolkata, a price war is all set to begin



► JW Marriott Kolkata, under construction

KOLKATA is all set to add two to three hotels in the 'mid-market upscale' to 'super-luxury' segments with approximately 1000 rooms added by the next year.

"At least two major hospitality projects (JW Marriott and ITC) may come up in the next two years," 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 the 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 2015-16 as well. But net income will remain constrained by the growing supply of rooms and rising expenses.

What do the management heads of the top hotels expect after the new entries?



Britta Leick-Milde
General Manager, Hyatt
Regency

We don't expect the new 5 Star properties to start a price war compromising on the quality of services. After all good services and customer satisfaction comes at a price and they have a responsibility to maintain this norm. Last year when a new international property came up in the city there was some undercutting of the room rents that forced many hotels bring down the price to survive the competition. But this superficial pricing affects quality of services. But gradually things became normal.



Dilip Mishra
Resident Manager,
Lalit Great Eastern

We won't be much affected by the price war (if it at all begins). This is because we are a heritage hotel. We offer a unique experience to our customers who look for special care. These customers too are unique in the sense that yearn for food and hospitality they won't get anywhere. It blends a old-world charm mixed with prompt and personalised care. However, there is no denying that the price war may affect the MICE section where people don't expect so much of a personalised service. In essence, the 'tariff war' is not going to affect us much



Marco Saxer
General Manager of
Swissôtel Kolkata

Most of the upcoming new hotels are in the 5-Star category. We don't belong to this luxury category. So even if they start a price war their rates are not expected to come down so low to affect us. Last year when a new international hotel started its operation in the Rajarhat area, they did spark off a tariff war, but that effect didn't last long. Besides, we have some unique advantages, such as the proximity to the airport and the Eco Park. This area will also have a colossal convention centre. In short, in the long run we won't be affected much.



Vinay Thakur
General Manager,
Pride Hotel

I don't think tariff will go down much because still there is a huge demand of hotel rooms in the city. Especially in the peak season — say November to February—most of the hotels run in sold out rates. The demand for rooms, in our category, is far greater than the supply. As the upcoming new hotels belong to the luxury category they may put some pressure on room rents of similar hotels (such as, the Taj Bengal and ITC Sonar). This won't make a difference to hotels like ours that's in the 100-room category.

Rate Trend

Figures for Kolkata; average room rent in Rs

Year	Average Room Rent	Occupancy(In%)
2010-11	4,788	65.4
2011-12	5,302	67.1
2012-13	5,461	67.1
2013-14	5,230	70.1
2014-15	4,867	67.7



**PLAY, PAY
OR FACE
THE MUSIC?**



► The controversial copyright societies – Indian Performing Rights Society (IPRS) and Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL) are yet again under the scanner, for the erratic and arbitrary collection of royalties, despite their uncertain status. The representatives of the societies are demanding license fees and royalties for the music being played at live events, weddings and the likes. Broadcasting and Media solutions company Novex communication is also in the fray. Can the music industry and the hospitality industry ever work hand in hand?



THE sum usually varies from Rs.5,000 to Rs.80,000 and the artists, bands, organizers or the management of a venue are approached to pay in order to avoid any last minute hurdles. The royalties being collected are supposed to be distributed to the original composers. In addition to this, the societies claim that they have a reciprocal agreement with the members of the music industry assignment in India and abroad which includes nations like China, Russia, and England amongst several others. If a sound recording is used as is, license ought to be sought only from PPL. On the other hand, if only the musical score and the lyrics are used, as is the case in live concerts, license from IPRS is to be procured.



► All Hotels' discotheques and jukeboxes must seek prior licences

Sections 33, 34 and 35 of the Copyright Act amended in 2012 relate to streamlining the registration and functioning of copyright societies. Section 33 (3A) of amendment required that previous copyright societies apply for re-registration should furnish full accounts before the Copyright Board on or before 21 June 2013. The societies failed to get registration from the Board but claimed that the registration has neither been cancelled nor renewed but pending due to internal inquiries[2]. On the contrary, IPRS took a paradoxical stand in IPRS vs Union of India & Ors and Hasan Kamal vs Union of India[3], where the subject matter of the writ petition was to look into its irregularities. IPRS contended that it was not a

registered copyright society post the 2012 amendment. Going by the opposing stands that the societies have taken and their legalde-recognized status, their activities like granting of licenses and collection of royalties stand infructuous.

Few questions that remain lingering are – what is the basis of collection, that is, what is the determining factor for the quantum of royalty collected? Secondly, what if a band performance includes songs from different artistes? How are the royalties distributed in such a setting? Further, the credibility of the representatives can always be put to question. How can one be assured that the royalties actually reaches the original musician or composer?

In order to continue as lawful 'licensors', the copyright societies need to establish an authentic status and adhere to the legal provisions, thereby instilling faith in the shaken trust.

Now let's go through a recent order from the Bombay High Court in IPRS v. Harsh Vardhan Samor case. Delivered ex parte on 22 December 2015, it restrains the owners of a Mumbai restaurant, from performing musical works in IPRS's repertoire at its premises, including at its Christmas and New Year events without a license. In other words, the Bombay High Court passed an order in favour of IPRS, restraining the Defendants from using musical works without its permission. However, the Court determined that IPRS' application to re-register in 2013 as a Copyright Society had indeed lapsed, in light of not meeting the requirements imposed by the Registrar of Copyrights. However, the Court accepted arguments that such did not affect its locus in being able to commercially exploit the licences it held as the 'Society' was incorporated as a company.

Before the order can be analysed, it must be noted that the judgement makes it IPRS's legal nature clear laying all previous doubts to rest. It clearly records that IPRS is a company registered under the Companies Act, not a copyright society under the Copyright Act. The court noted that IPRS had been assigned the performing and mechanical rights in the works of its members, and held that this would allow the organisation to license these works under Section 30 of the Act as the owner of the works in question.

The problem with this logic is that it flies in the face of the statutory intent behind the second proviso to Section 33(1) of the Act (inserted vide the 2012 Amendment), which reads as follows:

“Provided further that the business of issuing or granting license in

respect of literary, dramatic, musical and artistic works incorporated in a cinematograph films or sound recordings shall be carried out only through a copyright society duly registered under this Act” . The court dismisses this provision in two short sentences:

“The second proviso to Section 33 (1) of the Act puts a restriction on any entity which is not a Copyright Society from doing business of issuing or granting license in respect of literary, dramatic, musical and artistic works incorporated in cinematographic films or sound recordings. Obviously second proviso to Section 33 refers to an entity which is neither an owner of copyrights nor a copyright society registered under the Act.”

Given the long history behind the 2012 Amendment—as the lyricist Javed Akhtar struggled for three years get the Bill passed in parliament— this lack of analysis on the second proviso seems to be a grave omission. By allowing organisations such as IPRS to carry out the business of licensing musical works in their capacity as owners, the court appears seems to have completely eviscerated the legislative intent behind the insertion of the provision.

Before 2012, organisations such as IPRS and PPL were identified as being opaque and unduly privileging larger owners over smaller authors. In order to level the playing field for authors, the Amendment mooted a distinct shift towards vesting greater rights in authors vis-à-vis owners of rights, and one of the means employed to effect this shift was to restrict the ability of entities other than registered copyright societies to license underlying works.

Once we understand that the second proviso to Section 33(1) exists to remedy the mischief of large organisations exerting undue pressure upon authors (lyricists and composers), it becomes clear that an interpretation of Section 30 that allows the same



PPL's Version

All those who play or communicate pre-recorded music (of our members) for non-private purposes or in public places or commercial establishments or non-commercial establishments be it acoustic or visual, whether by way of Gramophone Records, Music cassette or CDs or Radio or TV or Cable network or in any other form / technology in must obtain prior licence from PPL. Some examples for the sake of illustration (non-exhaustive list): Broadcasting (radio, TV); Mobile telephony (caller ring-back tunes, track streaming, audio-cinema, WAP/IVR, etc) and Public Performance. Examples of such Establishments in Public Performance are:

AC Restaurant, Aircraft, Airport Terminals, Amusement Parks, Art Galleries, Banks, Banquet Halls, Bars, Beauty Parlors, Bowling Alleys, Buses, Cafes, Casinos, Cinemas, Clinics, Clubs, Dance Centres, Discotheques, DJs, Exercise Classes, Exhibitions, Factories, Events, Guest Houses, Hospitals, Hotels, Magic Shows, Museums, Non-AC Restaurants, Nursing Homes, Offices, Pubs, Railway Stations, Railway Trains, Reception Areas, Shops, Spectator Sports, Swimming Pools, Telephone - Music On Hold, Theaters

(The above list is illustrative, and not exhaustive)

Important note: PPL's Licence does not absolve the licensee from having to obtain licence for under-lying musical works or literary works, if any, from the owners thereof or the performing rights copyright society (PRS) representing such owners.

Caution: Any Broadcasting or Performance of Copyrighted Music Recording without first having a licence from PPL, in respect of its works, constitutes an Infringement of Copyright under The Copyright Act of 1957. It is a Cognizable & Non-bailable offence which attracts heavy penalty which can extend upto a fine of Rs 2 lakhs and imprisonment of 3 years.

Source: www.pplindia.org

mischief through the license/transfer of rights to a company would be entirely unsupported by legislative intent.

This is one justification for an interpretation that keeps unregistered copyright societies outside the scope of Section 30. Yet another comes from a post by none other than IP expert Prof. Shamnad Basheer's, in which he argued that the “spirit and intent behind Section 33” would clearly be in conflict with the court's logic, especially given that copyright societies perform quasi-public functions. For still another reason, consider the implications of this order.

If entities such as IPRS are allowed to continue doing business (as they have been, through this interpretation of Section 30), then there exists no incentive whatsoever for copyright societies to register themselves. In the absence of such registration, the entire catalogue of protections legislated into play by the 2012 Amendment would never see the light of day, since equitable copyright societies, as envisioned in Section 33 of the Act, would be (have been?) replaced by companies such as IPRS that base their business models on the execution of deeds of assignment from authors, and the enforcement of performing rights as owners under Section 30. In the absence of a competing society that gets itself registered under Section 33, this would result in a fundamental change in the market for musical work – pre-2012 IPRS would be firmly at the top of this new food chain, with composers and lyricists planted firmly at the bottom. In effect, orders such as Harsh Vardhan Samor could herald a second wave of market oppression for authors of musical works, who would be forced to assign their work under near-exploitative arrangements. In effect, Harsh Vardhan Samor could end up emasculating not just the second proviso to Section 33, but the entire gamut of author-friendly amend-



► Disc jockeys must pay required fees

ments introduced in 2012. These include Section 33A, which provides for appeals by aggrieved persons to the Copyright Board, whose jurisdiction would effectively be ousted by the functioning of IPRS in its current form, and Section 35, which requires copyright societies to be controlled by authors as well as owners – a stipulation that simply does not apply to a company.

Harsh Vardhan Samor doesn't look great even in an unlikely counterfactual, in which (presumably) a group of authors pool their resources to form a new copyright society for underlying works, get it registered under Section 33, and gain enough traction on the market to emerge as a credible

competitor to IPRS. In such a situation, the new society should be given a position of predominance (if not an outright monopoly) relative to IPRS. However, this would never happen, since Harsh Vardhan Samor seems to stand in the way of a frictionless licensing market insofar as the works already in IPRS's repertoire are concerned. If, according to this order, IPRS can continue extracting royalties from establishments, then what becomes of our new copyright society?

Further, there is a case to be made for monopolistic copyright societies as an a priori good – royalty administration is one of the few instances where a monopoly performs (in ide-



IPRS's Claims

IPRS administers and controls on behalf of its Members. The Performing Right in Musical Works which are:-

- The Right for Broadcasting and Causing the Musical Work to be transmitted in whole or in parts to subscribers to / of a diffusion service in all parts of the world.
- The Right to Perform the Musical Work in Public.
- The Right to Communicate the Musical Work to the Public.
- The Owner of the Musical Work has the Exclusive Right to:

Perform or Communicate the Musical Work to the public or to authorize any other person to do so. Therefore, exploiting or playing of music through any of the below mentioned reasons requires the permission of the Owner of the Music :- by way of Live Performances; by permitting any place to be used for Public Performance and / or Communication of the music to the public; by way of Recorded music; by Broadcasting / Telecasting any music; IPRS grants 'Blanket Licences' for a moderate annual charge which authorises the Public Performance, Broadcast or Diffusion by wire or by any other means of any of the numerous works which the Company controls on behalf of its Members and that of its Affiliated Societies throughout the world.

- The Licences covers both – Live performances as well as performances by any Mechanical / Electronic means.
- IPRS conducts its business of granting licenses per Section 30, as the Company is an owner of the copyrights as per the assignment deeds executed with its members who are owners and have assigned the same to it.

Source: www.iprs.org

al conditions) more efficiently than a competitive market environment. This only serves to render the fragmentation of the market for performing rights that would be brought about by Harsh Vardhan Samor all the more inexcusable.

Finally, the fact of the matter is that copyright societies in India today are expected to serve a social justice function, as Prof. Basheer rightly notes, in upholding the interests of the “little guy”. Even if a fragmented royalty administration market was desirable, the discomforts inherent in entrusting such a social justice function to market forces should serve as enough justification for protecting (at least for the moment) a well-regulated monopolistic model.

In addition to this, there appears to have been no disclosure by IPRS of its dodgy history – be it the Barasat orders, the official inquiry conducted (and later shelved) by the Registrar of Copyrights, or its dubious litigation history. For another, there could exist a strong argument to be made that even if Harsh Vardhan Samor’s reasoning were to be accepted, the

Deeds of Assignment flashed around by IPRS ought to be invalidated, since a majority of them must surely have been executed before IPRS metamorphosed overnight from copyright society to company. A third point that deserves analysis is the fact that these problems do not emerge with respect to IPRS’s traditional companion on these pages – PPL. Since the proviso to Section 33(1) does not include sound recordings, it would seem that PPL would still be free to issue licenses under this business model. These stories, alas, must be left for another day.

Incidentally, Business Standard carried a report that a similar order has been passed by the Delhi High Court on 23 December 2015 in IPRS v. Great Indian Nautanki Company . In their own way, our “copyright societies” seem to have been persistent to usher in silent nights across the hospitality and event management sector.

Source: Intellectual Property Experts Shristi Bansal, lexorbis.com, Balaji Subramanian, Spicyip.com,



► Marriage halls too have to obtain licence to play the music



Novex's Version

Novex Communications ventured into authorization of reproduction of the sound recording, the performance of the sound recording in public, its broadcast and inclusion in the program service. Novex has been offered to tie up with big brands in the industry like Yash Raj, UTV Movies and Shemaroo.

Novex is authorized agent under section 30 of the copy right act by Yash Raj Films, UTV Movies, Shemaroo Entertainment Pvt Ltd to grant on their behalf Public Performance Rights to the 3rd party who are communicating their content in Public Places.

Music at all public places including but not limited to hotels, restaurants, discotheques, event companies, DJs, cinema halls, shows, malls, stores, shops, salon, parlors, religious events, marriage halls, jukeboxes, railway & bus stations, airport, motels, guest houses, banks, offices, amusement parks, pubs, private shows, exhibitions & any such other public area intending to communicate to the public in any matter whatsoever, any musical works, sound recordings, or any part thereof, in any format, in audio, visual and/or audio- visual media is required to obtain a PPL license from the duly authorized agent.

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Source: www.novex.in

Hospitality industry seeks freedom from uneven taxes

Overall taxes on tourism arrivals applicable for hotels in India amounts to a whopping 25 to 30 per cent compared to 7 per cent in Thailand



THE hospitality industry has been at the receiving end in Annual Budgets for the last few years. Despite high decibel events and initiatives organised by respective States for promoting tourism and hospitality, the ministries have failed

to revisit and remodel some of the prevailing tax structures, laws and policies to bring it at par with competing tourism economies of the world.

“For instance, our neighbouring south-east Asian countries like Thailand and Malaysia have a GST of 7

and 6 per cent respectively. In contrast, GST applicable for hotels in India amounts to a whopping 25 to 30 per cent. Our industry is competing with a difference of roughly 20 per cent while matching with the global service amenities and requirements.

Also, we hope that the government considers granting infrastructure status to hotels with a project cost of Rs 25 crore as against the present Rs 250 crore," says Sudesh Poddar, President HRAEI.

Doing away with double taxation, exemption of service tax on foreign exchange earned, and simplification of taxation laws are some of the demands domestic tour operators for the past few years. But subsequent budgets have failed to meet any demand.

"The services of tour operators earning foreign exchange for the country should be exempted from whole of service tax. It should be treated at par with the physical goods exporters earning foreign exchange," IATO President Subhash Goyal said.

IATO claims to have over 4,000 members, covering all segments of tourism industry. Goyal said foreign exchange earnings should also be exempted from the proposed GST till international tourist arrivals in India touch the 30 million mark yearly.

Foreign tourist arrivals in 2015 grew by just 4.4 per cent to 80.16 lakh against 76.79 lakh in 2014. Considering the meagre share of global tourist arrivals, compared to the size and the huge opportunities that the country offers, government should keep the tourism industry free from any taxes including GST till the country receives 30 million foreign tourists yearly.

Besides, he said, litigations in service tax department are increasing due to frequent changes in service tax laws. Poddar said service tax laws needed to be made simple to understand and follow.

He also urged the government to address the issue of double taxation on outbound tour operators. "In case of outbound tour, only the service portion which is rendered in India should be taxed and rest should be out of the service tax," he said.

IMPACT OF GST ON TOURISM ARRIVALS			
COUNTRY	STANDARD GST RATE(SR) FOR OTHERS	TOURISM GST RATE(TR) FOR TOURISM INDUSTRY	TOURISM INFLOW
FRANCE	20%	6%	80m
HON KONG	Nil	Nil	60.8m
THAILAND	10%	7%	20m
MALAYSIA	10%	6%	25m
SINGAPORE	7%	7%	11m
SPAIN	16%	7%	57mn
TURKEY	18%	8%	31.5m
AUSTRIA	20%	10%	23m
BELGIUM	20%	6%	8m
FINLAND	22%	8%	4m
GREECE	19%	9%	15m
ITALY	20%	10%	46m
PORTUGAL	20%	5%	8m
SWEDEN	25%	12%	11m
JAPAN	10%	8%	19m
INDIA	25-30%	25-30%	8m



POLICY

The United Colours of India

The Government of India's Swadesh Darshan scheme has identified 12 thematic tourist circuits across the country. Eastern India, the most diverse region of the country, can have more spots included in the list

LAST year the Ministry of Tourism formulated a plan scheme called Swadesh Darshan for integrated development of tourist circuits around specific themes.

Under the new scheme 12 thematic circuits were identified: North-East India Circuit, Buddhist Circuit, Himalayan Circuit, Coastal Circuit, Krishna Circuit, Desert Circuit, Tribal Circuit, Eco Circuit, Wildlife Circuit, Rural Circuit, Spiritual Circuit and Ramayana Circuit. These circuits have been identified for development, which among other things, cover remote villages and small and medium towns.

Swadesh Darshan promotes India as a holistic destination and as

part of its on-going activities, annually releases print, electronic, on-line and outdoor media campaigns in the international and domestic markets, under the Incredible India

brand-line, to promote various tourism destinations and products of the country. The Ministry also promotes the tourism destinations and products through its websites and publicity and promotional material produced by it from time to time.

In addition, a series of promotional activities are undertaken in important and potential tourist generating markets abroad through overseas India tourism offices with the objective of showcasing India's tourism potential and increasing tourist arrivals to the country.

Following are some of the routes in

**SWADESH
DARSHAN
PROMOTES INDIA AS
A HOLISTIC DESTINATION
AND IS MEANT TO
BUCK UP THE
INCREDIBLE INDIA
CAMPAIGN**



► **The Himalaya Circuit is a key destination in the scheme**

Eastern identified under the Swadesh Darshan scheme.

Buddhist circuit: Sources said the Union Tourism Ministry has already identified Bodh Gaya, Rajgir and Vaishali in Bihar and Kapilavastu, Sarnath, Sravasti and Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh under the Buddhist circuit of Swadesh Darshan.

The Centre on Thursday launched a roadmap for integrated tourism development of the Buddhist circuit in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Aiming at attracting more tourists and creating job opportunities, government launched a strategy for integrated tourism development of the Buddhist sector in collaboration with the World Bank two years ago. Dubbed as “Investing in the Buddhist Circuit”, the Rs 450 lakh initiative is being carried out for development of Buddhist heritage sites in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in the first stage. While

International Finance Corporation, a wing of World Bank, is providing Rs 1.80 crore, Tourism Ministry is contributing Rs 2.25 crores and the contribution of Bihar and UP is Rs 2.25 crore each for the project.

The strategy aims at infrastructure development, skill development, increased market access, involvement of communities and enhancing the visitors experience in the Buddhist circuit. “Our government under leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has identified development of Buddhist circuit as a priority. Today we are launching strategy for integrated tourism development of the Buddhist Circuit with the partnership of the state governments, various stakeholders and private sector,” Tourism Minister Sripad Naik had said after launching the programme.

According to him India is blessed

to be the land where many religions including Buddhism originated. “Buddhism is one of the strongest bonding factors in Asia and the world with nearly 500 million followers all over the world. Today Buddhist heritage is India’s USP in tourism,” he said. Naik further said all places including Lumbini where Lord Buddha was born and Kapilvastu, Bodhgaya, Sarnath, Kushinagar have become holy religious icons for Buddhists. “Our efforts are to develop and promote all places connected with Lord Buddha and Buddhist heritage in the country.”

In order to increase the footfall, ministry is working for extending the visitors’ season at Buddhist sites by organising special religious programmes during the non peak periods. The minister also announced to hold international Buddhist conclaves in Bodhgaya and Sarnath at regular

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intervals this year to encourage tourist inflows to Buddhist sites. Rs Rs. 33.17 crores has been allocated for Bihar Cultural Centre at Bodhgaya.

The strategy for development of Buddhist sites provides an integrated framework to fast track tourism growth on the circuit by focusing on critical and opportunities along the destination value chain and will serve as a guiding framework for investment in tourism development on the circuit over the next five to 10 years. World Bank Country Director Onno Ruhl had said “the prime target is to fight poverty by creating jobs. India has world class tourism products and it has sheer potential of becoming number one in the tourism sector.” Ruhl further said tourism is important in fighting against poverty and it can provide direct and indirect employment opportunities.

Missing Diamond Triangle

Chief Minister of Odisha Shri Naveen Patnaik recently said urged the Centre to include the Buddhist circuit of the state in the list announced by Union Tourism Ministry under “Swadesh Darshan” scheme. The state has a huge potential of Buddhist tourism in Odisha with more than 200 sites.

“I would like to draw your attention to the huge potential of Buddhist tourism of Odisha. Archaeological exploration and excavations have established more than 200 Buddhist sites across the state,” Patnaik said a few months ago.

The Buddhist Triangle – popularly known as the Diamond Triangle of Odisha comprising Ratnagiri, Lalitgiri and Udayagiri, which is about 100 km from the state capital – is now a major tour-

ist attraction, he said, adding Buddhism flourished in these places from 3rd Century BC to 15th Century AD.

“The Buddhist remains in the form of Chaityas, Stupas, Monasteries and the tooth relic in Golden Casket found here aptly establish this Circuit on par with other major sites in India,” Patnaik said.

Noting that socio-cultural life of early medieval Odisha is reflected in the cultural act of these Buddhist monuments, Patnaik said, “it is a well established fact that Buddhism spread to the rest of the world after the Great Kalinga War from these places of present day Odisha by Emperor Ashoka.”

Thus, Dhauli-Ratnagiri-Lalitgiri-Udayagiri-Langudi circuit in Odisha deserves to be included in the list of Buddhist Circuits under the ‘Swadesh Darshan’ Scheme so that these destinations are improved with adequate tourism infrastructure and facilities, the chief minister said.

“In view of above, I would request you to include the Buddhist Circuit of Odisha in the list of Buddhist Circuits announced by the Ministry of Tourism under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme,” Patnaik reasoned.

North-East circuits: Two routes have been identified in the North East and sanctioned to be developed by the Ministry of Tourism. First among them is development of a Tourist Circuit in Manipur on the Imphal-Moirang-Khongjom-Moreh circuit, for which an amount of Rs. 71.82 crores has been sanctioned by Central Finance Assistance (CFA).

Apart from this route the State government has set aside Rs 6 crore for renovation and beautification of Kangla (a sacred palace) and the Kangla Pat (the moat surrounding it). Both these are in-

More Tourism Schemes

PRASAD

Twelve ancient cities with pilgrimage connections have been identified by the Union Ministry of Tourism for development under the Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spirituality Augmentation Drive (PRASAD).

PRASAD hotspots

- Amaravati (Andhra Pradesh)
- Gaya (Bihar)
- Dwarka (Gujarat)
- Amritsar (Punjab)
- Pushkar-Ajmer (Rajasthan)
- Kanchipuram (Tamil Nadu)
- Vellankani (Tamil Nadu)
- Puri (Odisha)
- Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh)
- Mathura (Uttar Pradesh)
- Kedarnath (Uttarakhand)
- Kamakhya (Assam)

The criterion for selection of these cities is their rich heritage and cultural history. To implement the PRASAD scheme a Mission Directorate has been set up in the Ministry of Tourism. The Budget provision of Rs.15.60 crore has been made in Revised Estimate (RE) 2014-15. For Development of basic facilities at Vishnupad Temple, Gaya in Bihar under this Scheme first installment of Rs.85.78 lakh has been released.



► **Dhuli, near Bhubaneswar, is a key point in the Diamond Triangle**

extricably linked with the history of Manipur. Amongst others, construction of footpath, providing luminous light, erecting proper fencing along the moat are being taken up.

The circuit trends through fresh water lake, Loktak, one of the top tourism assets of the State. Along the Indo-Myanmar highway, also lie a national park and the Khongjom War Memorial. It was here that Major General Paona Brajabashi, one of the great warriors of Manipur proved his valour against the superior might of the invading British Army in 1891. The circuit ends at Moreh, 110 kilometres away from Manipur's capital Imphal, on the border between India and Myanmar. It is the gateway to South East Asia.

According to a recent announcement by the Minister of State for Tourism, under the 'Swadesh Darshan' scheme, an amount of Rs.20.35

crore has been allocated to the state government of Manipur in 2013-14 fiscal for the "Integrated Cable-Car and Lakeside Tourism Development Project at Loktak Lake". Under this scheme, funds are allocated under public-private partnership, said the minister.

The other tourist circuit to be developed is in Sikkim linking – Rangpo (entry), Rorathang, Aritar, Phadamchen, Nathang, Sherathang, Tsongmo, Gangtok, Phodong, Mangan, Lachung, Yumthang, Lachen, Thangu, Gurudongmer, Mangan, Gangtok, Tumin Lingee and Singtam (exit). An amount of Rs. 98.05 crore for development of this circuit has been sanctioned.

Rangpo to Nathang comprises the Old Silk Route that traverses all the way to Tibet. Nathang is the highest location to stay in the Indian part of the Old Silk Route. It is one of the re-

motest Tibetan habitations in Himalayas and has breathtaking scenery. Gangtok to Gurdongmer Lake and Yumthang valley is another route to paradise. All these spots have Hindu temples and monasteries for the discerning pilgrims.

Apart from these the Government has sanctioned Rs 50 crores for Bhalukpong – Bomdila – Tawang circuit in Arunachal Pradesh. Bhalukpong, a colourful village in the Eastern Himalayas, has a glorious past linked to the Mahabharata. As the legend goes Lord Krishna had visited the spot. Bomdilla is famous for its Buddhist gompas and the 400 year old fortified Tawang monastery is famous all over the world. The three-tiered Mahayana monastery has a library which houses countless precious manuscripts, rare gol-lettered Buddhist scriptures, ritual vessels and tangkhas (illustrated scrolls) of great



► **Tawang monastery is a repository of precious Buddhist scriptures**

antiquity. The sanctum sanctorum, embellished by a ceiling rich with murals, is a 26 feet high gilded statue of Buddha.

In a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Tourism Mahesh Sharma said the number of foreign tourist arrivals in the eight northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura in 2014 was 118,552 compared to 84,820 in 2013 -- marking a 39.76 percent increase. In 2012, the figure was 66,302.

“Some of the factors responsible for poor tourist inflow to the destination are lack of connectivity, non-availability of reasonably priced hotel accommodation, absence of tourism infrastructure and carrying capacity of the destination.”

He said the government has included the northeast in two new tourism schemes that have been launched. Apart from the Northeast Circuit under the ‘Swadesh Darshan’ scheme, two other circuits under the scheme - Buddhist Circuit and Himalayan Circuit - can be linked to the region.

The minister also said the North Eastern Council had conducted a study for the identification of tourism circuits in the North East and the same has been shared with the respective state governments. He said the Arunachal Pradesh government has also sent a proposal for integrated development of adventure tourism in the state under the ‘Swadesh Darshan’ scheme.

The Buddhist Circuit can include monasteries and gompas spread across Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. These states along with North Bengal can also be a part of the Himalayan circuit.

As yet unidentified by the scheme, the diverse landscape and a variety of tribal population can also be included in Wildlife, Eco-Tourism and Tribal circuits. The flora and fauna of the North Eastern hills is the most unique. There are still some species yet to be discovered by modern science.

Coastal Circuit: Currently, Odisha is making out projects for Gopalpur, Puri, Chandipur, Talsari under the Coastal Circuit Development Programme. With 480 km long coast the state is a prominent coastal tourist destination in India. The Chilka lagoon is one of the most attractive tourist spot with its unique natural bounty.

Andaman & Nicobar islands in the Bay of Bengal is also part of the coastal circuit. With better air and sea connectivity these islands can match the scenic splendour of islands in South East Asia.

The Swadesh Darshan scheme is still in the early stage of implementation. It needs to be seen how the ambitious scheme is turned into reality.

With proper advocacy of the respective state governments there are many more areas of Eastern India which can be included in the 12 circuits. The unexplored region can be brought into the limelight through this grand plan. If the implementation is done properly the hospitality sector will be the biggest gainer.



"We are the sensory organs of a hotel"

INDRANI SANYAL, Director, Housekeeping Swissotel, Kolkata, believes even the best of the machines will never be able to offer the personal touch in service

What are the major challenges faced by the housekeepers in your hotel?

Availability of good quality staff is a big challenge. Today's generation is quite ambitious and they wish move fast ahead in the career ladder, without spending much time in making their foundations strong. So the retention of quality staff—in the supervisor and upwards—is a big challenge. In other words, training people is difficult but then you can't retain them for a long period of time. Some of the responsibility is outsourced. But getting quality work done by those staff is also a recurring challenge.

Are guests these days too demanding? Is it too stressful for the staff to handle the demands?

Guest demands would always be increasing. And this is not unexpected because they look for value for money. It is a repetitive cycle. But there are a few things that are quite difficult to handle. Sometimes communication clarity is not there. A guest may say I am unhappy, but can't say what he/she is not happy about. They'll say I am unhappy about the room, but won't say specifically what is wrong with it. And we don't even get a chance to meet the demand. Then they are out in the electronic media and criticize on 'poor' service.

You mean online reviews in travel sites? Do you receive bad review threats from customer?

Yes we do. We have some guideline to handle these. Unless the demand is unreasonable, we try to honour it without compromising on the finances. If we can't honour we apologize citing the appropriate reason. We also try and provide alternatives.

As you mentioned attrition is a teething problem. You must be facing poaching by your competitors in the sector?

I look at the problem in two ways. Some bit of attrition I always consider as healthy. First I need to keep my staff

motivated in terms of their environment. The other side is compensation and packages. We have to follow a strict norm and you cannot make much commitment beyond a limit. You can ensure to provide a good environment and there must be learning in the department. They must be kept engaged in a positive way. But if someone with a potential gets an opportunity I cannot offer, I don't wish to hold him/her back. Everybody has a desire to dream big and achieve it.

Since housekeeping is no more considered a back-of-the-house job do you encourage the staff to interact with the guests?

We call ourselves the 'heart of the house'. We are the sensory organs of the organization. We understand the pulse of the guests. This is why we encourage the staff at every level to interact with the guest in an informal and general way. We also take feedback from them to read the mind of the guest. We also identify the staffers who are shy and train to communicate in an effective way with the guest.

With advancements in technology and modernization, is the face of housekeeping changing? In future can you do with minimum manpower?

It's an eternal question I have been facing for the last 10 years. Indeed there are better machines that help me do jobs that I couldn't do earlier. They are faster too. But the basic backbone is not changing. You can't do away with the human touch.

Do you follow green housekeeping?

We do follow basic principles of sustainability in housekeeping. All are chemicals and packages are eco-friendly. We use minimal plastics and help conserve electricity. We use 'Green Cards' for our guests. If they don't want us to change the linen they can use this to indicate their wish. Most guests agree to do this, in case of bed linen. But even then they want us to change the bath linen on a daily basis.

Tea tourism! A taste of india

Realising the tremendous tourism potential that tea gardens in North East India have, many tea companies are now converting their age-old tea heritage bungalows into tourist resorts



► Verdant green of the tea gardens is therapeutic for the urban soul

FROM Siliguri in north Bengal to Dibrugarh in upper Assam, all along the stretch of National Highway lies the tea country. The sheer beauty of the land makes this truly God's own country. If you have had the experience of travelling across, you won't miss the British-era bungalows can be seen peeping out of the expansive green through the magnolia trees and the frangipani bushes.

In what has become a trend in the last decade, tea companies are taking a relook at some of these bungalows, in order to make them income-generating ventures, while also promoting the cause of the industry and help-

ing local people. The result: the new trend of tea tours.

In a tea tour guests get to travel in tea gardens and pluck tea leaves. Nature walks, trekking, rafting and golf are also on offer, punctuated, of course, by as much tea tasting as you like.

Wild Mahseer, Assam

This is a premium property owned by River Journeys & Bungalows of India Pvt. Ltd located in the centre of Assam, on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River in the district of Sonitpur, 20 minutes from the ancient city of Tezpur. It is a beautiful oasis set in the midst of the Balipara division of

Addabarrie Tea Estate, established by the British Assam Tea Company in 1864.

The main heritage bungalow has been restored from a 108-year-old property, the restaurant was a garage for tractors and the conference room, police barracks. The whole ambience is a recreation of the planter's life during the British raj – the cuisine is similar to the anglo-Indian meals that was so popular then (and now), the meals are served around a fireplace or an open bonfire by liveried orderlies.

Glenburn, Darjeeling

Nestled in a mountain about an hour and half from Darjeeling city, the



Glenburn Tea estate is a sprawling 1600 acre property with about 600 acres of tea estates and 1000 acres of forested land. The original residence of the estate manager known as the “Burra Bungalow” and a new four roomed villa called the “Water Lily Bungalow” provide eight rooms of pure unadulterated experience. Glenburn Tea Estate was originally started by a Scottish tea company in 1859 and passed into one of India’s prominent tea planting families, the Prakashes. The estate was lovingly restored in 2002 and since then has been widely regarded as one of the very best luxury boutique hotels in India, with guests returning year after year.

Cochrane Place, Kurseong

One of the best places to delve into the world of Darjeeling tea, the champagne of all teas, is Cochrane Place. The renovated stately home that once belonged to Percy John Cochrane is located on the outskirts of Kurseong town. Both Bagdogra airport and Darjeeling town are less than two hours’ drive away. Perched high up on the ridge, Cochrane Place offers breathtaking views of the mighty Kanchenjunga and also of the rolling tea gardens. It’s close to tea gardens, such as Ambootia, Makaibari and Castleton, that produce the best quality Darjeeling tea.

Combining old world charm and modern amenities, Cochrane Place rooms are cozy and comfortable. Each of the 31 rooms of Cochrane Place have their distinctive character and reflect the spirit of the British Raj. Each of the rooms are complete with Burma Teak four poster beds, wood paneling and flooring, hand crafted furniture and false fire places

Zurrantee, Dooars

Perched on a hilltop overlooking miles of sloping valleys and tea gardens, Zurrantee, a heritage resort 80km from Siliguri, is straight out of a fairytale. The resort, revamped from the estate direc-



► **Burra Saheb's bungalow can take a traveller to the Raj era**

tor's bungalow, is ensconced in a tea estate in the Himalayan foothills, nestled between the rivers Murti and Neora. It's three hours from Bagdogra airport.

The result of a joint venture between Solutions Inc and Darjeeling Dooars Plantations (Tea) Limited, the bungalow was originally built in 1890 and was owned by the Duncan Tea Estate. DDPL acquired the property in 1977 and it functioned as the MD's residence thereafter. In its new avatar as a 'heritage getaway', it is only about a month old. Zurrantee is one of the few Dooars estates to have ventured into tea-tourism.

Zurrantee, with its bungalow that sits amidst a 700-acre expanse of tea gardens (including the factory and employees' quarters), is for the tourist who is looking to relax in a quiet place, away from the bustle. The idea is to de-stress and detach.

Temi, Sikkim

Temi Tea Garden is the only Tea Es-

The idea of Tea Trail is fast blooming. A trip that offers the back-packer and the luxury tourist alike, a taste of the great outdoors and a glimpse into history would be hard to resist

tate in the state of Sikkim. The garden is just 18 km from Ravangla and can be visited on a day tour from Ravangla. The garden is spread on a slope below Tendong along the highway to West Sikkim from Gangtok.

Best place to stay here is Cherry Resort, right in the middle of tea gardens. Set amid a lush green carpet of manicured tea gardens, with 360 degree views of Mt. Kangchendzonga and the Tista River gorge nearly 8000 metres below, Cherry Resort sets a new standard for Himalayan hill resorts. Every spacious room has a deck looking onto a picture-perfect landscape, with wafts of the cool, fresh Himalayan to fill your lungs.

The Tea Trail, is an idea, fast blooming across North East India. A trip that offers the back-pack and the luxury tourist alike, a taste of the great outdoors, a true plantation experience and a glimpse into history would indeed be hard to resist.



FOOD

Biryani's long journey

Once a delicacy of the Nawabs, Biryani has come a long way in the past few centuries. Perhaps there is no better ubiquitous culinary delight that some Kolkata restaurants offer—following the legacy of Awadhi kitchens

SAHEBZADA Wasif Mirza loves his biryani light. In his household the dish is made in the Dum Pukht style – slow cooking on a charcoal fire in sealed containers. Usually the gosht and potatoes are partially cooked, layered and then left to sit in with rice. Whole spices are carefully wrapped in muslin, lowered in the broth and then withdrawn, so

that cloves and cardamoms don't mess up the rice. When the saffron-tinged mound of fluffy rice descends on the porcelain plate you can find each long grain magically separate. Some of these are slightly brown but mostly yellowish orange. The goat's meat is tender, courtesy a secret spice mix for the meat marinade not revealed to outsiders as it's a family secret.

Biryani aficionados must have already guessed Mirza's illustrious family. A resident of Metiabruz in Kolkata (nee Calcutta), he's a descendant of Wajid Ali Shah, the deposed Nawab of Awadh. After the British annexed his kingdom in 1856, Shah continued to maintain his love and patronage for the arts and cuisine as he spent his last days in the outskirts of the city with his vast entourage of court musicians, dancers (he is regarded as a major patron of Kathak), and cooks. And right there, on the banks of the Hooghly, he set about recreating Lucknow.

Touch of awadh

Said Mirza to IANS last year during the Kolkata Literary Festival, "He ensured the royal chefs maintained the same standards of cooking and followed the secret recipes to the core." According to him a lot of experimenting was done in the royal kitchen and while dining, typical Awadhi food etiquette was kept in mind. "Khaane ki tehzeeb hoti hai (There is a proper method to consuming food). We still maintain this and don't have anything else before or after biryani-- a complete meal in itself."

Among the numerous variety of biryani available across the country, Kolkata—and eastern India—still favours and has widely adopted the art from Awadh, perfected in the city. Wajid Ali Shah died barely a year after being exiled and his neo-Lucknow collapsed, as the British auctioned most of his vast property. However, the one asset they could do nothing about was his culinary legacy.

Perhaps the singular symbol of this is the potato in the Lucknavi biryani, presumed to have been added for bulk, and proudly touted as Kolkata's signature contribution to the dish it calls its own. Scores of restaurants and 'biryani-houses' in the city offer their own versions. Some serve scented rice generously laden with browned potatoes while others exclude the tu-



The aam admi's food from Awadh has come a long way and found its place on the connoisseur's plate



ber and replace it with paltry chunks of chicken. But one thing is common: they all follow the Nawab's legacy.

Potato in the pot

According to a survey by a renowned Indian newspaper, Kolkata Biryani was crowned the Numero Uno. Basically, an amalgam of Mughlai and Awadhi style of cooking, the biryani in Kolkata is much simpler to cook, but tastes superb with the addition of super soft potatoes and boiled eggs. But even among the best Mughlai restaurants in the city the style varies widely.

Located at the heart of the city, close to the iconic New Market, Aminia's Biryani has just the right amount

of ingredients that is needed to make a perfect Biryani. 'Simple in looks but carries the subtle of flavours within is that denotes Aminia's Biryani the best. Little of colors and greasy oils make the Biryanis indeed tastier than the rest. In the last few years, Aminia has opened several branches across the city and its suburbs. From Golpark, Tollygunje and Baghajatin in the south, to Rajarhat, Nager Bazar and Shyambazar in the north, Aminia is now accessible to the masses.

Shiraz restaurant, located at the Mullick Bazar crossing, has been catering to the Calcuttan's rising demand of "Awadhi Biryani" since years now with pride and élan. In recent

times, however, Arsalan Restaurant, at the Park Circus Seven Point has become a favourite joint for foodies. Their biryani rank one of the best in the country as its taste lingers in the mouth for long. They too have branched out across the city, but in order to savour the best, one should visit the main branch at Park Circus.

We end this culinary note with Abdul Halim Sharar, a courtier in nawab Wajid Ali Shah's Lucknow durbar, who wrote the real raez of Lucknow preferred mutton pulao to biryani, which was bit of an aam aadmi food. But the aam admi food has come a long way and metamorphosed to earn a place on connoisseur's plate.

FAKE REVIEWS

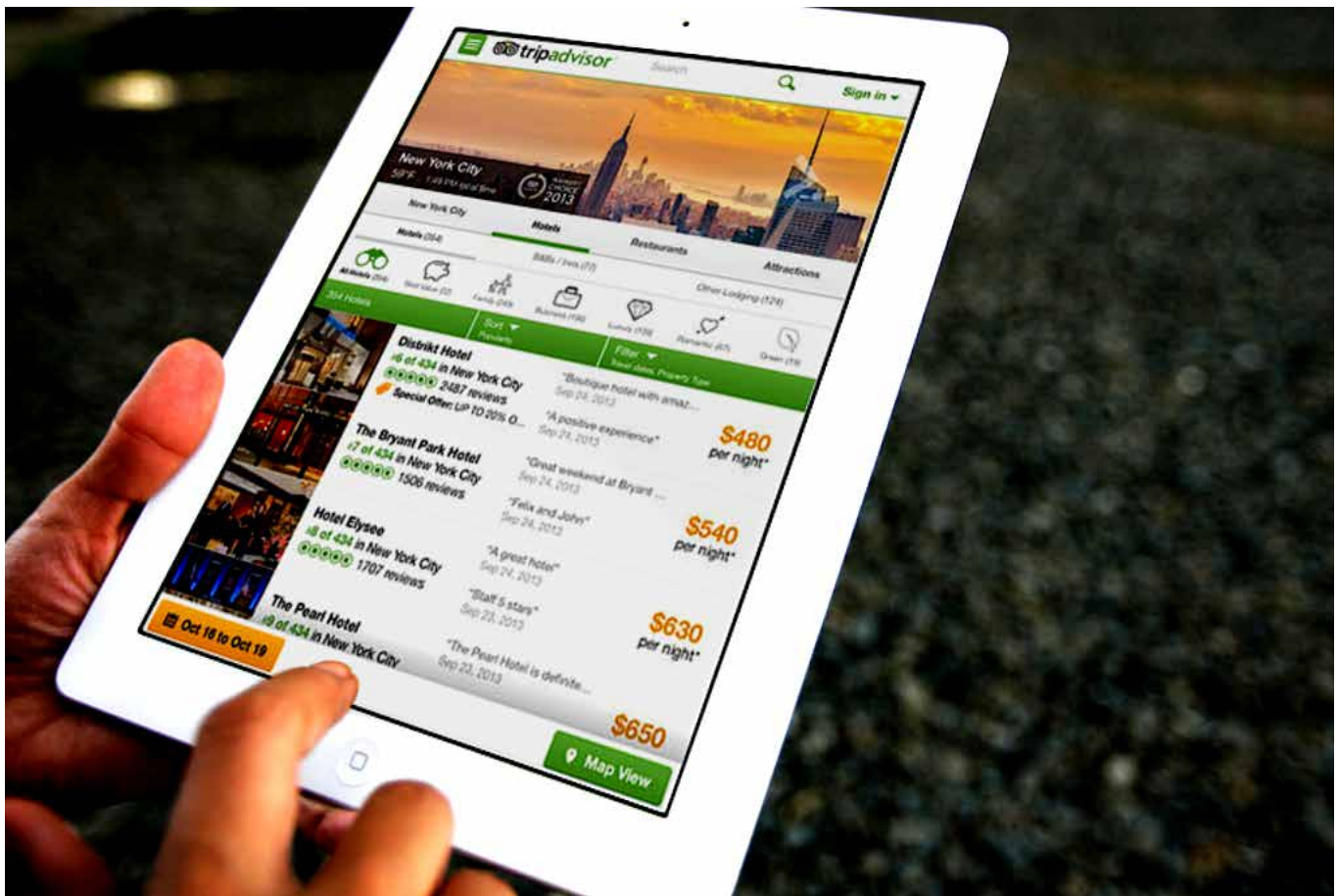
Deal with online critics

Controversy is growing amid charges of fake online reviews and defamatory comments. Learn to fight back the menace

In quite moments Sanjeev Patra loves to kick back by looking at some comments posted by customers at online hotel review sites. Specifically, the terrible reviews. "Clean and Neat. But everything is a trouble," wrote some TanaySai based at Bangalore. "Its average and upto standard of a 3 star accomodation (sic)," posted one Mohammed Re-saf. Patra is the Managing Director of Sandy's Tower, a luxury hotel in Bhubaneswar, and a user of consumer review sites, such as TripAdvisor, Goibibo, Agora, Travelguru and so on. Says Patra, "The pettiness and hysteria of some of the complaints never fail to shock me, from 'the mobile-phone reception was patchy in the lobby', to 'hot water taps in the toilet spewed scalding hot water'. It simply blows my mind."



FAKE REVIEWS



Sudesh Poddar, the owner of two fine dining restaurants in Calcutta, Manthan and Song Hai, and a luxury hotel in Dibrugarh, Assam, is also livid with anger. "You won't find any mention of Hotel Natraj, the only four-star hotel in upper Assam, in the list of top hotels in the region in review sites. Neither will you find my restaurants—located near Esplanade—among the highly rated ones in restaurant review sites," adds Poddar who is also the president of Hotel and Restaurant Association of Eastern India (HRAEI).

Patra and Poddar are among a growing tribe of hoteliers who question the legitimacy of some reviews posted on online review and travel booking sites. Says Tejinder Singh

Walia, vice president, Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Association of India (FHRAI), "Last September, in our annual convention at Bhubaneswar, representatives from top review sites had to face a barrage of questions from hoteliers and restaurateurs who expressed anger and frustration at some reviews posted on their sites. There is certainly some foul play in the review system." Walia goes on to hint that some review sites "manipulate comments in exchange of commercial gains" or kickbacks.

The argument exposed the dark side of online reviews that help one book a holiday or visit a restaurant. What started as online platforms for passionate people to praise or denounce everything from romantic getaways

and classic cuisine to mouldy beds and bland food, slowly turned into an important marketing tool for booking sites to make or break fortunes in the hospitality business. But now things are turning uglier as there is growing evidence that individuals and companies are cheating the system — upping their ratings by posting positive reviews for themselves or damaging the reputations' of rivals with negative ones. Customers have also been found to flex their online muscles to exact special treatment or meet unreasonable demand from hotels and restaurants.

Sometimes owners of restaurants find terrible online reviews of their eatery. It can turn out to be a handiwork of an old friend or a rival who



want to seek revenge and spoil the reputation. When somebody posts such a nasty review there's no way to find out if the person really visited the restaurant or get such information on when or what the reviewer ordered. So it's difficult to address any problem or find out if the service was really poor."

Repufact is a company that analyses customer reviews and ratings across the Internet for over 550 hotels in India. Its CEO Deepak Mavinkurve often finds fake reviews and some chaos around the system, especially in sites that allow unverified posts from anonymous reviewers. He cites an instance when a celebrity demanded an unreasonable discount from a Mumbai restaurant and threatened to defame the eatery through an unfavourable review on his massively popular Twitter handle in an effort to extract the discount.

Such review threats are becoming quite common. It so happens that a customer might say there is a problem with my meal and if you don't fix it I will get you to the social media. There is always a chance that some people might write a fake or bad review to extract something from a hotel or a restaurant, believe reputation management experts.

With the growing impact of online reviews on the hospitality business some hotels and food joints are taking the easy way out by posting phony reviews to ambush their rivals. Some social media consultants claim that there are firms which either put their own people to write positive reviews or hire agencies to trash rivals and glorify their own products and ser-

vices. People also create anonymous ids and post negative or defamatory comments on the rating system to defame the victim. Even sites like Facebook have not been able to devise systems to screen such offensive posts. The only option for the victim is to file a defamation suit through the Indian Penal Code.

Such bitter rivalry has spawned a new breed of professionals who ensure that the image of a business remains unsullied by unfavourable comments online. Called online reputation managers (ORM), they offer to purge negative posts or visuals, bury unfavourable search results and monitor a client's virtual image 24/7.

The best thing a hotel can do is to actively monitor its reviews using online reputation management software. A hotel or restaurant must actively track their online reputation and leverage feedback from guests to improve their service or they will lose business.

Top hotel and restaurant sites, however, strongly oppose the hoteliers' views on fake or fraudulent reviews. Leading travel website companies providing reviews of travel-related content claim they fight fraud aggressively and have sophisticated systems and teams in place to detect fraudsters. They also impose strong penalties to deter them. Apparently, reviews posted in their sites go through their system handled by multiple content specialists in order to maintain the quality of reviews.

Restaurant review sites also claim to investigate each and every review connecting with the reviewer over a phone call

How to Respond to Negative Hotel Reviews

In general, you want to show prospectives that your hotel reads, internalizes, and responds to reviews. You should personalize your responses to the guest review, and show your brand voice. You should also research the issue before you respond, so that you are aware of as many details of the guest's stay as possible. Did the guest complain before checkout? Is there a record of his or her communications with your staff?

1. Thank the guest by name

Even if the negative review is aggressive or hurtful, you should thank the guest for taking the time to give feedback. Take a minute and remember that all feedback is valuable. And, if you handle the situation gracefully, it can mitigate the effects of the bad review in the eyes of your prospective guests.

2. Apologize for the guest's poor experience

Remember, an apology is not an admission of guilt or wrongdoing. For whatever reason this guest's expectations were not met, which is disappointing for anybody. You should express sympathy that his or her experience fell short of expectation.

3. Highlight any changes you have made or intend to make

This is a good opportunity to take the conversation offline to avoid further public conflict. If the situation warrants, "changes you have made or intend to make" can be as simple as inviting the guest to contact you, so you can make it right. Don't promise any form of compensation online to avoid setting a precedent.

4. Evaluate the need for follow up procedures.

If you have the guest's contact information it's a good idea to send them a personal email to express your apologies and offer compensation if appropriate. Additionally, you should ask the following questions about the review:

Did this guest experience a systemic problem that each customer could face?

Is there an easy fix to the problem?

Is the problem unfounded or not likely to be repeated?

Or is the problem linked to something you cannot easily change, like infrastructure or design?

Source: www.revinate.com



or an email. Some travel booking websites enable customers to post real pictures of the rooms they stay along with reviews in to ensure transparency. Some sites have a question and answer platform where customers and hotel owners exchange notes to make things clear.

All review sites, however, vehemently oppose the view that review sites "generate revenue from manipulated reviews". They admit a small fraction of customers may be too demanding. Site owners believe that they are not just helping the hospitality sector improve its service but are providing free marketing and robust business.

While the argument goes on some

travellers are losing their faith over hotel review sites. A growing number of them would rather listen to her instincts rather than getting influenced by the opinion of the crowd posted on the review sites. One frequent traveller says, "Years ago when Internet was young we went backpacking with friends armed with a dog-eared travel guidebook. Recommendations didn't always match the reality and we went asking around. Eventually we landed in a cheap and obscure place run by some old mom and pop,"

That's how it worked then: we were in an information-poor environment. You never quite knew what to expect, but wasn't that why you were travelling?

Never get browbeaten by review bullies

1. Take the threat seriously, but don't allow it to cloud your judgment. Handle it like any other complaint: remain calm and professional, offer options, and do everything within reason to find a solution.
2. If you feel the need to acknowledge the threat, say, "We would prefer you didn't write a negative review. How can we resolve this situation to your satisfaction?" If the answer is, "Comp my charges!", say you're sorry but you're not at liberty to do that. Then say what you can do.
3. Record all details for future reference.
4. Most people won't follow through with the threat once calmer heads prevail, especially if you handled the situation with empathy and professionalism. If the guest does post a review and it's false and damaging, dispute it with the host site.
5. The reviewer might be a lost cause, but you may want to reassure other travelers by posting a response. For example, you might say, "Our recollection of this incident is quite different from how it is described here. We feel we acted reasonably under the circumstances, and while we wish the outcome had been different, we stand by the decision."
5. Be respectful in your response, and avoid "he said, she said" banter. Don't say anything that might provoke the reviewer to take the grievance to other review sites and social networks.
6. If the reviewer comes across as unreasonable or irrational in the review, you might decide to remain silent and let readers draw their own conclusions. If your reputation is otherwise solid, travelers aren't likely to be deterred.
7. Write guidelines into your Social Media Policy so that employees have the confidence of knowing where they stand in such situations, the options they have, and that upper management will support their decisions.
8. Afterward, debrief with staff and discuss how you might prevent a future recurrence. Take comfort in having done your best, and move on. There's too much positive and constructive feedback out there to waste an inordinate amount of time on these unscrupulous types.

Source: <http://reknown.com/>



STATE SURVEY

Jewel in India's Crown

Manipur, a little Shangri-La located in North East India, is the least explored state. It promises to be the greatest tourist discovery of the current century

► The only floating National Park in the world

AN oval shaped valley surrounded by blue green hills, rich in art and tradition, Manipur, has inspired description such as the 'Switzerland of the East' with its cascading rapids, varieties of flora and fauna and a colourful tribal population.

The state presents a blend of natural beauties, festivals, arts, dance, music, history, cuisine and spiritualism. The following aspects throw light on the state's beauty that will surely turn into a desired destination of the discerning traveller.

Loktak Lake & Keibul Lamjao

Loktak Lake is the largest fresh-water lake in North -East India is famous for the phumdis (heterogeneous mass of vegetation, soil, and organic matters at various stages of decomposition) floating over it. It is located near Moirang in Manipur state, India. The largest of all the phumdis covers an area of 40 sq km and is situated on the southeastern shore of the lake. The Keibul Lamjao, the only floating national park in the world, is the last natural refuge of the endangered sangai or



► Pung Cholam is a spellbinding performance; (bottom) a Vaishnavite devotee

Manipur brow-antlered deer (*Cervus eldi eldi*).

This ancient lake plays an important role in the economy of Manipur. It serves as a source of water for hydropower generation, irrigation and drinking water supply. The lake is also a source of livelihood for the rural fishermen who live in the surrounding areas and on phumdis, also known as “phumshongs”. Considering the ecological status and its biodiversity values, the lake was initially designated as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention on 23 March 1990.

Visitor Information: The lake offers excellent opportunities for visitors to enjoy the beauty of the lake and its several islands located inside it that



are studded with floating phumdis of different geometrical shapes. The important islands which offer facilities for visitors are the Sandra and Phubala. The Sandra Tourist Home on the island with an attached Cafeteria in the middle of the lake is an ideal tourist spot. Visitors get a bird's eye view of life on the lake—small islands that are actually floating weed on which the lake people live. Phubala resort, on the Phubala, is 40 km from Imphal.

Khangkhui Mangsor & Siroy Lily

Khangkhui Limestone Cave is a cave system in Cretaceous limestone. The wild cave is guided by locals for tourists, but is not developed except for some trails. Lamps are provided by the guide. The number of visitors seems to be rather low, so interested tourist groups are narrated the legend about the cave by the village elders of Khangkhui Khullen.

As often the legend is told in different ways, so we try to give an overview. According to legend a King named Mangsorwung had a lovely Queen and built for her a chamber of the cave which still is remembered as first wife chamber inside the Khangkhui Cave. The next chamber has been christened as Second Wife Chamber, because the King erected it for his second wife. Subsequent chambers are named after his sons. The biggest hall was the throne room of the king. In some versions of the story the king is called the Devil King.

The cave has a pit with a diameter of 5m and a depth of 30m, which is called Shirata (falling star hole) in the local Tangkhul dialect. The cave was used as a shelter during World War II by the locals.

Ukhrul is also the land of Siroy Lily (*Lilium Mackliniae*), the exotic orchid found in the Siroi Hills. Every year thousand of scientists and tourists all over the world come to see this precious flower. The district is also home

to many waterfalls, of which Khayang waterfall, which is about 20 km from Ukhrul, is very famous

Visitor Information: The cave is 15 kms from Ukhrul in northern Manipur, the abode of Thangkul Nagas. Ukhrul is 88 kms from the state capital Imphal, reachable through NH 150. The district headquarters has quite a few good hotels.

Yangoupokpi-Lokchao

Yangoupokpi-Lokchao Wildlife Sanctuary is located in the Chandel District along the Indo-Myanmar international border close to Moreh. The unique feature of the sanctuary is its varied diversity.

Bamboos are found abundantly in Yangoupokpi Lokchao Wildlife Sanctuary. This area contains several species of Dipterocarpaceae. Important species of Bamboos that are grown in this area are Melacanna, Bamboosa etc.

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose hoisted the Indian National Flag in Moirang on April 14, 1944



Fauna includes Hoolock Gibbon, Wildbear, Himalayan mountain bear, Indian Civet feline, Common Otter, Pangolin, panther and so forth, 29 types of reptiles which incorporate Tortoise, Viper, Krait, Cobra, Python, Land Monitor Lizard, 86 types of fishes and 6 types of creatures of amphibians.

Visitor information: The best time to visit the sanctuary is October to April. Accommodation for overnight is accessible at the following rest houses: Forest Rest House, Moreh, Indo-Myanmar Trade Centre Rest House, Moreh, Transit Camp at Wildlife Office, Moreh. Since the place is close to Moreh visitors can hire a taxi/cab to reach the destination.

Ina War Memorial

The INA War Memorial is located in Moirang in Bishnupur district of Manipur. Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose hoisted the Indian flag at this spot for the very first time on April 14, 1944. He was credited with founding the Indian National Army (INA) or the Azad Hind Fauj, whose purpose was to liberate India from the British with the help of the Japanese troops. The INA was first founded in 1942 and was later revived by Bose in 1943.

Following the hoisting of the flag, Moirang became the headquarters of the INA and occupies a place in the historical annals of India's freedom movement. The INA memorial also houses a museum which contains some mementos and personal artifacts of people involved with the INA.

The construction of the monument began in 1967 when there were reasonable funds collected from the state and central governments. The Netaji Library was completed on October 21. The union tourism ministry had in 2010 sanctioned the first installment of Rs 12 crore for upgradation of the 'Indian National Army memorial complex mega project'.

The site is quite popular with Japa-



► **Siroi Lily, the unique orchid**



► **INA Memorial Complex, Moirang**

nese and English visitors who visit to pay tribute to their forefathers whose lives perished in Manipur during World War II.

Visitor information: Imphal Airport is located some 30 km from Moirang. Imphal has a number of good hotels.

Dances & Festivals

Manipur has a diversified rich cultural and ethnic heritage being home to varied dance forms, festivals, indigenous cuisines and other exotic forms.

The state is famous across the world for classical style of dance known as Raas Leela which is distinct from other Indian dance forms. Manipuri dance is purely religious and its aim is a spiritual experience. This is a highly evolved dance drama or ballet, choreographed on 'Vaishnavite Padavalis' composed by main-

ly Bengali poets and some Manipuri Gurus.

According to the legend, the indigenous people of the Manipur valley were the dance-expert Gandharvas mentioned in the Hindu epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata. Not only is dance a medium of worship and enjoyment, a door to the divine, but indispensable for all socio-cultural ceremonies.

With 34 recognised scheduled tribes in the state, with each tribe having its own dance forms with distinct attire, Manipur is pot pourri of folk dances. All the tribes have also a variety of colourful festivals adorned with ritual dances. Lai Haraoba is a festival, associated with Meiteis celebrated to please traditional deities. Celebrated in honour of the sylvan deities known as Umang Lai, the festival

represents the worship of traditional deities and ancestors. The festival is in part a recollection of the creation stories played the deities with the first origin of this universe and evolution of the plants and animals through the will of Atiya Shidaba.

Khamba Thoibi dance is a duet of male and female partners, a dance of dedication to the sylvan deity, Thangjing of Moirang, is the depiction of the dance performed by Khamba and Thoibi, the hero and heroine of the Moirang episode of the hoary past.

Pung or Manipuri Mridanga is the soul of Manipuri Sankirtana music and Classical Manipuri Dance. It assumes an important ritual character, an indispensable part of all social and devotional ceremonies in Manipur, - the instrument itself becoming an object of veneration. Pung Cholom is performed as an invocatory number preceding the Sankirtana and Raas Leela.

It is highly refined classical dance number characterised by the modulation of sound from soft whisper to a thunderous climax.

Crafts & Textile

Manipur is famous for its special fabrics like moiraingphee, leirum, lasingphee and phanek. Tribal textiles are woven on a loin-loom, a type of back-strap loom commonly used by hill people. Weaving is universal and every girl knows how to weave. The loom forms part of her dowry. Weaving is done purely for personal use, by the women, while highly organised commercial weaving is done by men.

There is an aura of religion and romance around cotton-weaving. Each process and design is highlighted by a legend and connected with special functions, dances, and ceremonies.

The patterns in use here are typical of the region. Bold colours and geometrical patterns are in evidence in most of their textiles.



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