

MYSTIC EAST

...an unexplored horizon

A Bi-monthly Magazine by HRAEI | Vol 9 | Issue 2 | July - August 2023



The visionary strap

Mr Sudesh Poddar re-elected as the new President of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of Eastern India (HRAEI)



VISION

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

MISSION

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



PRESIDENT'S NOTE



After years of struggle and immense challenges inflicted by the pandemic, the Indian hospitality industry is expecting robust growth as India took over the presidency of G20 in December of 2022.

As the year progresses, more than 200 meetings involving officials from different countries will be organised in India across 50 cities. Around 30 heads of state and government from the G20 nations are expected to participate in the summit. To celebrate India's G20 Presidency the Ministry of Tourism has planned to organize a number of events engaging government-level stakeholders and also the travel trade and hospitality sector.

These events will open big opportunities for the hospitality sector, especially for the lesser-known destinations. This will surely increase the number of footfalls in the country and the number of inbound travellers,

including foreign diplomats and dignitaries. Hotel room rates are also likely to increase during the G20 presidency due to increased demand for rooms.

This will be an opportunity for the country to showcase its rich heritage and cultural diversity, as well as a plethora of tourist attractions ranging from historical sites, monuments, and temples to pristine beaches, wildlife parks, and mountains to this global audience, which may boost the country's share of global international arrivals in the future. It is an opportune time for our host hotels to present the highest levels of service in order to attract more business in future.

Mr Sudesh Poddar

President, HRAEI

EDITOR'S MESSAGE



“

Hospitality Management programs can help tomorrow's leaders learn problem-solving strategies that also help them determine how and when to implement innovations and technology in the customer journey

The Indian hospitality sector was one of the worst hit by Covid-19. Although there is no definitive estimate of impact, the Reserve Bank of India, United Nations WTO, McKinsey and reports by EXIM Bank show a dismal situation.

However, as always, there are silver linings in the dark clouds because disruptive experiences lead to innovations. So the hospitality education system will have to adapt, adjust and innovate to be in tune with new demands.

Building a career in the Hospitality industry and maintaining a customer-centric mindset are the keys to changes. To prepare the next generation leaders, the hospitality management curriculum must offer classes that teach students a range of soft, hard and digital skills, including those involving analysis, robotics, technology, organization, management and cross-cultural communication.

Hospitality Management programs can help tomorrow's leaders learn problem-solving strategies that also help them determine how and when to implement innovations and technology in the customer journey.

Classes focused on impactful disruption and navigating dynamic challenges inherent to the sector will give students the foundation they need for a successful career in Hospitality.

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Vol 9 | Issue 2 | July - August 2023

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

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The last-minute information makes it extremely difficult to arrange a member to attend the HRACC classification visit

Members of the Hotel & Restaurant Association of Eastern India have taken serious umbrage pertaining to the HRACC inspection process. As per the requirement of the Hotel Classification process, representatives of travel and hospitality trade associations as part of the HRACC team takes part in the physical inspection process for classification of hotels. In the past, the trade associations used to receive information about classification inspections well in advance that enabled them in assigning a suitable representative having requisite expertise and experience in the domain.

However, ever since the new Nidhi portal has been made operational, information about inspection visits usually comes at a very advanced stage due to which the associations get very less time to appoint an expert member for the HRACC committee for classification. The last-minute information makes it extremely difficult to arrange a member to attend the classification visit. It gets even tougher to arrange a representative to attend the inspection visit in remote areas of the country due to scheduling and travel constraints.

The members support FHRAI's appeal to V. Vidya-vathi, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India to the serious lapse in the HRACC inspection process being coordinated through the Nidhi Portal. The members discussed the issue seeking suitable changes / amendments in the process to ensure that information about classification inspection is shared with the stakeholders 15-20 days in advance This would enable members to appoint suitable representatives to facilitate the inspection visit.

Mr Pranav Singh
Honourary Secretary

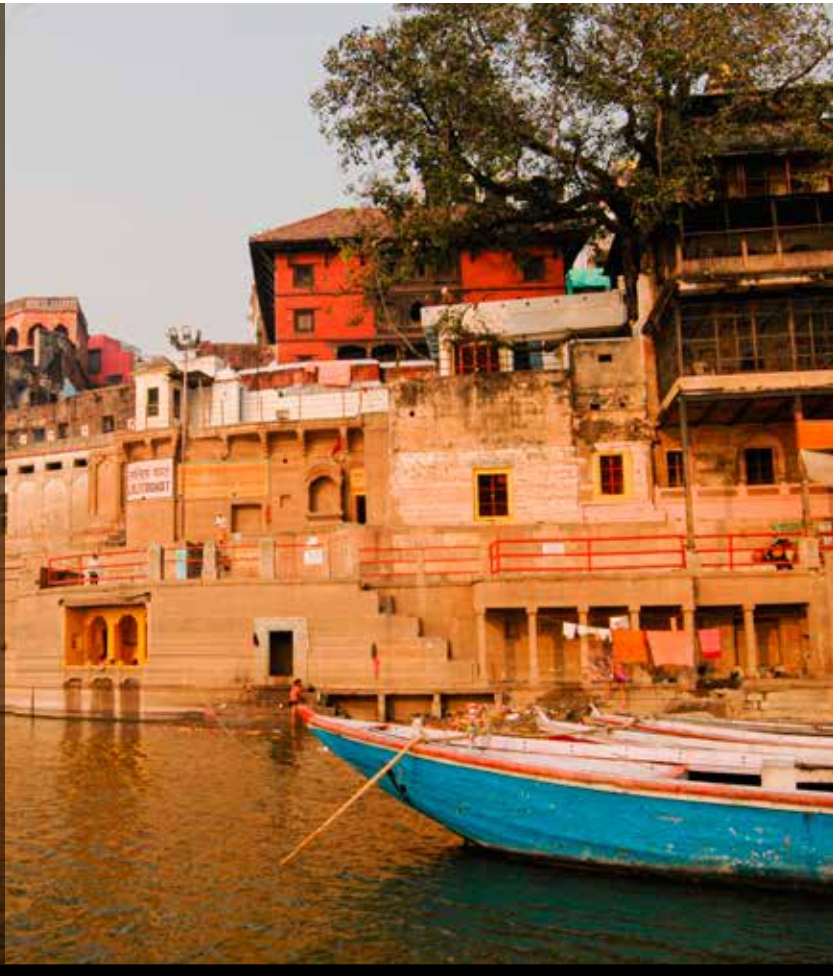
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NEW MEMBERS



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Janisha Saikia
Saha Pvt Ltd, Kolkata



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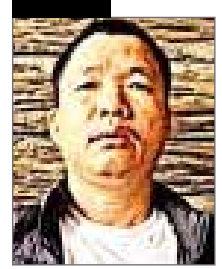
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Kolkata



"The biggest challenge in the hospitality industry is now shortage of skilled manpower"

The Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI), India's apex body and voice of the hospitality industry, held its 66th Annual General Meeting on 16th March 2023 in New Delhi. During the AGM, the members of the FHRAI elected the new Executive Committee; a twenty-four member team of six representatives each from East, North, South and West of India to manage the affairs of the apex industry body.

The AGM was followed by the first meeting of the new Executive Committee of the Federation which has

elected **MR SUDESH PODDAR** as the new President of FHRAI. He has previously served in the position of Hon. Treasurer in the Federation. Mr Poddar is a veteran of the industry and has been in the hospitality business since 1977. He owns multiple restaurants in Kolkata including the iconic 70-year-old Chinese restaurant – Songhai and a 4-star hotel in Assam under the banner – Satya Hotels Pvt Ltd. After he took over as the President of FHRAI, he told, among other things, that his immediate target is to increase the number of members of the association and turn FHRAI into a stronger voice representing the hospitality industry.



There are thousands of properties with the government which are either lying idle or not being run properly. The only option in such cases is PPP, which can help develop them

How is the G-20 shaping up the travel and hospitality sector in India? In your opinion, what would be its long-term impact on the hospitality industry?

India took the G20 Presidency baton from Indonesia in December 2022. During the Presidency year, India will host more than 200 meetings in over 59 destinations in the country.

India's G20 Presidency comes at a time when the world is recovering from its worst crisis in recent times - the Covid pandemic. As the economy rebounds after a slow-down of over two years, the G20 will not only contribute to a faster revival but also affords India an excellent opportunity to showcase its vibrancy, resilience, infrastructure development and its rich cultural heritage and tourism attractions. The theme of India's G20 Presidency - "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" or "One Earth · One Family · One Future" - is drawn from the ancient Sanskrit text of the Upanishad. Es-

entially, the theme affirms the value of all life – human, animal, plant and microorganisms – and their interconnectedness on the planet Earth and in the wider universe.

The Presidency is also a unique platform for hotels to send a strong and reassuring message that after the pandemic they are ready and equipped with unmatched excellence in services, to host global travelers with additional protocols of safety and hygiene in place.

The PPP model could be a game changer for the industry. What more could be done to promote this model?

In the right circumstances, PPPs can allow governments to lead the development of tourism assets in accordance with government priorities and high environmental and social standards, while harnessing the efficiency and creativity of the private sector. In order to promote investment in the tourism and hospitality sector, 'Infrastructure' status for hotel projects is provided as per current cost-based criteria of Rs 200 crore and it should be amended to Rs 20-25 crore to enable inclusion of 2-3 star category of hotels. This would reduce the cost of borrowing for potential investors and encourage creation of required tourism infrastructure. There are thousands of properties with the government which are either lying idle or not being run properly. The only option in such cases is PPP, which can help develop them.

When it comes to promoting 'Incredible India' on the global platform, what should be our renewed marketing

strategy? Which areas that need to be brought into sharp focus?

As per the Niti Aayog there needs to be greater integration between the Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of External Affairs for the purpose of branding and marketing of medical tourism in India as only 6.7 per cent of the overall foreign tourist arrivals are for medical purposes. As a pre-budget suggestion to Ministry of Tourism mentioned in the strategy paper, Niti Aayog has said that a Rs 500-crore fund invested in easily retractable Government Bonds or securities by the Ministry of Tourism, with another Rs 100 crore invested every year for next 20-30 years, will help sustain the industry in case of another unprecedented crisis.

The think-tank has also suggested a new 'Incredible India 3.0' campaign that focuses on top volume-generating geographies and key source markets such as - USA, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Russia and Japan for the next five years.

Rajasthan has recently announced full 'industry status' for the hospitality sector. How does FHRAI, as a leading association, take up this demand with other states as well as the centre?

For those looking to invest in the tourism industry, Rajasthan is increasingly becoming the top choice. From December 2018 to June 2023, a total of 802 tourism units have been sanctioned in the state, under which the state will receive an investment of Rs 10,463.47 crore. These approved tourism units will generate employment op-



FHRAI is now the third largest association of hotels and restaurants in the world. Through the years of the pandemic the association has tried to fight on behalf of its members



opportunities for 40,785 people in the state. The key driver for this change is that the tourism and hospitality sector has been designated as a full-fledged industry in the state to that end. As a result, investors are exhibiting a keen interest to invest in the state's tourist sector.

We have to showcase Rajasthan as a successful case study to other states and emulate it as a model. This will not only help generate revenue but also generate employment to thousands of people in the state.

How is your Association working towards increasing its membership base? Today, especially post-pandemic, what are the benefits of joining FHRAI?

FHRAI is now the third largest association of hotels and restaurants in the world. Through the years of the pandemic the association has tried to fight on behalf of its members.

But there are still many unmet demands that I wish to take forward. We have been talking about industry status and infrastructure status for the hospitality industry. We are doing a lot about it and many states have already given infrastructure status to hospitality. While these things will come eventually, for the hospitality industry to thrive and do well, people in huge numbers must come to the country. G20 is a game changer. This is my topmost priority and very soon we are meeting the Honourable Tourism Minister also for the same agenda. We will ask the government to continue doing this.

We are also introducing a special drive to increase our membership base. I wish to bring many more smaller properties in tier 2 and tier 3 cities under our fold. This will not only increase the headcount of members, but take our case forward to the government more democratically with a stronger voice.

When it comes to sustainable, planet-friendly tourism, how the industry players could become 'shapers and not just takers'?

Industry players must learn from many leading hotels in India and abroad who focus on sustainable and planet-friendly tourism. The FHRAI can help organise seminars and hold workshops across all regions of the country to disseminate the basic norms of planet friendly tourism to smaller players in the industry.

Do you feel over-tourism, especially in the mountain regions, is ruining tourism hotspots? Recently, tourism came to a standstill in Himachal Pradesh due to nature's fury. What policy changes are required?

To decrease the pressure on some select destinations, we must look for new spots and explore new hori-

zons. For instance, eastern India, especially the North East, still remains an unexplored horizon. All my business is in Northeast and Eastern India. The region has so much to offer for tourism and now with PM Modi's focus on the growth of tourism there, I am sure there will be a growth boom. Be it Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Kaziranga, Kolkata, Darjeeling or Sandakphu, Northeast is going to be the sought after destination for all the tourists in the country and abroad. Most importantly, it's virgin.

Consumers have been flagging the sky-rocketing hotel rates. Is this growth sustainable? Do you see rates normalizing in the near future?

Hotel rates have indeed gone up and availability has been an issue in the recent past. Any tourist place in India today has an acute dearth of hotels. As we are poised for a huge growth in the hospitality industry, we are trying to request more entrepreneurs to come into the hospitality industry and bring more hotels, homestays, guest houses and places of accommodation.

With the surge in domestic tourism, many hotel chains are now expanding to tier 2 and 3 cities. However, infra is key to the development. How does this spell growth for lesser-known destinations?

The current government has heavily invested in infrastructural development, especially air-connectivity to lesser known destinations. In the last financial budget it was announced that 50 tourist destinations will be selected through a "challenge mode, as well as on the basis of



physical connectivity, tourist guides, high standards for food streets, and tourist security". Each of them will be developed as a package. All relevant aspects of these spots will be available on an app to enhance the tourist experience, in an integrated and innovative approach for domestic as well as foreign travellers.

Under the Vibrant Village programme, tourism infrastructure and amenities will be facilitated in border villages, and states will be encouraged to set up so-called unity malls in state capitals, most prominent tourism centres or financial capitals to promote and sell their "one district one product" items, GI (geographical indication) products and other handicraft products. Under the Dekho Apna Desh initiative citizens will be encouraged to prefer domestic over international tourism, aided by sector-specific skilling and entrepreneurship development.

If all these plans are implemented as promised infra won't be a deterrent.

While hospitality has fully recovered, talent crunch or lack of skilled work-

force remains a crucial pain point. In addition, young hospitality professionals are picking other sectors like, retail, banking, etc., over hospitality. What does the industry need to do to bring back young talent?

The biggest challenge in the hospitality industry is shortage of manpower, which is going to be a key focus for me. It appears that this shortage is due to the lower pay-scale in the hospitality industry. The people working in the hospitality industry are skilled workers, like a lawyer, MBA, engineer or skilled workers from any other industry. This includes chefs, captains, stewards, and front office managers, as they all come from hotel management institutes. However, their pay is on the lower side. Hence, my focus would be urging the hotels and restaurants to increase 10-12 percent increase on a plate of food or drink and then increase the salary structure, so that people from other fields are keen to work in the hospitality industry. Currently, there is an exodus from this industry and people are going to different industries, resulting in acute shortage of manpower.

FAST TRACK, A COOK'S CAREER

Indian students who are keen to have a foreign degree or diploma in culinary arts at an affordable cost can check a long list of community colleges in the US.



Less than a decade ago, the number of culinary schools in the United States was rising rapidly. But the past few years have been challenging as many avant garde cooking institutes closed down and a plethora of new, but more affordable community colleges filled up the vacuum.

Confronted with increasingly steep operating costs and a pandemic that hamstringing the restaurant business, several schools have permanently closed campuses, including the New England Culinary Institute and the International Culinary Center (which licensed its curriculum to the Institute of Culinary Education). Johnson & Wales University, which has a well-known culinary program, closed two campuses in 2020. Even before the arrival of COVID-19, Le Cordon Bleu closed all of its North American outposts.

What's left, for the most part, are the most recognizable names — like the Culinary Institute of America and the Institute of Culinary Education, which each reported steady enrollment throughout the pandemic — and culinary schools at community colleges like Northern Essex, which has doubled its enrollment to 33 students since the program began in 2020 and expects to more than double that total this fall.

Many other community colleges have opened or expanded culinary programs in recent years, offering a high-quality education at a fraction of the cost of a private cooking school.

While they lack the prestige of the big names, these institutes may be better matched to the current economy. They can be a critical resource for a restaurant business in desperate need of line cooks



and other skilled workers, as well as for students seeking to start a career without running up big debts.

These are not the institutes meant for pl“If you want a really fancy culinary school, then sure,” said Katherine Ventura, 18, a culinary student at Northern Essex. “But if you want something quick, I would recommend this.”

The boom in community college cooking programs has caught the attention of local governments and businesses, which are playing an active role in driving their growth.

The state-of-the-art kitchens at Northern Essex Community College were built and equipped with funding from the state and support from Lupoli Cos., a Massachusetts real estate developer that owns the culinary school building and

helped cover some infrastructure costs. Students can work in one of Lupoli’s restaurants, Bosa, as part of the curriculum to get real-world experience, and the school doesn’t have to pay any operational costs. And on a recent afternoon, students got a lesson in breaking down various meats at Haverhill Beef Co., a butcher shop.

The price of that education: about \$6,500 for a certificate and \$14,000 for an associate degree — or less, as many culinary students receive grants or scholarships. Compare that with the Culinary Institute of America, an acclaimed private school where a single semester at its Hyde Park, New York, campus costs nearly \$20,000.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics in the US reports that the demand for

chefs and head cooks at restaurants and other establishments will grow six percent through 2029, faster than many other industries in the country. With the popularity of cooking shows and competitions, more and more people are discovering the field of culinary arts and what it takes to be successful in the industry. Earning a certificate or degree in the field not only provides the experience and training needed to get your foot in the door, but it also provides a foundation for upward mobility to become a future leader and trend setter in the industry.

So Indian students who are keen to have a foreign degree/diploma at an affordable cost can check a long list of 50 community colleges. Following is a selection of a top dozen.

STUDY ABROAD

1. Culinary Institute of America, New York, California, Texas

Degree Programs: New York, California, and Texas-Associate in Culinary Arts, Associate in Baking and Pastry Arts; New York-Associate for Advanced Career Experience, Bachelors in Culinary Arts Management, Bachelor's in Baking and Pastry Arts Management, Bachelor's in Applied Food Studies, Bachelors in Culinary Science

Certificate Programs: California-Accelerated Culinary Arts Certificate Program (ACAP), Wine and Beverage Graduate Certificate Program (WBGC)

There is little doubt that the Culinary Institute of America is considered one of the best culinary schools in the country, if not the world. Almost 80 percent of students in an associate degree program at the CIA will graduate. Of those who continue on to pursue their bachelor's degree, over 90 percent will graduate. The CIA offers degree programs in a variety of areas for those who want to excel in the area of culinary and party arts to those who want a career in management.

Students spend about 1,300 hours in kitchens and bakeries as part of their studies and have the opportunity to work with over 170 chefs from 19 different countries. In addition to traditional degree programs, the CIA offers the ProChef Certification Program which validates skills as chefs advance in their careers. The CIA offers students over 1,200 different externship sites which include some of the most exclusive restaurants in the country

Website: <https://www.ciachef.edu/>

2. Auguste Escoffier School of Culinary Arts, Boulder, Colorado and Austin, Texas

Degree Program: Austin-AAS in Culinary Arts

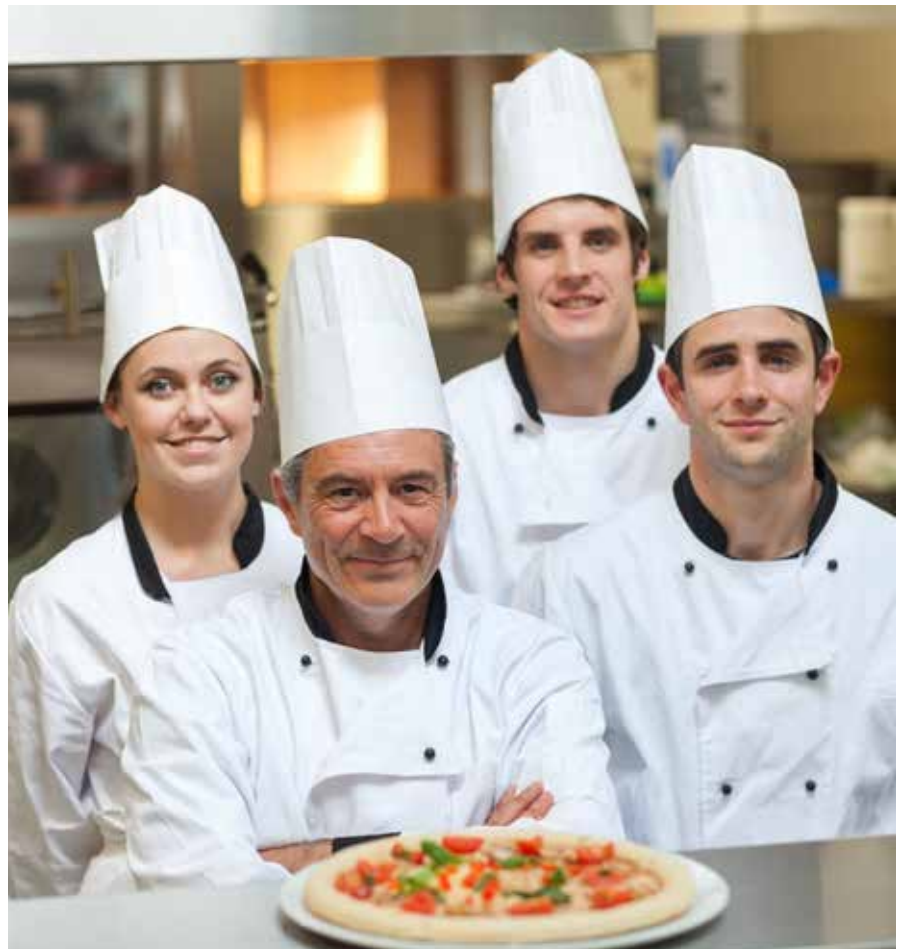
Diploma Programs: Austin and Boulder-Culinary Arts; Pastry Arts

Online Diploma Program: Culinary Arts

The Auguste Escoffier School of Culinary Arts teaches techniques developed by the world renowned "King of Chefs", Auguste Escoffier. Students benefit from small class size and personalized attention throughout the program. The school offers lifelong professional support

to graduates through job placement assistance, use of facilities, resume development, and networking opportunities.

One of the highlights of the culinary arts program is a three to 10 week (depending on the program) Farm to Table Experience which allows students to learn where a variety of foods come from, farming methods, and sustainability practices they can use throughout their career. Students may have the opportunity to experience produce, livestock, or dairy farms as well as the artisan market during their Farm





to Table Experience. This top culinary school also offers externship opportunities as part of each program for students to gain valuable hands-on experience in a professional culinary setting.

Website: <https://www.escoffier.edu/>

3. Institute of Culinary Education

New York, New York and Los Angeles, California

Career Programs: Culinary Arts, Pastry & Baking Arts, Health-Supportive Culinary Arts, Restaurant & Culinary Management, Hospitality Management, Artisan Bread Baking and The Art of Cake Decorating

The Institute of Culinary Education is one of the best culinary schools in the country. In 2016, ICE was named “Best Culinary School in America” by The Daily Meal — a leading food and lifestyle website. The International Association of Culinary Professionals named ICE

“Culinary School of the Year” four times in the last 13 years and the school has an excellent reputation in the industry. Overall student satisfaction is high with 93 percent of alumni recommending ICE to their

peers who want to start a career in the culinary field.

The school is on the cutting edge of the latest trends in the culinary arts, and its facility includes a bean-to-bar Chocolate Laboratory and a Hydroponic Garden. During the course of the program, students are given the opportunity to participate in both paid and unpaid externships at some of the finest restaurants in the country. For students who don’t receive an employment offer from their externship opportunity, ICE offers career placement services including career fairs, networking opportunities and an alumni network of over 14,000 graduates.

Website: <https://www.ice.edu/request-info?mcid=62462>

4. Kendall College National Louis University Chicago, Illinois

Website: <https://www.kendall.edu/academics/culinary-arts/>



Many other community colleges in the US have opened or expanded culinary programs in recent years, offering a high-quality education at a fraction of the cost

STUDY ABROAD



Degree Programs: AAS Culinary Arts; BA Culinary Arts

Certificate Programs: Culinary Arts Certificate

Kendall's nationally acclaimed culinary art programs have produced some of the most celebrated foodies in the industry. 12 students at the school have been the recipients of the coveted James Beard Foundation Award—several of them more than once. The school offers an associate and bachelor's degrees in Culinary Arts as well as a certificate.

In 2013, the school was reaffirmed by The Higher Learning Commission, and it's considered the number one program in Chicago for studying culinary arts. If you already have a bachelor's degree, you can take an accelerated AAS that takes just five quarters to complete.

Website: <https://www.ice.edu/request-info?mcid=62462>

5. Pierpont Community and Technical College Fairmont, West Virginia

Degree Programs: AAS in Food Service Management-Baking and Pastry Option; AAS in Food Service Management-Culinary Arts Option

Pierpont Community and Technical College is a top accredited culinary school offering degree programs in the field of culinary arts. Students complete an internship as part of this ACF accredited program and learn how to prepare and deliver quality food in a variety of settings.

Students who complete the Culinary Arts associate degree program can sit for the ACF exam to become a Certified Culinarian. They also have the opportunity to matriculate

into the bachelor's degree program in Hospitality Management if their focus is business and management driven.

Website: <https://www.pierpont.edu/>

6. Hudson County Community College, Jersey City, New Jersey
Degree Program: AAS in Culinary Arts

Certificate Program: Certificate in Culinary Arts

The Culinary Arts Institute (CAI) at Hudson County Community College is one of only two programs in the state accredited by the ACF. This top culinary school takes great pride in offering students individualized instruction and interaction with faculty and staff. Kitchen labs only have 16 students working at a time.

The CAI has several different kitchen labs which include bakeries, an ice-sculpting studio, fish and butchery room, a 4,000 volume library, and a mock hotel suite. Some of these labs have even been featured on popular television shows.

Website: <https://www.hccc.edu/bch/>

7. College of Southern Nevada, North Las Vegas, Nevada

Degree Programs: AAS Culinary Arts; AAS Food and Beverage Management; AAS Pastry Arts

Certificate Program: Certificate of Achievement in Culinary Arts; Certificate of Achievement in Pastry Arts

The Culinary Arts Program at the College of Southern Nevada is an ACF accredited program offering both certificate and degree programs in culinary arts and pastry arts. Students have the opportunity to work in the on-campus Russell's Restaurant, a full service dining facility where they can practice everything from food preparation to hospitality.

Students who receive their associate degree can transfer to UNLV to earn their bachelor's degree if they elect to do so. Participants in both the certificate and associate degree program work next to award winning chefs in state-of-the-art kitchen facilities. The low student-faculty ratio at this top culinary school ensures that students have plenty of one-on-one attention throughout the program.

Website: <https://www.csn.edu/schools/school-of-business-hospitality-and-public-services/department-of-hospitality-management/culinary-arts-program>



Culinary arts graduates can be a critical resource for a restaurant business in desperate need of line cooks and other skilled workers, as well as for students seeking to start a career without running up big debts

8. Metropolitan Community College, Omaha, Nebraska

Degree Programs: AAS in Culinary Arts and Management-Baking and Pastry; AAS in Culinary Arts and Management-Culinary Arts; Culinary Research/Culinology Transfer
Certificate Programs: Culinary Arts and Management Certificate of Achievement; Baking and Pastry Certificate of Achievement; Culinary Arts Foundations Career Certificate; ManageFirst Career Certificate

The Metropolitan Community College offers an accredited Culinary Arts and Management program with degree programs and certificates to meet the needs of every level of culinary professional. The Culinary Arts and Management associate degree

program offers three different options including culinary arts, baking and pastry, and culinary research/culinology transfer. Associate degree programs are made up of 27 credit hours of general electives and 35-40 credits in major requirements which includes an internship. Students also complete a professional portfolio.

Certificate programs are available in culinary arts and management, baking and pastry, culinary arts foundations, and ManageFirst and can be earned in approximately one year. Students work in kitchen laboratories and develop skills first hand while working side-by-side with experienced culinary professionals.

Website: <https://www.mccneb.edu/>

9. St. Louis Community College, Saint Louis, Missouri

Degree Programs: AAS in Banking and Pastry Arts; AAS in Culinary Arts

The Associate in Applied Science from St. Louis Community College is a 64-credit hour program designed to teach a variety of skills in food preparation and management so graduates are prepared for upward mobility in the culinary arts.

This top culinary school requires students to complete a capstone experience where they prepare and manage one meal through a commercial simulation. Coursework includes preparation of American as well as international Cuisine.

Website: <https://stlcc.edu/programs-academics/pathways/b-m-c-a-h/culinary-arts/>

10. Henry Ford College, Dearborn, Michigan

STUDY ABROAD

Degree Programs: AAS in Hospitality Studies-Culinary Arts; Bachelor of Science in Culinary Arts

Certificate Programs: Culinary Skills Certificate; Baking and Pastry Certificate; Restaurant Service Career Certificate

Henry Ford College offers an accredited Bachelor of Science in Culinary Arts and Exemplary ACF accredited AAS degree program in Culinary Arts. Students learn in six state-of-the-art kitchen laboratories, a computer lab, and a video production studio. The BS degree builds upon the AAS degree by offering advanced coursework in business and management.

The student run restaurant, Fifty-One O One is open during the school year and serves a wide variety of foods. The restaurant offers a weekly International Lunch Buffet for five weeks in May and June to allow students to practice their international culinary skills.

Website: <https://culinary.hfcc.edu/>

11. Great Lakes Culinary Institute at Northwestern Michigan College, Traverse City, Michigan

Degree Program: AAS in Culinary Arts

Certificate Program: Level #3 Certificate Culinary Arts

The Great Lakes Culinary Institute at Northwestern Michigan College offers a rigorous culinary program that focuses on the science and technique behind culinary practices. Students have the opportunity to work in five different culinary labs including a bakery, kitchen, advanced kitchen, a garde manger kitchen, and a beverage management outlet.



Lobdell's, a student operated restaurant, provides the opportunity to practice skills and obtain work experience. This top culinary school also offers a Level III Certificate of Achievement accredited by the ACF. The 54 credit hour program prepares graduates to become cooks in fine restaurants and other top establishments.

Website: <https://www.nmc.edu/programs/academic-programs/culinary-arts/>

12. Culinary Studies Institute At Oakland Community College, Farmington Hills, Michigan

Degree Program: AAS In Culinary Arts

Certificate Program: Certificate in Baking and Pastry

The ACF accredited AAS in Culinary Arts from the Culinary Studies Institute at Oakland Community Col-

lege is an extended degree program requiring students to complete 73 credit hours which includes a working internship. Students have the opportunity to compete in culinary competitions if they desire. Those interested in the Certificate in Baking and Pastry complete 32 credit hours with coursework covering areas such as retail baking, merchandising, cake decorating, and breads.

CSI operates three different culinary establishments where students work and learn their trade. Ridgewood Café has a fine dining component as well as a cafeteria and the Ridgewood Bakery serves a variety of baked goods. Reflections Restaurant is open September through April and serves three different entrees each Thursday.

Website: <https://www.oakland-cc.edu/culinary/>

Reconnecting to

Nature

Spas in hotels and resorts can be so designed that can enable guests to find balance and harmony with nature



Hotels and resorts around the world are recognizing this need and are incorporating nature-inspired spa facilities and treatments to provide guests with a rejuvenating experience that allows them to reconnect with the natural world.

It is important to note that whilst the spa often forms the hub of all wellness facilities and activities in a hotel, for a hotel to truly embrace wellness and offer genuine well-being to its guests, wellness must move beyond the spa. Indeed, for wellness to be meaningful in a hotel environment, it must permeate every element of the hotel and the guest experience.

Ideally, to reconnect guests with nature, hotels should begin with a holistic approach to design, considering the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of guests. Resort properties, of course, often have an advantage over urban properties in terms of incorporating design elements that harmonize with the surrounding environment. From eco-friendly structures nestled among lush land-



Hotels and resorts around the world are recognizing this need and are incorporating nature-inspired spa facilities and treatments to provide guests with a rejuvenating experience

scapes to open-air spaces that create an atmosphere of serenity and oneness with nature, designing for well-being in a natural environment can yield amazing results.

This is not to say that urban hotels can not deliver fantastic design experiences that allow their guests to find well-being by reconnecting to nature. Of course they can. It can be as simple as adding indoor and outdoor plant and garden features, or installing small water features, ponds and the like. Here's a few ideas...

Reconnect With Nature

Green Spaces and Outdoor Areas: Create green spaces within the hotel premises, such as rooftop gardens, courtyards, or terraces,

where guests can relax and unwind amidst nature. These areas can be designed with lush plants, trees, and natural elements to create a soothing environment. Green spaces can also be similarly created inside the hotel buildings too.

Natural Light and Views: Simply maximising natural light throughout the building can have a significant impact. Where available offer rooms with views of nearby parks, gardens, or cityscapes that provide a sense of connection to the outside world. Incorporate large windows, skylights, or glass walls to bring in natural light and create a sense of openness.

Nature-Inspired Design: Incorporate nature-inspired design elements throughout the spa area, such as earthy tones, natural materials like wood and stone, and indoor plants. Consider incorporating water features like fountains or flowing water walls to create a calming ambiance.

Outdoor Treatment Areas: If possible, create outdoor treatment areas where guests can experience spa treatments in the fresh air and natural surroundings. Set up private cabanas or secluded garden spaces where guests can enjoy massages, facials, or other treatments while being immersed in nature.

Sustainability Initiatives: Implement sustainable practices throughout the hotel and spa, such as using eco-friendly products, reducing water consumption, and incorporating energy-efficient technologies. Showcasing the hotel's commitment to sustainability helps guests feel more connected to na-

ture and supports their well-being.

Collaboration with Local Partners: Collaborate with local nature-based organizations, such as botanical gardens or nature reserves, to provide educational workshops, guided nature walks, or talks on local flora and fauna. This allows guests to learn more about the natural surroundings and deepen their connection with the environment.

For those hotels that choose to take it a step further, there are a select group of companies and consultants that can guide them on a path of well-being through design and construction.

Even those properties without the resources or ability to incorporate extensive well-being experiences through their design and construction, can still offer nature inspired wellness treatments and programs.

Nature-Inspired Treatments

To further deepen the connection to nature, hotel spas can introduce treatments inspired by ancient traditions and natural elements. These treatments aim to restore balance, rejuvenate the body and mind, and promote overall well-being.

Forest Bathing: Inspired by the Japanese practice of "shinrin-yoku," forest bathing involves immersing oneself in the sights, sounds, and aromas of a forest environment. Hotel spas located in wooded or jungle areas offer guided forest bathing experiences, where guests can engage in mindful walks, meditation, and breathing exercises, enhancing their con-



Inspired by the Japanese practice of "shinrin-yoku," forest bathing involves immersing oneself in the sights, sounds, and aromas of a forest environment

SPA DESIGN

nection with nature and reaping the health benefits of the forest.

Go Local: Offer spa treatments that draw inspiration from the local environment and traditional healing practices. Utilize natural ingredients, such as indigenous herbs, botanical extracts, or organic products, in massages, body scrubs, facials, and other treatments.

Earth-Based Therapies: Hotel spas are incorporating earth-based therapies that utilize natural elements like clay, mud, and minerals to detoxify, nourish, and revitalize the body. These therapies draw upon ancient practices from different cultures, such as Ayurveda's use of herbal pastes and Native American healing rituals involving earth poultices. By harnessing the power of the earth, guests can experience profound healing and grounding effects.

Aromatherapy with Natural Essential Oils: Aromatherapy has long been recognized for its therapeutic benefits. Hotel spas are incorporating the use of natural essential oils derived from plants, flowers, and herbs in their treatments. The scents not only elevate the sensory experience but also promote relaxation, reduce stress, and uplift the spirit. Essential oil-infused massages, facials, and baths create an immersive nature-inspired experience.

Nature-Inspired Wellness Programs

In addition to building nature-centric facilities and introducing treatments, hotel spas can develop wellness programs that foster a deeper connection to nature and encourage holistic well-being.

Mindfulness and Meditation: Hotel spas can offer mindfulness and meditation programs that encourage guests to embrace the present moment and cultivate a deeper connection with nature. Guided meditation sessions in serene outdoor settings, sunrise or



Guided meditation sessions in serene outdoor settings and nature-inspired mindfulness practices help guests relax, reduce stress, and find inner peace

sunset yoga, and nature-inspired mindfulness practices help guests relax, reduce stress, and find inner peace.

Outdoor Fitness and Adventure: To encourage physical well-being while reconnecting with nature, hotel spas can provide outdoor fitness activities and adventure programs. These may include hiking or biking trails, guided nature walks, outdoor yoga classes, or water sports in nearby lakes or oceans. By engaging in physical activity surrounded by natural beauty, guests can boost their fitness levels while immersing themselves in the wonders of the natural world.



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COVER STORY: TOURISM

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS



Pilgrimage is one of the sectors in the country which has a huge potential. The government is bringing new investment for the growth in the industry.



TOURISM

India is known as the land of Gods and pilgrimage is one of the tourist destinations in the country. Pilgrimage are available across the different parts of the country. The below diagram shows the concentration of foreign tourists visiting different parts of India.

Market Overview

Pilgrimage tourism also known as faith tourism, is a type of industry, where people travel individually or in groups to pilgrim destinations, or for leisure (fellowship) purposes.

Faith based tourism exists throughout the world, from India to Mexico, from Israel to Saudi Arabia.

In India, from ancient times pilgrimages have not only been calls to spirituality but also major economic drivers that have an impact not only on the soul of people but also in the pockets of the industry.

Market Risks

A sort of less risk is involved as far as the pilgrimage industry is concerned.

Pilgrimage travel is often less affected by the economic ups and downs in the marketplace. Because faith-based travellers are committed travellers and they tend to save for these religious experiences and travel despite the state of the economy. Faith travellers tend to have different motives for their travel than the travellers who do the same for other reasons.

For example, the faith-based traveller often travels as part of a religious obligation or to fulfil a spiritual mission. Faith-based travel can provide a steady flow of income to

a local tourism economy.

Top Market Opportunities

The Pilgrimage tourism in many ways parallels and provides opportunities to other forms of event tourism.

When a pilgrimage site grows in numbers of visitors, it helps to develop and grow, a series of dependent or ancillary industries like the souvenir industry or the lodging industry – this is mainly because some visitors visit the places for spirituality, wish for divine healing or thankfulness; others would reflect on characteristics of other forms of tourism venues and other leisure activities.

This leads to the development of the local area and also provides a boom to the local markets and their economic growth.

Market Drivers

Pilgrimage is a major industry, it is prompted not only by religious authorities to increase faith but also by commercial drivers such as tourist agencies and transport firms.

Such involvement by these concerns and the infrastructure that they provide – from good transport and accommodation facilities to information provided by guidebooks and on top of that online services help pilgrims plan their journeys; are important drivers or factors in the growth of the pilgrimage industry.

Market Restraints

Increased expenses for the development of a particular town; Spending on cleaning garbage collection, water disposal, lighting,



Pilgrimage is a major industry, it is prompted not only by religious authorities to increase faith but also by commercial drivers such as tourist agencies and transport firms

marketing and promotion can severely affect the municipal budget and where the pilgrimage site is located.

Increase in the price of real estate; Increase in the prices of land and houses; competition for the use of land; poorer sections of the population sometimes have to move out of the town.

General price increases; retailers and suppliers increase the prices of goods services; segregation between tourists and locals; desertification or tourist appropriation of creation of ghettos of gentrification.

Industry Challenges

Support industries should coordinate with the pilgrimage cycle and needs. All too often the spirituality that visitors seek is lost at the level of supporting industries.

During faith based tourism periods it is essential that hotels and restaurants connect with the art and cultural communities to develop an overall faith based product rather than a mishmash of unrelated offerings.

Technology Trends

E-visas for foreign tourists on arrival in the country has also have a deep impact in the increase in numbers of tourists.

Pricing Trends

The government is reducing subsidies on public transport.

The Airline industry consists of maximum private players which has led to the competitive pricing of the air tickets and the prices are found to come down over the years.

Regulatory Trends

The policy framework of the Pilgrimage industry is the same as that of the overall tourism industry of India.

Since independence many changes have been made in tourism policy. Before much less importance was given to this sector but it has changed in the decades.

Government approach towards tourism totally changed during the mid-80s time and policies were adopted in place of schemes, for development of both international and domestic tourism.

Stress was given on the development of selected tourism places and diversification from cultural tourism to holiday and leisure tourism. An export house status was provided to the tourism sector during the ninth plan – Since 1947, the Indian economy has been premised on the concept of planning.

This has been carried through the Five-Year Plans, developed, executed, and monitored by the Planning Commission (NITI Aayog after 2014) and special thrust was also given to the development of pilgrimage tourism, rural tourism, heritage tourism and health tourism.

The promotion of pilgrimage tourism was also formulated by the respective state governments in the following years. Allocation of funds for the country's infrastructure development.

The visa on arrival began in 2014 and as of April 2015 it has catered to tourists from over 40 countries, with a plan to expand this to around 100 nationalities over the next few years.

Other Key Market Trends

The biggest trend that was seen in 2014 was around mobile technology. Usage of apps for travel bookings has increased at a tremendous rate.

Market Size and Forecast

The Pilgrimage industry is in its forefront and various marketers can enter the market and develop themselves and the whole market as well.

Marketers could participate in providing basic sanitary facilities along with they could promote their products viz. If X company sponsors the Free or Paid Rest room facilities, its products would only be sold.

Marketers could also participate in constructing rooms for devotees to stay and promote their products.

Marketers could offer free/paid transportation facilities which will carry the promotion of their products/ services.

Pharmaceutical companies can sponsor free medical camps in which their products could be promoted.

Food products companies could set up their outlets to sell products with subsidized/actual prices.

Clothing/Garment companies could set up their stalls to promote their products and services.

Market Outlook

Pilgrimages are usually associated with religious events or locations, they may also come in the form of visits to places where political events have occurred, burial sites of political leaders, or famous monuments.

The land of versatility – India is second to none, more when it be-

TOURISM

comes a centre of attention all because of the different religions to which it serves as its home. Every religion has its significance and it is possible to get a glimpse of each of them and get mesmerised in the rich knowledge, the way followers of different faiths try to connect with their Creator at various pilgrimage sites in India.

Technology Roadmap

GPS system helping tourists reach the proper destination.

Anti threat system for the protection of the tourist.

Centralized booking system for pilgrimage.

Distribution Chain Analysis

For the trend of chain analysis we can take a look at the various hotel chains that have been developed to enhance the growing pilgrimage industry.

With travellers ranging from celebrities to businessmen and young professionals, the demand for branded hotels at religious places has gone up.

Due to lack of infrastructure it is a highly under-supplied market and hence the hoteliers have found a great opportunity to grow themselves.

Competitive Landscape

Competitive landscape gives a view about the competition a particular industry faces in the marketplace.

Places of pilgrimage provided a firm ground to tourism in the beginning and still continue to be one of the most effective factors of promoting tourism in India.

However Pilgrimage Industry fac-



es tough competition from its rival tourism sectors such as adventure tourism or leisure tourism as changes can be noticed in the paradigm of Indian tourists with a tilt from pilgrimage to pleasure trips.

More people have started to go adrenaline filled adventure trips as these activities provide a wider scope for enjoyment and other fun activities.

Key Market Players

The following destinations see the most number of visitors in most of the following places:

Ajmer: Ajmer is the holy city of Rajasthan. It is located 131kms west of Jaipur. Nasiyan Jain temple

located on Prithviraj Marg, is very famous and open to visitors.

Tirupati: Tirupati is situated in the Southern region of Andhra Pradesh of Chittoor district .One of the most famous Hindu temples in the world is at Tirumala crowning the seven hills, with Lord Venkateshwara as presiding deity.

Varanasi: Varanasi is located in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. This is one of the oldest living cities in the world. Varanasi is the religious centre of the world of Hindus.

Ujjain: Ujjain on the eastern bank of the Kshipra River is situated in the Malwa region of Madhya

Pradesh state. Ujjain once in every 12 years the Kumbha Mela is held on the banks of river Shipra.

Puri: The holy city of Puri, 60kms from Bhubaneswar is one of the four holiest points of pilgrimage for Hindus. The other important features of Puri are its beautiful beaches which have offered pleasure to both pilgrims and swimmers for centuries.

Pondicherry: Pondicherry is situated at a distance of about 160 kms south of Chennai on the Coromandel coast. Pondicherry is surrounded by the Bay of Bengal on the East, and on the other side is the South Arcot District of Tamilnadu.

Strategic Conclusion

The Pilgrimage sector of India is a booming sector and it is deemed to grow with the right strategies and developments. The improvements in accessibility and availability of transport will lead to smooth functioning of the industry.

With the rise of the middle and upper-middle class of the society and increase in their disposable income will further lead to an increased number of visitors in the country. The rise of this sector will also provide more employment opportunities and growth of other ancillary industries.

This is possible by creating religious and pilgrimage destinations. Moreover, sacred lands are identified, and further can be embellished. This in turn would boost employment and economic development. Its chief features include:

Aim of the Prasad Scheme:

- Formation and preservation of

proper religious destinations and spiritual sites to ensure a devout experience for devotees.

- Promotion of communal unity and harmony.
- Encouragement to incoming tourists and discovery of new scopes regarding tourist activities that can boost the prominence of an area.
- Providing a boost in the employment and economic strength of tourism-related sectors and encouraging pro-poor tourism to help the poor earn a livelihood.
- To make maximum use of the tax money collected from the public in order to better the country.
- Promotion of holistic development and mental peace amongst religious followers and believers.
- Improvement of quality of life and living standards of the people living around in terms of regional infrastructural development and aesthetic beauty.
- Sustainment and preservation of the art, heritage, traditions, culture, and rich history of India.
- Provide the locals with a souvenir of past achievements.

The strategy of Prasad Scheme

Few basic steps of carrying out the scheme include:

- Spotting and identifying landmarks or stations which have the ability to be turned into a pilgrimage, religious spot, or spiritual site. Consulting the landowners and stakeholders of the chosen area regarding the planned use of the land or further cracking a deal for the land.
- Ensuring an environment-friend-

ly approach. The outline design of such a site is by identifying the obstructive infrastructure around.

- To achieve the desired goal in a particular time frame by working closely and in harmony with both the state and national government along with private firms involved.
- For arranging for reasonable public funds when needed from sources like the public sector funds and the corporate sector funds.
- To encourage interests in culture, tradition, and heritage in the chosen region thereby supporting the livelihoods of those employed in related jobs.
- To offer and arrange related facilities for tourist visits in a planned manner.
- For maintaining the development of the area by offering coordination, regular checks, and by employing people to develop course action plans regarding the site.
- Administration and Their Responsibilities

However, the schemes and outlines are good. The implementation of the scheme has progressed rather slowly in the past few years. Some of the pilgrimage circuits have been working fine on their own for thousands of years without much government support.

Kumbha Mela at the confluence of three holy rivers in Uttar Pradesh and Gangasagar at the confluence of the river Ganges and the Bay of Bengal have survived for millenniums.



G20 BONANZA

Hospitality players look to cash in on Rs 850 cr opportunity due to G20 meeting





Hospitality sector's bullishness during the G20 presidency year stems from the fact that India will host over 200 meetings in 59 different locations across the country with over 1.5 lakh delegates from the Group of 20 countries expected to participate

Hospitality players are looking to cash in on a Rs 850-crore revenue opportunity arising out of India's G20 Presidency through delegation-related travel and accommodation requirements, while also looking to consolidate the foundation for future growth. With the G20 spurring demand in cities where meetings are scheduled, room rates for five-star hotels in key business cities have increased by about 20 per cent since the last quarter of 2022, and the trend is expected to continue in the coming months.

There is a visible impact in the increase in hotel occupancies and revenues as also in the employment prospects in the sector. The hospitality industry is expected to witness a 5.5 per cent CAGR. The sector's bullishness during the G20 presidency year stems from the fact that India will host over 200 meetings in 59 different locations across the country with over 1.5 lakh delegates from the Group of 20 countries expected to participate.

According to hospitality experts, the G20 summit, hosted by India as part of its presidency, is set to provide a major boost to the country. The positive impact of the summit extends beyond the immediate year, encompassing increased international exposure, infrastructure development, and destination branding.

The benefits of India's G20

presidency will not be limited to just a single year, as the exposure the country is receiving will have long-term spin-off effects, he said adding a growth in travel to India is anticipated, driven by the signing of new business ventures and the expansion of existing relationships and businesses. The summit, combined with the rising demand for domestic business travel, will contribute significantly to the uptick in the performance of the hospitality industry.

Some other experts claim the G20 presidency will also be a critical enabler of showcasing and promoting "India's rich heritage, landscape, tourist attractions and the diversity in a greater canvas and thereby attracting a larger influx of international tourism -something that is yet to come back at precovid levels.

The Indian hospitality sector, known as a 'sunrise industry' is highly profitable and a major contributor to the economy and G20 presidency will play a significant catalyst in strengthening India's position as a promising nation in the global hospitality sector. When asked about the increase in room tariffs. Price is a factor of demand and supply. G20 has spurred demand especially in cities where the meetings are scheduled.

According to a report by JLL, room rates for five-star hotels in key business cities have in-

creased by about 20 per cent since the last quarter of 2022. There has been a threefold growth in rates and occupancy. Rates also vary with seasonality and market mix.

The trend is expected to continue in the coming months, supported by sporting events, weddings and the beginning of the tourist season. On the business outlook in terms of occupancy and room tariff, industry estimates suggest that they will surpass pre-crisis levels in the coming quarters, driven by some key tailwinds such as the wedding season, the G20 summit, the Cricket World Cup (ICC ODI) and the revival of foreign inbound travel.

All tourism levers, such as MICE, inbound tourism, medical tourism, business and leisure travel are on the upswing. The outlook for the Indian hospitality industry remains favourable, as can be seen in the good start to 2023.

Global Stage: India's rise as a soft power

The G20, an organization rooted in the concept of international gover-

nance and the need for cooperation among states to address global challenges, is a key platform for promoting international economic cooperation and addressing global economic challenges. In 2023, India assumed the presidency of the G20, which will play a leadership role in setting the agenda for the G20 meetings and in coordinating the work of the other member countries. India's presidency of the G20 is seen as an important platform for advancing its interests and for promoting the country's profile on the global stage.

India, being the only major global economy slated to have 6+% GDP growth figures in the years ahead, outpaced Britain last year to become the fifth-largest economy in nominal GDP terms. In these times of global challenges, the G20 Presidency gives India a unique opportunity to strengthen its role in the world economic order. With the theme of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam,' India is steering an ambitious, people-centric agenda to address global challenges and facilitate sustainable economic development.

India, being the only major global economy slated to have over 6% GDP growth figures in the years ahead, outpaced Britain last year to become the fifth-largest economy in nominal GDP terms



Through a range of activities and events, India is able to demonstrate its commitment to multilateral cooperation and building bridges between different countries and regions. Being a great power is a function of capabilities, interests, and recognition. Economic and military power, nuclear and space capabilities, a defining role in global affairs and systems, normative weight, and a critical mass of diplomatic, cultural, intellectual, R&D, and technological resources, high-impact foreign policy management, and external projection of hard and soft power are prerequisites too.

India has been active in G20 meetings and has taken a leadership role in several areas, such as promoting inclusive growth, in-

creasing investment in infrastructure, and strengthening financial regulation. India has also used its membership in the G20 to advocate for developing countries' interests and promote economic cooperation and integration between developed and developing countries.

The World Bank has warned of a possible global recession in its latest forecast, cutting down global growth estimates for 2023 and 2024, owing to factors like the geopolitical scenario, persistently high inflation, and higher interest rates. However, India remains a promising figure in the current scenario. The multilateral bank reiterates that India is undeniably a global powerhouse and that the Indian presidency of G20 will unleash its potential, pay heed to in-

sights and feedback from members, and contribute to the international community.

India's celebration of its G20 Presidency can be seen as a demonstration of its emerging soft power, as it showcases the country's growing influence and reputation on the global stage. The G20 Presidential year is expected to help India in its image-enhancement exercise, find new partners, and reinforce relations. The platform is expected to be a mirror of India's independent foreign policy driven by its increasing economic might.

In conclusion, the G20 Presidency gives India a unique opportunity to strengthen its role in the world economic order and become a global soft power. As India sets an ambitious, people-centric agenda-



The Indian presidency of G20 is undoubtedly creating a path towards becoming a major global soft power

to address global challenges and facilitate sustainable economic development, it is expected to contribute to the international community and build bridges between different countries and regions. The Indian presidency of G20 is undoubtedly creating a path towards becoming a major global soft power.

Women-led Development: India's Opportunity

Women's economic empowerment is at the heart of India's G20 agenda. Exploring the potential of gender transformative approaches, this intergovernmental forum of the G20 promises a platform for members to collectively translate ideas into tangible outcomes aimed at achieving substantive and sustained gender equality.

India's vision is well encapsulated in our Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remark at the G20 Summit in Bali, "global development is not possible without women's participation." There is substantial evidence to support that with increased internet and mobile penetration, female entrepreneurship has scaled substantially in India. With an estimated 13.5 million to 15.7 million MSMEs and agribusinesses, India has more women-owned enterprises compared to many other countries.

According to a McKinsey report, India can add up to 18% to its GDP (approximately \$ 770 billion), provided it bridges its gender equality gap by improving female workforce participation in the country. In addition to job creation by private and government sectors, entrepreneurship is a powerful yet largely untapped opportunity for working-aged women in India. By creating jobs, fuelling innovation and advancing investments in health and education, entrepreneurship among women can help transform India's journey towards social and economic growth.

SMART TECH

Can AI cut down hospitality jobs?

Never. As long as hotels and restaurants have human customers they'll always seek a humane touch in service

IN the past few months it seems the only buzzword in the technology space is AI (Artificial Intelligence) and the chatbot called ChatGPT. In all types of media outlets, especially those covering technology, stories and reports on AI have also sent a shiver in the world of employment and job place. The fear was already there, but ChatGPT has renewed it: Is AI coming for our jobs?

In an article in The New York Times technology analyst Amy Tara Koch has brilliantly described the situation. Her experience is fairly common these days, found in many places across the world including India. However, at the end of the article it reassures those working in the hospitality sector that AI-induced smart technology can never replace human beings and machine intelligence is likely to remain inadequate while interacting with human customers.

Koch writes, "These days, it's all about making

do when I'm greeted by the glut of smart technology in hotel rooms. Voice-activated lights. Chatbot concierges. QR codes on television sets. Mobile browser or app check-ins. Texting the valet for my car. And even motorized drapes...it's all infuriating. And overwhelming."

While describing her experience in a boutique hotel high in the Swiss Alps, sick of a flurry of "smart technology" she hankers for good old human concierges and yearns to hear a human hotel staff to attend her and listen to her simple requests.

She writes, "Since I could not locate anything resembling a telephone in the room, I hoofed it to the lobby and returned with a receptionist to power down my "smart mirror." Twenty minutes later, already in my pajamas, I encountered a new challenge: No switch I turned, no knob I twisted would kill the bathroom lights. I closed the door, affixed a face mask over my eyes and made do."

This is the irony of deploying smart machines in every other corner of a hotel room. Authorities wish to bring down the cost of labour, but absence of humans in the precincts often make hotels look like space



Proponents say the guest benefits behind these investments are numerous, from personalizing the hotel experience and anticipating guest needs to reducing their “friction” points and freeing up staff

stations operated by machines and gives you an eerie feeling.

I had a similar feeling when I was put up in such a smart hotel in central Singapore. The five story hotel with about 60 keys had just about 10 staff. There was no question of any room service and even the restaurant was nearly a self-service kiosk where you have to put the bread slices on a conveyor belt of an automatic toasting machine during breakfast. There were tea, coffee, and juice machines. There was only a single chef to make omelettes and a young guide to show you how the machines work.

In the room, you have to talk to your all in one remote to get most of the things done including getting the TV started, moving the drapes of the windows, how to operate the fancy taps in a sophisticated bath room and even ask the Google Assistant

for tips on the city tour. A sweet voice from the TV would tell you the distance of each tourist destination and how to negotiate your way using your Google map. Mind it, it was five years ago and the term AI was not so prevalent.

A recent study from the industry magazine Hospitality Technology and the University of Nevada’s William F. Harrah College of Hospitality in Las Vegas surveyed 100 hotel operators in the US and noted that adoption across the industry of self-service features such as check-in kiosks and mobile room keys is booming.

Proponents say the guest benefits behind these investments are numerous, from personalizing the hotel experience and anticipating guest needs to reducing their “friction” points and freeing up staff.

Neha Jaitpal, the global general manager for Honeywell’s Building Technologies sector, oversees “intuitive” solutions for more than 2 million hotel rooms worldwide, working for companies such as Accor and Fairmont Hotels & Resorts. “Imagine arriving at your hotel room after a long day of travel, and it’s already adjusted to your preferred settings — from the temperature, lighting and even the position of the drapes,” she told Koch. “Through automation, guest rooms can be personalized without the need for human interaction.”

“Smart hotel rooms are about empowerment,” said Robert Firpo-Cappiello to Koch, Hospitality Technology’s editor-in-chief. “Contactless interactions were a survival pivot for hotels during the pandem-

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ic. People are used to them now. There is no going back.”

Yes, some (young) travelers I’ve talked to love it.

“At the Wynn Hotel, I enjoyed having Alexa close the blinds, turn off the lights and play music,” said Eddie Burns, 25, a drummer and touring musician. “I arrived super late and it was great to navigate everything from bed.”

I used to walk into a hotel room and relax. Now it is a job to figure out how to use the lights and switch off the television, which, of course, is set to the hotel’s promotional station



Power on the Palm?

One “guest technology provider” is pushing guests to rely more heavily on their ubiquitous cellphones.

Sonifi Solutions Inc., which works with global brands such as Hyatt and Marriott, generates unique QR codes for guests on their in-room television — to activate, you scan with your phone camera, as you would a web-based restaurant menu, which takes you to an app or website. Then with their phones, guests control their TVs and lighting, connect with the concierge (by chat), order in-room dining or make a spa appointment. The “personalization”

piece of the platform extends to the television, which, based on guest behavior and information gleaned from a loyalty program, can be set to a yoga class for a fitness enthusiast or ESPN for a football fan.

“By streamlining mobile capabilities and letting phones be the place of fulfillment, it saves guests time,” said Kara Heermans, a Sonifi senior vice president. Juliana Colangelo, 33, a vice president at the wine and spirits marketing firm Colangelo & Partners, is a fan.

“Smart TV QR codes get me what I need on my phone, from hotel gym classes to valet parking,” she said, adding that she wishes that rooms had QR codes to leave staff tips. “I never carry cash anymore.”

Waste of ‘Mental Energy’

But please, can we go back? These “guest enhancements,” touted as in-demand by hoteliers and the tech companies that make them, are not in demand by me. They have been, in fact, obstacles — obstacles between me and sleep, me and the view that I had paid for, and me and firm pillows (in Miami, that request was not an option on the tablet, and no human answered the phone in housekeeping). What was once straightforward is now idiotically complicated.

“I used to walk into a hotel room and relax. Now it is a job to figure out how to use the lights and switch off the television, which, of course, is set to the hotel’s promotional station,” said Jill Weinberg, 67, a regional director with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and like me, a frustrated hotel guest. “Here

is an entirely new system to waste mental energy upon every single time I travel.”

Another quibble with “personalized” hotel rooms? They are impersonal. “Frictionless” functionality does not engender character or soul; people do. I like being welcomed by the front desk, to discuss restaurant ideas with the concierge and chit chat with the other staff, who more often than not have interesting local tips. I could care less if a room “knows” that I like Pilates and the thermostat set to a nippy 69 degrees. And I’m not downloading an app just to request towels. Can’t I just ask about housekeeping?

Other travelers want to, too.

Stephanie Fisher, an adviser with the luxury travel agency Local Foreigner, said many of her clients “request hotels with personalized service that prioritize guest relationships.”

“The best memories come from connecting with people, not devices,” she added.

Thankfully for me and many other guests, not all hotels are embracing technology as the magic bullet of the future. Some, such as the Graduate Hotels, a chain of boutique hotels in college towns like Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Nashville, Tennessee, are — aside from Wi-Fi and some smart TVs — intentionally analog.

“We are about nostalgia, the notion of transporting guests to a simpler time, so we never bought anything,” said Ben Weprin, founder of the Graduate Hotels. “We want guests to immerse themselves in the college community and then come back to their rooms to decompress.



Our motto is: Out of the metaverse and into the universe.”

In Europe, the only technology offered in the rooms of the Rocco Forte Hotels is high-speed internet. That’s not to say technology is pooh-pooed: The door attendants use an earpiece to communicate a guest’s name to reception so they receive a personal greeting as they check in, and back-end systems track preferences so the wait staff might “remember” a guest’s morning specialty coffee order. Cutting-edge, it is not. That is the point.

And that’s fine by me. While the idea of human-centric lighting to match my circadian rhythm is a noble one, please, just give me a light switch. Perhaps a good, old-fashioned landline with a human at the other end, too. I’ll be more than fine. I’ll be a happier, more relaxed guest.

Another quibble with “personalized” hotel rooms? They are impersonal. “Frictionless” functionality does not engender character or soul; people do. I like being welcomed by the front desk, to discuss restaurant ideas with the concierge and chit chat with the other staff, who more often than not have interesting local tips

THE Central government will organize the country's first Global Tourism Summit in New Delhi as part of India's ascension to G-20 presidency, where all G-20 member countries will participate on April 10-12. The summit will showcase 'major tourist destinations' of the country with various state governments as stakeholders.

In a roadshow, ahead of the summit, the Tourism Ministry officials emphasized on how the Centre is focussed on bringing global investments in Cruise, Medical, Religious, Adventure and Eco-tourism segments, the day Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually launched world's longest cruise Ganga Vilas on January 12 in Varanasi.

Ahead of the Global Tourism Investors' Summit, a road show was held in Kolkata urging various eastern states, including Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Andaman & Nicobar Islands, to take a proactive role in promoting their states in front of the global investors with niche destinations.

West Bengal Tourism Secretary Saumitra Mohan spoke about the existing tourism related policies already in place, including WB Tourism Policy 2019, Tea Tourism Policy (where Garden owners can use 15% land for tourism purpose), Homestay Tourism Policy.

"West Bengal is in fifth position in foreign tourist arrival and we want to move up the ladder. We want to

leverage the potential that already exists in the state...Bengal is a state which has Sunderbans, wetlands, sea beaches, mountains, wildlife and rivers," Mohan said.

"In Bengal, we are awaiting investments in the Cruise Tourism segment," Mohan added. During the recent Global summit on "Financial Inclusion" in Kolkata from January 9-11, the G-20 delegates were offered Ganga cruise, cultural festival on board and dinner.

WEST BENGAL IS IN FIFTH POSITION IN FOREIGN TOURIST ARRIVAL

Mohan also emphasized on how Durga Puja, which received intangible cultural heritage status from UNESCO, can be promoted as an intangible cultural & heritage tourism. Jharkhand government representative, on the other hand, said it would like to project Eco-tourism and Religious tourism as their investable segments.

Here goes the text of his speech delivered on this momentous occasion.

Good afternoon, it is indeed a matter of great privilege for West Bengal Tourism to be a part of the Global Tourism Investors' Summit 2023 as

West Bengal is in fifth position in foreign tourist arrival and it can easily move up the ladder. It can leverage the potential that already exists in the state...Bengal is a state which has Sunderbans, wetlands, sea beaches, mountains, wildlife and rivers



a part of G-20 dialogues. On behalf of the Department of Tourism, I would like to thank CII for extending the invitation to be a part of this Road Show in Kolkata this afternoon.

The State of West Bengal is one of the culturally most diverse states of India. West Bengal boasts of different ethnicities, cultures, religions, people and languages which add to its variety.

Geographically, the State encompasses two broad natural regions; The Gangetic Plains in the South and the sub-Himalayan and Himalayan area to its North. It can be termed Mini India as it has almost all the geographical features. Some of these features are unique (e.g. UNESCO World Heritage site of Sunderbans delta, tea plantations, wetlands, sea and beaches, Dooars, mountains, wildlife, river, forests and what not. It all gives the State a huge competitive advantage.

The architectural heritage of West Bengal is significant; Terracotta Temples with its intricate architectural designs and European Buildings are a sublime attraction. The state is also best known for its cuisine, sweets and street food.

Tourism Industry plays a vital role in the state's economy. The Travel and Hospitality sector's contribution to West Bengal GDP including spillovers to other sectors is estimated at around 12% as against the national average of 9.6%. The State Government is keen to strengthen the sector which is likely to have a spillover effect by way

of creating livelihood opportunities and boosting the local economy. Each district has its own unique tourism resource and there is immense potential to utilize it with the help of the private sector.

As per the India Tourism statistics released by the Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India last year, West Bengal is the 5th state in terms of the highest Foreign Tourist Arrival (FTA) and this is bound to grow phenomenally with direct flight connections with Europe and the USA, for which we would like to jointly work with you.

The State Tourism Department has framed some important policies for a focused approach to various sub-sectors of Tourism and facilitate the ease of doing business.

- West Bengal Tourism Policy 2019
- Tea Tourism Policy 2019
- West Bengal Homestay Tourism Policy 2017 amended in 2019
- Recognition of Tourism Services Providers, 2021
- West Bengal Tourist Guides Certification Scheme 2021
- Revised Incentive Policy for the Tourism Industry, 2021
- Some Additional Policies that are currently in pipeline:
- Draft – WB Eco Tourism Policy
- Draft – Adventure Tourism Policy
- Draft – Heritage Tourism Policy
- Draft – Rural Tourism Policy
- Draft – PPP Policy
- Draft – Caravan Tourism Policy
- Draft – River Cruise Tourism Policy
- Draft – Health & Wellness Tourism Policy

Here are the highlights to some of the tourism opportunities in the State that could establish significant linkages with Private Investors and the G-20 nations.

Cruise Outsourcing – Given the number of rivers and innumerable water bodies in the State, there is a huge scope for developing different water-based sports including river cruises and house-boating excursions. Private players do have a big opportunity here.

City Based Tourism – There are a number of historic cities in the State of West Bengal where multiple layers of our rich civilization with footprints of foreign settlers could be experienced. This is palpably evident in its tangible and intangible heritage at these locations.

The Department of Tourism has undertaken initiatives such as Integrated City Pass in order to facilitate online access to several prominent Tourist Hot Spots of Kolkata and propose to introduce the Hop on Hop off Tourist Bus Service covering a fixed route surrounding the historic BBD Bag area wherein the British had first settled in the 17th Century.

The Department is also exploring the possibility of illuminating the Heritage Buildings in Kolkata in collaboration with different stakeholders. There is, in fact, a huge opportunity for private investment in Heritage Walking Tours & Stays, Heritage Cruises, Culinary Tourist



Walks and Tourist Bus Services. The Department will be more than happy to extend the requisite hand-holding support as might be required for the purpose.

Medical and Wellness Tourism –Bengal has beautiful mountains and the Dooars which serve as ideal locations for wellness services. Apart from this, top class hospitals with competitive rates and lower waiting time make it a preferred destination for availing medical services.

Ease of Doing Business- As far as ease of doing business is concerned, the State ranked 9th in Ease of Doing Business index. For operating businesses, the State has introduced a single window system for fast-tracking all kinds of permissions required for setting

up a unit under the travel and hospitality sector.

Incentive Scheme – The West Bengal Incentive Scheme, 2021 has been introduced for Tourism Units to be set up in the State and is applicable to eligible tourism units and projects along with the extension plans for the existing projects. Incentives such as State Capital Investment Subsidy, Interest Subsidy, Waiver of Electricity Duty, Additional Incentive on Generation of Employment, and Additional Incentives for Adventure Tour Operators among others are extended for encouraging different tourism-related activities across West Bengal.

Quantum of Project Investment in West Bengal – The state is working towards improving the basic

infrastructure and implementing newer projects to give thrust to the sector. Tourism is likely to see an investment of more than Rs 5,000 crore over the next three years from the private and public sectors. The target is to increase the “number of inbound traffic from 100 million to 300 million per year. West Bengal is already at number 6 when it comes to domestic tourist arrivals.

Quantum of Private Investment –The State is keen on promoting private partnership in the sector and has formed six Sub-Committees on specific sub-sectors of Tourism such as Adventure Tourism, Eco Tourism, River Tourism, MICE Tourism, Heritage & Cultural Tourism and Rural & Tea Tourism with representatives from the industry with a view to formulate



better policy architecture through wider consultations.

Tourist Guides – A Pool of 3000+ New and Existing Trained Tourist Guides certified by the Department of Tourism under the Tourist Guide Certification Scheme in association with Utkarsh Bangla in Hybrid mode is available for utilization by all the private operators intending to engage in tourism-based activities in the State.

Home Stay – Standardization of

Home Stay amenities and service delivery has been initiated by the Tourism Department. More than 2000 plus home stays have registered with the Department and there is ample scope for new home stays and improvement of infrastructure of the existing home stays with the help of private partnership.

Industry Status to Tourism in West Bengal – The Department is exploring the possibility of provid-

ing Industry Status to the Tourism Sector which will push growth and private investment in the sector so as to encourage and attract private sector investments and create a favourable environment to leverage private sector expertise like resources, skills, innovativeness, flexibility, and capacity.

Intangible Cultural Heritage - This narrative will protect Bengal's rich cultural heritage and boost livelihood generation through entrepreneurship development and local community involvement. There is immense scope for promoting tourism-based activities with a focus on Bengal's Intangible Cultural Heritage. Examples: Patachitra Scroll Painters' Village in Naya, Pingla; Fakirs' Village in Gorbhanga & Jalangi etc.

Tangible Cultural Heritage – The terracotta temples built across Bengal in the late medieval period, the historic Zamindari estates spread across the State including Narajole, Chakdighi etc., the Heritage Buildings built during the colonial rule in Bengal, the Buddhist circuit and many more have immense scope of private engagement in promoting tourism-related activities.

Religious Tourism – The greatest festival Durga Puja wherein all religious and social barriers, folk art forms, music and literary excellence melt with one another is celebrated with pomp and grandeur, making the state a tourist's delight. The Durga Puja in Kolk-

ata has recently been inscribed in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Apart from Durga Puja, West Bengal is known for the Shaktipeeths, Gangasagar Mela, Basanta Utsav and various other festivals throughout the year. Private investment in the hospitality sector surrounding religious tourism across West Bengal has significant opportunities.

Tea Tourism – The Tea Tourism and Allied Business Policy, 2019 has been introduced with the aim of generating enhanced investments and employment opportunities for sustainable and inclusive economic development by way of effective utilization of vacant and surplus land in Tea Gardens without any compromising the area under tea plantation.

Art & Craft Villages – The emerging arena of Tourism where people can visit/stay in these villages and experience the traditional crafts along with the lifestyle of the artisans. Example- Kushmandi for Gambhira Masks, Nutangram for Wooden Dolls, Charida for Chhau masks, Bikna for Dhokra artwork, Panchmura for Terracotta Horses etc.

Eco Tourism – The eco-tourism locations for the promotion of sustainable eco-tourism ventures are spread across North Bengal, Purulia, Jhargram and Sunderbans. Being rich in Biodiversity, the State has immense investment potential in Eco Tourism.



Given the number of rivers and innumerable water bodies in the State, there is a huge scope for developing different water-based sports including river cruises and house-boating excursions. Private players do have a big opportunity here

Souvenir Outlets – To promote local traditional crafts of West Bengal, the State proposes to introduce Souvenir Shops across prominent locations and there is sufficient opportunity for private partnerships in this venture.

Heritage Villas & Home Stays for Accommodation – The Zamindar Baris, Bonedi Baris, Heritage Tea Garden Villas and Heritage Home Stays of West Bengal can be utilized fruitfully with sufficient scope for private partnerships. Heritage stays have proved to be of high demand in the recent past.

Ropeways – Investments in Cable Cars at identified Tourist Destina-



tions of Purulia, Darjeeling, Kalimpong etc. are worth exploring.

I am hopeful that with your support, Tourism in West Bengal would reach greater heights in the near future. The Department of Tourism is readily available to assist and support in any such ventures.

Now, the Governor, after careful consideration of the matter, is pleased to announce the Tea Tourism and Allied Business Policy, 2019 in modification of the Tea Tourism Policy notified vide No. 3362-LP/5M-10/2012 dated 17/07/2013 and Notification No. 665-LP/5M-10/12 Dated 4th March 2015. The policy is aimed at generating enhanced investment and employment opportunities for sustainable and inclusive economic development by way of effective utilization of vacant/ surplus land in Tea Gardens without any curtailment/ compromise in areas under tea plantation. The salient provi-

sions of the Policy are as follows:

1) Tea gardens will be allowed to utilize 15% of the total grant area subject to a maximum of 150 acres for tea tourism and allied business activities.

a. Out of this allowable area a maximum of 40% can be used for construction activities in conformity with extant Rules and Regulations and provided the proposed activity is in harmony with the ecology and the environment.

b. The allowable business activities shall include Tea Tourism, Plantation, Animal Husbandry, Hydro Power, Non-Conventional Energy Resources, Social Infrastructure and Services. An illustrative list of activities under the above broad categories may include tourism resorts, wellness centres, schools, colleges, universities medical/ nursing colleges, hospitals, cultural/ recreational &

exhibition centres, horticulture, floriculture, medicinal plants, food processing units, packaging units etc.

2) Each proposal shall be examined on case to case basis by a Screening Committee constituted as follows:

- i. Chief Secretary to the Govt. of West Bengal- Chairman
- ii. ACS/ Principal Secretary of ICE Department- Member
- iii. Principal Secretary Labour Department- Member
- iv. Principal Secretary L&LR and RRR Department – Member
- v. Principal Secretary, Tourism Department – Member
- vi. Principal Secretary, Agriculture Department – Member
- vii. Principal Secretary, Environment Department – Member
- viii. Representative, Tea Board- Member
- ix. Two Representatives of Tea Associations- Members
- x. Joint Secretary/ Special Secretary, ICE Department – Member-Convenor Representation from Forest department, Public Works Department, Power & NES Department, Animal Resource Development Department or any such relevant department shall be co-opted in the Screening Committee as member on case to case basis as required in terms of the proposal.

The department of Industry, Commerce and Enterprises will act as Nodal Department.



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