

Why India is entering its strongest hospitality cycle ever: Puneet Chhatwal

Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) Managing Director & CEO Puneet Chhatwal believes Indian hospitality has entered a defining phase — one that will reshape the industry's scale, speed and structural evolution over the next five years.

According to Chhatwal, the foundations laid over the past decade — policy reforms, infrastructure expansion, rising domestic travel and stronger branded supply — have created the conditions for sustained, high-growth momentum.

“India's hospitality sector has fundamentally shifted. The last decade created the conditions for what we are now witnessing: sustained high demand, faster new supply addition, infra-led emerging destinations, and evolving hospitality formats and business models. We are in an inflection phase where the sector is redefining what's possible.”

Infrastructure as the Growth Catalyst

Chhatwal underscores India's broader macroeconomic trajectory as central to hospitality's expansion. With India poised to remain among the world's fastest-growing major economies — and on track to become the third-largest global economy — travel demand is expected to accelerate in parallel.

He points to critical aviation infrastructure as a powerful enabler. New airport openings, including:

- Noida International Airport (Jewar Airport, NCR)
- Navi Mumbai International Airport

along with capacity expansions in Bengaluru, Goa and Hyderabad are strengthening connectivity across gateway markets and unlocking new corridors of travel-led development.

The Road to 2030: A Different Growth Curve

Chhatwal believes the next five years will compress growth cycles in an unprecedented manner.

India's hospitality market, still underpenetrated relative to global benchmarks, is projected to add 100,000 additional branded hotel rooms, taking total branded inventory to 300,000 rooms — a milestone expected to be achieved in half the time it took to develop the first 100,000 rooms.

Importantly, this growth will not be confined to metros. The surge is expected across:

- Luxury to economy segments
- Tier-1 gateway cities
- High-potential tier-2 and tier-3 destinations

Emerging regional markets are increasingly attracting institutional capital and traveller demand alike, accelerating decentralised growth.

Demand Is Structural, Not Cyclical

Chhatwal notes a permanent behavioural shift: travel is no longer viewed as discretionary spending but as a core lifestyle priority. This sustained consumption momentum provides a durable demand base for the industry.

However, he cautions that realising India's full potential will require structural alignment:

- Granting infrastructure and industry status across states
- Stronger global marketing of India as a destination
- Talent pipeline development
- Technology integration into core hotel operations
- A sustainability-first development mindset

“A concerted public–private partnership is necessary to unlock the full potential of India’s Travel & Tourism sector — making it a significant contributor to the country’s GDP growth and employment generation.”

At the Inflection Point

Chhatwal’s outlook frames Indian hospitality not as a cyclical recovery story, but as a structural transformation narrative.

If the past decade built the runway, the road to 2030 may well define India’s arrival as a globally significant hospitality powerhouse — driven by infrastructure, scale acceleration, regional dispersion and sustainability-led growth.