

MYSTIC EAST

unexplored horizon

A bi-monthly magazine by HRAEI | Vol 2 | Issue 4 | July - August 2016



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“

Reduced dry days will cut down hooch death and revenue to the state exchequer

”

Dear Fellow Members,

The Hotel and Restaurants Association of Eastern India (HRAEI) has been striving since September 16, 2014 to cut down the number of dry days in West Bengal.

Our repeated appeals to the state excise commissioner (on July 2, 2015 and April 8, 2015) with a copy to the honourable finance minister and tourism minister, Government of West Bengal has finally paid off. Recently the Bengal government issued a circular that permits bars in three-star hotels and above and clubs to serve liquor all 365 days a year and cut down the list of dry days to a mere four-and-a-half days from 12.

The decision ahead of the festive season in October is a bold step when prohibition is the keyword of populism in several states. This will not only help cut down tragic deaths caused by consumption of illicit liquor but also add valuable revenue to the state exchequer.

We welcome the Government for this pragmatic step to push the state's effort at promoting tourism and hospitality.

Sudesh Poddar
President, HRAEI

MYSTIC EAST

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Vol 2 | Issue 4 | July - August 2016

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SECRETARY'S MESSAGE



“
To attract more private investment in the hospitality sector WBIS, 2015 has been launched with a slew of benefits
”

Dear fellow members,

The Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool government is giving its tourism pitch a new makeover. Bollywood superstar and brand ambassador for West Bengal, Shah Rukh Khan, has promoted Bengal as 'the sweetest tourist destination' in an ad film by the state tourism department to attract domestic and foreign travellers. Of late, the government has rolled out its mega campaign to project visiting West Bengal is a total experience woo travellers. The new logo with a tagline 'The Sweetest Part Of India' not only reminds Bengal's fame and glory for sweetmeats, but also places emphasis on the humility as well as generosity of the Bengali population in front of the domestic and international tourists.

The tourism department has undertaken a slew of promotional activities which includes pan India television and FM campaign, airport branding, hoarding and bus shelters and aggressive publicity on Web and social media push to reposition the new brand to the domestic and international audience.

To attract more private investment in the hospitality sector, the new West Bengal Incentive Scheme, 2015 has been launched with some special benefits like Floor Area Ratio (FAR) relaxation and extension of tourism promotion assistance @75 per cent of VAT for 5 years in respect of mega projects.

The projected investment in respect of 44 units which have registered under WBIS, 2008 and WBIS, 2015 combined is around Rs 1,234 crore. New units like Sinclairs in Kalimpong and Burdwan and Lemon Tree in Purulia have already started their operations. Ambuja Group is coming up with two new projects, one at Digha and another at Makaibari tea estate in Kalimpong. Total projected investment for units which have registered under WBIS, 2015, is around Rs 152 crore.

All these sound too good to be true for the hospitality sector.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pranav Singh'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Pranav Singh
Secretary, HRAEI

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HRAEI CORNER

HRAEI'S APPEAL TO CUT DRY DAYS PAID OFF

Bengal government cuts down annual dry days from 12 to 4.5

IN a pragmatic and significant move the West Bengal government led by Mamata Banerjee has decided to drastically decrease the number of dry days in West Bengal from 12 to 4.5. The announcement is a bold step towards putting hard-nosed fiscal realities above the dangerous populist politics.

These new rules from the Excise Directorate of the West Bengal government will take effect immediately, with the festive season coming up soon. Additionally, bars in hotels rated 3 stars and above, and clubs will now be able to serve alcohol 365 days a year.

"We have been striving since September 16, 2014 to cut down the number of dry days in West Bengal," says Sudesh Poddar, the President of The Hotel and Restaurants Association of Eastern India (HRAEI). "Our repeated appeals to the state excise commissioner (on July 2, 2015 and April 8, 2015) with a copy to the honourable finance minister and tourism minister, Government of West Bengal has finally paid off."

The cash-strapped West Bengal government has earned nearly Rs

4,000 crores in alcohol-related taxes in the last two financial years and has set a target of Rs 4,698 crores

far under the more than 20 per cent figure in states like Maharashtra.

"Restrictive alcohol laws have affected the tourism and hospitality industry negatively," says Mr T. S. Walia, a senior member of the HRAEI. "This is a sunrise field where West Bengal has been focusing aggressively in recent years." According to him, dry days keep away foreign tourists. "In the past long spell of dry days, especially during the Durga puja and Diwali holidays repelled foreign tourists from the state."

The decision is not only expected to push up sales in restaurants/bars with liquor licences, but open up more distilleries in the state generating employment. "Prohibition leads to black marketing and boot-legging that results in mass death caused by large amount of spurious alcohol," adds Mr Poddar.

"We welcome the Government for this diligent step to push the state's effort at promoting tourism and hospitality despite a call for prohibition by the opposition," says Pranav Singh, secretary HRAEI.



► A past issue of Mystic East strongly advocated reduction of dry days

for the financial year 2016-2017. Even then, West Bengal's revenue collection from excise is less than 10 per cent of the total state revenue,

FSSAI frames safety standards for alcoholic drinks

THE Food Safety Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has approved standards for alcoholic drinks like whiskey and beer and finalised a list of additives to be used for making these products. This is a first for all major alcoholic drinks in the country for which standards and the additives list have been finalised. “FSSAI has finalised a list of food additives and standards with respect to alcoholic beverages,” revealed Pawan Agarwal, CEO, FSSAI.

He added that these standards are in alignment with International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV) standards. The file has been moved

to the Union Health Ministry, and the standards will be operationalised soon after a notification.

“With this, FSSAI has crossed a major landmark in setting of standards for almost all food categories available in the country,” added Agarwal.

Earlier this month, the regulator has operationalised the list of 11,000 food additives provisions that can be used by food businesses in various categories. This is considered important because food products which have been manufactured by using these approved additives may not require product approval. (PTI)

plea of Federation of Hotels and Restaurants Association of India against the levy of these two taxes saying Parliament was not competent to legislate on these two aspects.

The federation, whose members are a number of hotels spread all over the country, as well as city-based five star hotel Leela Palace, had contended no part of the transaction of supply of food in a restaurant or hotel is now left out for being made amenable to service tax levied by a statute enacted by Parliament.

Disagreeing with the hotels, the bench said, “It is not possible to accept the contention of the petitioners that Parliament lacks the legislative competence to enact section 65 (105) (zzzzv) of the Finance Act with a view to bringing the service component of the composite contract of supply of food and drinks by an air-conditioned restaurant within the service tax net.”

However, regarding levy of service tax on short-term accommodation provided in a hotel, the bench said, “It is not merely an overlap of luxury tax and service tax as far as accommodation provided in hotels is concerned.

“It is in fact the same levy but by different statutes, one enacted by the state and the other by the Union. This is indeed an instance of encroachment by the Union into a field that is completely covered by a state legislation,” the bench said.

“Consequently, the court is satisfied that the provision of short-term accommodation in hotels etc. envisaged in Section 65 (105) (zzzzw) of the Finance Act is a taxable event that is entirely covered by the term ‘luxuries’ in Entry 62 of List II of the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution and therefore outside the legislative competence of Parliament,” the court said and disposed of the hotels’ plea.

Delhi High Court upholds service tax on food, drinks in AC hotels, restaurants



THE court's decision came on the plea of Federation of Hotels and Restaurants Association of India against the levy of these two taxes saying Parliament was not competent to legislate on these two aspects.

The Delhi High Court on Friday, upheld the Centre’s decision to impose service tax on food and beverages served in air-conditioned restaurants and hotels across the country.

A bench of Justices S Muralidhar and Najmi Waziri, however, held as “unconstitutional and invalid” the provision in the Finance Act of 1994 which allowed levy of service tax on short-term accommodation of less than three months in a hotel, inn, guest house, club or camp-site.

The court’s decision came on the

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Wine experts join hands to launch Wine Excellence Awards nationally

Few Wine aficionados, wine consultants, and wine critics got together to launch Wine Excellence Awards to promote wine culture and recognize excellence in wine production, retail, service, etc. in the country. To start with the organizers have decided to launch their first Awards in Delhi NCR – delWine Excellence Awards – in Delhi NCR on September 14, 2016 at Pullman Aerocity Hotel.

Announcing their plans in a press conference, Subhash Arora, President, Indian Wine Academy; Sourish Bhattacharyya, Food Blogger and Founder of Indian Restaurant Spy; and Sonal Holland, renowned Sommelier and beverage consultant said that the objective is to fill the void as there is no platform currently in the country to recognize and honour excellence in the Wine space in the country.

“Our endeavour is to promote the wine culture across hotels, restaurants, retail and also in each household in this country. We will be covering the whole spectrum starting from the wine producer to wine importer as well as a hotels and restaurants through these awards,” said Arora.

The highlight of the programme will be a 'by invitation only' Wines of the World (WOW) Showcase, where guests will be able to taste 120-plus wine labels, including the best from the Indian wine producers and their leading international counterparts. The Showcase will lead to the glittering awards ceremony, which will take place at a sit-down dinner for 300 invited wine professionals, journalists and connoisseurs where eight premium wines will be served.

Explaining the structure of the awards, Bhattacharyya said that the whole selection process of awardees will be both jury

based and voting based to maintain highest level of “integrity and neutrality”. Questionnaires will be sent to hotels and restaurants in the Delhi NCR, which will contain questions pertaining to both service and detailing of the wine list. The jury will assess the responses and six nominees will be select-

ed in each category. This will be followed by a face to face interview with these nominees. Based on the interview, three nominations will be shortlisted and put for online voting by facebook communities of both Indian Wine Academy and Indian Restaurant Spy.

Besides the popular awards, there will be another set of awards where Best Wine Maker; Best Indian Wine Producer; Best Wine Tourism Company, Best Wine Importer; Best Wine Retailer, etc. will be decided through a 'perception survey' among wine professionals. The third and final category will be the three delWine Editor's Choice Awards. These include Lifetime Achievement Award and the Best Value for Money Wine List (5-star hotel and standalone restaurant).

The promoters have plans to hold city specific wine excellence awards in other cities as well. The next delWine Excellence Award will be held in the city of Mumbai later this year.

Holland will also prepare the ground for India Wine Awards in the lines of international awards where winners will be decided on the basis of blind barrel tastings. They propose to hold this first of its kind event in Mumbai sometime in February – March, 2017. Plan is to hold India Wine Awards in Mumbai and Bengaluru alternatively, Holland said. “Our endeavour is to give India Wine Awards an Indian touch, format and execution with global standards,” she informed.





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Master Chef Nisar Ahmed moves to Mayfair Hotels & Resorts



NISAR Ahmed, professional chef with over 24 years of rich work experience in the hospitality field recently moved to Mayfair Hotels & Resorts at Bhubaneswar. His new role and responsibility includes offering new direction to cuisine development of the group.

After having completing a three-year diploma in hotel management and catering technology, Ahmed started professional career as a kitchen executive trainee for two years and then rose to be an executive chef at Starwood Hotels. This was followed by stints at four 5-star hotels, including ITC Hotels (ITC Sonar and ITC Maurya Sheraton) and Fortune.

He had been an Executive Chef for Doha Asian Games and TAJ Sats – a sister concern of Taj Group of Hotels and Singapore Airline Terminal Services with work experience in countries like India, Qatar and UAE.

Nisar also had been a team leader for Indian Cuisine Promotion abroad in Hilton Hotel in Ankara and Istanbul.



Mecca to have world's largest hotel

BY 2017 Mecca will be home to the largest hotel in the world with 10,000 rooms. According to reports, the Abraj Kudai hotel, with an investment of around US\$ 3.5 billion, is expected to be ready for visitors in 2017. Touted to be the largest hotel in the world, the project is owned by Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Finance and is being designed by the Dar Al-Handasah group. It will be located in the Manafia area of Mecca's central zone, which is about two km from the Holy Haram in Mecca.

The property will have 70 restaurants across 48 storeys and 12 towers (which will vary between 30 and 48 storeys). There are also plans of four helipads on the roof.

The hotel expects a number of royal visits, so it's being planned in such a manner that entire floors of the 1.4 million sq m complex could be reserved for royal families. There will also be a convention centre built inside the hotel compound. The hotel's podium will accommodate a bus station, shopping mall, restaurants, food courts, conference centre and car parks. A dome located on top of two mid towers will house a ballroom and the convention centre.

Due to its size, location, exposure and architectural style, the building poses itself as a landmark with a modern multifunctional identity relating to both the Saudi locality and the Islamic universality of its expected users.

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Kerala Tourism bags six National Tourism awards



Kerala Tourism on Saturday bagged six National Tourism awards for 2014-15 in the marketing category for states. It received two more awards, including the one for its Responsible Tourism (RT) initiative in Wayanad.

The state tourism received three out of the six awards for states in the Tourism Promotion and Publishing category, including the one for 'Most Innovative use of Information Technology' – social media/mobile app. The Wayanad initiative, which has transformed the hilly district's economy through intensive participation of the local people, was selected for the award in the 'Responsible Tourism' category. Sargaalaya Arts and Crafts Village at Iringal, a small but thriving village in Kozhikode, fetched the award for Kerala Tourism in the Rural Tourism project category.

Haryana Government announces Gita Mahotsava from December 6-11 in Kurukshetra

THE Haryana Government has chalked out a detailed programme for the five-day Gita festival to be held in Kurukshetra in the state from December 6-11, 2016. The arrangements for the "Kurukshetra Mahotsava Gita Jayanti Samaroh" were reviewed at a meeting of senior officers presided by Manohar Lal Khattar, Chief Minister, Haryana, an official spokesperson said.

574 people from different districts of the country will attend the event. The delegate count is equal to the number of Shlokas (verses) delivered by Lord Krishna in the Bhagvad Gita, the spokesperson said quoting the Chief Minister. Khattar said each member would adopt and display a Shloka during their journey to the venue of the festival. During their journey, they will disseminate the teachings of the sacred Bhagvad Gita



among the people. "This would encourage participation of people from across the country in the festival," he added.

He said that to further encourage

participation from other states, Gita Shloka recital, declamation and quiz competitions would be organised in all states and the winners would be invited to the programme at Kurukshetra for the final rounds of these events. He also directed the officers concerned to organise one-day Gita Jayanti programmes at block level to ensure participation of people, and three-day programmes at district level between December 1 and 5.

The Chief Minister directed the officers to ensure beautification and cleanliness of the city before the programme and instructed them to make adequate arrangements for transportation. Prominent personalities associated with the Bhagvad Gita from across the globe, members of the Indian diaspora and other scholars would be invited to participate in this festival.

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Stayzilla expands presence in North East, Sikkim and Bengal



Stayzilla.com has expanded the number of homestays in North East, Sikkim and Bengal, given the remoteness and demand for stays in these areas. Among offbeat destinations, Stayzilla has become the only homestay consolidator to facilitate accommodation in and around the Northern part of West Bengal.

Stayzilla has also introduced homestays in Tawang, Bhalukpong and Bomdila, located along the West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh. While homestays in Bhalukpong are supervised by the forest division, the stays in Bomdilla are run by Monpa, Sherdukpen, Miji, Bugun and Aka tribes.

With an array of homestay facil-

ities available across Sikkim and Meghalaya, Stayzilla lists homestays that offer tourists an opportunity to live with the locals, discover and share their lifestyle. Stayzilla has also been involved in promoting eco-tourism and rural home stays in the region.

On revitalising village tourism, Ankit Rastogi, vice president – marketplaces, Stayzilla, said, “Unlike most travel experiences, rural homestays focus on collaborating with locals in improving their community’s quality of living. We at Stayzilla work closely with state tourism departments to develop unique tourism experiences based on the community’s cultural heritage

to enable tourists to experience local hospitality, cuisine, customs and traditions by staying with families.”

Along with rural and wildlife tourism, religious destinations spearhead domestic tourism in the country. The Mayapur Tourism Department under ISKCON temple provides accommodation to several devotees and have recently opened up homestays in collaboration with Stayzilla.

Stayzilla is conducting several sensitisation workshops across Siliguri, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Agartala, Imphal, Aizawl, Kohima, Dimapur, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Moosakhia, Samanong and Kaziranga among others to promote bed and breakfast (B&B)/ homestays.

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RESTAURANTS

THE RISE OF THE



QUICK BITE

Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs) will continue to steer the growth in the food service industry. International food chains, attracted to the huge Indian market, never expected that the Indian samosa will throw a challenge to the trendy burger or chicken fries

With a consistent growth of over double digits there has been an increase in segmentation into different formats. From a totally unorganised industry, the food service industry has transformed into an organised industry. The role played by international chains, their entry and rapid expansion, was a game-changer in this respect

ONCE an introverted, home-driven consumer, the indulgent Indian is today waking up to a nascent yet formidable “Eating Out” culture, making food services one of the most promising business sectors in India.

Even with a contribution of just less than 2.3 per cent to India’s GDP, the Food Services market is worth Rs 247,680 crore (USD 48 billion). It comprises food services in the organized sector (i.e. chain and licensed standalone players across quick service restaurants, fullservice casual and fine dining restaurants, hotels, bars and lounges, cafés, and frozen dessert formats) as well as the unorganized sector (dhabas, street stalls, halwais (sweet shops), roadside vendors, food carts, etc.). Further, the market is projected to grow to Rs 408,040 crore (USD 78 billion) in the next five years, that is by 2018.

With a consistent growth of over double digits there has been an increase in segmentation into different formats. From a totally unorganised industry, the food service industry has transformed into an organised industry. The role played by international chains, their entry and rapid expansion, was a game-changer in this respect. Majority of these chains were Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) or Casual Dining formats. The brands that stand out today in terms of brand presence in the market include McDonald’s, Domino’s Pizza, California Pizza Kitchen, Jumbo King, Pizza Hut, Papa John’s, KFC, etc.

According to India Food Services Report 2013 commissioned by National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) with the help of Technopak the food services market in the India which is currently valued at Rs 247,680 cr (USD 48 bn) is projected to grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 11 per

cent over the next five years to reach Rs 408,040 cr (USD 78 bn). At the same time, the growth in the organised QSR segment in the country over the next five years would be much higher compared to any other formats – be it casual dining, fine dining, café, etc. The QSR segment which is estimated at Rs 5,500 cr (USD 1,060 mn) in 2013 is projected to grow at a CAGR of 25 per cent to reach Rs 16,785 cr (USD 3,230 mn) by 2018, the report said.

The total share in the food services market of the QSR is projected to go up from the current 43 per cent to 50 per cent till 2018. If one adds, Cafes and Frozen dessert/ice cream parlours, which are also QSR in terms of operational and service models, the share that this segment going to command would be much higher.

Another market research agency, CRISIL, also reported a similar growth projection for QSR segment earlier this year. Their study predicted almost double growth in QSR market size from the current Rs 3,400 cr (2012-13) to Rs 7,000 cr by 2015-16. There will be 16 to 18 per cent addition in terms of QSR outlets annually over the next two to three years, the study says. Organised chains, which are largely focus on metro, Mini-metro and Tier I cities today, will start moving into Tier II and III cities in the coming years. 40-45 per cent new outlets will be in these smaller towns and cities, CRISIL said.

Growth facilitators

The growth projection is made considering the burgeoning demand that is going to come because of rapid demographic changes happening in the country. When demand drivers for convenience food in the market would be rapid urbanisation and burgeoning young and aspiring population with higher propensity to spend on comfort and luxury who love to eat out on a regular basis, the supply side



RESTAURANTS



► Influenced by the West, eating out culture is catching up in India

drivers, according to industry pundits would be, influx of new international QSR players into the market and exponential expansion of existing international and domestic players in the market.

According to the President of NRAI, the young and working population which comprise 60 per cent of the total population of India, who are aware and exposed to global cuisines will be a great demand driver for QSR in the country. Most of the industry players expressed similar sentiments. The transformation of Indian consumers' lifestyles over the years has tremendously helped the IEO (Informal Eating Out) industry to grow and expand. Today, eating out is no longer considered as just an occasion-driven activity like it was a few years back.

With increasing number of people eating out (from three times a month a few years back to eating out approximately seven times a month today) the industry offers major opportunities to the players to capture a larger consumer base, opined head of a multinational QSR chain in India.

From a business model, QSR's has scalability through different ownership models – own, franchisee, mix of ownership and franchisee, revenue sharing, etc. The format is not complex as other food services formats like casual or fine dining restaurants. QSRs are differentiated for their speed of service, affordability and convenience. While the international chains in this space focus and specialise on a single cuisine or product category, like burgers, pizza, wraps,

sandwiches, etc., Indian QSRs offer multiple cuisines and products.

International brands

As per reports, a number of international fast food brands are currently exploring India entry with the support of Indian private equity funds. Such brands see lot of opportunities in the Indian market as economic trickles to smaller townships and cities. Funds are no more an issue for new ventures. There has been a spate of Private Equity (PE) investments and funding in several new projects. Even early stage funding is a possibility in India today, which was never the case earlier. A unique product, which is aspirational, headed by the right person, and has all systems that make it scalable and last but not the

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► **Deep fried snacks, raw greens and sauce are staples for many QSRs**

least is ‘simple’ has a tremendous advantage over the other products. This period is one of the better periods for the hospitality industry.

Although fast food had deeper roots in the Indian milieu, it was the international brands that proliferated fast with the market demand. Today, Domino’s has over 989 outlets across India, up from 830 stores located in the country in 2015. Other international brands that also have strong presence include Subway (500 outlets), McDonald’s (220), KFC (320) and Pizza Hut(400).

International food chains did get attracted to the huge Indian market, but they face challenges they didn’t expect. “The market seemed extremely attractive to us and we wanted to woo the customers here,” says one of the directors on condition of ano-

nymity. However, little did they guess that the going would not be as easy as it seemed. It isn’t just the plethora of players operating in India but the huge challenge from local vendors. “Today, we feel we were not adequately prepared to tap the market at this point in time,” says the director.

Counter Culture

This perhaps explains the anxiety of several international fast-food chains that are in India with aggressive expansion plans to keep pace with the growing appetite of the QSR market.

While the numbers are catching the fancy of established foreign players who obviously see a significant business opportunity here of billion-plus, what they fail to realise, from the disadvantage of distance, is that the domestic market is also seeing a prob-

lem of plenty.

Rob Young, chairman at Australia-based firm DC Strategy — a franchising and International consulting group — explains that global food chains entering India with its diverse culture make decisions on the basis of speculation rather than ‘actual fundamentals’. Also, the Indian franchisers who partner with foreign multinational QSRs don’t themselves have enough knowledge about the vastness of the Indian market. “It’s one blind man leading another,” says Young to Business World.

“The fundamental success of Indian QSRs lies in offering a menu that is diverse enough to appeal to a cross-section of customers pan-India, catering to their cultural and taste preferences,” says Rajat Wahi, partner and head of Consumer Markets



► **Young Indians love to eat out frequently**

at KPMG to BW. After all, the Indian palate is habituated to desi food, and although it is influenced by the West, it doesn't completely move to a fare that is offered by foreign players. "What's more, the burgers and fast food that the local restaurants offer are extremely price competitive to be affordable for the pockets of domestic customers," adds Wahi.

Advantage Local

While it becomes easier for home-grown vendors to offer a complete meal for less than Rs 100, global brands using Indian franchisees find it difficult to toss up a menu at that price. It is not the emergence of organised players alone that is challenging for foreign brands. With the growing appetite for fast-food in India, competition is getting even more

Industry experts say there could be a dip in growth for foreign players. If current signals are any precursor, the growing competition from local players is beginning to eat into the share of foreign chains



intense with roadside vendors scoring a point against organised QSR chains with their range of the desi aloo tikki and vada pao and other delectable snacks at a price as low as Rs 25, too.

Since pricing and local flavour are democratising branded fast-food consumption in the country, many western chains are also trying to slash the prices of their items. But does low pricing erode brand equity for foreign chains in particular? "The entry level pricing should not be less than 20-30 per cent of your actual core product price. If you price the entry level product lower, you will attract the wrong segment, which comes in purely due to the pricing. This actually drives away your real customer, who may be looking for a different eating out experience," says Samir Chopra, chairman & founder, CybizCorp — the master franchisee for Carl's JR and Lazeez Affaire Group.

Another issue that preoccupies international chains is the high real-estate cost here with the market oversaturated. It is a bigger challenge to choose the right multiplexes with high footfalls.

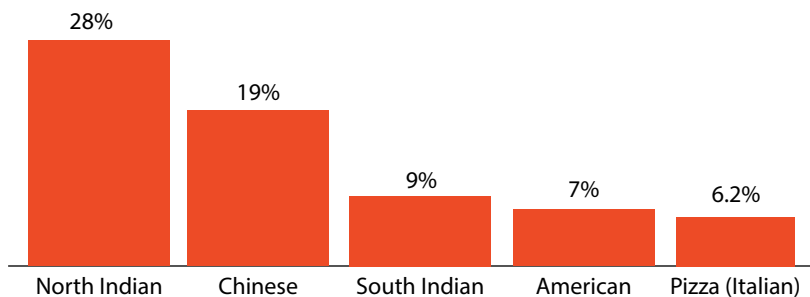
The concept of QSRs took off in India around 20 years ago with the entry of McDonald's in 1996, and the sector has seen a massive makeover since. Given that McDonald's had the first-mover advantage, it succeeded in ramping up its presence in subsequent years. Currently, as per industry estimates, as much as 60 per cent of the QSR market in India is dominated by foreign brands.

However, the mood is not that upbeat. Industry experts say there could be a deceleration in growth for foreign players. If current signals are any precursor, the growing competition from local players is beginning to eat into the share of foreign chains.

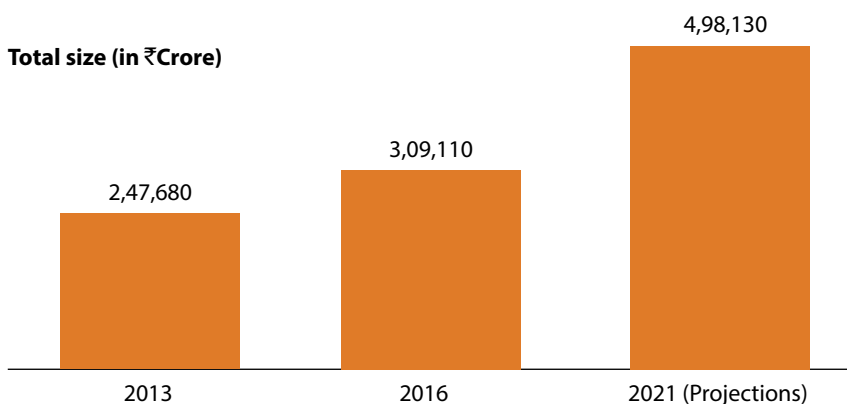
The contours of the fast-food market here have witnessed a dramatic change in the past 2-3 years with national chains replicating the efficient

RESTAURANTS

Top 5 Most Preferred Cuisines



Market Size and Growth



Source: India Food Services Report 2016

► Indians are still conservative about their food choices

supply chain models of their global counterparts. Some of the prominent ones who have not only been able to establish a brand for themselves but have also evinced investor interest in the past one year alone, include Faaso's that offers a variety of wraps, Massive Restaurants, founded by Zorawar, son of celebrity chef Jiggs Kalra, that runs chains such as Made in Punjab and Farzi Café. There are many more in growing list of Indian QSRs raising funds. In addition to the modern desi chains mushrooming, like Haldiram's, Bikanervala and even Saravanaa Bhavan, which are growing at a significant pace.

However, this is not to say that

the going is all smooth for local players. Look at what happened to home grown Nirula's that entered the fast-food business in 1977. With the entry of several players in the market eventually it failed to keep pace with competition and had to shut shop in several parts of north India. Currently, it is understood that the company is again focusing on its revival recipe strategy.

With today's intense competition where too many food chains are locked in a battle to woo the customer, it has become imperative for all players to re-invent their business outlook. This perhaps explains why most global chains are tailoring their offerings in terms of the flavours, pricing and

services. Their efforts include sprucing up vegetarian menus, offering no beef based products, sometimes even establishing separate cooking areas for vegetarian and non-vegetarian food. To meet the Indian consumers' inclinations, even the mayonnaise McDonald's serves in India is eggless.

At a time when both national and international QSRs are trying to build on the growing appetite of Indian customers, a host of online food portals are busy trying to control costs and sustain investor interest. The result is they are having to adhere to extreme measures that include shutting shop, tweaking their businesses or reducing staff. Recently, online food ordering startup Foodpanda was in the news for laying off 50 per cent of its workforce. This was right after TinyOwl Technology, a Mumbai-based online food ordering firm, hit the headlines for slashing over 110 jobs. Pioneering restaurant-finder app startup, Zomato, also announced layoffs of a reported 300 employees. There are others who have shut down. Bangalore-based food tech startup Dazo recently decided to wind up within a mere year of launching. It failed to keep pace with its competitors and was short of capital even after raising its first round of funding in April last year. Similarly, SpoonJoy, an online restaurant, announced that it will be shutting down in Delhi and in parts of its headquarters city.

But the outlook for the food and beverages market remains strong and the consumers really have reasons to cheer as they have a plethora of choices. According to ASSOCHAM, as much as 50 per cent of India's population eats out at least once every three months and eight times every month in bustling metros compared to the US (14 times), Brazil (11 times), Thailand (10 times), and China (9 times).

So, with competition mounting in the industry, both national and international QSRs will be aiming to draw in new consumer segments.

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THE OTA CONUNDRUM

Are online travel agents and aggregators friends or foes of the hotel industry? Are they helping increase occupancies or decreasing the room rates and value of your hotel in the long run? Senior members of the industry is still divided on the issue

AROUND 10-15 years back, very few in India had even heard of online travel agents (OTAs). The concept that took off in the mid 1990s in the US has now evolved into an integral part of the hospitality and tourism industry across the world. This great disruptive technological trend got gradually embedded as a 'necessary evil' by the hospitality industry.

Today's travellers expect itinerant services wherever they are and for whatever they are searching. Also, hotel guests are increasingly aware and expect the hotels to provide such services. Statistics show 85 per cent of leisure travellers used online services during vacations and 38 per cent explicitly



access travel information via the internet or their mobile devices. Already 30 per cent of leisure travellers use apps to find hotel deals.

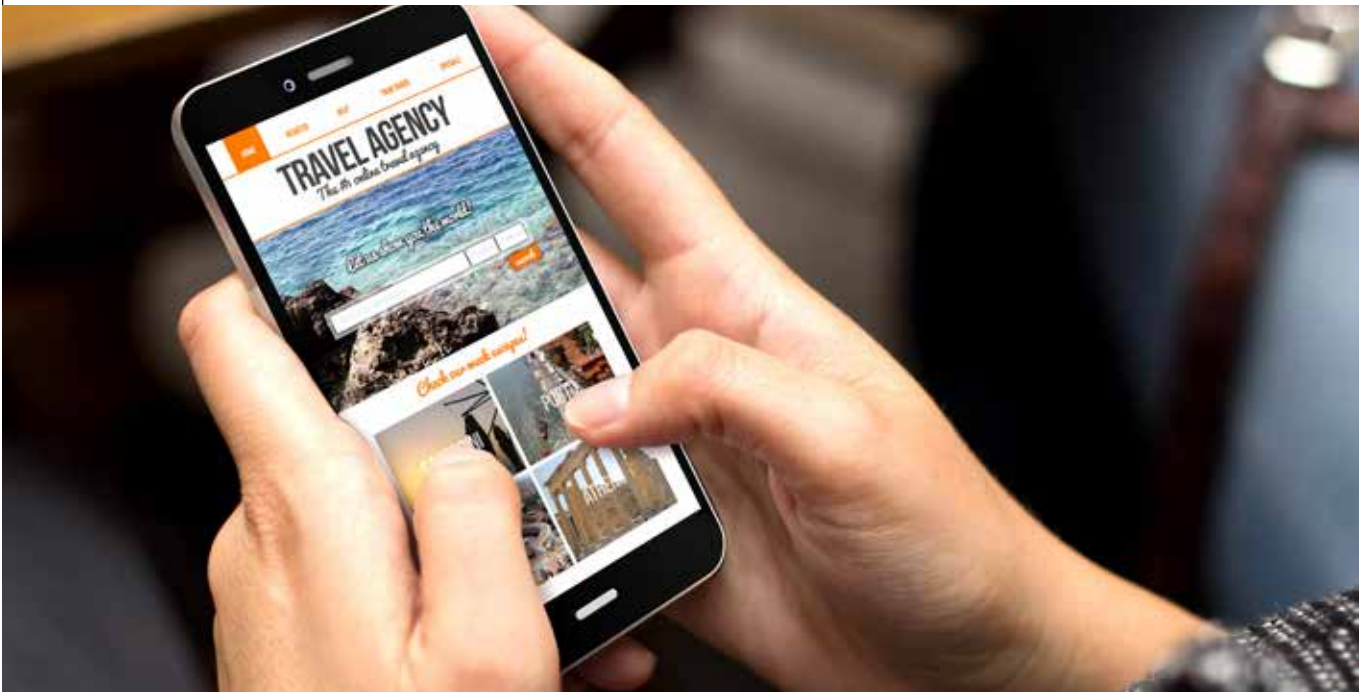
Hotel owners have invested significant amount of funds into the business and have put in much effort to create a brand name for themselves. The need to adapt to the online services is very much understood and is the order of the day. In the recent past, the domination of online portals and mobile applications for booking of rooms and rating of hotels is very much visible (that is MakeMyTrip, Goibibo, Yatra, Travel Guru, Cleartrip, Agoda, Expedia, Trip Advisor etc.). As a result many of us in the hotel business have to depend on online aggregators for online bookings.

Hotel aggregator companies like Oyo Rooms, Zo Rooms, Zip Rooms,

Vista Rooms and Airbnb leverage technology and enable consumers to have a hassle-free budget hotel booking experience while helping hotels/guesthouses to increase their occupancy. Elsewhere Treebo is looking at aggregating hostels under a single brand and platform. The idea is simple: provide users with quality budget stays but through aggregation and co-branding rather than by owning and running their own properties. These companies provide a boost to hotel occupancy rates, particularly in lean periods and help in diversifying a hotel's client base by introducing guests who would have else been difficult to target.

Simple maths

For the general public, it can be hard to understand the nuances of the situation when in fact it's rather simple. Every time a traveler books



► **Nearly a third of leisure travellers use apps to find hotel deals**

a room directly via a hotelier's website, there is no commission to pay, save the credit card fees. So on a Rs 1000 transaction, for example, the hotelier gets Rs 980 in revenue. But when that reservation comes through an OTA, or any of its subsidiaries, the hotelier will pay out a commission on average of 25 per cent, sometimes more if and when a promotion or preferred positioning is chosen. So on that Rs 1000 transaction, the hotelier now only gets Rs 750 in revenue.

Do the math: for hotels and properties selling tens or hundreds of room every day, the commission levels can skyrocket to insane amounts on a monthly and yearly basis if the OTA take a larger share of online sales. And this is what's presently happening!

This situation is not exclusive to hoteliers. Hostel owners are also

OTAs allegedly engage in practices such as advertising false discounts, search results which are distorted by commercial factors rather than the best deal for the consumer and sometimes hidden commission arrangements

being approached by a new breed of OTAs to sign partnerships and sell their available inventory.

Okay, but what's the issue, then? Isn't normal for middle players to make a commission when delivering clients to your property? That business model has been in place forever, much before the internet existed, through affiliate marketing, or giving a finder's fee for a new client. Herein lies the real problem: if the OTA sends a new client, that a hotelier would not have gotten in the first place, everybody wins. But if the client used to book directly a given hotel in the past, and now deals through an OTA, for the hotelier this now becomes a problem....

Grievances about OTA

In fact, here are the four common complaints from hoteliers when it comes to online travel agencies:

Commission levels: Whenever you make a reservation through an OTA, the hotel pays out a commission of 15-18%, sometimes more. These commission levels are undergoing changes and negotiations as we speak, due to industry pressure from leading hotel chains, but it remains nevertheless the number one issue.

Restrictive conditions: Hotels, inns, hostels... everybody who signs with OTA are required to sign complex and details contracts that demand rate parity, rate integrity, and room availability, among key conditions. In other words, a hotel can't show a lower rate on his own website, nor can he make rooms available on a site while unavailable on another.

Online reputation: If a traveler writes a comment, positive or negative, on TripAdvisor or Yelp, hoteliers can respond publicly. It gives context to the situation. But if you have a bad experience and write up a comment on an OTA? Hoteliers can respond to you privately, but it won't show on the site. So users only see traveler reviews, and not the hotel response. Not good for hotels, nor for site users who don't get the complete picture.

Loss of direct relationship with clients: OTA have developed such brand equity and user loyalty that many tend to book over and over with them. Hotels.com has been promoting its "book 10 rooms, get the 11th free" program for a while.

And the benefits?

Yet there are certainly areas of opportunities for those who choose to work with OTA. Here are three key benefits:

The "billboard effect": According to a Cornell University study, hotels listed on Expedia will benefit from reservations directly to their site, simply as a consequence of being seen on Expedia. Incremental reservations will vary from 8 per cent to 26 per cent, depending on the type of hotel – independent hotels are the ones who seem to benefit most! Bearing in mind the substantial amounts of money OTAs are spending online, this reason alone should be enough to consider playing along. But this begs the question: if a potential traveler comes to your website from Expedia or Booking, will she find everything and be able to book within a few clicks?

Multiscreen capabilities: Most OTA sites and mobile applications are on their 4th or 5th

generation, have great UX and showcase seamlessly what travelers want to see without having to click too many times. Expedia, for example, developed its Scratchpad enabling customers to start a session on a tablet, continue on their mobile and perhaps close the deal on a desktop. Hotel sites should watch, learn and replicate what seems to work, rather than ignore the evolution in customer needs and wants online.

Direct relationship: While the booking may have come from a third-party, some hotels embrace this as an opportunity to retain the customer by asking their email upon checking-in, either to become part of the hotel loyalty program, or either to take advantage of a promotion. Some hotels offer coupon for next reservation, which needs to be made online, on their site, or through their call centre.

So, friends or foes?

At the end of the day, online travel agencies are neither friends, nor foes. A necessary evil, perhaps? They play a key role in promoting travel, from accommodations to transportation, including things to see and do once at a given destination, i.e. restaurants, tours and activities, attractions, etc.

For a campground owner, a hostelier or hotel managers, the question is more about how you can drive more business directly to your website rather than why is some of that business going through OTA. It's an uneven battle if you only look at buying Google AdWords, but savvy remarketing campaigns and, more importantly, a strategic approach to content marketing can help if you properly identify how and when to invest





► **OTAs play a key role in promoting accommodations to transportation in the hospitality sector**

on your owned media, versus paid & shared media.

Nobody ever said hospitality marketing was easy, especially in this fragmented space that is now seeing the rise of the sharing economy. This party is far from over, and hoteliers must keep their focus on a quality experience while maintaining their leadership in the online world. OTA are part of the equation, so what do you say: friends or foe.

Reverse angle

Looking at the issue from the reverse side the aggregators have opened up avenues and helped create a level playing field for

independent owners and smaller chains. In general, aggregators and OTAs constitute a successful additional distribution channel that allows for valuable market exposure to individual hotels. A large OTA can provide a hotel--especially one in the 2,3 or 4 star category with limited visibility-- with wide online publicity. They can also help hotels sell unsold inventory.

However, all these come at a cost. Though OTAs offer a range of advantages on the marketing front, their high commission rates constitute a major concern to most of the hoteliers. Whenever a customer makes a reservation on online travel portal, the hotel pays

out a commission of 15-18 per cent, sometimes it's even higher, at 25 per cent or more. These commission levels are undergoing changes and negotiations, due to industry pressure from leading hotel chains, but the issue remains nevertheless.

OTA or aggregators have a definite room inventory agreed with the hotels with specific prices, but the prices of these rooms are kept inversely proportional to customer demands which tend to be high for peak season and low for offseason. Hence, prices offered by OTA or aggregators are no different than the ones consumer can get if he/she goes to the hotel directly. With

increased supply and heightened competition, commissions paid for bookings coming through OTAs are burning holes in the hoteliers' pockets.

Rate parity

Moreover, the stringent clauses like Rate Parity that OTAs impose on the hotels are taking its toll. Overall, these conditions are posing harsh impact on hotel revenues. But keeping aside the fact that OTAs are costly partners for hotels, they still cannot be ignored considering their overarching reach and marketing might. Technology solution providers to the industry underscore this. In the end, online travel agencies cannot be treated as either friends or foes to the industry as both are somehow dependent on one another.

The growth of online platforms should be examined carefully. While they can bring benefits, there are pitfalls to the emergence of online platforms. Online platforms can rapidly scale. They tend to have small payrolls and are often less capital intensive than the business that they intermediate allowing them to achieve significant market power in short periods of time. It can also create a perverse situation where the business of providing a good or service is significantly less profitable than the business intermediating its sale.

The market is dominated by a handful number of OTAs which are using their market share to charge unfairly high rates of commission from hotels, and to introduce one-sided agreements (rate parity clauses) which prevent hotels from charging less directly to a consumer. OTAs are trying to escape accountability on the pretext that they do not come into

the e-commerce policy as they do not mention the name of the service provider but the truth is that they do mention the names of the hotels on their websites.

Call for transparency

There are simple steps which can be taken to improve transparency in the online hotel booking market: OTAs are currently engaging in numerous practices such as advertising false discounts, search results which are distorted by commercial factors rather than the best deal for the consumer, and hidden commission arrangements. Consumers are not aware, for example, a service that appears free in fact carries a hidden commission charge of somewhere between 15 to 30 per cent. The basis for search rankings must be clearly

Online platforms tend to have small payrolls and are often less capital intensive than the business that they intermediate allowing them to achieve significant market power in short periods of time

presented. Consumers should be clear when hotels are being promoted through search rankings because higher commissions are being paid, or due to other non-price factors.

Recently European Union Committee has come out with a lengthy report on what it calls "Online Platforms". The report is the end of an investigation on how the largest online platforms use their market power and whether the current regulatory environment remains "fit for purpose". The crux of the matter is that OTAs have become a law unto their own, having too much power in their hands, be it the high commission charged, the manipulation of reviews, which has hit hoteliers under the belly. The need of the hour is that we the hoteliers, the travel trade have to come together to seek out a conducive environment to survive.

Nevertheless, hoteliers find it challenging to drive traffic to their own website because the search engines are flooded with online travel portal, paid search, key words and sponsored advertisements. OTAs know the tricks on how to list and route customers to the hotelier for a steep commission.

It is also increasingly helpful for hotels' websites to contain some of the stronger marketing techniques and design attributes of the OTAs and comparison websites. And thus beat them at their own game.

The core question is how much of a hotel's total business shall be derived from OTAs? There is no right or wrong approach with regards to how many OTA bookings should be accepted. It will ultimately depend on a hotel's specific requirement. And that will decide whether OTAs are your friends or foes.



► The front office ensures that the guest has a great experience

A Hotel's Eyes and Ears

Front office of a hotel needs to be efficient so that guests feel at home with a personal human touch. However, effective service lies in striking a balance between being inquisitive and nosy

WHEN staying at a hotel, every guest likes to be treated as royalty. Each guest wants the staff to understand his or her preferences, instinctively anticipate needs, and unobtrusively make the stay memorable. So how do modern customer relationship management tools help hotels to make that happen? Do they really drive

repeat business and increase in revenue?

The management of customer relationships is an important function in the hospitality industry. It is up to the hotel then, to make the customer feel personally welcomed, valued and cared for, as far as possible. The front office plays an important role in ensuring that the guest has a great experience by antici-



A repeat guest is always pleasantly surprised when he is making a reservation for the second time, and the front desk operator tells him about his special preferences

pating and taking care of the guest's every need. The front office does not do this just to ensure that the guest comes back, but because they are in the business of hospitality.

However, the question that arises is whether or not hotels are really able to properly utilise the guest information databases. However, when we take into consideration the extensive timeframe over which information specialists have been keeping electronic tabs on travellers to understand their travelling patterns and preferences, it's obvious that the front office does not have exceptional guest recognition skills.

On this front the better question might be 'what do hotels really do with their guest history?' The first and most obvious answer is that hotels chains offer 'frequent sleeper clubs' that promise airline points or bonus stays as a reward for continued patronage. While it is true that we all love freebies, it's more important to ponder whether club points add value to the guest experience. Does being a frequent sleeper make a guest more recognisable to the staff? Has the service improved? Does membership earn a preferred vintage wine and the feather pillow for the guest?

A second easy answer is that the hotel may use the guest history databases to build the customary mailing list. Mailing lists offer guests the magic chance to know about what's going on at hotels in and around the vicinity. This is an excellent use of guest history for the hotel. Mailing lists lure new guests to the door or remind those who have visited earlier to come again, but they still don't do much in terms of taking care of the guest who's in search of that elusive feather pillow.

For the past few years, hotels had been asking guests about their preferences, and how they'd like the minibar to be stocked. Now, they are going a step further by discreet-

ly monitoring what guests do during their stays and then recording that information, which is shared by the hotel company's multiple properties.

Efforts undertaken on these lines range from logging the kind of fruit that is left on the room service plates, to noting that a guest is asking for hot tea to be sent to his room. While such dotting service is welcomed by some travellers, many privacy conscious customers resent this new found nosiness. An efficient front office team understands that guests expect good service as a right these days, and have no misgivings about switching to another hotel or resort. However, effective service lies in striking a balance between being inquisitive and nosy.

The front office is the first touch point for a guest staying at a hotel. A repeat guest is always pleasantly surprised when he is making a reservation for the second time at the property, and the front desk operator tells him about his special request preferences, non-smoking room, low floor, etc, before they can make these requests to the front desk operator.

"When it comes to guest history, it is the job of the front office to ensure that the updated information is communicated to the rest of the departments," says Ashutosh Singh, Assistant Front Office Manager, Heritage Hotel, Manesar. For instance, guest history notes on special diets go to F&B or room service, and a special request of a particular type of bedding will go to the Housekeeping department.

The front office plays an important role in developing relationships with the guest, and since guest recognition is an important aspect of that relationship, the one question that a front desk operator cannot afford to ask a guest is, "Have you stayed with us before?" However, recognising a guest isn't an easy task. Part of the trick is to recognise

GUEST RELATIONS



► **The front office must have a clear understanding of privacy regulations**

whether someone making a booking is a repeat guest, whether he is doing so by phone, calling the toll free reservations number or booking over the Internet. This isn't always easy. Most people usually visit a hotel in just one capacity. However, there are some guests who may quite easily come in different roles — convention attendee, family vacationer, meeting planner, or just one of the boys on a golf outing — with different room and package preferences for each visit. Name changes due to marriages and divorces are also an obvious recognition challenge.

It is also essential that the front office has a clear understanding of privacy regulations that define what data you can keep, for how long, and for what purpose. European countries have long imposed stricter rules on this than are common in other parts of the world, and are likely to contin-

The most dominant aspect of bookings these days is how the Internet has transformed the whole picture

ue to refine them. A recent European Commission recommendation, for example, is that the personal data of users conducting a search should not be stored or processed 'beyond providing search results.' It also recommends that this data should not be used to serve up personalised adverts if the user has not created an account or registered with the search engine, which could limit keyword marketing efforts to first-time searchers.

The advent of technology and the role that it plays in the smooth operations of a modern front office cannot be discounted. The most dominant aspect of bookings these days is how the Internet has transformed the whole picture. The e-Front Office features on websites, e-mail, and Web-based marketing have massively extended hoteliers' ability to interact with their guests, gather more information about them and tailor visits much

more closely to their expectations.

There are two main benefits of maintaining guest history. The first is to encourage repeat guests to return. The second benefit is to use guest history patterns to identify newer guests. It encourages more repeat business from existing guests through better awareness of their wishes, habits and preferences. This includes ensuring that the stay itself is as closely tailored to the guests' wishes as possible, and tailoring personalised correspondence pre-and post-stay to maximise the current visit and encourage a return visit. It also helps to use this knowledge to find new guests similar to the most valuable ones who have already stayed at the property; what Pinehurst's Michael Schubach once memorably described as "forgoing development of a better mousetrap in favour of generating an ever-increasing supply of mice."

This is a crowded field for vendors.

There are many alternatives for hoteliers looking for help in expanding or improving their customer's resource management efforts. However, they all have one common goal: to come up with as complete and accurate a guest profile database as possible. Information in a guest profile can be classified into four main types: behavioural (guest, room and activities information collected from previous stays), preferences (learned through direct input from the guest, usually from a Web form or loyalty programme), inferred (interests deduced by tracking click-throughs on the Web site or from a marketing e-mail) and public data (from census or other third-party demographic sources). An ongoing challenge is how to track guests' cash or credit card purchases on the property. This will be a useful addition to their profiles, but it can also become a privacy and security hassle to consider linking through the credit card number.

This information must be constantly monitored with a look out for duplicates that should be merged, and watching for outlying data values that need to be verified. The Leela Kempinski Kovalam has simultaneously embarked on a three-pronged technology thrust that includes the 'Opera Reservation System' which enables effortless and logical reservation flow, as well as enhanced revenues through tighter inventory control. 'Touché' is designed to be used for touch-screen based purposes. It handles customer profiles, table reservations, table management and guest feedback analysis. It will speed up order taking and cashiering operations by bringing down delivery time. 'Triton' enables the hotel towards creation of a self-improving process for service delivery and guest satisfaction. It assists in unified cross-department tracking of guest requests, complaints and maintenance jobs. It triggers automatic escalations and personalised alerts on non completion of the jobs assigned.

As the General Manager of the Leela Kempinski Kovalam, Biswajit Chakraborty says, "Today's leisure travellers are urbane, perceptive, demanding and discerning enough to handle their requirements. Hotels have to go beyond the physical attributes of location and design. Efficacy, ability, effectiveness, accuracy, performance, personalisation, recognition, efficiency, and zero maintenance problems are the real drivers of revenue, customer loyalty and customer satisfaction."

In addition to ensuring that guests receive prompt service, rapid-response systems also provide a wealth of management information. Tracking how long it takes to respond to specific types of requests can lead to workflow realignments for quicker action and better service. Repeated complaints by different guests from a specific room can highlight an otherwise undetected engineering problem. "It is a job



► **Technology plays a key role in the smooth operations**



► **Front office drives repeat business and increased profit margin**

of constantly ensuring that you keep re-inventing yourself, and making sure that the customers know that you are making a special effort to cater to their every need,” says Raghu Sapra, Director Rooms, Hyatt Regency Delhi.

In November 2006, Marriott International Inc’s Ritz Carlton launched a central system called ‘Mystique’ that shared its staff’s observations about guests with all of the company’s 60 hotels for the first time. At the same time, the Hilton Hotels Corp was in the process of researching a radio frequency identification system which is based around the concept that the guests will carry a microchip enabled card in their pocket that will inform the front office immediately when the guest walks into the hotel, thus allowing quicker identification and check in.

Now, Langham Place Hotel in Hong Kong pushes the envelope further by using this platform to introduce a new level of guest history and personalisa-

Hotel companies continue their efforts at personalising the guest’s experiences in the hope that this will help them to win high paying guests

tion. Not only do they ask the guests for their usual preferences like pillow type and room type, but they will also gather frequently dialled numbers, personal stock profile, home photos, radio stations and news preferences. When guests return to stay at Langham Place Hotel, they will find personal, customised content fully uploaded on their guest phones, even before they enter the room, including their family picture.

Hotel companies continue their efforts at personalising the guest’s experiences in the hope that this will help them to win high paying guests. All this is happening at a time when the hotel industry is doing well and the year on year record occupancies rates keep touching new heights, every year.

There are myriad ways in which a hotel can use available data, and so many ways it can add value to the hotel’s performance. As a hotel company, you need to decide what you want to do first — increase the number of repeat guests, drive revenue from specific segments, up the standards as well as quality of service offered, etc. Once these are in place, ensure that the database is configured to support that. It’s important to stay focused and try not to do everything at once, though the range of possibilities certainly makes it tempting.

Every aspect of a guest’s experience with a hotel contributes to its relationship with him or her. Therefore, all the traditional hospitality systems (performance monitoring systems, CRM, etc) and the newer ones (e-mail marketing, Web-based marketing, etc.) must work together to present a unified, consistent experience and to make that relationship a positive, lasting one. It is up to the front office staff to effectively understand the preferences of a new guest, recognise those of a repeat guest, put in place systems that bridge the inevitable gaps, and consequently communicate these to the rest of the staff.

Don't ignore genuine online reviews



MR AJAI PUNJ, General Manager, Radisson Blu, Ranchi is a certified expert in revenue management system. However, he believes more than any automated system the human intelligence and derivations from available data give rise to more profitability of a hotel. He spoke to Mystic East in an exclusive interview Excerpts



What's your career graph in the hospitality sector?

After passing out from Institute of IHM Pusa in 1991, I was placed at the prestigious Oberoi School of Management as a senior kitchen trainee. After that I worked for The Taj Westend, Bangalore. Then I joined Maurya Sheraton Hotel and Towers in New Delhi—arguably India's finest hotel—and Le Meridien, New Delhi. After that I had stints at Goa, Bahrain, Switzerland, Pune, Agra and Oman. Now I am in Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand.

What are the significant changes you have brought about in the Ranchi hotel?

With support from a wonderful team we are in the process of restoring the glory and popularity of the magnificent property—an icon in itself—of the Carlson group here.

Where does the state of Jharkhand stand vis-a-vis other east Indian states from the viewpoint of the hospitality sector?

Beautiful Jharkhand has a tremendous potential. Under the dynamic leadership of Shri Raghubar Das,

the hon'ble Chief Minister of the state, we are poised to make a great progress towards expanding revenue share from hotels and tourism. We organise Jharkhand Food Festival occasionally, among other programmes to tap the potential.

How important are revenue management (RM) in modern hotel management?

RM is of utmost importance in today's hospitality world. As a certified expert in RM this is the way forward for hotels. But mere strategies don't work, you have to implement them and adapt them to the local market.

Does an automated RM system help maximise profitability for all type of hotels?

Yes. However, more than any automated RM human intelligence and derivations from available data maximise profits. On a number of occasions, this has helped me achieve a gross operating profit (GOP) over 40 per cent. I achieved this by amalgamating strategies and tactics of basic revenue making concepts with the latest trends and local market situations.

How does a small/ non-star category hotel benefit from modern RMS?

In any scale of business, analysis of all factors affecting your yield gives desired results. Even if, there is no formal revenue management system available at a small/non star category hotel, to start with, a simple application of tools and resources to compare them with direct competition will give them better results. Let us remember that customer is the king and a wide choice is available to him/her. Hence we must be better than our next competitor in order to become the first choice.

What is your opinion on online hotel reviews?

In today's fast moving digital world, communication effectively happens via online reviews. Any feedback is welcome. However, we do filter fake reviews and take genuine feedback quite seriously. We act on it immediately with an appropriate response and make it a point to reply to all reviews. We also learn from useful suggestions from our valuable customers and try to make improvement based on these. Seeking feedback is critical and acting on it is absolutely necessary.



Old Trade, New Tricks

Housekeeping is considered as the backbone of the hotel industry. The latest technological advancements have brought about a change in this department's work system, but human efficiency still plays an important role

HOUSEKEEPING services in a hotel is entrusted with maintaining a hygienic and clean environment. A decade ago, staff were involved in completing the paper work after their assigned job. Room checklist, lost and found, discrepancy report, vacant, dirty and occupied cabin list etc, were mandatory and was noted down manually.

Housekeeping department has large number of staff working right from the Executive Housekeeper

(EHK) to housemen. Right from the EHK to housemen, everyone was responsible to finish their respective paper work. Most of the vacant space in the department was occupied by these paper sheet in the folder and were maintained for future references. As time passed by, technology came into existence and the workload of paper and manual job was cut down to minimum but not completely. However, technology has improved the work efficiency and eliminated most of the

time consuming work in the housekeeping department. With development in technology, the work pattern changed a lot in the housekeeping department, which resulted in reduction of manpower and time.

Old Tricks

Housekeeping job always being a physical work but at the same time it was also a clerical job for the housekeepers. Housekeeping department has large number of staff working



► **Maintaining a hygienic clean environment is the basic job**

right from the EHK to housemen. The supervisor used to note down all the occupied, vacant, dirty rooms of the day and send it to the EHK and the front office. This was done three times a day i.e. in the morning, afternoon and night. Supervisors were responsible for the inventory of the linen. A work list or maintenance slip was prepared for engineering departments for all maintenance work. The housekeeping staff had to undertake these things everyday. The above work was done manually on paper and used to consume a lot of time.

Executive Housekeeper of a three-star hotel in Kolkata says, "Previously there were a lot of things in the hotel, which were done manually, right from the room status to guest request. Supervisors used to check the room,

come down, fill up the register and call up the front office or send a note stating which rooms were clear for business. Even the guest request was a time consuming process as it used to be directed from room maid to supervisor or desk and then again through the same channel to complete the request. The only way one could know that the request is completed was the guest request book at the desk."

Echoing with the above statement, Director Housekeeping of a 5-star Hotel in Kolkata said, "Earlier we assigned one person to do all the paper work. He had to come down or call the desk to update the maintenance job or for any other work. Lost and found procedure was time consuming and sometimes there used to be discrepancy in room reports sent to the front

office. There were no means of communication apart from the phone line at the desk and guest request used to take time to complete."

New Tech

Today, technological evolution being the mantra globally, most of the hotels in the world have installed and applied various applications and software systems. This helped hotelier and also the staff to learn, understand and aware of the latest technology. Today, there are various technology solution company providing the application and services to the hotel industry in India.

"Housekeeping, though a core operational department for any hotel, has not seen many changes, as far as technology is concerned. A few PMS (property management systems) just brush through a small portion of the entire accommodations operations but do not provide a comprehensive solution to the host of activities. The technology at present is limited to majorly just two activities i.e. PMS - caters to the room status coordination between front desk and housekeeping and maintenance related coordination between engineering and housekeeping," Manish Jain, Director, Kazzam- housekeeping solution company, said.

Since the inception of technology in the housekeeping department, work has become easier. "Previously, the housekeeping department was considered responsible only for maintaining basic cleanliness and upkeep of the property. Not much emphasis was laid on analysis-reports, software, training of staff related to the latest happening in field of housekeeping. However, in the last five years, trends have definitely changed with more focus on creativity, innovations, training, use of the latest equipments and technologies and software with new processes and standard operating procedure in place, said Executive



► Technology helps simplify work and bring more efficiency

Housekeeper of three-star property in Kolkata.

According to Executive House Keeper of another 5-star hotel says, “Technology is being upgraded every single day and the housekeeping department has seen a sea of change when it comes to technology. Technology helps us in simplifying our work and brings more efficiency to the system. For example, personal digital assistant’s are being used by the supervisors to clear rooms, to get all the information and preferences of the guests and to update the same. In case the guest is checking in for the first time, preferences are taken from the Internet and social websites. Computers reduces the number of papers used thus reducing the impact on the environment. Radio-frequency

identification (RFID) are being used in linen to track pilferage. Automatic chemical diluting machines are being used to get the right dilution thereby reducing wastage and increasing efficiency.”

Multiple Uses

PMS, iPads, smartphones, maintenance related coordination, inventory tracking system, RFID (a chip, created by linen technology tracking, are being sewn into anything made of cloth inside a hotel room where a sensor will go off to alert the hotel immediately while taking it) is an example of how technology has been applied in the housekeeping department.

Managing Director of facility services company said, “We have offered features to update room status from

guest room phones (Today, we enable the same through High Television also known as HITV). We were the first international vendors to introduce features for lost and found tracking and loaned items control. We were also the first to allow maintenance requests to be logged and monitored through the housekeeping software. Today, we offer guest response management system that registers all guest requests, assigns it to staff over mobile text messaging, monitors completion, escalates service delays and records cost of service failures.”

There are other companies that has been active in making housekeeping solution. Head of such a group said, “The housekeeping department has always looked for, and in most cases adopted comprehensive technology

solutions that enhance their overall efficiency, for example, iPads and smartphones with specific housekeeping applications on it, kiosk-based stations at floors and text message modules to address guest grievances rapidly. Numerous functions such as room cleaning, lost and found, housekeeping supplies and inventory, accessing the mini bar using telephones and other common housekeeping functions have been automated using smart applications. We at IDS NEXT constantly engage in research and involve our customers in the process to develop better software offerings especially targeted at addressing their pin-points.”

Overall Impact

The housekeeping department has always been criticised but usually has the least customer interaction. Now, it is fast becoming the most significant department with the management of rooms being high on the priority list.

The industry has definitely made use of the new technology available to increase efficiency and standardise operations. Overall, hotels are using innovative technology within guest rooms to promote hotel facilities and drive revenue opportunities, in short, provide a better service and connect with the customer. Staff retention has also become a driving force in the adoption of new technology. Increased communication between housekeeping staff help to add value. The multiple language feature in technology also enables management to help staff understand fully what is expected in terms of room maintenance and stock control.

The largest expense on a hotel's balance sheet is manpower, out of which 40 per cent is due to housekeeping. Hotels are now looking for solutions that enable them to optimise manpower through innovative means, which is why technology is vital to the housekeeping department.

Housekeeping is responsible for all-important first impressions (cleanliness, upkeep and maintenance). A successful team can influence the profit margins of the hotel than any other department. It is humanly impossible to keep a track of various activities and to remember how many rooms in a 400-room hotel need a room painting or out of 100-plus team members who is most weak in bed making. The worst comes when a housekeeper leaves and a new one joins with no clue of where the department is headed. So, the need to have technology assist in planning the departments progress synergised with the hotels vision is top priority.

Future Tech

No one can predict the future and no one can say what could be the future in technology in coming years. However, there are individuals who are working and want to develop or want something with some more pro-

ductivity, which can be useful to the housekeeping department in the near future.

As innovations in the consumer electronics world evolve, this trend will undoubtedly influence what guests will come to expect during their stay. Travellers will be demanding access to more Internet-based content through the in-room television, acting as a digital concierge to access information. Internet applications on TV sets and 3D viewing and this will further influence consumer choices and the ability for the hotel to deliver the ‘complete experience.

The future technology for hospitality would be better sleep management system, innovative service designs for quicker and efficient service.

However, India is fast catching up with the latest technology and in some areas are better than what the others can offer. It is time, which will decide the excellence of technology in India.



► A successful housekeeping team can influence the profit margin of a hotel



Welcome to Prefab Hotels

A fast changing economy in China paved the way to modular building systems. The Indian hospitality industry can take a cue to bring momentum to hotel development in the country, particularly in remote areas

WITH a fast changing economic environment and society coming to terms with the 'new normal' in China, hotel developers are seeking for more carefully planned and executed projects, based on a sound economic footing to ensure sustainable operations. Under such circumstances the modular building system might become one possible remedy to bring momentum to hotel development in China, particularly in remote areas. This publica-

tion provides a brief introduction of China's modular building construction for the hotel industry.

Why modular building?

Modular building is a process in which a building is constructed off-site, under controlled conditions in a factory, delivering the consistent quality designed to the same codes and standards as conventionally built hotel units. The controlled environment and 'massproduction' allows

for a significantly expedited construction timeline, saving as much as half the construction time. Companies like CIMC-MBS and Deepblue Smart House are the trailbalzers for modular construction in China and has provided numerous modular building solutions for different projects around the world, including residences, student accommodation, camp accommodation, hotels, beach houses, overwater bungalow etc. For hotel construction the modular building systems are of-

ten factory finished structures that form enclosed spaces within a completed building. Each module is fitted out before transported to deployment site for installation.

After a façade encloses the individual modules the building will look generally the same as one built with traditional construction methods. There are some key advantages of using the modular building for hotel industry:

Quality. Quality and consistency is the core factor for modular building systems. For each projects, modules are fully fitted out inside, in a controlled factory environment that allows for easy and frequent quality checks. In addition, during the showroom or prototype construction phase, there will be an inspection and testing plan, which covers fit-out, plumbing, electrical, ventilation drainage and other relevant facility issues, to ensure the entire construction meet global, regional or local construction standards and building codes. Connection details and composition of the modules will also be tailored accordingly to allow the system to withstand the extreme natural conditions.

Timing. Varying from project to project, using the modular building system can cut down the total construction time by 30-60 per cent compared to traditional construction methods. Meanwhile on-site labour for modular building system is typically reduced by 70 per cent, which leads to considerable benefits for access, storage of materials and Health & Safety issues in general. In addition, sourcing qualified labour in remote locations can be challenging and more time (and cost) intensive.

Flexibility. The modular building systems are based on very standardized units, yet the design and the layout can be adjusted to fulfill different project's requirements. As a significant advancement the restrictions of designing with standard container



► Design and layout of modular building are flexible

sized units no longer apply; the production line can be adapted to different module sizes.

Cost. Modular building allows reductions in the overall capital costs by 10-30 per cent, through greater efficiencies of design, delivery and onsite management. For instance a standard hotel project using the modular building system, the construction costs for each module, including the FF&E, usually won't exceed RMB 700,000.

How does it work?

For a standard hotel project, usually there are two options for using modular building system—full turnkey solution or supply only solution. For full turnkey solution qualified companies will provide full service from design review to installation and finishing work. For supply only option hotel developers might design their own prototype module and outsource the mass manufacturing work to qualified companies.

Following the traditional building process, the conceptual design stage will include an auditing and optimization for the modular system and

its development requirements. Once the concept design is done the project will move on to the technical design stage. Upon completion a prototype will be built, similar to a showroom, to finalize the design and get initial approval for building codes and meet other standards. This presents the greatest time saving opportunity, as such testing is done off-site. During the manufacturing & delivery stage, the onsite building foundations will be installed in preparation for module delivery. The modules will be built and fitted on special production lines. The latest technology allows for very strong modules to be built, they can be stacked 18-20 stories high, frame-free. After the steel fabrication each module will be fitted out and install with all fixtures, wiring, lighting plumbing, air-con, sprinklers and FF&E. The finished modules will be transported on standard container vessels. A 500 unit hotel can be manufactured and shipped off to the subject site in as short as four to six weeks. Once all the modules arrived at the subject site, they will be lifted into place and stacked. The modules



► Interiors of a prfab bungalow can look fabulous

will be fixated by bolts and all wires, pipes, ducts, etc will be connected. The façade will be added thereafter concealing the modular building system. Before handover to the client there will be a final inspection and testing on the whole construction.

For prefab overwater bungalow, taking Deepblue Smart House's product as an example, it is made of light gauge steel frame system (AS/NZ standard) and wooden panels. The indoor area of the bungalows ranges from 50 to 100 square meters with one kitchen and different numbers of bathrooms and bedrooms depending on the projects. Turnkey solution of this type of overwater bungalow includes design plans, optional site and foundation works, manufacturing, shipping and finishing work. Production capacity for the prefab overwater bungalow could be up to 15,000 square meters per month. This method has proven particularly successful with overwater units.

What is inside each module?

No matter how fancy the whole modular building system might sound, all these modules will eventually become hotel rooms. The in-room experiences are essential for hotel guests. Let's

take an inside look of a 4X7 module.

The module is constructed using corrugated corten steel. The outlayer of the module includes corner casting, connection box, lifting frame and side rail, allowing the module to endure weeks of shipping at sea and on rugged road. The interior lining of the module is isolated from exterior structural shell and provides good separation for acoustics and fire. The sectional perspective of the module includes plasterboard fire lining, mineral wool insulation and cement fibreboard or concrete floor deck laid on EPDM acoustic strip. Airborne noise transmission is doubly attenuated since each bedroom is isolated from the external steel shell of the module via air cavity in the walls and EPDM strip in the floor.

A minimum 20mm air hollow space between each module will further ensure a good acoustic performance. Modular construction with containers further allows each module to be a separate fire compartment, significantly enhancing safety. The composite party wall between bedrooms protects not only the required stability but often exceeds the integrity requirements defined in the fire strategy. External fire stopping needs to be

applied within the hollow space of the façade and it is designed as part of the site-specific envelope system.

In the bigger picture, sets of modules are grouped for mechanical systems to maximize the efficiency of the electrical, ventilation, drainage and other relevant facilities.

Outlook

In the new era of hotel development in China, sustainable development and return on investment are the major concerns for hotel developers. With the successful cases abroad and more stringent rules and regulations, the modular building system has great potential to develop, change the construction paradigm in China's core areas and facilitate hotel development in remote areas.

India story

Established in the year, 1995, Sai Structures India, have been involved in the building prefabricated cabins, prefabricated house and portable office. In recent times, they started building luxury cottages keeping in mind the diverse needs and requirements of the clients. They've provided customized solutions to Hotel Clarks Inn (Sahibabad) and Hotel Kingston (New Delhi).

Modulex is India's first full fit-out steel modular buildings company. They construct permanent buildings using UK developed steel modular technology. They are capable of building a 100-room hotel, fully fitted out as a turnkey project, in less than 24 weeks. However, the square foot cost of their technology is the same as traditional construction, But it also offers great time savings (enabling a quicker return on investment), as well as cost advantages, such as protection from construction material cost inflation through fast build programmes, our fixed cost guarantee and greatly reduced capital borrowing costs. With a huge volume of orders the cost will surely come down.



PILGRIMAGE

Seats of COSMIC POWER

It's time Shakti Peethas—temples consecrated to the goddess Shakti—across the subcontinent get proper infrastructural support to draw more tourists across India and abroad. Many of these seats of divine power happen to be located in eastern India

THE mythology of Daksha-Yagna—the ritual sacrifice by the king Daksha—is considered to be at the root of Shakti Peethas, the sacred abodes of Devi Sati. These shrines are located all over South Asia—India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. There are 51 Shakti Peetha—or places of strength—as per the puranas. However, some texts throw up 52, and even 108 sacred spots with consecrated ashes or body part of the goddess, the female principal of Hinduism and the main deity of the Shakta sect. They are sprinkled throughout the Indian subcontinent. With the passing time temples were founded and these sacred spots into revered pilgrimages in India.

The legend goes that, at some time in the Satya Yuga king Daksha performed a sacrifice for purposes of exacting revenge upon Lord Shiva. Daksha had become enraged when his daughter Sati had married the unconventional destroyer god against his wishes. Daksha invited the many gods to his sacrifice, with the deliberate exception of his daughter and son-in-law.

Sati was unable to bear her father's persistent intolerance toward her husband, and so she committed suicide by jumping onto a pyre. Enraged at the insult and the injury, Shiva interrupted Daksha's sacrifice and cut off his head, replacing it with that of a goat. Still crazed with grief, Shiva picked up the remains of Sati's body and danced recklessly over the entirety of the universe, engendering various cosmic disturbances along the way. The entire pantheon of gods had to combine their efforts in order to stop this dance of destruction, and, in the process, Vishnu's disk (or SudarshanChakram) cut the corpse of Sati to ribbons. The various parts of her dissembled corpse fell at several spots all throughout India where the Shakti Peethas stand today.



► **Danteshwari temple in Chhatishgarh dates back to over 600 years**

Even though 51 is the number of Shakti Peethas considered by the mythology, some believe the number is 108, or more. Let's have a look at the prominent ones, especially those found in eastern India.

Kamakhya Temple: In this temple in Guwahati, Assam, the presiding deity Kamakhya resides on the mountain of Nilachal. One of the most famous Shakti Peetha Temples in India, the seat of Maha Shakti (supreme energy) this temple is associated with several mysticism and attract thousands of domestic as well as international devotees during the festival of AmbubachiMela. According to Devi

Purana, Sati's Mahamudra(female reproductive organ) fell in a cave which is worshipped here in the form of a stone. It is believed that from mid June the deity Kamakhya starts menstruating which continues for three long days; during this period no homage is offered to the deity. The temple complex comprises several other temples dedicated to Shiva and different incarnations of Durga.

Tips: Take a dip in SaubhagyaKunda for a bright future. Collect Kamsindur for the wellbeing of the household, business or married life. Devotees visiting this temple get rid of ailments and the deity protects them from all evil spirit.

Tripura-Sundari-Temple: Popularly known as Matabari (the abode of Mother), Tripureshwari is a temple located on the outskirts of the south-western town of Udaipur in the state of Tripura. Around 51 km from Agartala city, the temple is located in a serene environment where the clamor of so called city life gives way to the chanting of hymns by the priests, sound of bells and the noise of shopkeepers inviting the devotees to buy puja samagri. The right foot of Sati fell on this spot and the deity is worshipped here in the form of a sixteen year old girl called 'Soroshi'. The sanctum is built in square shape which resembles a normal Bengali

hut. Animal sacrifice is an inseparable part of the daily puja. There is a huge pond behind the temple where various species of fish can be seen.

Tips: People often visit this temple to fulfill their wish and it is believed that once a wish reaches the Goddess, it gets surely fulfilled.

Tarapith Temple: A mystical shrine on the Birbhum District of West Bengal, Tarapith is an ancient temple dedicated to one of the 12 incarnations of Goddess Kali called Tara. It is said that the eye ball (tara) of Sati dropped here. A hub of tantric activities, offerings, and all supernatural deeds, a smasana (crematorium) is located next to this temple. The quaint background, myths associated with it and beliefs transform the temple into one of the must see religious tourism places in India. The face of the deity is made of silver and unlike other forms of Kali she has got two hands. She is wearing a garland of snake and Shiva is found sucking her breast in the form a kid. Offering of blood is a must to conduct the daily puja and that is why every morning goats are sacrificed on the altar of the temple.

Tips: It is believed that people visiting Tarapith temple never go back with empty hands. The deity is worshipped here in her motherly form.

Nalateshwari-Temple: A calm and composed temple town sanctified by the water of River Brahmani, Nalateshwari is a temple dedicated to one of the incarnations of Goddess Kali. Here the vocal chord with part of the tracheae had fallen. The temple is located on a small hillock. The temple wall contains beautiful panels of terracotta. The belief goes like this: if one ties red or yellow threads on the trunk of a holy tree present there, one's wish gets fulfilled.

Tips: No matter how much water is poured down the Devi's throat it

neither gets overflowed nor dries up. Collect the holy water here.

Kalighat Temple: Located on the banks of a small canal Adi Ganga, Kalighat is one of the major attractions of Kolkata city. It is said that the toes of the right foot of Sati is worshipped here. The temple is associated with the Nath/Siddha tradition which speaks about different forms of yoga. Here the idol of goddess Kali is unique from other temples. Instead of a huge idol of the deity her image is made of black stone with three huge eyes, a long protruding golden tongue and four golden hands. On the day of Snanaytara while giving her a holy bath, the priests cover their eyes with cloth. Religious people visiting Kolkata do not miss out visiting this temple.

Tips: Tuesday, Saturday and Ashtami are the special days for worship-

For spiritual tourists the temples of Shakti have always remained centre of attraction due to the mysticism associated with them. Many of the idols are believed to have self incarnated



► The Tara Tarini temple in Odisha is one of the oldest pilgrimage centres



► The temple complex at Kamakhya in Assam comprises several other temples dedicated to Shiva and different incarnations of Durga

ping. Offer your puja on these designated days.

Tara Tarini temple: This temple on the Kumari hills or Purnagiri at the bank of the River Rushikulya near Brahmapur city in Ganjam District, Odisha, India is worshiped as the Breast Shrine (SthanaPeetha) and manifestations of Adi Shakti. The Tara Tarini Shakti Peetha is one of the oldest pilgrimage centers of the Mother Goddess and is one of four major ancient TantraPeetha and Shakti Peethas in India. The goddesses Tara and Tarini are represented by two ancient stone statues with gold and silver ornaments. Two brass heads, known as their ChalantiPratima, or Living Image, are placed between them.

This ChaitraParba is the most important among the festivals, celebrated at the Tara Tarini Hill Shrine. It takes place on each Tuesday of the month of Chaitra, during mid-March to mid-April (according to the English calendar). Lakhs of devotees come

For the discerning spiritual tourists a lack of basic infrastructure and paucity of good hotels near most of these pilgrimages is a big impediment. A lot needs to be done to promote religious tourism in areas

from every corner of world to have darshan of the Tara Tarini and perform their Manasika after fulfillment of their desires.

Tips: Devotees come to offer the first bunch of hair of the newborn babies with the belief that goddesses Tara Tarini will protect the newborns from all evils and ensure their well-being.

Mahalaxmi-Devi-Temple: Popularly known as Shree Pitham, this glorious temple is the seat of Kolhapureshwari (the presiding deity of Kolhapur, Maharashtra). It is believed that the eyes of Sati fell here. There is a huge difference between the commonly found Laxmi idol and the image found in this temple. Here the lion is portrayed as the mount of the deity. In Mahalaxmi Temple of Kolhapur, the idol of the deity is carved in black stone and she has four hands holding a mhalunga (a citrus fruit) a Kaumudoki (large mace), a khetaka

Other Maha Shakti Peethas

The modern cities or towns that correspond to these 64 locations can be a matter of dispute, but there are a few that are totally unambiguous, these are mentioned in the AshtaDasaShakthiPeethaStotram by AdiShankara. This list contains 18 such locations which are often referred to as MahaShakthiPeeths.

Sr. No.	Place	Part of the body fallen	Shakti
1	Trincomalee (Sri Lanka)	Groin	Sankaridevi
2	Kanchi (Tamil Nadu)	Naval	Kamakshi Devi
3	Pandua, Hooghly district (West Bengal)	Stomach	Shrinkala Devi
4	Mysore (Karnataka)	Hair	Chamundeshwaridevi
5	Alampur (Telangana)	Upper teeth	Jogulambadevi (Yogambadevi)
6	Srisailem, (Andhra Pradesh)	Neck part	Bhramarambadevi
7	Kolhapur (Maharashtra)	Left eye	Mahalakshmidivi
8	Mahur (Nanded District, Maharashtra)	Back part	Renuka Devi
9	Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh)	Elbow	Mahakalidevi
10	Pithapuram (Andhra Pradesh)	Left hand	Puruhutikadevi
11	Jajpur (Odisha)	Naval(Navi)	Biraja Devi
12	Draksharamam (Andhra Pradesh)	Navel	Manikyambadevi
13	Guwahati (Assam)	Vulva	Kamarupadevi
14	Prayaga (Uttar Pradesh)	Fingers	Madhaveswaridevi
15	Kangra, Jwalamukhi (Jammu)	Head Part	Vaishnavidevi
16	Gaya (Bihar)	Breast part	Sarvamangaladevi
17	Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh)	Throat	Vishalakshidevi
18	Kashmir	Lips	Saraswatidevi

(shield) and a panpatra. The main attraction of the temple is a small open window on the western wall through which rays of the setting sun fall directly on the deity's face on the 21st of each March and September.

Tips: There are six fixed days in each year when sunrays enlighten different parts of the idol of the deity. On those days Kiranotsava Festival is organized.

Danteshwari-Temple: A center of belief, dependency and hope for the tribal as well as non-tribal people of Dantewada, Chattishgarh, Danteshwari Temple is a revered Shaktipeeth dedicated to goddess Durga. It is be-

lieved that the teeth of Sati fell here and the temple got the name from the same connection. The temple dates back to almost 600 years and she is believed to be the presiding deity of Kakatiya Dynasty. The temple is located at the confluence of the holy rivers Shankini and Dhankini which are bestowed with different colours of water. The deity is known as Danteshwari Mai and the tribal people worship her as their only saviour deity.

Tips: Dussera celebration is a grand festival when thousands of tribal people assemble together in this temple and take the deity out for a grand procession.

For spiritual tourists the temples

of Shakti have always remained centre of attraction due to the mysticism associated with them. Most of these temples are built under the patronage of different dynasties and depict a unique architectural style. Moreover, the idols of the deities are mostly carved out of stone and many of these images are believed to be self incarnated.

However, for the discerning spiritual tourists a lack of basic infrastructure and paucity of good hotels are big impediments. Except Kamakhya and Kalighat, to some extent, a lot needs to be done to promote religious tourism in this region by both central and state governments.



► Murals of auspicious Buddhist emblems and colourful prayer flags amidst the mountains in Tawang work magic on the minds of a traveller

STATE SURVEY: ARUNACHAL PRADESH

The last of the great Shangri-La

Arunachal Pradesh has an enormous potential for development of new product ideas-some of which are the latest craze in the western world today



SHANGRI-LA is a mystical, harmonious valley' or so goes the description in James Hilton's 1933 novel, *Lost Horizon*. Hilton went on to describe a Garden of Eden on Earth: a land of milk and honey in a hidden Himalaya valley, where nobody grew old or ugly. Over the years, there's been no shortage of contenders for the title of 'Lost Shangri-La' but now there's a new kid on the block: Arunachal Pradesh. The thunderous Himalayan peaks so little known that few have been named, let alone climbed, plus jungles teeming with life forms that scientists are yet to catalogue, delicately tattooed and pierced tribal peoples living in long houses in the forest, magnificent Buddhist Temples and a severe dose of near limitless adventure.

Arunachal Pradesh, a veritable treasure house of nature, tucked away

Snowy mist, famous monasteries, unexplored passes and tranquil lakes come together to form some of the prettiest mountain spots in Arunachal Pradesh

in the north eastern tip of India, invites you to relax in its picturesque hills and vales encircled on three sides by Bhutan, China and Myanmar. Nature is in its full splendour in Arunachal Pradesh topped with salubrious climate and its simple and hospitable people. Snowy mist, famous monasteries, unexplored passes and tranquil lakes come together to form some of the prettiest mountain spots in Arunachal Pradesh. For a tourist the options are varied, each more tempting than the other.

Apart of the eastern Himalayan range and situated in the north eastern tip of India bounded by Myanmar on its east, Bhutan on the west, China on the north and north east, here are the basic facts of Arunachal Pradesh.

- The largest state in the north east that covers an area 83,743 sq.km with evergreen forests covering more than 82 percent of the state.
- Average rainfall of above 3000 mm per year and climate variation from sub-tropical in the south to Alpine in the north.
- Inhabited by 26 major tribes and a number of sub-tribes.
- Thinnest population density in the country with only 17 percent per sq. Km.
- Home to more than 500 varieties of orchids

Location

Arunachal Pradesh Located at the top of North-Eastern India lies between 26.3 degrees north and 29.3 degrees north Latitude and 91.3 degrees east and 97.03 degree east longitude. It is bounded by Bhutan in the west, China in the north and Burma in the east and the state of Assam in the south, covers an area of 83,743 sq. km. Picturesque and hilly terrain, Arunachal Pradesh is criss-crossed by innumerable mighty rivers and rivulets which drain the waters of this vast area to empty in the Brahmaputra. The state is endowed with number of rare and



► Close to Itanagar, Naharlagun railway station, was inaugurated in 2014

endangered flora and fauna. Evergreen forest covers more than 60 per cent of Arunachal Pradesh and is rich in magnificent trees of high economic value. The state is proved of having above 525 species of orchids, which adorn the land and the landscape. The rich and diverse forest types provide natural shelter, food and habitat for wide varieties of wild animals. It is perhaps the only state, which harbours four major wild cats, that is, tiger, leopard, clouded-leopard and the snow leopard and also the rare feline species like the golden cats and the marbled cats. The large herbivores like elephants, gaur and wild buffaloes are found in the foothill areas.

Tourist interest

Arunachal Pradesh is the most picturesque tourist destination of India. Places of tourist attraction in the state can be broadly classified into four categories:

Places of Religious Importance and Archeological/Historical Sites: Malinithan, Tawang, Parsuram Kund are the places of religious and historical importance. Malinithan, a pilgrimage centre for Hindus is located at Likabali, headquarters of sub-division of West Siang District. Ruins of a big temple belonging to 14th –15th century. Tawang is famous for the 300-year-old Buddhist monastery. Parasuram Kund, another important religious place. On the day of Makar

Sankranti, thousands of pilgrims take holi dip in the Kund to wash off their sins.

The important historical and archaeological sites in the state are, an excavated 18th century Buddhist stupa, Vijaynagar, 8th to 17th Century old excavated fortress, Bhismaknagar, 9th century temple, Malinithan, 17th –18th century large stupa in Zimithang Chorten. Ita fort In Itanagar, which bears elegant testimony to the past glory of this area of ancient capital.

Wildlife Sanctuaries and National Parks: There are eight wild life sanctuaries and two national parks where a variety of wildlife animals and birds could be sighted. Prominent among them include elephants, tiger, gaur, musk deer, clouded leopard, red panda, Himalayan black bear, crapped langur, hillock, gibbon, hornbills, peacock, pheasants, florican, and host of other migratory birds. The state is famed for 50 species of orchids.

The wild life sanctuaries are: Pakhui wild life sanctuary (861.95 sq.km) East Kameng, Itanagar wild-life sanctuary (140.30 sq.km), Papumpare- Dr. D. Ering Memorial wild-life sanctuary East Siang (190.0sq. km), Mehao wildlife sanctuary (281.50.0sq.km), Dibang Valley- Kamlang wildlife sanctuary (783.0sq. km), Lohit- Eagle's Nest wildlife sanctuary (217.0sq.km) East Kameng, Kane wildlife sanctuary (55.0 sq.km) West Siang, Sessa Orchid Sanctuary (100.0sq.km), West Kameng, Dibang Biosphere Reserve (4149.0sq.km) Dibang Valley

National Parks: Namdapha National Park (Project Tiger) at Miao (1985.23) Tirap District, Mouling National Park at Jenging (483.0sq.km) East Siang

Adventure tourism: Arunachal Pradesh is endowed with thick evergreen forests with numerous streams, rivers and gorges ideal for angling, boating and rafting and its terrain is

suitable for trekking, hiking and holidaying in a serene atmosphere. The Government has identified four major trekking routes namely: Pashighat-Jengging – Yinkiong, Bhalukpung – Bomdila –Tawang, Roing – Mayo-dia – Anini & Tezu – Hayuliang, Pashighat-Jengging-Yinkiong,

Arts and Craft, Fairs & Festivals, Dances: The state is also endowed with local arts & craft skills; thus we find exquisite carpets, painted wooden vessels and silver articles furniture from cane and bamboo, shawls and jackets, shoulder bags, beads of agate, paper making etc. The festivals celebrated by the Arunachalees, mirror the people, culture, their artistic genius and skill in music and dance, which is a vital element in the life of every tribe. Important festivals are Losar, Nyokum, Boori Boot, SiDonyi, Aran, Mopin, Oriah, Mol Solung, the Ojiyale Festival, Tamladu and so on. Apart from the monastic dance per-

formed by the lamas during the Torgya festival, the Monpas have extremely attractive traditional dances.

Apart from the biodiversity there are many more natural tourist sites such as lakes, valleys, peaks and waterfalls.

Tourism Infrastructure

Road is the only means of transportation in the State. The entire road network of Arunachal Pradesh is connected with two National Highways No. 52 and 37. The National Highway-52 also passes through Pasighat, Roing and Tezu. The road connectivity is poor. The total road length in Arunachal Pradesh is 17655.09 km. There are settlements in the state, which are totally dependent on air dropping for their daily supply. Arunachal Pradesh was brought under railway map of India with the opening of Balipara- Bhalukpong metre gauge line.

In April 2014 Naharlagun railway station was inaugurated in Papum Pare district at about 15km away from the state capital Itanagar. A passenger train and an intercity express to Guwahati were introduced on a daily basis. The weekly New Delhi-Naharlagun super fast express was also introduced in February 2015.

Arunachal Pradesh is not adequately connected by air links. A few centres are connected by Pawan Hans Helicopter Services for which helipads are constructed. Accommodation facilities include hotels, circuit houses, inspection Bungalows, tourist lodges, guest houses. Arunachal Pradesh has few star category hotels. The total rooms available are not adequate in the state.

The present system of water supply is a gravity-based system where the river water is directly pumped to a tank located at the highest point of a habitat. In Arunachal Pradesh, 10 towns and 3599 villages have inadequate drinking water facilities.

Opinion Poll

Primary data was conducted by means of an open-ended questionnaire as well as through focus group interviews. These were conducted at different locations within the state of Arunachal Pradesh, including Bom Di La & Itanagar among others. Questionnaires were distributed among tourists (foreign & domestic) and hoteliers.

The findings from the survey indicate:

- Traveling in a group or with their families were mostly domestic tourist
- Traveling alone by a person who is on a business trip and indulge in some sight-seeing in their spare time.
- Foreign tourists had availed of package tours and had got their information from magazines and websites. The foreign tourists were



► Snowcapped mountain range of Bomdila is a photographer's delight

however unanimous those procedures for obtaining Inter Line Permit (ILP) should be simplified.

- The spending habits of the foreign and domestic tourists differed substantially with the Indian tourists spending Rs.500/- per day on average on food and lodging compared to Rs. 2000/- per day of their foreign counterparts.

However, cost was an important factor for both groups.

34 per cent of the respondents preferred traditional food. Among other cuisine, North Indian was the most popular, being the preferred food 46 per cent of the time followed by Chinese and others, which were preferred only 20 per cent of the time.

On the whole, all the tourists were unanimous in their view that the transport infrastructure and the amenities offered by the hotels need to be improved. The survey of hoteliers also revealed that some of even the better hotels did not have such basic facilities.

Swot Analysis

Strengths: Arunachal Pradesh has a rich inventory of world class tourism resources, both natural as well as manmade which include picturesque landscape, large forest areas, beautiful mountains, lakes, springs- and waterfalls. * Arunachal Pradesh is called the Power- House of the North-Eastern States with highly significant power production. The total hydro-power potential available in the state is estimated to be 30000 MW, which is one third of the entire hydro potential of the country (84,000MW). Many new hydel power projects are under construction despite protests by some environmentalists

Weaknesses: Inadequate marketing of tourism products of Arunachal Pradesh*Deficiencies in infrastructure especially connectivity and accessibility.



► Richly gilded and colossal statue of Lord Buddha

Opportunities: Arunachal Pradesh has enormous potential for development of new product ideas some of which are the latest craze in the western world today; Heritage Tourism: The state has an abundance of historical places, Religious Places, Archeological Sites and forts which can be suitably renovated and opened up for tourism; Health Tourism: Arunachal Pradesh is rich in plants having medicinal values; Entertainment Tourism: Arunachal Pradesh have a great potential for features like; entertainment complexes such as amusement parks, water parks, cable car rides, aquariums, casinos, sound and light shows, etc; Adventure Tourism : Arunachal Pradesh has significant potential for water sports (wind-surfing, water skiing, ailing, crocodile dandies, etc), para-gliding, river rafting, scuba diving, etc and trekking, mountaineering; Cultural Tourism: Arunachal Pradesh has rich cultural

heritage which is exhibited through the various fairs and festivals and dances.

Threat: Being location in isolation in terms of development, the State is facing challenges, which directly and indirectly curb the growth of tourism. The existing infrastructure, safety and security, local awareness and others are the major hindrance for the development of the tourism in the State. Accessibility is the foremost problem followed by poor infrastructure and a lack of basic amenities.

Need for Infrastructure

The number of average beds per 1,000 tourists is less than 500. In other words, the hotel accommodation in Arunachal Pradesh is inadequate for a quality accommodation. At present the State has few star categories of hotels. In order to attract the tourists, the government of Arunachal Pradesh needs to take immediate steps to create Star categories of hotels for the tourists. Budget Hotels for Domestic Tourists and 3 Star and 2 Star Hotels of international standards for foreign tourists are required.

New accommodation facilities has been proposed at Star categories of hotels in Itanagar, bed facilities at Mechuka, Dirang, Tuting, Hayyuliang, Dong etc.

The water requirement for domestic case is taken as 150 lpcd, for tourist purposes the same is assumed to be around 250 lpcd. Thus for the year 2021, the water requirement calculated on the basis of the available beds works out to be 0.24 MLd.

For the project tourists of 2021, the extra sewerage generation will be around 0.2 Mld. Provisions have to be made for the proper disposal of the same.

Also Help Line and improved health facilities are required. Under the central government's Hunar se Rozgar Tak scheme many youths are being trained in hospitality

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