

MYSTIC EAST

unexplored horizon

A bi-monthly magazine by HRAEI | Vol 1 | Issue 6 | September - October 2015



COVER STORY

SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS



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 MESSAGE



Sudesh Poddar

The festive season has taken off smoothly and is expected to make things better. According to the credit rating agency ICRA, the growth of the hotel industry in India will rise to 6 per cent to touch \$1.8 billion by 2016

Dear Fellow Members,

The year 2015 has been quite good for the hospitality business. The festive season has taken off smoothly and is expected to make things better. According to the credit rating agency ICRA, the growth of the hotel industry in India will rise to 6 per cent to touch \$1.8 billion by 2016.

In this situation I request all our members to improve their standards of facilities and services and apply for classification for getting star categories for their hotels. The Ministry of Tourism has a voluntary scheme for approval in six categories and sub-categories for hotels. We at the HRAEI will assist you in the process. You can contact us for any help required to go ahead.

I would also like to remind you that to improve the standards of services, housekeeping is one of the key aspects. In the age of social media it is

the best avenue to earn guest satisfaction and garner positive reviews. We must develop the required skills in the housekeeping staff to do so.

Finally, I would request all of you to comply with the additional 0.5% service tax for Swachh Bharat for Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's noble cleanliness programme. A clean India will help usher in more international guests to the country and its hotels keeping in tune with our motto 'Atithi Devo Bhava' (The guest is equivalent to God).

And may God bring us more wealth and prosperity

Sudesh Poddar
President, HRAEI

SECRETARY'S MESSAGE



Pranav Singh

The key pointer for us in the survey is that for Indian travellers, the most important factors for selecting a hotel include air-conditioning, breakfast, room service and in-room Wi-Fi

Dear fellow members,

Let me share some good news with you. A new survey by the US-based travel website TripAdvisor shows that as many as 44 per cent travellers from India would increase their travel budgets in 2016.

The key pointer for us in the survey is that for Indian travellers, the most important factors for selecting a hotel include air-conditioning, breakfast, room service and in-room Wi-Fi. This means we hoteliers need to treat these factors as a basic necessity for a domestic traveller. To attract more customers and gain a positive or word-of-mouth publicity strengthen these basics if you wish to get better business.

Indian travellers also think of a holiday as a reward that their family deserves. The sentiment is also a good pointer we should keep in mind while moving into 2016. Always keep in mind that an extended Indian family may ar-

rive during the holiday season. So you have to make arrangements for the octogenarian grandfather or grandmother as well as the pampered grandchild.

The survey also indicates a word of caution: online traveller reviews are cited by 93 per cent of global as well as Indian accommodation owners as being the most important element for the future of their business. So don't take any of the traveller reviews lightly as it can make or break business. Try to address each and every negative review with care. Also don't forget to thank the traveller who posts a rave review.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pranav Singh', written in a cursive style.

Pranav Singh
Secretary, HRAEI

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President of
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▪ Special feature



RAW TALENT POOL

North East India has a pool of skillful youth who can be assets to India's hospitality industry

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HRAEI CORNER

Excise fee structure of star category hotels: A paradox

The excise licence fees for star category hotels is extremely high in West Bengal. The fee for a two-star category main bar is Rs 70,000 and for the additional bar is Rs 30,000. The main bar fee for a three-star and four-star hotel is Rs 1,00,00 and for the additional bar fee is Rs 30,000. And for a five-star category hotel are respectively Rs 15,00,000 and Rs 2,50,000.

These fees are immensely high with respect to business generated in the year 2015 in which the state had observed 13 dry days.

In order to facilitate the growth of hospitality sector in the state, preparing to welcome a host of national and international delegates, the Hotel & Restaurant Association of Eastern India (HRAEI) sent a letter to the Honourable Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee apprising the situation. The association requested the

state to relook in the fee structure.

The response from the state government is awaited.

Entrance fee waived for new members

In order to welcome more members in the HRAEI fold, the association has decided to waive the entrance fee for new members.

The waiver period is October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016. This measure has been undertaken to increase the number of members.

25 per cent discount on new HRAEI cards

The discount on HRAEI card for members has been increased to 25 per cent from the existing 20 per cent on food and accommodation in member hotels.

This will be effective for those who become members before July 1, 2016.

spective platforms. The largest online player MakeMyTrip is confident of its budget brand Value .

“With Value , MakeMyTrip intends to change the game by giving its brand assurance to the budget segment hotels, and hence, capitalise offline to online shift for hotel bookings. MakeMyTrip’s Value offering is different from that of competition,” says Magow. But this is not deterring budget hotel aggregators.

Kavikrut, Chief Growth Officer, Oyo Rooms says, “Even if some of the online travel agents (OTAs) have de-listed us, there are others supporting us like Cleartrip and Expedia. We have acquired supply of budget rooms and technology to compete with them.”

Amit Taneja, Chief Revenue Officer, Cleartrip, says, “As long as budget aggregators add value and give us comprehensive content, we will continue to have them on our platform. There is demand for the budget category in the sub INR 3,000 price range.” The decade-old Cleartrip does not have a budget brand of its own, but is willing to give more choice to consumers looking for budget accommodation. “ Just about every budget aggregator is on our site today ranging from Oyo, Zo to Treebo and Fab Hotels,” he adds.

Apart from Cleartrip, there are others like Expedia and Bookings.com who are willing to support such room aggregators. There are also a number of small and new travel sites who continue to list budget rooms. For instance, the three -year old Musafir.com is also getting ready to include budget aggregators as part of its offering. “We would be adding budget aggregators like Oyo and Zo on our site. We are not threatened by them unlike the bigger players who believe they would be creating monsters by supporting them in the budget hotel category. In our case, we are still small and would include them to give more options to our consumers,” says Vijay Keshavan, CEO, Musafir.

Source: Business Line

Some travel sites keen on promoting own brands



ONLINE travel sites are divided on listing offerings from budget hotel aggregators. Companies such as MakeMyTrip, Goibibo and Yatra, which have their own budget hotel brands, are blocking offers from players such as Oyo and Zo Rooms. Other online travel sites like Cleartrip and Expedia, however, are

listing the budget room aggregators.

Rajesh Magow, CEO of MakeMyTrip, believes his brand of budget hotels under Value is superior to the current brands of budget aggregators such as Oyo and Zo Rooms. Similarly, Yatra owns TG Rooms and TG Stays, while Goibibo is backing Go Stays on their re-



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Foreign tourist arrival in Nov 2015 witnesses 6.5% growth over Nov 2014



NEW DELHI: The Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) during the month of November 2015 were 8.15 lakh as compared to FTAs of 7.65 lakh during the same period in 2014 and 7.34 lakh in November 2013.

There has been a growth of 6.5% in November 2015 over November 2014. FTAs during the period January - November 2015 were 71.03 lakh with a growth of 4.5%, as compared to the FTAs of 67.94 lakh with a growth of 10.5% in January- November 2014 over January - November 2013.

The top 15 source countries were USA (15.76%) followed by Bangladesh (12.27%), UK (11.00%), Canada (4.52%), Australia (4.22%), Malaysia (3.43%), Russia (3.42%), Germany (3.34%), France (2.93%), Sri Lanka (2.89%), China (2.83%), Japan

(2.51%), Singapore (2.19%), Nepal (1.77%) and Thailand (1.58%). These top 15 countries account for 74.66% of total FTAs during November 2015.

The top 15 ports that handled majority of FTAs during the said period were Delhi Airport (31.55%) followed by Mumbai Airport (17.71%), Chennai Airport (7.39%), Haridaspur Land check post (7.09%), Bengaluru Airport (6.26%), Goa Airport (4.61%), Kolkata Airport (3.91%), Hyderabad Airport (3.25%), Cochin Airport (3.10%), Ahmedabad Airport (2.63%), Tiruchirapalli Airport (1.64%), Trivandrum Airport (1.62%), Gede Rail (1.44%), Gaya Airport (1.10%) and Amritsar Airport (0.95%). These top 15 ports account for 94.25% of total FTAs during November 2015.

Source: PIB, India

Forex from Tourism drops even with rise in foreign arrivals

NEW DELHI: Foreign exchange earnings from tourism have been inching up for the past five years, supported by the increasing number of overseas visitors. Calendar year 2015, however, is going to be different. Foreign tourist arrival to India saw an increase of 4.3 per cent in the first 10 months of the current year. The rise should have reflected in the foreign exchange earnings, too. But, earnings have declined 2.4 per cent to USD15.93 billion between January and October 2015.

The decline compares unfavourably with a 10 per cent earnings growth (in dollars) during the first 10 months of 2014. If one takes into account the weaker rupee, the increase in rupee terms should at least have been higher to the increase in tourist arrivals. However, the earnings in rupee terms have grown by only 2.5 per cent in the first 10 months to INR 1,01,348 crore. The rupee earnings had risen 16 per cent during January-October last year.

Ajay Prakash, former President, Travel Agents' Federation of India, who runs Nomad Travels, said he had not seen a slackening in demand for luxury holidays even though they account for only 10-12 per cent of in-bound arrivals. "Maybe the larger inbound market is feeling the pinch somewhere. This one factor can only explain the trend of decline," he said.

Experts say being a long-haul destination, India has to compete with top global tourist destinations to attract tourists from Europe and the US. However, the country has not been able to match the experience offered by destinations such as Dubai and, to



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some extent, even Oman. People from Europe and the US have an option to go to other long-haul destinations.

“The high-end tourists are not directed towards India. The tourist arrival data still count people who are visiting friends and relatives as tourists. But, are these real tourists? It is December and the Delhi streets should be buzzing with tourists. But it is not so,” said Ankur Bhatia, Executive Director, Bird Group, which has interest in hospitality and aviation services, among other things.

Of late, India has been seeing a sharp surge in tourist arrivals from Bangladesh and the neighbouring country has also replaced the US as the top source for arrivals in the first 10 months of 2015. Almost a million of the 7.67-million tourists who visited India last year were from Bangladesh. But, most of them visit India for medical treatments and businesses, and are not tourists in the real sense of the term.

Source: Business Standard



Tourism Ministry recommends Chefs for Padma Awards

NEW DELHI: Taking into account the long standing demand of the Chef community in the country, Ministry

of Tourism, Government of India has recommended to the government to consider culinary artists for Civilian

Padma Awards. This was informed by Dr Mahesh Sharma, Union Minister for Tourism & Culture, Government of India while inaugurating the second New Delhi Palate Fest. The Minister said that food is a vital component of tourism experience and chefs play a critical role in it.

The Palate Fest is supported by Incredible India brand of Ministry of Tourism. Speaking about initiatives of Ministry of Tourism to promote Indian cuisines, Suman Billa, Joint Secretary –Tourism, Government of India said that the Ministry try to promote Indian cuisines in a “small way” at all the Festivals of India that Ministry of Culture organizes in overseas markets. He said that the government would rather play the role of a facilitator by supporting private initiatives wherever possible to promote Indian food.

Source: HBI

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Indian hotel industry to touch \$1.8 billion mark by 2016: ICRA



MUMBAI: The domestic hotel industry is estimated to touch \$1.8 billion by 2016, from \$0.8 billion presently, buoyed by rise in online bookings, an ICRA report has said.

An estimated 8.4 million Indians are likely to book hotels online by 2016, up from 3.5 million in 2014, the report said.

“The deepening penetration of Internet usage and smart phones in India has led to increased booking of hotels through online portals and applications in recent times,” it said.

The report further pointed out that hotel bookings is one of the least penetrated segments within the travel categories in India and online bookings account for 16% of the hotel bookings currently. This is expected to grow to 25% in 2016, the report said.

In comparison, in Europe, 70% of the hotel rooms are booked through online booking portals while it stands between 35-40% in USA, the report noted.

With increasing online competition, popular models that have come up include online travel agents (OTAs) offering a single marketplace for all travel-related needs, and meta search engines like Tripadvisor and Kayak, that operate like travel discovery platforms.

Among the key OTAs, Makemytrip holds 47% market share, while Cleartrip and Yatra hold a 20% share each, followed by Goibibo, the report said.

Further, online accommodation reservation services like Oyo Rooms, Stayzilla are gaining popularity, it added.

Apart from this, branded hotels operate direct bookings through their websites offering customers with loyalty benefits. However, OTAs and online accommodation booking services have also started loyalty schemes of late, the report said.

The report cited that the gain in popularity of these channels meant that the number of bookings routed through OTAs increased, thus impacting hotel revenues.

Therefore, to promote choice and avoid unfair competition, from 2002-03 onwards, majority of global hospitality majors started implementing strict rate parity rules regardless of distribution channel, the report said.

Source: PTI

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Tourism ministry launches a Comprehensive Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India

NEW DELHI: The Ministry of Tourism has launched a Comprehensive Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India (STCI) for three major segments of tourism industry, namely accommodation, tour operators and Beaches, Backwaters, Lakes and Rivers sectors during the sensitisation Workshop for Stakeholders on Sustainable Tourism organised in August, 2014. This information was given by Mahesh Sharma, Minister of State for Culture and Tourism (Independent Charge) and Minister of State for Civil Aviation in a written reply in Rajya Sabha.

The criterion has been adopted by the stakeholders. Further, the Ministry has guidelines for approval of Hotel Projects at the implementation stage and also guidelines for classification/re-classification of operational hotels under various categories. As per these guidelines, hotels at the project stage itself are required to incorporate various eco-friendly measures like Sewage Treatment Plant (STP), Rain Water Harvesting System, waste management system, pollution control, introduction of non- Chloro Fluoro Carbon (CFC) equipment for refrigeration and air conditioning, measures for energy and water conservation etc.

Under the guidelines for project level & classification/re-classification of operational hotels it has been prescribed that the architecture of the hotel buildings in hilly and ecologically fragile areas should be sustainable and energy efficient and as far as possible be in conformity with the local ethos and make use of local

designs and material. The tour operators approved by Ministry of Tourism have to sign a pledge for commitment towards Safe & Honourable Tourism and Sustainable Tourism to fully implement Sustainable Tourism practices, consistent with the best environment and heritage protection standards, such that the present tourism resource requirements optimise both local community benefit and future sustainable uses.

The Ministry of Tourism holds a

constant dialogue with State Governments/U.T. Administrations, various tourism related institutions and stakeholders for drawing up strategies for development and promotion of tourism in the country including Sustainable Tourism. The Ministry of Tourism supports from time to time various seminars and events that deliberate or focus on tourism in the country including Sustainable Tourism in rural areas.

Source: HBI





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Loss-making ITDC hotels may be first to go in strategic sale of PSUs



NEW DELHI: Pushing through with its plan to sell a majority stake in sick and loss-making public sector units, the Centre is understood to be working on a list of about 50 such PSUs. Hotels under ITDC could be the first on the block.

“A strategic sale of some ITDC hotels could take place this fiscal. There is a case for their sale as these are loss-making units and non-core functions taken up by the government,” said a senior official, adding that the Finance and Tourism Ministries have been discussing the issue.

The Tourism Ministry is understood to have identified eight loss-making ITDC hotels, including properties in Jaipur and Bhubaneswar.

Additionally, the government has reviewed a list of nearly 50 PSUs that can be considered for strategic stake sale, the official said, adding that sick units identified by the Department of Public Enterprises for revival and closure would also be considered for the purpose.

A policy is also being worked out to use the land-bank available with such sick firms, the official added.

The move comes even as the Finance Ministry is working to revive the Disinvestment Commission that was operational under the earlier NDA government. The Commission is was mandated to identify sick PSUs and initiate strategic stake sale. Outlining the Narendra Modi government’s intent to revive strategic stake sale in, and privatisation of, PSUs, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had set a target of raising ₹28,500 crore through such transactions in Budget 2015.

Source: CCI Newswire



Now, visa on arrival for Japanese tourists in India from March 2016

NEW DELHI: Recently Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced visa on arrival for Japanese tourists from March 2016 at Hyderabad House in Delhi on Saturday.

The visa on arrival will include those who come to India on business trips.

India will extend 'visa on arrival' to Japanese citizens including for business purpose from 1st March 2016.

Modi said that the Visa on Arrival is beyond the Electronic Tourist Visa (ETV) that the country has extended to visitors from 113 countries.

The Prime Minister said that India "deeply value" its special strategic and global partnership with Japan,

and the private investment from Japan is rising sharply in India. He termed Kyoto-Varanasi Partnership as a great symbol of friendly mutual relationship between the two countries.

Meanwhile, India and Japan signed multiple Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) on Saturday for cooperation in the defence, transport and civil nuclear energy sectors.

Stating that the India-Japan partnership had the greatest potential of any bilateral relationship, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed the signing of the MoUs that will, among other things, bring

Japan's high-speed trains to the Mumbai-Ahmedabad route.

Earlier, addressing the India-Japan Business Leaders Forum here, the Prime Minister emphasized that he wanted India and Japan to move ahead together, not just in the sphere of high-speed trains, but also for "high-speed growth."

Recalling his Japan visit last year, and the commitment of \$35-billion investment made by Japan, Modi said the figure had surprised many at that time, but today, within a short time-span, "unimaginable progress" had been made, and the contours of this investment were beginning to get visible on the ground.

Hotel aggregator Wudstay venturing into paying guest accommodation

BUDGET hotel aggregator, Wudstay, sensing the demand for extended stay options among working professionals and students, has ventured into this segment by introducing paying guest (PG) accommodations. The startup has already signed up with 50 PGs in Delhi, Gurgaon, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Kota offering close to 2,500 beds.

“A huge section of the Indian population move out of their home cities for work or education and due to the unorganised nature of the space (PG), they find themselves struggling to find decent accommodation for months,” said Prafulla Mathur, Chief Executive Officer, WudStay. Paying guest and shared accommodations are picking up because rentals in big

cities are increasingly becoming unaffordable. This has opened an alternative for startups such as WudStay, Grabhouse and Nestaway to enter the highly unorganised nature of the shared accommodation market in India and bring in their expertise of standardizing properties.

The accommodation startup works on an asset-light model — it partners with smaller hotels, brands them, and aims to provide standardised services to budget travellers with room rates ranging from INR 999-4,000, without owning any properties. These accommodations will be located in cities with large corporate presence or multiple educational facilities.

According to Mathur, the startup gets up to 40% of its business from

corporate travellers. “We are targeting to take our PG accommodation to cities that attract a huge migrant population,” Mathur said, adding that the startup plans to double its inventory under this segment in the next three months.

Founded in April 2015, WudStay has a presence in over 40 cities and plans to reach 65 cities over the next 18 months. Mathur said the company is now in talks to raise series A round of funding and expects to close it in the coming months. The company raised a USD3 million funding from Mangrove Capital Partners and Vikas Saxena of Nimbuzz and also acquired offline budget hotel aggregator, Awesome Stays, in August this year.

Source: The Economic Times

Oyo Rooms set to acquire Zo Rooms in an all-stock deal

OYO Rooms is close to extending its dominance in the budget hotel market by snapping up its main rival Zo Rooms, in an all-stock deal, according to three people aware of the transaction. The deal, structured as an asset sale, will give Zo Room’s seven founders and investors including Tiger Global a combined 7% stake in India’s largest budget hotel aggregator.

The sale comes after Zo Rooms was unable to raise fresh capital from investors. ET reported the acquisition talks between Oyo and Zo on December 3. “It is an all-asset sale. In the given deal structure, Oyo will not be taking liability of Zo’s dues,” one per-



son said. The person added that Zo’s cash-strapped parent, Zostel Hospitality will wind up after the deal and may default on some of its dues to

vendors and advertising and branding firms.

Zo’s assets include its technology and a network of 11,000 rooms

in 1,000 hotels across more than 50 cities and towns in India, which will give Oyo more muscle to hold its place against the new startups and larger online travel companies that have entered the hotel aggregation market.

Oyo Chief Executive Ritesh Agarwal and Zo Rooms CEO Dharamveer Chauhan did not respond to email queries and phone calls from ET. All seven founders of Zo Rooms — Chouhan, Akhil Malik, Paavan Nanda, Tarun Tiwari, Chetan Singh Chauhan, Abhishek Bhutra and Siddharth Janghu — will exit post the transition.

About 40% of Zo's employees will be absorbed by Oyo, a second person said. The deal is likely to close in two weeks. The structure of the deal would allow Oyo to pick exactly what it wants from Zo. "Asset sale can be of two kinds — one is lump sum, where both assets and liabilities of a busi-

ness unit are transferred but where corporate tax liabilities get left behind with the seller. The other is piecemeal, which is tax-inefficient (but) where assets can be cherry picked (and) liabilities can be left behind," said Sanjeev Krishan, partner and leader for private equity and transaction services practice at audit and consultancy firm PwC. He declined to comment specifically on the Oyo-Zo deal.

The Oyo-Zo transaction signals potential for more aggressive consolidation in India's consumer internet sector, where startups chasing big markets with aggressive discounting are starting to run out of money as investors flock to the most dominant of them. The deal also comes two months after India's largest online travel agencies including MakeMy-Trip and Goibibo blocked budget-hotel aggregators such as Oyo Rooms and Zo Rooms

from listing and marketing hotel properties on their websites.

"This deal is a clear example of cash being the differentiator in the sector," said an investor on condition of anonymity. "Reminds me of the Ola-Taxi-ForSure deal." India's largest cab aggregator, Ola, bought out smaller rival TaxiForSure for about USD200 million in March, gaining a huge leap over US-based Uber in India.

Zostel was founded in August 2013 with an initial capital of INR 20 lakh as a chain of backpacker hostels providing secure and centrally located accommodation to young travellers in air-conditioned dormitories with laundry service, TV, internet and other facilities for under INR 500 a night. Eight months ago, the company entered the budget hotel market and began spending aggressively.

Source: *The Economic Times*

Vivanta by Taj Green Cove Kovalam wins top conservation Award

VIVANTA by Taj Green Cove, Kovalam, a property owned by Muthoot Pappachan Group, has won this year's prestigious National Energy Conservation Award in the category of Hotel Sector, for its innovative efforts in the field of energy conservation. The award was instituted by the Union Ministry of Power to recognize the benchmarks in energy conservation in different sectors.

Vivanta by Taj secured the first place in the hotel sector (5-star and above category). The award was received by Mathew C Thomas, General Manager and Sivakumar K, Chief Engineer from Piyush Goel, Union Minister for Power at a function in Delhi as part of the National Energy Conservation Day.

The hotel has initiated several steps



in the last three years for energy conservation. In 2013, the hotel had received the Certificate of Appreciation from the Kerala State Pollution Control Board and last year, it won the Kerala State Energy Conservation Award.

Ixigo launches 2500 handpicked 'Super Value Hotels' across 80 Indian cities

ixigo, a travel search marketplace, has announced the launch of a new meta-search across curated budget hotels on its website. Aptly named 'Super Value Hotels', ixigo's curated collection of 2500 budget hotels across 80 cities in India has affordable room-rates ranging from INR 599 to INR 2499. This standardised collection of hotels provides super value for money by providing amenities such as clean beds, air-conditioning, TV, a good location, room-service, breakfast and Wi-Fi at a great price.

ixigo's 'super value hotels' compares deals across branded budget hotel providers such as Oyo rooms, Wudstay, Zo Rooms, Vista Rooms as well as independent hotels in popular locations in all major cities of India. It also meta-searches the cheapest rates across 20+ hotel-booking websites for India including the brand's own website for most of them, allowing travelers to find the best rates for 'super value hotels' across websites such as Booking.com, Makemytrip.com, Hotels.com, Goibibo.com and Agoda.com. Travellers can also compare hotels in a tabular manner across their prices, ratings, reviews and amenities.

Aloke Bajpai, Co-Founder & CEO, ixigo said, "We are making the lives of travellers simpler by narrowing down to the best budget hotels in India from among the 12,000 in our database. We've filtered them by amenities, lo-

cation and by sifting through thousands of reviews and photos on the web. Our team has also visited many of our chosen 2500 hotels personally to ensure that only the best ones earn the 'super value' tag. These accommodations provide great value for money and hence we recommend them for price-conscious travelers. We will be rolling out super value hotels on our apps very soon, and will also double the number of cities and super value hotels we cover by December."

Google estimates the online hotel booking market in India will be \$1.8 billion by 2016, up from \$0.8 billion in 2014. A large part of this growth will be driven by the growth of smartphones in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. ixigo has recently received investment from Micromax, an Indian smartphone manufacturer and has also forayed into cabs aggregation and meta-search.



Indian hospitality congress invites nominations for annual IHC awards

INDIAN Hospitality Congress (IHC), an organization of the tourism and hospitality educators and academia in the country, as part of the preparations for their Annual conference, has invited nominations for IHC Awards. The awards will be announced and distributed at the seventh Indian Hospitality Congress which is scheduled on February 10 to 12, 2016 at Banarsidas Chandiwala Institute of Hotel Management & Catering Technology in Delhi.

The categories of awards for which

the nominations are invited include IHC Educators Award (IHCEA), an award to recognize teachers/educators who have demonstrated excellence in teaching and research in tourism and hospitality; Young Teacher Welcome Award that recognizes new entrants into the teaching profession; Promising Training Manager; Aspiring Researchers of Hospitality & Tourism Award, an award to recognize young researchers; Budding Hoteliers Award; Face of Future award, etc.

IHC has introduced 'Gallery of

Legends' Award from last year. This award recognizes legends from hospitality and tourism industry. The debut award was bestowed on PRS Oberoi last year. Similarly, IHC also recognises individual contributions of industry figures conferring Honorary Life Membership Award. Last year, the Life Membership awards were given to Chef Manjit Gill, Corporate Chef, ITC Group, and NS Bhuie from NCHMCT. The last date for nominations for IHC annual awards is January 15, 2016.



Prestige Group set to bring Conrad Luxury Hotels brand to Bengaluru

REVVING its hospitality play in India, Prestige Group is all set to bring the luxury brand—Conrad Hotels & Resorts, a part of Hilton Worldwide, to Bengaluru. The Conrad Hotel is being developed in central Bengaluru's Ulsoor locality and is expect-

ed to come up in the second quarter of 2016 at a cost of INR 370 crore, a top company executive said. After its launch in Pune, this will be the second Conrad Hotel in India.

"The hospitality industry is on the threshold of growth with a positive

business environment. There are opportunities in different micro-markets as opposed to an overall generic demand, depending on the products, services and brands on offer, as these factors play a pivotal role in the hospitality industry in particular," said Zaid Sadiq, Executive Director, Liaisoning and Hospitality, Prestige Group, a property developer.

The company is building 3 hotels in the city under the Marriott, Sheraton (owned by Starwood) and Conrad brands. Sadiq said Prestige intends to invest about INR 750 crore to increase its hospitality play over the next 3 years. Sensing demand for mid-market hotels in the country, Prestige also plans to develop its own brand in this segment, apart from associating with international hotel chains.

"If one looks at the masses, one of the main requirements among them is for mid-segment hotels and this sector is currently quite disorganised," Sadiq said adding that there is a huge potential for mid-segment hotels in the 3-star and 4-star categories in the country.

Source: The Economic Times



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SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS

It's time hospitality companies harness the power of Internet and social media to enhance customer engagement, customer satisfaction and improve retention rates

THE 21st Century is the age of Internet technology that has been touching all spheres of our life. A majority of the hospitality sector has recognised the power of online inventory and the necessity of a strong social media presence.

According to the credit rating agency ICRA, the hotel industry in

India is showing signs of coming out of a long hiatus, courtesy the online booking trend. The room occupancy rates and revenue growth are estimated to touch \$1.8 billion by 2016, from the present \$0.8 billion, riding on the wave of the online booking phenomenon.

Moreover, never has a user-gen-

erated online rating meant as much as it does now. Digital referrals, and the power of what's posted on the web via user-generated review sites – digital word of mouth – can drastically impact a business' revenue. There are 3.3 billion brand mentions in 2.4 billion brand-related conversations within the US every day, and

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the typical American mentions brand names 60 times. India is catching up the trend, if not faster, with an unprecedented growth of the smartphone market and increasing internet penetration.

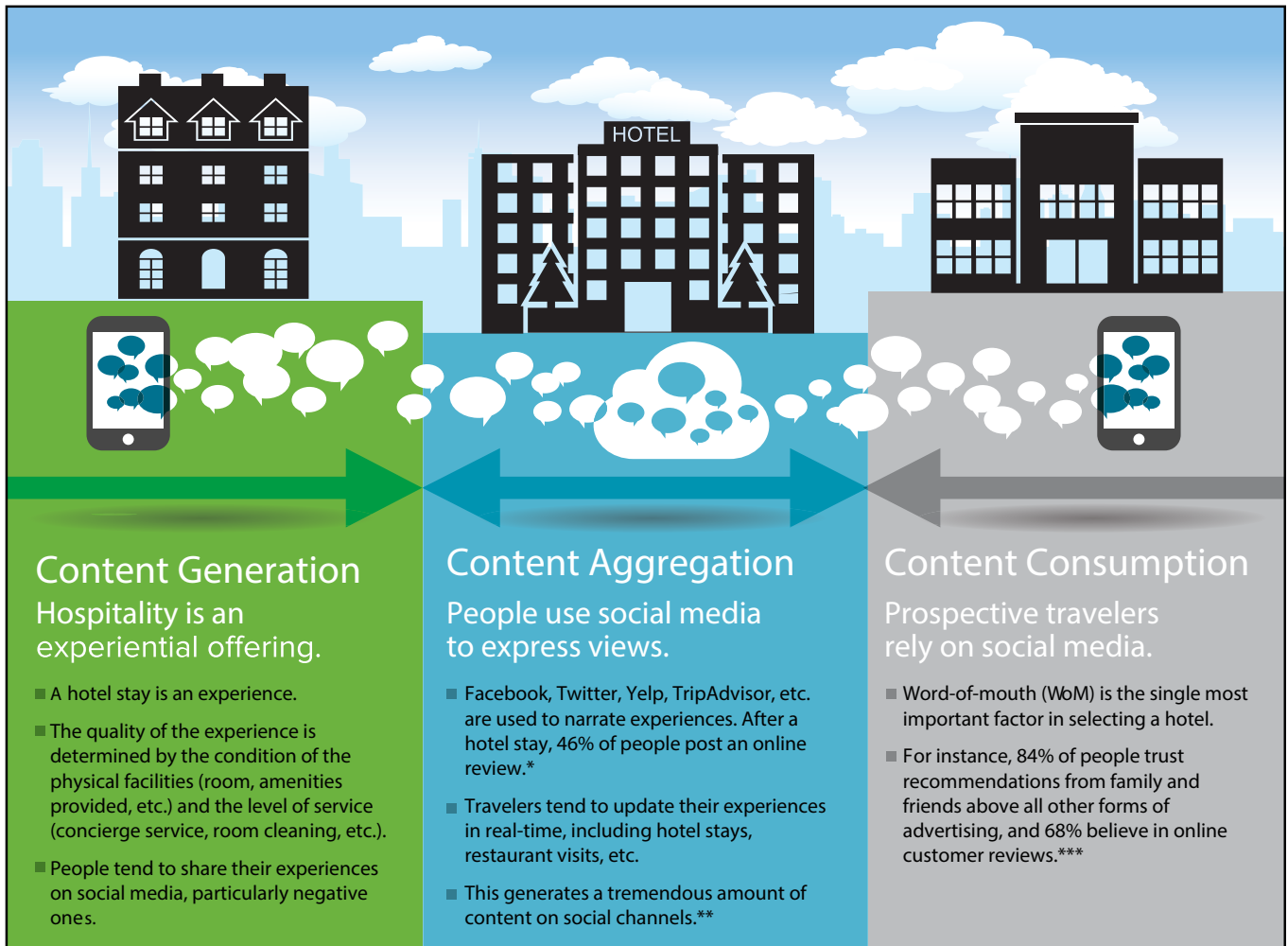
Now the Millennials—a person reaching adulthood around the year 2000—have become the core customer for the the majority of airlines, hotels and travel companies. As they enter into their peak earning, spending and travel years, most policy decisions have to be taken keeping this generation in mind.

Within this group of GenY travelers, there are many different markets considering the fact that exploration, interaction and experience are the major focus of Millennials. Willing to pay more for a greater experience, these ‘travel junkies’ and ‘foodies’ have their own specific choice based on different subsets of this market. They look for a unique, novel experience and will command change within the market.

Given the rampant use of social media, it’s clear that tremendous benefits can accrue for companies that enable effective social media interventions, including conveying information about their service, maintaining brand perception, encouraging highly satisfied customers to speak well of their experience, and offering immediate response to negative experiences. This is particularly true for travel and hospitality companies, given the propensity for people to use social media when researching their vacation destination, sharing their vacation experience, and reviewing the places they’ve stayed. Consider that 52% of Facebook users said their friends’ photos inspired their vacation choice and travel plans, and 55% of travelers said they changed their travel plans after researching their trip on social media.

Customers’ posts, likes and other digital activities are so important that hotels can gain valuable insights from these highly personalized and contextual customer experiences to have

Impact of Social Media on Hotel Reputation



Source: Cognizant 20-20 insights (www.cognizant.com)

a competitive edge. The influence of social sites such as TripAdvisor, Kayak, Expedia and Yelp, it has become a business imperative for hotels to embrace social media.

Engaging customers through these platforms is not a big deal now for both large and small scale hotels. Numbers of methods are applied for hotel social media marketing. Starting from brand building to gaining as much guests you can, all are done through this advanced system of marketing. Facebook, Twitter, etc. are few of the most

commonly used hotel social media marketing platforms that let customers get to know about the hotel and its services in much detail. These days, no one prefers to visit the website of hotels individually to check out the services offered.

Since, this generation is always found online on the social media platforms, reaching them is not that difficult and in fact, they like to get information with ease rather than searching for them here and there.

Large numbers of hotels and resorts

have started with this new approach to promote their hotel and services. Since the market is too competitive, it is necessary for the entrepreneurs to dedicate their time to the promotion work and recognize their

leads and competitors in the market. Because the number of users is going on increasing with each passing day, all these platforms are expected to be the new Google of this century.

Technology and traveller behaviour is evolving at a dizzying speed, and keeping up with changes can be a dis-

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traction from taking care of guests and generating revenue.

To help ensure you allocate time and resources in all the right places, here's a look at trends that will shape online travel marketing in 2014 and beyond:

Turn content into snacks

According to recent research, an adult's average attention span is only 8 seconds long. Combined with today's endless flow of social media content, expect people to take fleeting glances – not thorough reads - at your posts.

You need to make every second count by making your social media posts brief, mobile, shareable and easy to digest.

Hotels can create these types of 'snackable' content by taking a larger piece of content and breaking it up into smaller pieces of information. Best way to do this is to ALWAYS use visuals in

Important Cues from Social Media

- Photo sharing (Pinterest, Instagram or Facebook): Images will be playing a vital role.
- Mobile (Tabs or Smart Phones): More & more people are sensing this as their comfort zone. Keep your Apps or social networks in place. Want to grow, your phone/tab is your weapon.
- Customer Service More & more customer service will be handled via social media. It is happening already & definitely will get bigger & stronger.
- Stay on top of your game by internally formulating a management strategy on how to respond & how often.
- Statistics Need to know which social Networks work for you and get you traffic for your website or turn into a sale/customer

your social media posts and write super short sentences (a max of 2 sentences). For example, when promoting a package at your property, don't list out all the benefits or the full package description in your social media posts. Instead, take just one detail, such as one included amenity, and post about that. Continue to do that for other pieces of the package in future posts.

The new norm of sharing

In 2014, expect your social media followers to share even more about their travels and hotel experiences. As we engage more and more in a digital lifestyle, people are opening up more and stressing about privacy less. While they are not losing their desire for privacy entirely, the threshold has changed. The more people share online and the more their friends and families react to it,

the safer they think they are to continue sharing but Social networks have proven disappointing as a sales channel. The real decisions are being made on review sites and OTAs. People go to Facebook to socialize; they go to TripAdvisor and Expedia to shop. And despite all the chatter on social networks, your website remains your single most important tool for marketing your hotel. At a minimum, set up alerts on Google, TripAdvisor, Twitter, and Facebook to monitor and react to commentary.

Smartphone contribution

The use of smart phones is proliferating at a staggering rate and travellers are leading the charge. Increasingly,

travellers are using smart phones to find places to stay, eat, drink, shop, explore, and relax while on the go. That can have a significant impact on your same-day and walk-in business. You need to have a mobile-compatible site to help travellers find you. Ensure that rates, descriptions, and location information are easily navigable. Check that your address, directions, and location pin are accurate on Google Maps, the backbone of many location-based applications. Be sure to test out how your property is displayed on Apple, Android, and Blackberry devices.

Reviews form your reputation

The Internet and social media have

transformed travel by creating platforms for travellers to exchange information and advice with the people they trust most. Online reputation management is a critical new function in the hotel industry that grew out of the explosive popularity of social networking. It is the process of tracking, analyzing, and reacting to reviews and feedback as well as actively participating in social networking to build awareness and shape perceptions of your hotel.

There will be good reviews and chances are there will be negative reviews too. A negative review related to a specific personal experience is often best dealt with privately whereas a general Internet has become the best way

Five Applications of Social Media for Hotels



Marketing



- 1 Information Dissemination**
Use social media channels to share information, i.e., videos on YouTube, photographs on Flickr and Pinterest, updates on Twitter and Facebook, etc.



- 2 Ongoing Customer Engagement**
Create a buzz around the brand by conducting contests and employing gamification strategies on social networking channels like Facebook.



- 3 Just-in-time Marketing**
Extend market deals and offers to customers in real-time that are personalized and contextualized to customer situations.



Service

- 4 Extending Concierge Service**
Enable customers to seek service from any location using social channels like Twitter to enhance customer satisfaction.



- 5 Service Recovery**
Ensure that unfavorable opinions expressed in social media forums are addressed in a timely and transparent manner.



Source: Cognizant 20-20 insights (www.cognizant.com)

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to promote or market business. Especially with the introduction of several social media platforms, it has become much easier to market your business that reaches directly to the target audience at a large scale. For hoteliers, it is really a powerful platform as almost all the target audience is easily found on these social media platforms. Therefore, an effective hotel social media marketing is very much important for all the hotels and resorts.

Youth, middle-aged people or straight away the travel lovers, all are easily grabbed on these platforms and hence you can put forward your offerings to them directly. These days, social media has become so powerful that majority of people now believe more in the social presence of a hotel rather than believing what the its website talk about. Travellers have now started evaluating and trusting a hotel by checking out its social media presence, fan following, reviews of guests, complaint or suggestion can be addressed on a public forum. Address negative comments in a positive manner without coming across as defensive or trying to further the argument.

Keep in mind that you're not only responding to a guest, you're representing your property to thousands of potential visitors who read the reviews of your hotel. Always encourage your happy guests to leave a good review on travel sites.

Fans/followers count

You may have read a lot about brands buying fake fans or followers just to inflate numbers. But the question is, why is it bad? Yes, fake fans can never form a relevant target audience for your hotel or restaurant but the purpose of a huge fan base is not that. Fans attract fans. When you go to a Facebook a page, via a recommendation or a search or after viewing an Ad, the first thing that stands out is how many fans or followers a brand has. If the number is high, chances



INDIAN LUXURY HOTELS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

	Facebook	Twitter	Google+	YouTube	Pinterest
ITC Hotels	90K	6.2K	NA	218 subs	NA
Oberoi Hotel	87K	9.2K	721	263 subs	453
Taj Hotels	69K	6.8K	NA	514 subs	216
The Lalit Hotels	137K	1.4K	83	33 subs	NA
The Leela	34K	687	NA	118 subs	NA
Trident Hotels	51K	3.5K	359	19 subs	NA

blog.digitalinsights.in

Data as per March 2014 collected by Digital Insights



SOCIAL MEDIA NUGGETS FOR F&B

- Dining out is a must: 99 per cent people dine out when on vacation
- Frequency of dining out: Over 30 per cent people dine out over 10 times when on a week-long vacation, seven times (14 per cent), five times (13 per cent)
- Eat it, flaunt it: 55 per cent people have taken a photo of their food and posted on a social network.
- Chef, who's he? For 75 per cent chef of a restaurant does not influence one's decision to dine there
- Dining out intentions get stronger: 30 per cent people plan to dine out more than last year

Source: Internet Moghuls

of converting that user into your permanent fan or follower is higher. Till you are aware there is a difference between genuine and fake fans and the numbers are just for a show, you are safe.

Expand your reach

Most relevant to Facebook, the reach of your content should be your prime focus. Why print or TV ads which are broadcast nationally more expensive than the local ones? Wide reach. All your efforts should be directed towards enhancing your reach and especially to the regions from where you expect more guests for your hotels. For organic reach you need a big (and genuine) Facebook fanbase and it needs to engage with you else your content will not travel beyond your fan base. For viral reach, make content that is shareable.

It is to be noted that users share only that content which makes them look better in front of their friends,

so think how can you boost your fans' ego. Paid reach is easy to get but is neither sustainable nor recommended for a long tenure. Any paid social media campaign should be crisp, short and to the point. The longer you run paid campaigns the lesser you focus on your organic and viral reach and that defeats the entire purpose of building a community

People talking about this

This is one of the most important parameter which gives you clear understanding of how your social efforts are paying off. Every time a user takes any kind of action on your page, the action generates a story.

This includes someone liking your page, checking in, liking a post / image, commenting on your posts, responding to an event and so on. You may have a hundred thousand fans but if your PTAT is low it shows that either your relevant fan base is low or your content is not interesting. If PTAT is low, your reach will be low as well. So, if your content pillars are not assisting in better PTAT, change your focus.

Make it viral

Though a little ambiguous, it is a clear indicator of how well do you engage your fans. While PTAT will let you know how many people took an action on your page or tagged you outside of your page, Virality indicates the percentage of such people who were reached and then took an action. This method cancels out fake or dormant fans and lets you know how well you are engaging your relevant fans. However, the purpose of monitoring the virality is not limited to this. Virality lets you know how good your content is and thus you can create more such content. But the biggest mistake a marketer can make is to feel good about a virality rate of 4% to 5% while (industry standard being 2.5%) while the reach is only a fraction of total fan base. So, keep in

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mind that your organic reach should steadily increase and should definitely be upward of 15% as Facebook displays your content only to less than 10% of your fan base. The rest can be reached only if they are actively participating on your page.

Be and stay social

Last, but not the least, stay social. On

a social network, your tone should not be explicitly official. Yes, the verbiage should reflect your brand positioning but your fans are looking for a fun and an interesting page and want to feel a human connection with you. When your fans communicate with you they know their words are being read by a person on the other side and they want the replies in a human

tone. It never hurts to announce the Admin of the page and even put a few pictures up. It will generally assist in people talking less negatively about any mistakes or oversights and will enhance conversations.

So the real objectives for a hotel or a restaurant include increase in brand awareness, increase in brand recall, increase in revenues via more roomnight bookings and / or footfalls to the F&B outlets or other services open for non-residents like Spa or a Gym. As is the case with most of the marketing strategies, you may not be able to correctly or directly quantify these objectives as there are dependencies on the marketing platform to generate the correct or relevant data. Hence, when it comes to social media marketing, the real objectives are generally converted into visible objectives which are nothing but the structured data provided by the social networks including engagement levels, total followers or fans, overall sentiments of the content created by users, demographics of the audience connected with you and so on so forth.

As visible objectives can be easily assessed, it is important that the link with real objectives is carefully thought out so as to avoid any ambiguous results when you analyze the performance of your social media marketing campaigns. The relation between the two is subject to deliberation and is dependent on your experience in offline marketing to correlate the total spend, total users reached, conversion ratio and finally the cost per acquisition. So, it is better left to the Revenue Managers or Sales & Marketing heads to define and correlate the real and visible objectives.

Once you have established the relationship between the real and visible objectives, your focus should only be on achieving the visible objectives as the real objectives will be achieved automatically.



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MUSICAL JOURNEYS

Festivals have been generating a significant amount of tourists and are being recognised as a form of cultural tourism, by the Ministry of Tourism and state tourism boards. With millions of tourists attending major Indian festivals each year, eastern India has a veritable bouquet of music and dance festivals to attract them

CULTURALLY India is the most diverse place in the world. It is a vivid kaleidoscope of landscapes, magnificent historical sites and royal cities, misty mountain retreats, colourful people, rich cultures, and festivities.

As in the last decade cultural tourism has developed into a significant avenue of tourism across the world India has the potential to be a hotspot of cultural tourism. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO) more than 40 percent of all international tourists are “cultural tourists” as study of festivals have become an important way of learning about a nation or its ethnic characteristics.

Keeping an eye on the trend, Government tourism departments across India have been marketing the festivals to lure the global tourist. As a result festivals have changed over the years. Earlier festivals were associated with key calendar moments, linked specifically to particular seasons and heritage sites. Over the last decade, these have changed and developed, and there is now a broad and diverse range of festivals and events taking place all over India throughout the year.

When one observes the marketing campaigns used to promote India, the fairs and festivals of this country are some of the key contributors to the image of Incredible India. Eastern In-

dia—the hub of a diverse culture and people—is slowly taking a centre stage in festival oriented tourism.

The Odisha Tourism Development Corporation (OTDC) has been a pioneer in developing dance and musical festivals to showcase the state’s rich cultural heritage. Nagaland’s Hornbill Festival has also been a top draw for international and domestic tourists. Following are some of the prominent festivals that have been drawing hundreds of thousands of foreign and domestic tourists to witness the microcosm of culture and diversity in all colours. These have the potential to draw thousands consumers of hospitality business.

KONARK, MUKTESWAR AND RAJARANI, ODISHA



DURING the cooler winter months, Odisha comes alive with festivals devoted to traditional music and dance. The state is home to Odissi, one of the eight classical dance forms of India. It also has many forms of folk and tribal dances.

Odisha Tourism plays a key role in organising three festivals to witness mesmerising music and dance performances, held amongst some of the

state's most well known temples.

Konark Dance Festival is a festival held every year in December in backdrop of the Sun temple in Konark. Many celebrated dancers from all over the country perform at this venue. Since 1989, this festival has been organized in the state jointly by Odisha Tourism and Odissi Research Centre to promote the diverse Indian dance heritage as well as the popularity of Konark Temple

and Odisha as a tourist destination. A celebration of Odissi, Bharathnatyam, Manipuri, Kathak and Chau Dances; the festival truly comes as a lavish feast for the eyes and ears.

The Mukteswar Dance Festival, which concentrates on Odissi dance and music, offers solo, duet and group Odissi performances. It takes place in the courtyard of one of Bhubaneswar's most prominent and well-preserved temple complexes. The beautiful architectural works of the temple add to the splendor of the Mukteswar Utsav.

In order to show case the glorious tradition of Indian classical music, every year Rajarani Music Festival is organised by the Department of Tourism. The festival is celebrated in the Rajarani Temple complex in Bhubaneswar. Various famous vocalists and instrumentalists from across the country came to perform at festival. Along with music ancient temple complex provides a dramatic atmosphere with its beautiful sculptures.

HORNBILL, NAGALAND



NAGALAND'S Hornbill Festival is the perfect place to go experience the rich, diverse culture that of Northeastern India. In December all the tribes from Nagaland congregate to celebrate the festival in Kohima, the state capital.

This is essentially a music and dance festival. Since tribes remain scattered across in different villages it is not very easy to get a glimpse of such dance. The week-long festival unites the tribes and people enjoy the colourful performances, crafts, sports, food fairs, games and ceremonies. Traditional arts which include paintings, wood carvings, and sculptures are also on display.

Organized by the State Tourism and Art & Culture Departments, Hornbill Festival can be an ideal model to showcase a mélange of cultural displays under one roof.

ZIRO, ARUNACHAL PRADESH



THE pristine Ziro valley in Arunachal Pradesh is inhabited by the Apatani tribe whose spiritual beliefs and customs have enabled them to coexist harmoniously with nature for centuries.

The four-year-old event that sells itself as India's greatest outdoor music festival draws a few thousand people for a period of four days in September, and a host of international and local musical talent. Besides bringing local musical talent into the spotlight, Ziro

festival features acts from around the country that have become standard fixtures of a hit lineup.

While there are local homestays and a handful of lodges/ hotels available for tourists, the event organizers set up a camp site near the festival grounds for a more immersive experience and late-night cultural exchange.

Unlike in Odisha and Nagaland, the Ziro Festival of Music has developed into a top tourist attraction with private support from music lovers .

KENDULI BAUL FAIR, WEST BENGAL



THE annual fair held at Jaydev Kenduli celebrates the unique musical art of the Baul community—a group of mystic minstrels. Every year, during the month of January, Birbhum, the land of the red soil, comes alive with the lilting strains of Baul music. Jaydev Kenduli, about 42

km from Shantiniketan on the banks of the River Ajay, is believed to be the birthplace of the famous poet Jaydev. An annual fair is organized here on the occasion of Makar Sankranti from January 14 to 16.

The three-day fair provides a wonderful opportunity to savour the mu-

sic of these wandering minstrels who believe in the simplicity of love and life.

Thousands of people from all over the world flock to Jaydev Kenduli every year to witness a piece of ancient rural India being brought alive in front of their eyes.



BIHU, ASSAM

THE Bihus, the national festivals of Assam, comes in three hues based on the farming calendar. The Bohaag Bihu marks the New Year (Baisakh, the middle of April) at the advent of seeding time, the Kaati Bihu (in Kartik, the middle of October) marks the completion of sowing and transplanting of paddies, and the Maagh Bihu (Maagh, the

middle of January) marks the end of the harvesting period. Bohaag Bihu is also called the Rongaali Bihu or the Festival of Merriment, Maagh Bihu is also called Bhogaali Bihu or the Festival of Food, Kaati Bihu is also called Kongaali Bihu or the Festival of the Poor.

The folk songs associated with the Bohaag Bihu are called Bihugeets or

Bihu songs. The Bohaag Bihu lasts for several days during which “the young people in the village may be seen moving about in groups gaily dressed or forming circles” singing songs of love and romance.

It’s time tourism and hospitality business take appropriate steps to connect tourists to the splendours of Assam.



YAOSHANG, MANIPUR

Yaoshang is a festival celebrated in spring season starting from the full moon day of Lamda (March) for six whole days by the Manipuris. The premier festival combines Hindu and indigenous traditions of the region. It is identified with the festival of Holi and is considered the most important festival in Manipur. Thabal chongba, a Manipuri folk dance is performed during this festival. Like Holi, the Hindus of Manipur play with colours during this festival.

Thabal Chongba or dancing in the moonlight (literal meaning: moonlight jumping or leaping), is a popular Manipuri folk dance associated with the festival of Yaoshang in India. The literal meaning of Thabal is ‘moonlight’ and Chongba means ‘dance’, thus ‘dancing in the moonlight’.

So if you are planning a trip to Manipur in the month of February, don’t forget to be a part of the Yaoshang festival and carry home the memories you will cherish all your lives.



SARHUL, JHARKHAND

Sarhul is one of the grand festivals of tribals in Jharkhand. This festival is celebrated on Chaitra Shukla Tritiya, the third day of bright half in Chaitra month (February-March). Tribals celebrate 'Sarhul', a festival marking the beginning of New Year, by worshipping trees. This annual festival is celebrated during the spring season when trees and other elements of nature are worshipped. Sarhul literally means 'Worship of Sal'. Sarhul is celebrated for several days during which the

main traditional dance Sarhul dance is performed.

Tribes all across Jharkhand celebrate this festival with great fervour and joy. Tribal men, women and children dress up in colorful and ethnic attires and perform traditional dances. They also drink a locally made beer, called Hadia, brewed out of a concoction of rice, water and some tree leaves and then dance around the trees.

The State Tourism can take appropriate initiatives to attract tourists during Sarhul.



BIDESIA AND KAJARI, BIHAR

OVER thousands of years various traditional dance and music forms have evolved in Bihar. Most of the folk dances are religious in nature, in which, gods and goddesses are invoked through dance, performed to the rhythm of folk songs and music.

Bidesia is the most popular folk dance of Bihar people. The dance is said to have originated in the 19th century. It is a folk theatre form that is prevalent in the Bhojpuri-speaking regions of Bihar.

Kajari songs are basically sung during monsoon season. The dance form called Kajari Dance accompanies these songs. The dance starts in the month of 'Shravan' or the starting of the monsoon season every year and lasts for the entire duration of rain. These songs describe how wonderful earth has become due to rain and how happy and pleasant people are.

Tourism boards across the world have used festivals for generating opportunities to promote tourism. This recent trend is turning into a big advantage for the Indian tourism industry and the major stakeholders believe that with the correct marketing and positioning of the festival or event, this particular segment may prove to be the biggest tourist pull for India.

FEST DELIGHTS OF NORTH EAST INDIA

Festivals of North East India are colorful and full of cultural delight. And these festive occasions are the perfect time for tourists to get a glimpse of the rich cultural heritage of the region. Here are some of the top festivals of North East India that will simply amaze you. And, if you are planning a trip to visit North East India, you must make sure you get a chance to attend one of these festivals.

Assam

Brahmaputra Beach Festival – It's a cultural and traditional extravaganza of Assam's unique heritage with a tinge of modernity. The festival backed and supported by the ATDC is held every year during the month of January and February on the banks of mighty river Brahmaputra.

Bihu – Bihu is the festival of prosperity and harmony and widely accepted as the chief festival of Assam. Irrespective of caste, creed religion or faith, the festival is celebrated with much fanfare and jubilation by the Assamese people. Three types of Bihu festival is celebrated every year in the months of Bohaag (mid April), Maagh (mid January) and Kaati (mid of October). Rongali Bihu or Bohag Bihu celebrated during mid April is considered as the most important Bihu festival.

Mizoram

Anthurium – Anthurium is one of the major festivals of Mizoram and is celebrated every year during the month of September. It's a festival for promoting the tourism potential of the state. The main function of the festival is held at the Reiek tourist resort, located in an idyllic and scenic locale of Reiek village in Aizawl, the capital city. The place is located some 70 km from the main commercial hub of the Aizawl.

Tripura

Kharchi Puja – It is a sacred religious festival observed during the month of July or August on the eight day of the new moon. During this day, Kharchi puja is performed on fourteen deities that are regarded as the dynasty deities of the Tripuri. The word Kharchi is a Tripuri word which closely means cleansing and hence Kharchi puja is observed to cleanse the people or the kingdom from sins or evils.

Sikkim

Guru Rimpoche's Trungkar Tshechu – On the tenth day of the six month of Tibetan calendar, the birth anniversary of Guru Padmasambva, also known by the name as Guru Rimpoche, is observed in Sikkim. Guru Padmasambva introduced Buddhism for the first time in Sikkim and throughout the Himalayan region during the 8th century.

Arunachal Pradesh

Namdapha Eco-Cultural Festival – Namdapha Eco-Cultural festival is a cultural fair of the various ethnic people of Miao sub-division of Arunachal Pradesh is held every year since 2004.

Nagaland

Hornbill Festival – Hornbill festival is celebrated on the first week of December every year. The festival is organized by the Nagaland government to showcase the rich vibrant cultural heritage of various ethnic groups of Nagaland. The main events of the festival are held at Naga Heritage village, located in Kisama which is about 12 km from the state capital Kohima.

Manipur

Sangai Festival – Sangai festival is the tourism festival of Manipur, designed and organized by the state government. The festival showcases the unique cultural and traditional heritage of the people the state.

Meghalaya

Wangala Festival – Wangala Festival of Meghalaya which is also known as the "100 Drum Wangala Festival" is an enchanting winter festival. Practiced traditionally by the Garos, it is the annual harvest festival of Meghalaya and is celebrated in the honor of Misi Saljong, The Great Giver. Wangala Festival signifies the beginning of winter and also marks the end of labor in fields ushering in a period of relaxation and merry making.

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I wish all five-star hotels focus a bit more on regional cuisines

Madhumita Mohanta, The Lalit Great Eastern's executive chef, has created a unique 'Regional Speciality' in the menu card that reflects cosmopolitan nature of Kolkata cuisine



Well, first things first. When did you start out in hospitality? Where did you work before you joined The Lalit Great Eastern, Kolkata?

I started out in 1998 after having passed out from IAM, Kolkata. First I joined The Park Hotel, Kolkata. Worked there for about four years and went overseas. Then came back to India in 2010 and was back in Kolkata last year as I joined this hotel.

How did you feel in Kolkata after 16 long years? What are the changes you observed in the hospitality sector after over a decade and half?

A number of new hotels, including

quite a few luxury hotels, have come up in the city in the past 16 years. I can also find a large number of fine dining restaurants. Some Mughlai restaurants have expanded their footprints with a number of new outlets across the city and beyond. But more surprising is the fact that we have so many restaurants specialising in Bengali cuisine. Even five star hotels have at least a page dedicated to Bengali cuisine. When I left the city we had just Suruchi at Elliott Road run by a group of women (All Bengal Women's Union) and Aaheli at Peerless Inn. But now you have about a dozen fine dining restaurants that serve Bengali food exclusively. This is such a welcome change as I find the young gen-

eration appreciating their local cuisine. They are feeling proud of their culinary tradition.

Probably this is kind of a yearning for our lost cuisine. Don't you think the younger people are turning revivalist?

Yes. As women are stepping out of their home to build career or earn the daily bread they don't have time to cook traditional dishes which takes time and it's cumbersome. In good old days in the kitchen of a joint family with so many women in the household it was not a problem. But tell me when did you last enjoy dumurer dalna (curry of green raw figs) or bok phul bhaja (agati blossom fritters)? How many

A jazz band consisting of three men in black tuxedos is performing in a hallway. From left to right, they are playing a flute, a double bass, and a saxophone. A large, ornate chandelier hangs from the ceiling. In the foreground, a woman is lying in a white bathtub, wearing a highly decorative, jeweled headdress. The scene is lit with warm, golden light.

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people have even heard of pui metuli chorchori (a mixed vegetable dish with tender-crisp buds of pui Malabar spinach)? There are so many types of shaak (leafy greens) and cuisines based on them. As a society changes the eating habits change and some cuisines go on the verge of extinction. You need to either preserve it or revamp the endangered cuisines because they represent a culture. Each of these dishes were developed through centuries of trial and error in the traditional kitchen. They are so full of nutrition and economical too! It's good that the young people are appreciating this. And it's a duty of chefs like us to offer tribute to these endangered cuisine. I wish all five-star hotels focus a bit more on regional cuisines.

Do you serve any of these at The Lalit Great Eastern Hotel?

Yes. We do try out some of these in our Ajker Niramish (Day's Special Vegetarian Delicacy) section of our menu. Unlike most other five star hotels you'll see four pages of our menu card dedicated to 'Regional Speciality'. Among Bengali delicacies you'll find Sorshe Die Palong Phoolkopi (cauliflower and spinach simmered in mustard gravy) and Peyaj Postor Bora (Pan fried poppy seed and onion patty). In the non-vegetarian side you'll find Gondhoraj Mangsher Chop (Crumb fried lamb croquettes scented with gondhoraj lime), Borishali Chigri (Prwan cooked in the style of Borishal in erstwhile East Bengal) and Posto Murgui (Poppy seed paste and marinated chicken laced with mustard oil). You'll get some lost cuisines from both sides of Bengal. Not just Bengali delicacy, you'll also find Anglo Indian, Chinese (Tangra style) and Nizami/Mughlai dishes. This represents quintessential Calcutta in its cosmopolitan hues.

You mean Anglo Indian, Calcutta style? And biryani with potatoes and eggs?

Exactly. These are signatures of

Calcutta in these dishes. You'll find Anglo Indian food in Bangalore, Chennai, Mumbai and so on. But Calcutta's Anglo Indian food has its own imprints. The Railway Mutton Curry comes with eggs and potatoes. Mutton Istew (not stew) and Mixed Grill London House Steak also has got the Calcutta touch. And in case of Nizami/Mughlai also you'll have a regional variant. Biryani here is lot more subtle, dry and light unlike its Hyderabadi or Lucknowi version. Similarly, Chinese Tangra style involves a lot of saute and frying. You won't find the typical Chilly Chicken or Manchurian Chicken in traditional Chinese cooking.

It seems a lot of research has gone into the Menu Card, especially the part that deals with Regional Speciality?

Yes. We worked hard to showcase culture and history of the city. We looked into historical recipes and also spoke to the chefs of many restaurants across the city. We have exchanged notes even with many legendary street food makers, such as, Chittoda of Dacre's Lane. The mutton or chicken stew they make is really wonderful. It's economical too! However, when we do it we make it more scientifically. As a result you'll find it consistent and same all the time.





RECIPE: REGIONAL SPECIALITY

DOI MAACH INGREDIENTS

4-6 large pieces of rui or any white-flesh fish
oil for frying fish
2-3 tbsp. - Ghee
Bay Leaves
1 onion, halved and minced
2 Onions ground to a paste
1/2 tsp - Turmeric paste
1 tbsp. - Ginger paste
1/8 tsp - Garlic paste
1/2 cup Curd blended with one cup of water
salt to taste
1-2 tsp - Sugar
6-8 green chillies,
slit a few raisins,
soaked in water
Garam Masala

METHOD

Fry the fish in hot oil until just brown. Keep aside after draining well. In a pan (karai), heat ghee and add the bay leaves and garam masala. Stir fry for a couple of mins. Then add sliced onion. Fry stirring from time to time until onions turn brown but are still soft.

Add the onion paste and all the other masala pastes. Stir and fry till masala changes colour.

Sprinkle with a little water as you fry masala. Blending the curd well with water, pour into karahi through a sieve. Simmer gently.

Add salt, sugar and green chillies. Simmer, stirring for 5 mins.

Add the fried fish, placing in one layer in the karahi. Spoon gravy over fish. Sprinkle with raisins.

Simmer over a very gentle fire shaking karai from time to time until fish is quite cooked, gravy has thickened and oil risen to the surface.

Note:

Heat should be carefully controlled when cooking the fish. If cooked over high heat, the gravy will curdle.

It is also difficult to stir the pan without breaking the fish during the final stages of cooking.

**SOME
PORTALS
MANIPULATE
CUSTOMER
REVIEWS
OF HOTELS
UNFAIRLY**



Mr Tejinder Singh Walia ■

MR TEJINDER SINGH WALIA, former President of FHRAI, expects more tourist arrivals in eastern India in 2016

How has been the year 2015 for the hotel industry in the eastern region of India? And for HRAEI?

The year has neither been good nor bad for the hotel industry in the east as well as whole of India. But compared to last year (2014) the business is surely looking up.

This year the hospitality industry in the eastern region was in the limelight, courtesy the Golden Jubilee Convention of the Food Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI). For us it was a big achievement for several reasons. I had been the President of FHRAI when this happened in September (now a Vice President). First, it was not very easy to convince members of other regions to hold this important event in a tier 2 city like Bhubaneswar. Before the event we presented our case in an investor's meet in New Delhi. We were able to make them aware of the tremendous potential of eastern India, especially the North East, in tourism and hospitality. After the presentation 10 investors were ready to sign MoUs for new ventures in Odisha. Out of them five of them visited the convention in Bhubaneswar, but the state government was not ready for this. However, we hope all these projects will happen in the long run. Simply put, for hoteliers in eastern India it's been a great achievement. We were able to change the perception on eastern India. The event was a big success as it was held so smoothly, despite the fact that Bhubaneswar is not a Metro city.

At HRAEI we have been able to increase the number of members substantially. We have introduced a drive to have more members and as a result in the last couple of years we have done exceedingly well in this front.

There's a negative perception on east, especially the North East among many people.

Yes. There's a negative image in the mind. They are scared of safety, security and insurgency. But not all places have these problems. Shillong, Itanagar, Agartala, Guwahati and Silchar are quite peaceful places. Well, connectivity and availability of enough rooms is surely a problem in some places, but in Shillong, Guwahati and Kaziranga these are not a problem at all. To solve the connectivity issue the central government is taking steps as the Prime Minister has shown active interest to develop the area. Unfortunately all new schemes under the ambitious North East Industrial and Investment Promotion Policy (NEIPP), 2007 was abruptly stopped in 2014 though it was supposed to run till 2017. NEIPP was introduced to make the region competitive with other parts of the country. Some of the key features of the policy was waiver of excise duty and income tax exemption on finished products in North East. Not just the scheme was stopped, HRAEI members haven't got benefits due to them. As an FHRAI President (until September 30) I have sent letters and proposals to reinstate NEIPP and help them get the due benefits.

As you mentioned we do not enough rooms for tourists in the North East. But I think the number of rooms available for tourists are too few in the entire country.

Right. In cities like New York, Bangkok and Singapore you've over 1,25,000 rooms. But such a big country like India has only 1,50,000

rooms. East has the least number of rooms. By 2020 the country must have at least 1,80,000 rooms to accommodate the rising number of foreign tourists in India. Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) rose by 7 per cent in 2014. It has further gone up in 2015, as over 5 lakhs of footfalls were recorded by May 2015. In 2016 we are expecting over 8 lakhs FTAs. To welcome these tourists we'll need more rooms, especially in eastern India. Revival of policies like NEIPP will help us take this forward.

Many young travellers choose a hotel based on reviews in the social media. Are hoteliers ready for this new technology trend?

Technology, especially those based on Internet, is slowly becoming an important aspect in the hospitality business. This is largely a positive trend, but we also have come across a negative aspect. There are some portals that manipulate reviews of hotels and restaurants unfairly. Some are upgraded while others downgraded based on sham reviews. At the Bhubaneswar FHRAI meet some of our members had arguments with the portal owners over this issue. This issues need to be fixed. The internet is surely revolutionising the hospitality, there's no doubt about it. Now one can book a room so easily through a mobile application, complete the check-in formalities quickly and step into a room within minutes. You can also choose a room on your own without much hassles. Technology will bring about more changes. For instance, you can have lights that change based on your mood. You can enjoy movies or music as per your taste.

THE PERFECT MATCH

A huge talent pool of skillful youth and an unexplored natural beauty in the Northeast India can make the region a hotspot for the hospitality Industry



► Many youths from Northeast are fluent in English

SKILLS

NORTHEAST India is considered to be one of the most favoured tourist spots in India by Globetrotters and Discovery Network's Travel & Living channel. People are attracted to the region by the richness of its culture and the sheer variety of its festivities, dress, cuisines and ethnicities.

The Barail and the Patkai ranges, and the eastern Himalayas offer adventure activities like rafting, trekking and mountaineering.

Shillong and Cherrapunji in Meghalaya are frequented by tourists because of their pleasant climate and picturesque landscape. Assam has developed many new tourism spots in areas like Tezpur, Kaziranga, Shonapur and Karbi Anglong. Jatinga in North Cachar hills with its romantic setting amidst the Barail ranges and rich variety of migratory birds becomes a destination for ornithologists around the world. Haflong and Diphu, the two hill towns of Assam, join the list of hill stations with their picturesque landscape, trekking routes and lodging facilities. The states of Nagaland and Manipur also attract tourists for their culture, landscape and world-class resorts. Arunachal Pradesh is considered the queen of

the Northeast because of its starkly beautiful Himalayan landscapes and cultural variety.

Besides tourists from other parts of India and the world, tourists from south east Asian countries also flock to the region. The Inner Line Regulation of 1873 and the Restricted Area Permit (RAP) is revoked by the central government to facilitate tourism in the Northeast. The Guwahati airport is a world class international airport and the infrastructure of other regional airports in Imphal and Dimapur is good. Budget airfares are also available with private airlines like Indigo, Spice, Jet Airways etc. competing to attract travellers.

Scopes for hotel industry

To encourage tourism the state governments have undertaken reforms and taken steps to develop eco-tourism projects in the area. But still, the region has a huge untapped potential. A well-developed tourism industry can act as a key revenue generator in the area. Tourism infrastructures like hotels and resorts with involvement of the local people—especially the youth— can go a long way in solving the teething problems in the area. The infrastructure required by tourism—



► Youths in the region have good soft skills

transport, communications, water supply and health services—also benefits local communities and can be used for other activities like speeding disaster relief, providing for the local population and fuelling the overall development of the region.

Catalyst to peace

The Northeast India is plagued by multiple problems, from poverty to insurgency and ethnic violence, which have rendered it poorer and less connected than the rest of the country. These realities, have thus far, prevented the region from realising its full tourism potential.

Tourism and hospitality industry can play a catalyst to peace, harmony and economic development by engaging the youth in the area. Since the level of literacy and education is

The youth from Northeast India have huge demand in the hospitality industry for their good school education, fluency in English and superior physical fitness

higher in the the region compared to the rest of India, the huge number of unemployed youth makes it easier for insurgent groups to get them recruited for anti-national activities.

According to the 2011 census the youth dominated the population. With proper training and employment, this talent pool can be harnessed as a workforce for nation building. Interestingly, a majority of the workers in the service and hospitality industry in New Delhi, Pune, Bangalore or Hyderabad, consists of youth from the Northeast.

Since the majority of the youth are born and brought up in hilly tracts they are physically fit and hardworking from childhood. They also have a penchant for games and sports. The ability to communicate fluently in English—due to the sheer presence



► The young in Northeast are physically fit

of a large number of English medium schools—and a superior soft skills picked up in course of education make them ideal candidates for the hospitality industry.

Hospitality training for youth

To help train the youth a number of private training institutes have opened centres in these areas. Kolkata-based Orion Edutech, a National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) partner company having trained over 14000 candidates in hospitality and tourism, has a strong focus on developing employable skills among the youth in the Northeast. Says Manish Agarwal, the CEO of the company, “The manpower in these states are very good for the hospitality sector. In Northeast we have trained 7000 candidates in the last seven years for tourism and hospitality.” affirms Agarwal.

The training in hospitality includes front office, housekeeping, guest relations, food production, F&B services, etc. The courses vary from two months to a year. The minimum qualification is 10th pass. However, for housekeeping and front office drop outs from 10th class are also inducted. Though there is a student pay model, about 70 per cent of the courses are subsidised under various government schemes. “The different state government schemes, for instance, in Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal and Manipur provide fees to us, along with many central government schemes,” mentions Agarwal. “There are two ways of imparting training – the training centres in different Northeast locations; also training centres in Guwahati, Kolkata with residential facilities where students mobilised from distant Nagaland and Arunachal and are trained,” informs Agarwal.

Placements galore

These candidates are placed with partner hotels and travel companies



► **The region has a wide diversity in cuisine**

in Bengaluru, Delhi, Pune, Hyderabad, and other cities. “We have an industry partner called Leonia Resort in Hyderabad. We have also partnered with major hotels like Swissotel, The Park Group, JW Marriott where our students are working,” states Agarwal, adding that, the company has a placement office in Dubai for hospitality students. These students are trained in India and given international placements in the Middle East.

Agarwal mentions that in the hospitality sector more than 90 per cent candidates get jobs. Acknowledging that there is a huge demand for North east candidates across hotels in India, he says, “The reasons why these can-

didates join the hospitality industry is the growth opportunities, accommodation facility and food. If a candidate from the Northeast enters the IT sector, he/she has to take care of his own lodging, which a hotel company provides if he was working for it. Also, hotels provide a secure environment for female candidates. It is easier for them to adjust in this sector.”

“Our major focus has always been placements, so they do on-the-job training and post the completion of the course they get placement,” states Agarwal, adding that he has big plans for the hospitality and travel sector. “Six million people are required by the industry. Out of two million candi-

dates as many as 35 to 40 per cent of the people we are going to train will be from the hospitality sector,” he adds.

The company also promotes self-employment, for instance women candidates who have done food production have started their own bakery. “We also try to encourage married women to start food home delivery system so that they can earn without having to leave their home,” remarks Agarwal.

Training the trainers

There is also a train the trainer programme. About 10 to 15 per cent of the students are trained further and inducted as trainers within the com-

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► **Radisson Blu, Guwahati, is Northeast's premier new hotel**

pany. There are 700 people directly employed by Orion Edutech, apart from those working with franchisees.

InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG), one of the world's leading hotel companies, and IL&FS Skills, one of India's largest skills development organisations, have launched a IHG Academy branded training centre under their partnership in Kalimpong, West Bengal. The first branded training centre was launched in New Delhi last year.

The Kalimpong centre is set to be one of the largest talent development centres under the IHG Academy programme, attracting young talent from

the rural areas of Northeast India.

IHG Academy is a pioneering global collaboration between IHG and local education and community providers which aims to provide local people with skills development and employment opportunities at more than 4,900 IHG hotels across the globe. There are now over 900 IHG Academy programmes across more than 60 countries globally, and 25 IHG Academy programmes across India.

Local talent pool

Shantha de Silva, Head of South West Asia, IHG said, "As one of the largest hotel companies in the world, we are

in a great position to help train local talent and increase the proportion of employable workforce for the hospitality industry. We do this through IHG Academy which is a core pillar of our Corporate Responsibility strategy. Over the next 12 months our target under our IHG Academy partnership with IL&FS is to train 100 students across the country. With this rebranded centre in Kalimpong we are confident of drawing more young local people from Northeast India to undergo our high standards of hospitality training and we are delighted to be able to do our part in skilling local talent to support the growing tourism industry in India."

IHG currently has 22 hotels open across four brands in India: InterContinental, Crowne Plaza, Holiday Inn and Holiday Inn Express. A further 47 hotels are due to open in the next three to five years.

Hospitality schools

NIPS School of Hotel Management, Kolkata, a leading hospitality education institute has training centres in the East Khasi area of Meghalaya. The institute also offers short term training course to youths from the Northeast in their inhouse residential facilities in Kolkata.

With more such skill development programmes the youth in this region can certainly get jobs in the growing hospitality sector across India. With improved tourism infrastructure in the region along with the development more premium and budget hotels, the local youth can be employed close to their home.

Last year Radisson Blue was the first 5 star hotel to have forayed in Guwahati and the Northeast. If you visit the city, the hub of the region, you won't miss colossal structures of a number of upcoming 5 star and 4 star hotels. In days to come, these properties will be managed by the talented youths trained to welcome you.



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