

# HRAWI *Now*

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*Dear members,*

**A**s we draw the curtain on HRAWI's landmark 20<sup>th</sup> Regional Convention, held in October 2025 at the Taj Lands End, Mumbai, I am filled with pride and gratitude. This Platinum Jubilee edition of the Convention was not just an event; it was a celebration of our 75-year journey, a reaffirmation of our legacy and a powerful reflection on the future we are shaping together.

Aligned with the Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision of 'Viksit Bharat@2047', the hospitality and tourism sector has been identified as a key pillar of national growth. As a part of this vision, 'Viksit Maharashtra@2047' highlights the industry's transformative role in shaping a future-ready economy. Over the two days, industry leaders, policymakers, visionaries, and entrepreneurs came together to engage in meaningful dialogue on the opportunities and challenges facing hospitality and tourism in India. The discussions and business sessions were dynamic and forward-looking, covering critical themes

including the role of AI in hospitality, technology adoption, GST reforms, India's culinary heritage, inclusivity, and infrastructure development.

We were honoured to have distinguished dignitaries including **Dr Shashi Tharoor**, Member of Parliament, **Mohamed Farouk**, Regional Director (Western & Central Region), India Tourism Mumbai, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India; **Neelesh Gatne**, Managing Director, MTDC; **Surendra Kumar Jaiswal**, President, FHRAI; along with a distinguished group of Past Presidents and industry stalwarts who added immense depth to the proceedings. We extend our heartfelt gratitude for their invaluable presence, support, and encouragement. Their perspectives underscored the vital role of the hospitality industry in advancing employment, entrepreneurship, and India's image as a global tourism hub.

We were privileged to have Maharashtra Tourism as the State Partner for this milestone event. The collaboration added immense strength and credibility to the Convention. We also

express our appreciation to all sponsors whose partnership ensured the grand success of this Platinum Jubilee celebration.

One of the most special moments of the Convention was the felicitation of all past Presidents of HRAWI, including legends who have shaped the very foundation of our Association. Renowned actor **Boman Irani** presented the honours, making the evening inspiring. Lifetime Achievement Awards were conferred upon our President of Honour — Dr Ajit B. Kerkar, and Member of Honour — Vivek Nair, whose contributions to Indian hospitality remain monumental.

As we look ahead, I invite all members to carry forward the energy, ideas, and optimism ignited at the Convention. Let us continue to uphold our values of excellence and innovation, while preparing our teams and businesses for the next chapter of Indian hospitality. Together, we will ensure that HRAWI not only celebrates its illustrious past but also continues to lead from the front as a true champion of India's hospitality industry.

*Warm regards,*

**JIMMY SHAW**, President, HRAWI





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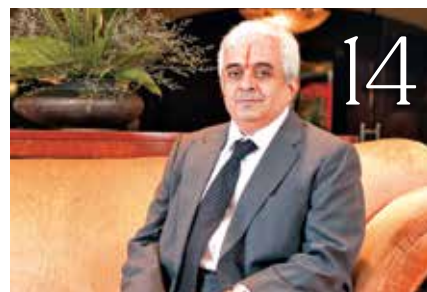
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## HRAWI recognises legacy leaders

HRAWI felicitates its former Presidents, appreciating their contributions and the foundational role they played in strengthening the association's legacy.

**Secretary General**  
Trupti Pawar

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## A new dawn for Western India's hospitality

The 20<sup>th</sup> HRAWI Convention marked 75 years of hospitality excellence, uniting leaders to address sector's challenges across Western India.



HRAWI Bureau

**W**ith the aim to reignite dialogue on tourism and hospitality in the Western region, Hotel & Restaurant Association Western India (HRAWI) organised its 20th Regional Convention in partnership with Maharashtra Tourism in Mumbai recently, where it welcomed an illustrious gathering of dignitaries.

The event was graced by **Dr Shashi Tharoor**, Member of

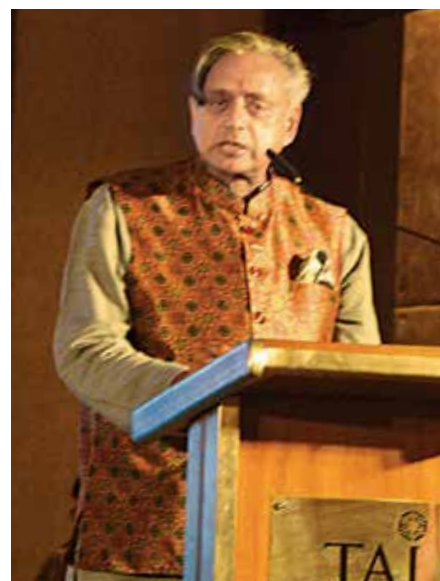
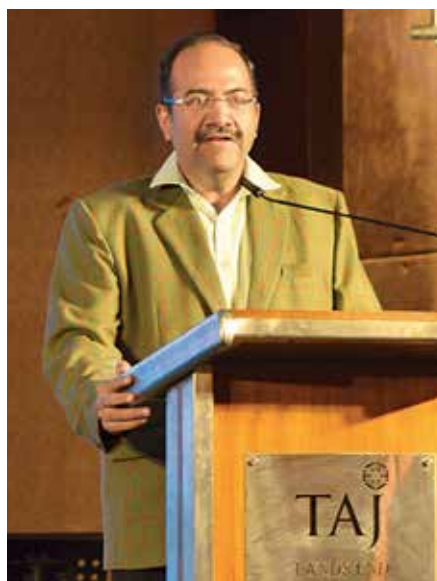
This convention was not just a celebration of HRAWI's 75-year legacy but also a reaffirmation of its commitment to shaping the future of Indian hospitality

Parliament, and Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, along with other luminaries including

**Mohamed Farouk**, Regional Director (Western & Central Region), India Tourism Mumbai, Ministry of Tourism; **Neelesh Gatne**, Managing Director, Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC); **Surendra Kumar Jaiswal**, President, FHRAI; and **DS Advani**, Convention Chairman, HRAWI.

At this prestigious occasion, **Jimmy Shaw**, President, HRAWI, underscored the convention's significance for the hospitality sector. "This milestone convention is not just a celebration of HRAWI's 75-year legacy but





also a reaffirmation of our commitment to shaping the future of Indian hospitality. From being the country's first hospitality association to growing into one of its strongest industry voices, our journey has been defined by resilience, innovation, and unity."

### A welcoming India

Captivating the audience with his intriguing opinions on the sector, Tharoor positioned tourism and hospitality as "mirrors of a nation's soul". Underscoring India's Viksit Bharat@2047 vision, he called for decisive movement on the three I's as foundational pillars: Image, Infrastructure, and Immigration.

"For India to achieve its Viksit Bharat@2047 ambition, we must urgently address these three pillars, which includes building our Image by ensuring safety and dispelling outdated perceptions, our Infrastructure by building not just more hotels but more 'kinds of hotels' to meet the massive room shortfall, and our Immigration by ensuring our borders are as welcoming as our hotel lobbies. We must move from promoting one 'Incredible India' to celebrating many 'Incredible Indias', each offering a unique story," he said.

Adding to Tharoor's opinion, Farouk presented a forward-looking outlook and elaborated on the sector's national significance and future priorities. "As we mark the

Contributing over 5 per cent to the GDP, hospitality is the critical engine that translates India's vast tourism potential into tangible growth

dual milestones of HRAWT's Platinum Jubilee and the inauguration of the Navi Mumbai International Airport, it is clear that the hospitality sector is a central pillar of India's economic future. Contributing over 5 per cent to our GDP and sustaining millions of livelihoods, this industry is the critical engine that translates our nation's vast tourism potential into tangible growth and global brand value for 'Incredible India'. In alignment with the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047, the Ministry of Tourism is committed to developing 50 benchmark destinations, implementing a robust Destination Management framework and actively facilitating investments in hotels and infrastructure to position India as a leading global tourism destination."

Speaking about how Maharashtra has been taking initiatives to drive this growth in the state, Neelesh Gatne, Managing Director, MTDC, revealed, "Maharashtra is unveiling ground-breaking initiatives to transform its tourism landscape.

With the recent UNESCO heritage tag for the Maratha Military Landscapes, we invite you to partner with us in developing this immense potential. Furthermore, we are pioneering underwater tourism by scuttling the ex-Navy ship INS Guldar off the Sindhudurg coast, introducing a novel submarine experience. To accelerate this growth, MTDC has finalised a privatisation policy for its 157 land parcels and will be floating tenders within the next two months."

### Building the ecosystem

Adding on to the above insights, Jaiswal, said, "FHRAI's focus this year is on building a stronger, more resilient hospitality ecosystem through FHRAI IHM-led programmes and a new independent research centre dedicated to driving industry insights and advocacy. We have already begun executing a clear action plan, including measures to support members facing operational challenges in the industry and to engage with policymakers on critical issues like GST. In our recent meeting with the Union Tourism Minister, we raised concerns about GST on hotel tariffs and have received encouraging signals regarding Input Tax Credit. Going forward, FHRAI will continue working closely with relevant departments and ministries to create a more enabling environment for our sector's growth." ♦♦









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# A fairer playing field for hospitality businesses

**Jimmy Shaw**, makes an appeal for policy parity, the extension of GST reforms to the hotel sector, and a collaborative approach.



Hazel Jain

**A**t the 20<sup>th</sup> HRAWI Regional Convention, **Jimmy Shaw**, President, HRAWI, spoke about the legacy, continuity, and the future of the 75-year-old association. Touching upon urgent issues, he brought up the recent development of the state government's decision to allow hospitality businesses to remain open 24x7, calling it a bold and progressive step. But other restrictions still in place give stakeholders pause. "Bars and alcohol service are still under the old timing restrictions, whereas every other business can operate all-round the clock. It is my request that we should be permitted to at least

"Bars and alcohol service are still under the old timing restrictions, whereas every other business can operate round the clock."

have alcohol service in hotels and malls where robust security detail is already in place. Additionally, if these are genuine security concerns, once proven safe, please extend it to the rest of the standalone restaurants. This will help offset the sharp rise in excise license fees, taxes, and duties recently imposed on us. It

is also my request that this policy be extended beyond the city of Mumbai to other cities and states because our future growth lies in tier II and III towns, which is essential to achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047," Shaw said earnestly.

Thanking the Government of Maharashtra for introducing a forward-looking tourism policy in July 2024, Shaw added that its implementation has been complex and slow. "Any policy's true success lies in crystal clarity along with ease and speed of execution. We urge simplification of the benefits to all stakeholders. Another request is that one must be willing to look outside one's own state to adopt the best practices and implement what is fuelling growth and success elsewhere," he explained.



“Being singled out and denied the ITC, burdening over 90 per cent of our business to bear GST as a direct cost of doing business is simply unthinkable.”



**JIMMY SHAW**  
President  
HRAWI

### Revised GST

Turning to the burning issue of GST, Shaw said that the reform to eliminate the 12 per cent slab and bring down GST practically on all goods and services to the 5 per cent slab, did not extend to the hospitality sector.

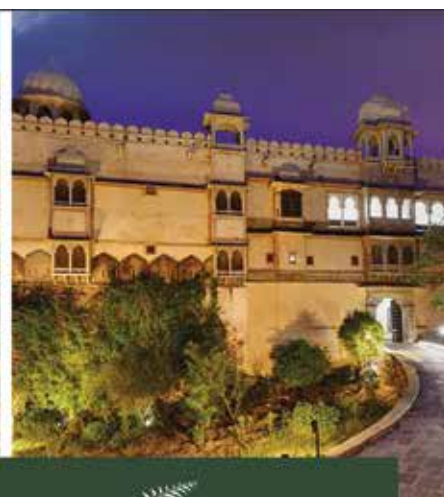
“Being singled out and denied the Input Tax Credit (ITC), burdening over 90 per cent of our business houses to bear the GST as a direct cost of doing business on virtually all our revenue, is simply unthinkable. Linking unrelated

services like food and beverage to accommodation, using outdated 2017 room rates to define luxury in the year 2025 just so that dual GST rates can be applied to our services, refusing ITC, all go against the basic tenets of indirect taxation while singling us out for this unfair treatment. We appeal for fairness and uniformity, so that our industry — that was denied any relief during the pandemic while

every other industry enjoyed a relief package — which continues to bear the highest compliance costs, can also now thrive,” he said.

While there has been progress in terms of being granting industry status since 1999, Shaw elaborated that even after 25 years, the real benefits remain elusive. “In the past we were not consulted. We are now invited for consultations, which we appreciate, but often it is at short notice making true participation impossible. We request that consultations happen from an early stage of planning to be meaningful. We are sure that the hospitality industry will keep the tourism flag flying higher than ever before. We share the same goal to achieve a Viksit Bharat much before the year 2047,” he affirmed.

Assuring the audience, Shaw concluded, “Work with us, trust us, and we will ensure that every decision benefits the consumer, our workforce, the industry, and the government.” ♦♦



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# Complacency an unacceptable risk

While Western India has a strong position in chain-affiliated hotel sector, **Vijay Thacker**, MD, Horwath HTL, India, warns against complacency.



Hazel Jain

From the grandeur of heritage hotels to the vibrancy of modern experiences, India's hospitality story in the Western region has been one of constant evolution. At the 20<sup>th</sup> HRAWI Regional Convention, the session '75 Years of Indian Hospitality – The Evolution' unfolded like a rich tapestry of insights and reflections. Conducted by **Vijay Thacker**, Managing Director, Horwath HTL, India, the discussion focused on the region's immense untapped promise as a landscape brimming with opportunity, and a renewed spirit to redefine the country's tourism and hospitality future.

Focusing on chain-affiliated hotels, Thacker said, "We have 32 per cent of the supply share in Western India, which includes Chhattisgarh. We have one-third of the total demand in the country for chain-affiliated hotel rooms and therefore we are in a much better wicket than some other regions. There are 10 key markets in India, where big players have got more than 5,000 hotel rooms in the chain-affiliated space. These markets are in the six metro cities and Goa, Pune, Ahmedabad, and Jaipur. Four of these are under HRAWI. In Western India, we have four of the 10 key markets of India. Additionally, the two largest hotels in the country are in Mumbai – Aurika by Lemon Tree Hotels and the Grand Hyatt."

Coming to large-format hotels, three of the four hotels in India with more than 600 rooms are in the Western region, Thacker shared. "We have a one-third of the share

of hotels with 500–600 rooms. If you look at hotels between 400–500 rooms, we have six out of the 16 hotels," concluding that the region has some of the best hotels. He outlined some concerns, saying, "We also have a very heavy reliance on the four key markets of Mumbai, Goa, Pune, and Ahmedabad. These four markets are a substantial source of

"We have 32 per cent of the supply share in Western India, which includes Chhattisgarh. We have one-third of the total demand in the country."

supply, demand, and revenue. If this region has to continue to flourish, it is necessary that the business spreads, demand spreads, revenue spreads, and attitude spreads among the other markets," he added.

## Bring in segment variation

In multiple markets, hotels in the west are focused on just one or two segments of demand. "We do not have a range of demand. The service sector is not really growing outside of Mumbai, Pune, and Indore maybe. Ahmedabad is unable to grow the services sector. The rest of Gujarat is unable to grow the services sector. They are hamstrung by prohibition. There is a lot of focus on weddings but not MICE. Moreover, in large parts of the west, there is a rate sensitivity and that is a question of attitude again," Thacker observed.





The country has shown that post-COVID, there is a willingness to pay more. “Rates have moved up in several markets. I wish that several tier II and III markets in Western India would embrace that too. Let us be critical of ourselves

in terms of service quality too. There are markets where there is an unacceptable element of *chalta hai* attitude. The service really needs to grow — keep in tune with the expectations of the market,” Thacker added. In his concluding

remarks, he laid emphasis on improving efficiencies, “Do not expect profitability to continue only on an upward curve, you need to watch your efficiencies. To achieve profitability, efficiency is an aspect that is highly underappreciated.” ♦♦

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# Mixed-use models to catalyse growth

Experts believe that even though mixed-use development offers plenty of opportunities, it is not devoid of risks in the hospitality landscape.



Hazel Jain

At the 20<sup>th</sup> HRAWI Regional Convention, the panel on 'Mixed-Use Development: Hospitality's New Frontier' explored how blending spaces can redefine value creation and growth across the hospitality landscape. Moderated by **Vijay Thacker**, Managing Director, Horwath HTL India, the session had **Suma Venkatesh**, Executive Vice President, IHCL; **Raghu Sapra**, Head of Hospitality, Embassy REIT; and **Sanjay Sethi**, CEO & Managing Director, Chalet Hotels, as speakers.

Chalet approaches mixed-use at a corporate scale across commercial and residential spaces, independent

Building complimentary assets and office spaces generates more room night demand for hotels and enhances the returns for the business

of hotels. "Our DNA lies in real estate," said Sethi. "Chalet sits on a lot of land parcels. For us, it was about how we can enhance the returns for the business. So, we decided to build complimentary assets. Office spaces tend to generate room night demand for hotels. If you are in the same

compound, it is captive enough. In Hyderabad, the group has 14 million sq ft office space where we have two hotels. Today, that generates a demand of about 500 rooms a day. Of that, about 30 per cent comes to our hotels. In fact, additional demand of close to 150 rooms a day comes from that office complex. We believe a million sq ft will bring in demand for an additional 31 rooms per day. If you are very captive, you might even capture all of it if they are on the price points that you are targeting."

Does this mean there is an opportunity for businesses who have land bank?

Addressing the issue, Venkatesh emphasised that people's lifestyles are changing, and they are increasingly looking at





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luxury services in their everyday living spaces. “We see that luxury homes are no longer just homes. People want curated services on top of the homes.”

She added, “Moreover, when you are looking at building more hotels, expanding in metros or in leisure locations where land is an expensive component, real estate helps in defraying some of the costs of development. It may help the developer get back their initial investment and de-risk to some extent, which is the developer’s need,” she said.

Venkatesh believes that hotels that have the backbone can support residential development. “It could

### Luxury services make residential developments more attractive to prospective buyers and makes the entire project more financially viable

be apartments, branded apartments, or villas in leisure locations — you can provide that layer of luxury services, which makes residential developments more attractive to the prospective buyer and at the same time makes the entire project

more financially viable or attractive for the developer,” she added.

Underlining where the opportunities lie, Sapra said that people are looking for convenience, so Embassy REIT creates an ecosystem by placing a hotel for all the occupiers of its office space. “Today, the office is no longer looking just for a food court. If you are not providing them proper amenities like a variety of restaurants, you do not have competitive edge. There is a demand even for sports zones in our commercial spaces. In many mature markets, most of the development is mixed-use. It is all about creating the ecosystem,” he explained. Although, it is different for different markets, Sapra added, saying that the Return of Investment (RoI) in Pune versus Mumbai versus that in Bengaluru will be different. “Even the returns in Manyata Park and Whitefield in Bengaluru will be very different because office rentals are very different. So, in certain locations where office rentals are lower, the return on hotel is much higher in today’s date.

It is safe to say that the panellists unanimously agreed that the mixed-use model has potential provided it is done with care. ♦





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# Mastering the franchise-model for success

Franchising thrives not on transactions but on relationships, say leaders during a discourse on how hospitality can scale up smarter.



HRAWI Bureau

**A**t the business session, 'Master Franchising – Scaling Hospitality the Smarter Way' during the 20<sup>th</sup> HRAWI Regional Convention, the hum of conversation filled the room not with the usual industry chatter but the kind that comes alive when experience meets curiosity.

On stage, **Megha Agarwal**, Partner, Khaitan & Co, sparked the dialogue with a question that is on every hotelier's mind: "When it comes to expansion, what works better – a master franchise or an area development?" It was not just a technical inquiry; it was a mirror held up to India's evolving hospitality landscape, which is eager, ambitious, and distinct. Addressing the nuance of this dilemma, **Abhinash Ashok**,

India's franchise model carries its own rhythm, which is different from the normal modus operandi as it is more control-driven





Vice President, Hotel Operations & Development, Choice Hospitality, Suba Hotels, unpacked the complexities of franchising. He spoke of how India's franchise model carries its own rhythm, which is different from the normal modus operandi as it is more demanding, more control-driven. "When we design franchise agreements," he said, "from the franchisee's side, our first preference is of locations, then the kind of investment owners are putting, and ROI."

However, "As franchiser, when we are making an agreement, we have to meet the objectives of the owner but our brand lives through our signages, our standards, our marketing strategy. The real challenge is control. When the owners are handling the operations, we focus on optimising the sales, on how we are going to create brand awareness."



Adding perspective to the complexities of the franchise model, **Chetan Arora**, Director, IHOP, noted that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. "It really is a case-by-case

situation," he said. "It depends on where the brand is in its journey." His story of transitioning Subway India from an area development model to a master franchise was a



In today's landscape, global brands, who earlier focused on upscale and luxury segments, have realised the potential for mid-market in India

lesson in adaptability — how scaling demands structure and speed.

"When we hit scale of about 300 restaurants, we found that driving menu and product innovation to the last mile was becoming a challenge."

As the conversation steered toward franchise trends, **Akhil Gupta**, Chief Business Officer, Treebo Hotels, observed a clear shift in the market. He said, "In today's landscape, international brands have realised the potential for mid-market in India, who were earlier focused on upscale and luxury segment," he said with conviction. "We were one of the first such companies that partnered with Radisson for the Park Inn and, very recently, we now have mastered franchisee for core mid-market brands such as ibis Styles





and Mercure.” Rounding off the discussion, **Dheeraj Gupta**, Founder & MD, Jumboking, highlighted what gives Indian brands their edge against global players. He called it “the underdog advantage.” “You

have to look at the international players eye-to-eye and be able to compete.” He added, “If we charge a 10 per cent royalty, we must deliver at least 20 per cent value. That is the only way to build loyalty

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The key to true success lies in choosing the right franchise partner and communicating the value the brand brings into the market

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in a world where your franchisee can just take down your board and start his own brand tomorrow.”

### Standards vs localisation

Emphasising how true success lies in balancing brand integrity with local sensibilities, Gupta explained, “I think the biggest example of localisation in hospitality would be the heavy focus on F&B.” He elaborated that many international brands avoid F&B and banqueting, even though these are essential due to weddings and events. “In India, wedding events is a big use case for hotels but abroad, it is mostly business travel, which is





why they do away with banqueting or restaurants. So, that is one good example of how these international brands can adapt locally as long as they can uphold the brand standards and also respect the local nuances and market requirements.”

Abhinash Ashok highlighted that localisation adds cultural flavour while giving the example of hotels in Ayodhya, where staff greets with ‘Jai Shri Ram’ at the door, while business hotels greet with a crisp ‘Good morning’ — both authentic, both aligned. “Brand’s ethos can be aligned to the local things in some of the spaces, where it is required and according to the guest preferences. Mostly, it goes with the F&B or minor operating departments, not in the core major functions of the hotel,” he added.

Gupta emphasised that brand standards lose meaning if they are overly flexible in their dealing. The key, he said, lies in choosing the right franchise partner and communicating the value those

Franchising is not a transaction, it is a relationship built on shared growth, respect for local realities, and a brand’s standard

standards bring. “When the brand name drives higher bookings and rates, franchisees naturally see the worth in upholding those standards,” he noted.

By the end, one theme stood out: franchising is not a transaction, it is a relationship built on shared growth, respect for local realities, and maintaining a brand’s standard. As the session drew to a close, the collective insight lingered in the air: in the world of hospitality, success does not just belong to the brand that scales fastest but to the one that scales wisely. ♦♦

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## Homegrown brands taking a leap

Experts claim India's homegrown brands are stepping out of global shadows by defining excellence through one partnership, one experience at a time.



HRAWI Bureau

India's hospitality sector is at an inflection point moving from dependence on global names to cultivating its own world-class brands. At the 20th HRAWI Annual Convention, the session 'Homegrown & Growing – India's Emerging Hospitality Brands' unpacked the opportunities and obstacles that define this shift. Moderated by **Bibhor Srivastava**, Managing Director, Events, ITP Media, the discussion brought together industry visionaries

Recruiting locally and scaling operations around community talent can help brands achieve break-even

who have dared to chart their own path, navigating the highs and learning humbling lessons of building from the ground up.

### Building from scratch

"India needs its own set of homegrown hotel brands delivering global standards," Srivastava began, setting the tone for an honest conversation. And even though the panellists agreed, creating brands that can stand shoulder-to-shoulder with international players is far from easy.

For **Amruda Nair**, Founder & Director, Araiya Hotels & Resorts, the journey began with a leap of faith and a recalibration of scale. "We have four operating hotels at the moment and will be at 10 before





the financial year closes,” she said. “The biggest learning for me was the change in scale. I moved back from managing a 611-room property in the Middle East to a 6-room hotel here in India. Our biggest learning was making the numbers work even in smaller formats. So, we are determined to grow slowly.”

Her pragmatic approach to expansion rests on what she calls “smart geography”. “Many of our properties are in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, where the owners have held land parcels for decades. That helps us avoid high urban land costs, which can take up to 40 per cent in city projects,” she explained. Recruiting locally and scaling operations around community talent can help them achieve break-even within 18 months — a rare feat for young hotel brands.

### Lessons from trailblazers

If hotels face challenges of scale, restaurateurs wrestle with fragility. **Rohit Khattar**, Founder-Chairman, Old World Hospitality & EHV International, knows that better

than most. “We took our first restaurant, ‘Chor Bizarre’, to London in 1990, possibly the first Indian brand to go overseas,” he recalled. “Every geography, every city, is a new learning curve. Restaurants have delicate economics. You don’t have large capital or senior people. You need to be there yourself, nurturing it like a baby for nine months before opening.”

International brands bring distribution and foreign clientele but their cost structures cannot compete with domestic players

Khattar shared how his strategy evolved over the years. “Now, I try to locate our restaurants within hotels as it gives you a kind of bullet proofing. You get the

hotel’s engineering and statutory support, and yet, we ask for an independent entrance and try to mitigate the problems of a new city, which in India itself is tough but overseas even tougher.”

His formula of collaboration includes licensing Indian restaurant brands to hotels, while retaining control over quality and brand essence, which offers a sustainable model for Indian dining concepts to scale globally.

Interestingly, Nair shared a parallel journey on the European circuit, where she owns restaurants in Malta and Portugal. “We follow a hotel model but the Mediterranean brings its own challenge of seasonality. To offset the quiet months, we attract Indian weddings and offer outdoor catering in scenic venues,” she said. It is a blend of hospitality and experience, where food becomes a performance.

### Indian advantage

When it comes to hotels, **Vikramjit Singh**, Founder & CMD, Alivaa Hotels, emphasised that Indian brands

possess a fundamental edge: cost structure. “International brands bring distribution and foreign clientele but their cost structures cannot compete with ours,” he said. “Look at domestic players like Lemon Tree — they are hitting 50 per cent GOP margins. Owners care about what they take home, not the logo on the building.”

Singh pointed out that Indian brands are finally outpacing global ones in new signings and room keys. “Domestic players now sign more hotels than international brands. The tide is turning because we understand local markets in tier II, III, and IV cities far better. We do not come with a fixed playbook. They are more flexible and adaptable.”

**Suhail Kannampilly**, Managing Director, Concept Hospitality, echoed a similar sentiment. “Flexibility is our strength,” he said. “International chains operate within rigid frameworks. But in India, even two cities in the same state — like Mumbai and Pune — are completely different markets. You have to be adaptable.”

## Domestic players now sign more hotels than global brands. The tide is turning as they understand local markets in tier II and III cities far better

The conversation turned to how this flexibility evolves at the luxury end of the spectrum. Kannampilly noted that while international expansion demands structure and compliance, domestic brands can still excel in experiential luxury without global affiliations.

Singh added that the opportunity abroad lies in targeting where Indians travel most. “Out of the 30 million Indians who travel overseas, most visit eight key cities. Put an Indian brand there and it will thrive,” he said.

Agreeing with Kannampilly’s perception, Khattar pointed out the

exciting evolution of India’s dining scene that stands as the USP for the growth of Indian brands. “What is happening in India right now is remarkable,” he said. “There is a strong rise in casual and premium-casual formats. Many of these restaurants get labelled ‘modern Indian’ or ‘fine dining’, but at their heart, they serve regional Indian food just elevated in presentation and experience. The price point is affordable, around ₹1,500, yet the quality feels premium. That is where I see endless growth. I call it ‘casual fine’, dining that is refined, rooted, and accessible.”

Khattar’s own story illustrates the virtue of focus. “My first restaurant, Chor Bizarre, started at Hotel Broadway,” he said. “I wanted to create an American diner but realised the market wanted something else. So, I Indianised it. One of my biggest regrets is not scaling that brand but COVID taught me that focus is everything.”

For Kannampilly, the turning point came when Lemon Tree Hotels







affiliated with Marriott. “Scaling internationally needed a distribution network,” he explained. “Marriott brought with them flexibility and

decided to open up to the mid-market and to the upscale market of India.” As the discussion highlighted, India’s hospitality brands hold

India’s homegrown hospitality brands are no longer in the shadow of global giants. They are learning, adapting, and growing on their own terms



key advantages over international players from cost efficiency to flexibility and adaptability.

Adding depth to this discussion, Nair underscored a fundamental truth. She stressed that hospitality ultimately thrives on relationships, which she experienced even in Europe. “In Malta, business runs on who refers you. Even a plumber would not answer your call unless you say, ‘I am James’s friend,’” she laughed. “It is not about the size of your business but your reputation. It is a favour system and it reminds me of India.”

India’s homegrown hospitality brands are no longer in the shadow of global giants. They are learning, adapting-, and growing on their own terms — one property, one relationship, one experience at a time. ♦♦





## Honouring the captains

HRAWI presents awards to former Presidents of the Association who contributed to Western India's hospitality growth with their valuable and strategic leadership.



HRAWI Bureau

Commemorating 75 years of HRAWI at the 20<sup>th</sup> HRAWI Regional Convention, the Association felicitated former Presidents to acknowledge their instrumental

role in shaping the Association and driving the growth of hospitality and tourism across Western India. The honours were presented by Chief Guest **Boman Irani**, who is an acclaimed actor, philanthropist, and an inspiration to millions.

Here's a glimpse of those memorable moments:





**Zaheer Ghani** receiving the award on behalf of his great grandfather, the **Late Mr Maneck S Shaw**, Past President, (1962–1969).



**Jimmy Shaw**, President, HRAWI receiving the award on behalf of **Dr Ajit B Kerkar**, Past President (1969–1980).



**Reju Sidharthan**, Director, F&B, Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces, receiving the award on behalf of the first three Past Presidents: **Late Mr AP Sabavala** (HRAWI President 1950–1955), **Late Mr Rustom Masani** (HRAWI President 1955–1959), and **Late Mr DRD Tata** (HRAWI President 1959–1962).



**Harmeet Singh Bedi** and **Gurbir Singh Bedi**, Joint Honorary Secretary, HRAWI, receiving the award on behalf of their grandfather, the **Late Mr Manmohan Singh Bedi**, Past President (1980–1982).





**Mark Shaw** and **Jamie Shaw** receiving the award on behalf of their grandfather, the **Late Mr Pesi M Shaw**, Past President (1982–1988).



**Swarn Malik**, wife of **Late Mr Prakash Malik**, Past President (1988–1992) receiving the award on his behalf.



**Nirav Gandhi**, Senior Vice President, HRAWI, receiving the award on behalf of **Late Mr Jehangir Cama**, Past President (1992–1996).



**Amruda Nair**, daughter of **Vivek Nair**, Past President (2000–2004) receiving the award on his behalf.



**Sushma Seksaria**, daughter of **Late Mr Sunder N Awatramani**, Past President (2004–2006) receiving the award on his behalf.



**Harmeet Singh Bedi** and **Gurbir Singh Bedi** receiving the award on behalf of their father **Late Rabinder Singh Bedi**, Past President (2006–2007).



**DS Advani** receiving the award on behalf of **Dinesh Khanna**, Past President (2007–2008).



**SP Jain**, Past President (2008–2009), receiving the award.





**Suresh M Talera**, Past President (2009–2010), receiving the award.



**Kamlesh Barot**, Past President (2010–2012), receiving the award.



**DS Advani**, Past President (2012–2014), receiving the award.



**Bharat Malkani**, Past President (2014–2016), receiving the award.



**Dilip Datwani**, Past President (2016–2018), receiving the award.



**Dr Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**, Past President (2018–2020), receiving the award.



**Sherry Bhatia**, Past President (2020–2022), receiving the award.



**Pradeep Shetty**, Past President (2022–2024), receiving the award.



# FHRAI Covention focuses on markets in tier II cities

Experts convene at the 55<sup>th</sup> FHRAI Convention to discuss the potential of tier II cities in turning India's trillion-dollar dream into reality.





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# High-end mattresses influencing hotel RoI

**Arvind Rawal** writes that investing in quality mattresses can attract long-term gains, enhancing efficiency and profit margins for the hotel sector.

Quality mattresses play a significant role in the hospitality industry, as guests' key requirement is comfort. Therefore, hoteliers must invest in the right mattress to provide a good night's sleep and enhance overall guest satisfaction. The initial cost of high-quality mattresses may seem overwhelming, but they can yield long-term benefits in terms of higher occupancy rates, repeat business, and Return on Investment (RoI).



**ARVIND RAWAL**  
Vice President  
Institutional Sales (India),  
Eclipse Mattress

## Strategic investment

Mattress quality is no longer just an operational choice — it is a strategic business investment. It can directly influence not only your brand reputation but also booking conversions.

- **Drives hotel revenue:** Comfortable and hygienic

mattresses reduce complaints, which can significantly boost guest satisfaction and hotel revenue.

- **Reduces operational hassles:** Durable mattresses require fewer replacements and less maintenance, ensuring operational efficiency.



Mattress quality is not just an operational choice but a strategic business investment influencing brand reputation & booking conversions

- **Builds guest loyalty:** High-quality mattresses make a lasting impression, increasing repeat bookings and long-term brand loyalty.

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- **Hospitality-grade durability:** Each mattress is built with a reinforced pocketed spring core, ensuring long-lasting support and minimal motion transfer, ideal for heavy hotel use.
- **Customisation for hotel needs:** Tailored solutions for hotels include size flexibility, branding options, and specifications to match different room categories.
- **Proven industry expertise:** Equipped with decades of experience in the hospitality sector, their products align with brand standards and guest expectations. ♦





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