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Dear members,

Stepping into February, the year is already gathering momentum for our industry. The past few weeks have underlined both the promise and the pressures facing hospitality, and as always, HRAWI remains focused on turning our collective voice into tangible, on-ground progress.

The Union Budget 2026 has placed tourism and hospitality closer to the centre of India's growth narrative. The emphasis on destination development, skilling, digital infrastructure, and experiential tourism is encouraging and reflects a growing recognition of our sector's role in employment generation and economic expansion. These are welcome, well-intentioned steps that can strengthen domestic tourism and improve India's global competitiveness.

That said, the industry continues to await resolution of several long-standing structural issues that directly impact investment and viability. Infrastructure Status for hotels across the country, the rationalisation of GST, delinking of accommodation and food services, and a relook at the artificial ceiling of ₹7,500 on room tariffs to define luxury remain critical. The continued denial of ITC is a serious challenge, affecting both

new investments and day-to-day operations, particularly for budget and mid-market hotels. While policy announcements point in the right direction, execution often gets caught in red tape and procedural bottlenecks that run contrary to the spirit of "Ease of Doing Business". Our engagement with policymakers will, therefore, remain persistent and constructive, because only effective implementation can convert intent into impact.

Alongside policy advocacy, capability building remains central to HRAWI's mission. I am pleased to share that we launched our Knowledge Series on 12 February 2026 at Amanora The Fern, Pune. We are delighted to collaborate with Ernst & Young (E&Y) as HRAWI's Official Knowledge Partner for this initiative. The programme is designed to equip our members with timely insights into key regulatory and policy developments affecting our businesses, with focused sessions on Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP), GST, and Labour Codes.

The Knowledge Series will be conducted every month across different towns and cities in our region, creating a structured and consistent learning platform for members. These sessions will be complemented by our regular

FSSAI workshops, ensuring that members remain updated on food safety, compliance requirements, and evolving regulatory frameworks. Continuous learning is no longer optional – it is essential. I strongly encourage members to participate and make the most of this initiative.

The month culminated with the 6th HRAWI Conclave & Awards 2026. Themed "Empowering Hospitality", it was scheduled for 26 February 2026 at Ramsukh Resorts & Spa, Mahabaleshwar. The Conclave focused on three areas shaping our sector – the DPDP Act and Information Security, Artificial Intelligence for Hospitality, and Food Safety & Pest Control. These are practical, business-critical domains that influence guest trust, operational efficiency, and long-term sustainability.

The Awards segment, as always, celebrated excellence, innovation, and leadership within our fraternity. Recognising those who set benchmarks and inspire progress is always important. HRAWI's strength has always come from the active engagement of its members. I look forward to meeting many of you in more events like these, and to continue our shared journey towards a future-ready hospitality sector.

Warm regards,

JIMMY SHAW, President, HRAWI



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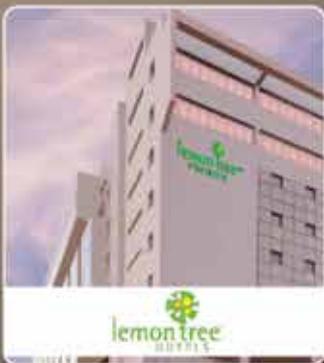
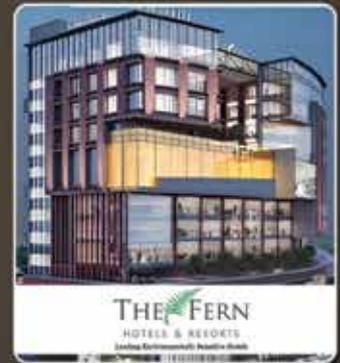
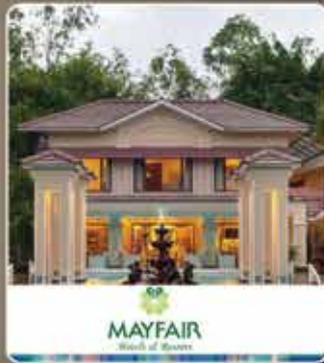
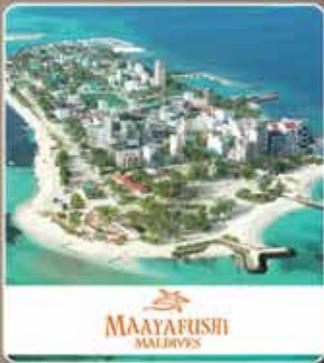
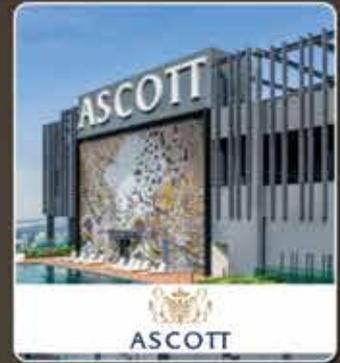
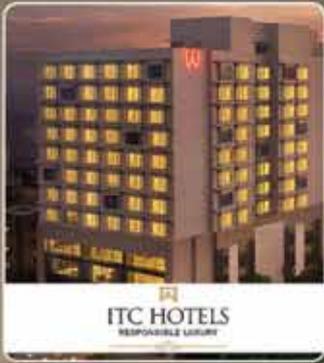
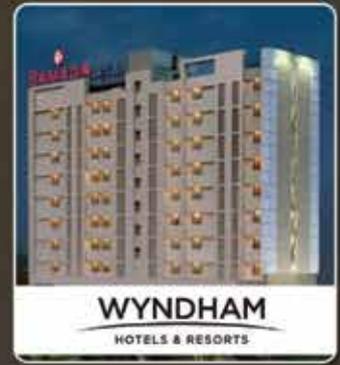
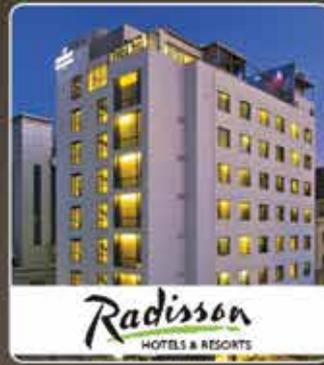
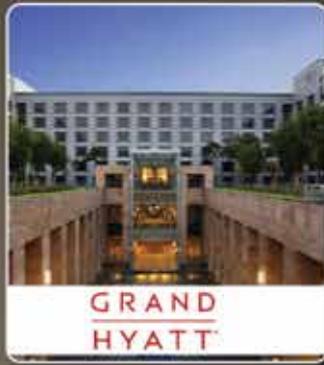
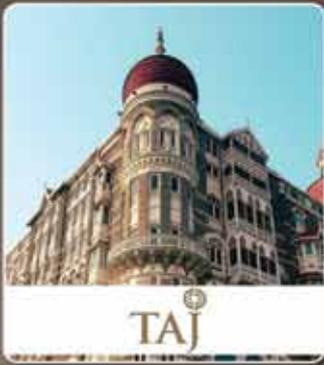


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8 Indian kitchens get a professional facelift

HRAWI is aggressively dismantling "back-of-house" complacency — transforming complex safety science into an indispensable, high-standard reality for the Indian hospitality sector.



14 Success amid shifting laws

HRAWI's inaugural Knowledge Series addressed complex legislative hurdles, offering a vital roadmap through India's shifting regulatory landscape.



Hospitality leaders react to fiscal roadmap

Beyond the ₹5,000 cr infrastructure blitz, Budget 2026 reclassifies hospitality as a core economic pillar, yet critical statutory hurdles remain.

24 Sustainable luxe with Pride

Pride Hotels is fundamentally re-engineering luxury by replacing single-use habits with renewable energy and circular water systems.



How inclusive spaces drive guest loyalty

Inclusive architecture is reshaping hotel experience, proving that barrier-free spaces are a non-negotiable necessity for respectful hospitality.

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HRAWI's multi-city food safety crusade

This February, the Hotel and Restaurant Association (Western India) successfully implemented FSSAI's latest food safety training programmes across Indore and Mahabaleshwar, certifying a new wave of professionals.



HRAWI Bureau

The Indian hospitality sector is finally waking up to a hard truth: service is nothing without science. We are seeing a massive, long-overdue pivot toward a culture defined by bulletproof safety standards. For over 75 years, HRAWI has been the voice of the industry, and today, that voice is calling for better compliance. This February, they doubled down on this mission, taking FSSAI's Food Safety Supervisor Training in Advance Catering (FoSTaC) to two hubs. The endgame is simple — safety is non-negotiable.

FoSTaC'S SAFETY DRIVE

The circuit started in Indore — the commercial and street-food heavyweight of Madhya Pradesh. On 4 February, HRAWI set up at the Hotel Solaris to run their latest

FoSTaC session. The session drew 21 professionals from across the city's dining and lodging landscape. Under the technical direction of **Dr V Pasupathy's**, Lead Expert, FoSTaC – FSSAI, the day wasn't only about ticking boxes — it was a deep dive into the granular “how-to” of food handling and modern sanitation. The session focused on the data: waste management, systemic hygiene, and the protocols needed to keep a high-pressure kitchen from falling apart.

After Indore, the focus shifted to the Western Ghats. On 25 February, HRAWI landed at the Hotel Dreamland in Mahabaleshwar. This session pulled in 26 professionals, all clearly feeling the push to align with the latest national safety rules.

Dr V Pasupathy was back at the helm, this time tackling the logistical headaches unique to hill stations — ecologically sensitive waste disposal and water quality. The curriculum



By certifying dozens of supervisors, HRAWI continues to strengthen the safety of India's diverse catering sector



stayed heavy on advanced handling and rigorous sanitation.

As **Jimmy Shaw**, President, HRAWI noted: “Food safety is the bedrock of guest trust. We aren't just certifying people — we are empowering them.” By bringing this training to Mahabaleshwar, HRAWI is proving that “remote” cannot, and should not, mean “lax”. The standards here must be as sharp as any five-star facility in Mumbai.



Training 3,700 supervisors transforms staff into safety ambassadors, ensuring a culture of responsibility



THE COLLECTIVE EFFORT

These workshops are a part of a massive, coordinated push to professionalise “back-of-house” operations. To date, HRAWI has put 3,773 professionals through the FoSTaC and FSSAI Management Training wringer. This is a shift in the industry’s DNA. The logic is simple — build safety ambassadors. These 3,700 supervisors return to their hotels

with the authority to mentor peers and oversee daily compliance. This initiative protects the guest while safeguarding the global reputation of the Indian hospitality sector.

EXPANDING THE SAFETY NET

HRAWI is now in motion to expand this safety net across Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Goa. The focus is

shifting to places where the talent crunch is most painful and formal training is harder to find. Working with the Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI), HRAWI is turning food safety from an annoying extra into an invisible, effortless must-have. The association’s goal is to build a foundation on a total refusal to compromise on safety. ♦♦



AAI Tourism Policy is for developing entrepreneurship and leadership qualities among women in the tourism sector and to empower women in the state.

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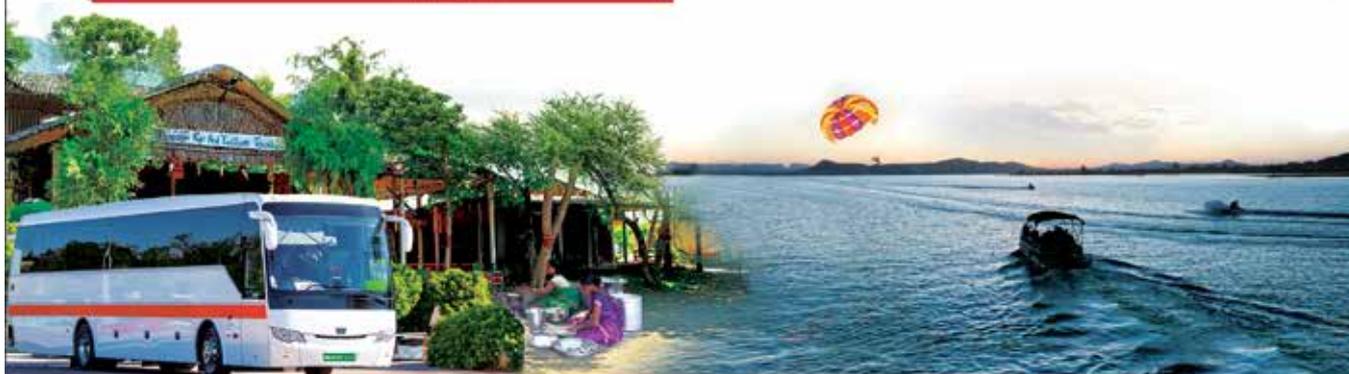
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FHRAI & IHM “running” the kitchen

FHRAI–IHM recently organised a high-energy mini marathon in Greater Noida, themed ‘Viksit Hospitality for Viksit Bharat’, to celebrate the sector’s vital role in India’s economic development.



Knowledge Park III was freezing at 6 am on 1 February, but the energy was electric. It wasn’t just a crowd of runners — it was a mix of chef whites, suits, and students. FHRAI–IHM’s “Viksit Hospitality for Viksit Bharat” mini marathon put 400 people on the tarmac. This wasn’t a standard fitness event. It was a loud, high-visibility attempt to show that hospitality isn’t just a service job — the message was about rebranding the industry from the ground up.

The industry is in a weird spot. Hotels are popping up everywhere, but the talent pipeline is dry. Surendra Kumar Jaiswal, President, FHRAI, didn’t hold back when he pointed out that while

hospitality fuels India’s GDP, the skill gap is a massive hurdle. The race was a tactical move to show the youth that there’s dignity and money in this sector.

This wasn’t just a jog — it was an industry-wide push to make hotel management aspirational again. The categories were standard — 10k, 5k,

and 3k — but the execution was pure hospitality. Instead of just water stations, the route had culinary stalls. Top chefs were there, not just as spectators, but showcasing signature dishes to runners as they went past. It turned the race into a live career fair. Between the chip-timed laps, you had Bhangra,





The 'Viksit Hospitality' theme aligns the industry's growth with the national mission for a developed India

Zumba, and live bands. Even the influencers and celebrity chefs on the track were there for a reason: to make the profession look “cool” on the social feeds where the next generation actually lives.

Sustainability wasn't just a buzzword here. The organisers ditched single-use plastics for eco-friendly kits. Hydration stations were waste-free. It's the same way

these students are being taught to manage a floor or a kitchen. Crossing the finish line meant a medal, sure, but it also meant being part of a community that's usually stuck behind a front desk or in a basement kitchen. For once, the industry was out in open.

For students running the logistics and stalls, it was a real-world test in event pressure. As hotels expand

into smaller towns across India, this kind of outreach is the only way to find new blood. This is now going to be an annual thing. We need to humanise the work and show that it's the backbone of a developed India. The 2026 run showed that hospitality has plenty of stamina. It's about more than serving guests — it's about inspiring the people who will run the show in 2047. ♦♦



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Maharashtra launches new tourism policy aimed at the State's future growth and development

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Department of Tourism, Govt. of Maharashtra

Critical LPG shortage threatens hospitality sector

The Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India warns of widespread closures, as a sudden commercial LPG supply crisis disrupts kitchens across major Indian states.



HRAWI Bureau

The hospitality industry in India is facing an unprecedented operational crisis, following a near-total halt in the supply of commercial LPG. Over the past week, intermittent disruptions have escalated into a severe shortage — leaving thousands of establishments, from high-end hotels to small eateries, struggling to remain functional. According to **Pradeep Shetty**, VP, FHRAI and Spokesperson, HRAWI, the crisis intensified following a Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas notification dated 5 March, which created widespread confusion among distributors and led to a suspension of deliveries.

The impact is currently most acute in Maharashtra, with cities like Mumbai, Pune, Aurangabad, and Nagpur reporting critical stock depletions. Industry leaders warn that if supply is not restored within 48 hours, approximately 50 per cent of restaurants in Mumbai may be forced to suspend operations.



PRADEEP SHETTY
VP, FHRAI
Spokesperson, HRAWI



The shortage has also spread to Delhi, Karnataka, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh, threatening the stability of a sector that serves millions of professionals, students, and travellers daily.

Smaller businesses and cloud kitchens are particularly vulnerable, as they operate with minimal reserves. Furthermore,

the disruption poses a significant reputational risk to India's tourism — potentially leaving international and domestic tourists without reliable food services.

While the industry is exploring induction and electric cooking, these alternatives are currently non-viable for the high-intensity, fast-paced requirements of commercial Indian kitchens. Such a transition would require massive capital investment and infrastructure overhauls, which the sector cannot implement overnight.

The FHRAI and HRAWI are urging the government to recognise the hospitality sector's role as an essential service — as it was during the pandemic — and intervene immediately. Without the urgent restoration of uninterrupted LPG supplies, the vast ecosystem of employment supported by the industry remains under immediate threat of a forced shutdown. ♦♦



National LPG shortages threaten half of Mumbai's restaurants, risking essential food services for millions



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Knowledge Series tackles policies & data protection



HRAWI's Knowledge Series in Pune addressed transformative legislative shifts, providing members with technical clarity on data protection, labour codes, and fiscal policies.



Mansi Chauhan

Navigating the hospital sector's current statutory environment requires more than just operational oversight – it demands a forensic understanding of shifting State and Central mandates. Recognising this burden on the fraternity, the Hotel and Restaurant Association (Western India) (HRAWI), convened its first Knowledge Series on 12 February at Amanora The Fern, Pune.

Produced alongside Official Knowledge Partner – Ernst & Young – this was an institutional briefing of significant scale, providing general managers and directors a roadmap through the legislative fog. The agenda dissected four critical pillars:

- The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act
- The subsumed Labour Codes
- GST administrative refinements
- The 2024 Maharashtra Tourism Policy.

Trupti Pawar, Secretary General, HRAWI, opened the forum by noting that informed compliance has become a prerequisite for business continuity. This monthly roadshow is designed as a regional intervention to equip stakeholders with the specific legal frameworks needed to mitigate risk and avoid statutory penalties.

DATA PROTECTION

Abhijit Parab, Partner – Cyber Security, Ernst & Young, led a sobering session on the DPDP Act, a law that fundamentally alters the hotel-guest relationship. Because



Data privacy has transitioned from a discretionary practice to a mandatory shield



our industry functions as a massive processor of personal identifiers – from passport scans and credit card data to surveillance footage – establishments are not legally classified as data fiduciaries. This classification carries heavy baggage. Parab highlighted that statutory



fines for failing to secure this data can escalate to ₹250 crore per instance. The discussion focused on the 'Privacy by Design' mandate, requiring members to audit every data touchpoint, including third-party OTA integrations. In the current digital economy, establishing a robust information security management system is no longer a discretionary 'best practice' but a mandatory shield for institutional reputation.

LABOUR REFORM

The consolidation of 29 sprawling central labour statutes into four streamlined codes represents the most aggressive shift in India's industrial relations framework in decades. **Tarun Pandey**, Partner – Labour Code, Ernst & Young and **Anshul Shukla**, Director – Business Consulting, Ernst & Young, provided an impact analysis that caught many in the room off-guard. The crux of the change lies in the revised, uniform definition of wages, which now restricts exclusions to 50 per cent of total remuneration. This single amendment forces a total rethink of existing salary components across the sector. Members were cautioned that this restructuring would likely trigger a higher financial outflow regarding provident fund, gratuity, and other mandatory contributions. The message was clear: initiate impact assessments immediately to align payroll with the new definitions and manage these long-term financial liabilities before they hit the balance sheet.

TAX UPDATES

The technical session on GST, conducted by **Siddhartha Jain**, Partner, Ernst & Young, and **Akshit Saraogi**, Director – Global Trade and Customs, Indirect Tax, Ernst & Young, moved away from the basics to address the grey areas currently triggering departmental audits. The session focused on Input Tax Credit (ITC) eligibility for capital expenditure and the taxability of composite supplies, such as bundled stay packages. A recurring theme was the need of digital automation. As tax authorities adopt increasingly



Immediate assessments are essential to align payroll with new wage definitions and manage long-term financial liabilities

sophisticated electronic monitoring, manual processes are becoming a liability. Experts urged the delegation to adopt real-time reconciliation tools to ensure budget-related amendments are correctly mirrored in property accounts. Meticulous documentation and rigorous vendor verification remain the only real defence against disputes during departmental assessments.

TOURISM POLICY

Shifting the focus to fiscal opportunity, **CA Julfesh Shah**, Chairman, COSIA Vidarbha, broke down the Maharashtra Tourism Policy 2024. This policy provides a menu of incentives, from stamp duty waivers and power subsidies to SGST reimbursement, yet the devil remains in the eligibility criteria. For instance,

expansion projects must achieve a capacity increase of over 50 per cent to unlock the premier incentives tiers. The session also touched on the provision for 'Additional FSI' in hospitality developments, a potential game-changer for brownfield projects in space-starved urban hubs like Pune. This roadmap allows members to leverage state-backed support for infrastructure development, provided they understand the specific checkboxes required to unlock these funds.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

The day concluded with an interactive Q&A that saw delegates seeking granular clarity on implementation timelines and the actual cost of compliance. The sheer engagement and turnout in Pune have already urged HRAWI to soon announce the 2nd edition of the Knowledge Series. Preparations are currently in full swing for the next installment, which aims to be better, more insightful, and more comprehensive than the first. As the industry moves toward a more disciplined and professionalised future, HRAWI's proactive stance ensures its members aren't just reacting to changes – they are ahead of them. With the series preparing to move through other cities in the Western Region, the Pune debut has set an exceptionally high bar for industry advocacy and peer-led education. ♦♦

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India Business

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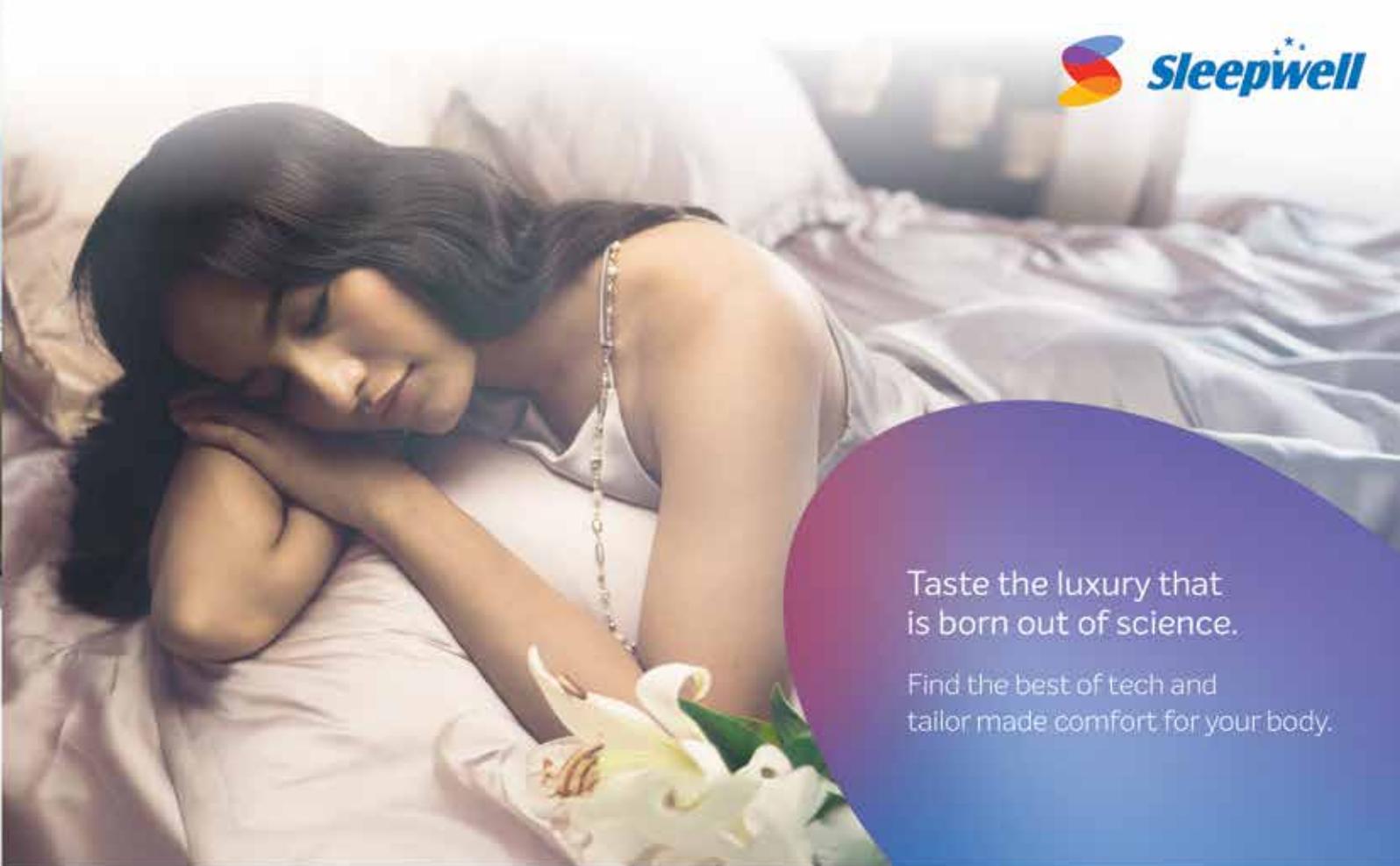
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Consumer Brand





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Infrastructure status still tops hospitality wishlist



The Union Budget 2026 presents a defining moment for India's hospitality sector, as stakeholders demand structural reforms, equitable taxation, and formal recognition as a core industry.

 HRAWI Bureau

For decades, the hospitality sector had been the invisible backbone of the Indian economy —

contributing significantly to the GDP and generating millions of jobs, yet it continued to grapple with a fragmented regulatory framework. As the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) and the Hotel

and Restaurant Association of Western India (HRAWI) submitted their final representations for the Union Budget 2026, the mood was one of guarded optimism.

The headline demand for 2026 was, once again, the granting of



full infrastructure status. While the government had previously extended this to hotels in specific coastal and spiritual hubs, the industry advocated for a universal application. Currently, building a premium hotel required a capital outlay similar to a highway project or a power plant, yet hoteliers were forced to borrow at commercial rates with stiflingly short gestation periods. By conferring infrastructure status, the Ministry of Finance would allow developers access to the Harmonised Master List, enabling them to secure long-term financing, at lower interest rates. This was not merely a request for a handout — it was a prerequisite for the “Viksit Bharat” vision, which aimed to welcome 100 million tourists by 2047.

Simultaneously, the ease of doing business remained a persistent thorn in the side of hospitality operators. On average, a restaurant in India requires more than 25 licences to open — a number far exceeding that of our global peers. The 2026 Budget was expected to provide the fiscal impetus for states to synchronise their licensing policies, reducing the

With over 25 licences to open a restaurant, industry urged unified licensing to ease investment

bureaucratic friction that had long deterred foreign direct investment.

Furthermore, the industry sought a critical correction in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime. The current complexity — where tax rates fluctuated based on room tariffs — created an administrative burden, and confused international travellers. HRAWI had consistently argued for a uniform GST rate of 12 per cent across all hotels, regardless of the room rate. Crucially, the restoration of the Input Tax Credit (ITC) was considered vital. Without the ability to offset taxes paid

on inputs against their final liability, businesses faced tax on tax, which eroded margins, and prevented the reinvestment necessary for property maintenance and staff training.

Finally, the budget was also expected to address the human element. The hospitality sector faced a widening skill gap. We hoped to see increased budgetary allocations for specialised hospitality institutes and apprenticeships. As we looked toward the announcement, the requirement remained clear: the government needed to cease viewing hospitality as a luxury, and finally treat it as the vital economic infrastructure had become. For the sake of India’s global standing, FHRAI and HRAWI hoped for a budget that reflected this reality.

Ultimately, providing the sector with its long-overdue “due” was not merely about granting fiscal relief for hoteliers — it was a strategic investment in India’s soft power, global competitiveness, and the overarching goal of becoming a premier destination. The time had come for the government to deliver the necessary structural reforms to secure the industry’s future. ♦♦

Budget 2026 — tourism reborn as strategic asset

On 1 February 2026, **Nirmala Sitharaman**, Finance Minister, decisively repositioned tourism from a discretionary leisure segment to a recognised strategic asset for India’s economic future.



 **HRAWI Bureau**

The Union Budget has effectively reclassified tourism and hospitality as a strategic asset. With the sector contributing nearly ₹15.73 lakh crore to GDP and supporting 7.6 crore jobs, the 2026-27 fiscal plan moves beyond optics into structural transformation. By integrating travel into the nation’s core economic pillars, the government has acknowledged that the

industry is no longer just a “leisure” byproduct but a primary driver of the \$5 trillion economic ambition.

The centrepiece of this shift is the ‘growth connector’ framework — a ₹5,000 crore investment into city economic regions. By green-lighting seven high-speed rail corridors and upgrading 20 national waterways, the government is bridging the gap between urban hubs and emerging destinations. **KB Kachru**, President, Hotel Association of India and Chairman – South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, notes, “Infrastructure

 **Seven new high-speed rail corridors will act as growth connectors, linking metros to emerging Tier II & III tourist hubs** 



growth in tier II, tier III cities and the East Coast Tourism Corridor are expected to boost hotel viability and diversify India's offering." This infrastructure-led approach turns geographic promise into measurable economic opportunity, particularly in the temple towns and regional hubs that are seeing a surge in domestic demand and require more robust supply chain support.

To address the persistent talent shortage, the Budget proposes transforming National IHMs into a flagship National Institute of Hospitality. This is complemented by a pilot programme to upskill 10,000 guides across 20 iconic sites.

Pradeep Shetty, Spokesperson, HRAWI, calls this a welcome move but highlights the need for deeper reforms, "Right steps with a clear focus on skilling and experiential offerings will strengthen domestic tourism. However, we urgently need infrastructure status and GST rationalisation to truly unlock the sector's potential."

A significant win for the industry is the rationalisation of Tax Collected at Source (TCS) on outbound travel, slashed to a flat 2 per cent. This move addresses liquidity concerns for travellers and levels the playing field for organised travel agents who were losing ground to offshore booking channels due to previous tax complexities. "The simplified flat 2 percent TCS replaces the earlier tier structure – easing compliance and unblocking cash flows for travellers," observes **Mahesh Iyer**, MD & CEO, Thomas Cook – India.



TCS slashes to 2 per cent, easing liquidity for outbound travellers and boosting organised travel business

The Budget identifies specific growth pillars – Medical Value Tourism, Eco-Tourism, and Heritage Hubs. Five regional medical hubs and the upgradation of 5 archaeological sites, including Dholavira and Lothal,

signal a move towards experiential tourism. **Rajesh Magow**, CEO, MakeMyTrip, emphasises that the National Destination Digital Knowledge Grid will revolutionise how travellers discover India. However, the sentiment among leaders like **Ravi Gosain**, President, IATO, remains cautious regarding the lack of specific funds for overseas marketing.

While the Budget is a watershed moment for infrastructure and skilling, the industry's call for Infrastructure Status and Concurrent List placement remains unanswered. For the hospitality sector, this budget is a powerful demand generator but the struggle against high operating costs and fragmented GST continues. ♦♦

Pride Hotels redefines green luxury standards

Atul Upadhyay, Executive Director, Pride Hotels Group, is currently overhauling the brand's portfolio by hard-wiring ESG goals into daily operations, ensuring luxury guest experiences align with environmental care.



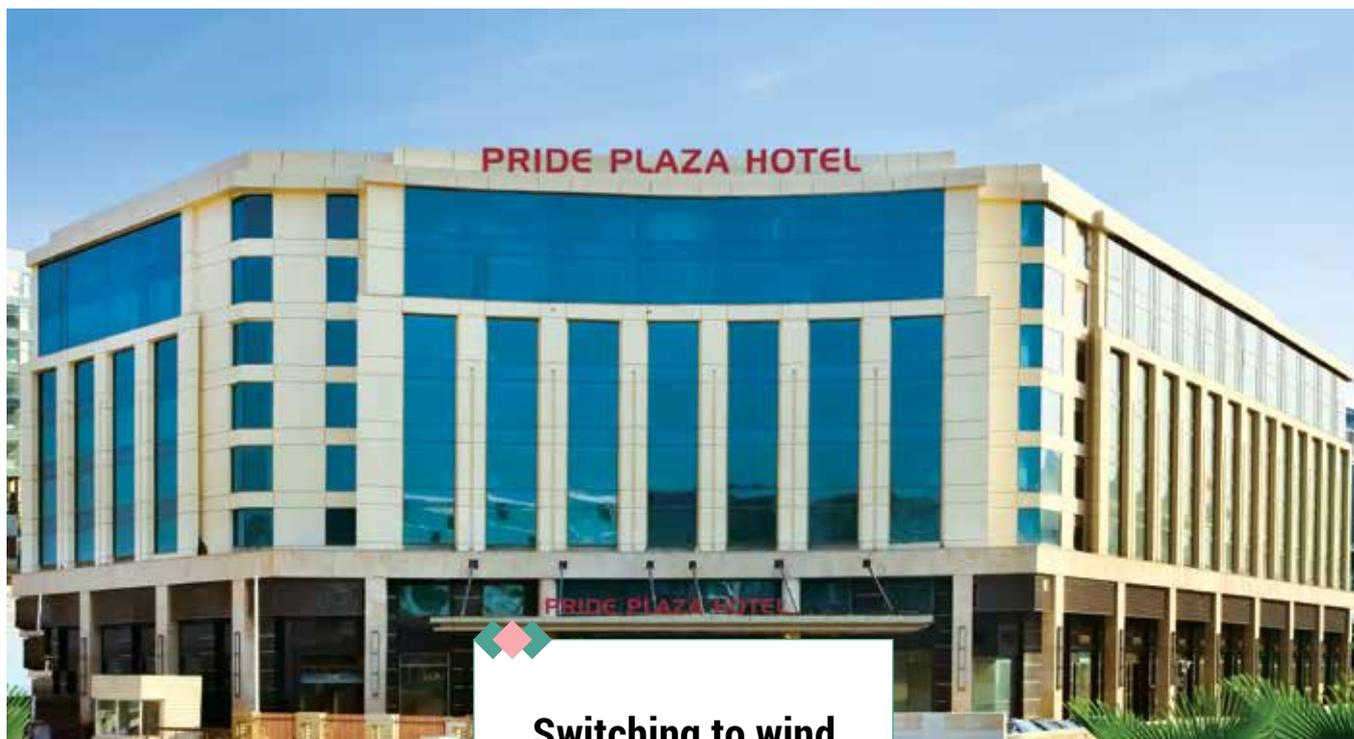
ATUL UPADHYAY
Executive Director
Pride Hotels Group

The hospitality sector in India is currently navigating a major turning point. Pride Hotels Group is not just following this trend but is actively defining how luxury and sustainability can live together. By weaving eco-conscious habits into the very fabric of their daily work, the Group is proving that high-end service doesn't have to come at the cost of the planet. This isn't a surface-level PR move – it represents a deep, structural

rethink of how luxury is delivered across the subcontinent.

Through a series of rigorous, evidence-based audits across its properties, Pride Hotels is finding practical ways to sharpen energy efficiency and cut down on waste. These checks make sure every guest stay helps the environment whilst sticking to the “Authentic Indian Hospitality” the brand is famous for. Upadhyay points out that real hospitality means looking after the planet, the local community, and the





Switching to wind and solar power helps establish a fresh benchmark for green hospitality standards

next generation. This vision comes to life through smarter operations and a sourcing plan that backs local suppliers, which in turn cuts down on transport emissions and helps the regional economy grow.

One of the biggest wins in their current plan is setting up in-house bottling plants – which can be seen in action at the Pride Plaza Hotel Aerocity, New Delhi.

This move takes a direct swing at the industry’s old habit of relying on single-use plastics and slashes the carbon footprint that comes from trucking water around. By making high-quality water right on-site, the Group offers a green alternative that fits global standards without watering down the guest experience. Power management is a huge part of

the strategy as well. The Group has ramped up its use of clean energy, pulling from wind and solar power. They’ve also swapped out old tech for LED lighting and high-efficiency machinery across the board.

These steps do more than just lower the carbon count; they make the business more resilient for the long haul and set a fresh benchmark for other Indian hotels to follow.

Water conservation has moved from being an “extra” to a core part of the job. By setting up advanced Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) and recycling systems, Pride Hotels reuses treated water for things like gardening and cooling systems. This is a lifesaver in water-stressed areas, allowing hotels to keep up their standards without draining the local taps.

This work isn’t just internal talk. It is backed by international awards – Pride Elite Hotel Phaltan has earned IGBC Net Zero Energy and LEED India NC Platinum status. As the Group grows, it stays anchored in a mix of local sourcing and environmental duty, creating real value for today’s conscious traveller. ♦♦



Universal design — the future of hospitality

Hemant Khadse, CEO, East Corp Group and Fire & Life Safety Consultant examines how integrating universal design, Indian building codes, and robust emergency egress makes for safe, dignified, and inclusive hospitality.



In an increasingly diverse and mobile world, hotels have become gateways to experiences, memories, and comfort. But for many guests with physical disabilities, the built environment still has invisible barriers that turn a simple stay into a challenge. Accessibility is not optional — it is a business imperative and a moral responsibility.

INCLUSIVITY BY DESIGN

“Universal Design” goes beyond minimum accessibility requirements. It represents the principle that spaces should be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible. Instead of designing separate, “special” rooms or access points — universal design integrates

accessibility into the core fabric of buildings so that all guests feel welcomed and respected.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016 mandates accessibility in public buildings — including hotels. The Harmonised Guidelines and Space Standards for Barrier-Free Built Environment provide detailed specifications on entrances, toilets, lifts, and more.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- **Pathways & approach:** The journey from the entrance to the lobby should be levelled, or gently sloped via ramps with handrails and non-slip surfaces. Ramps should have a maximum slope of about 1:12.



HEMANT KHADSE
CEO, East Corp Group and
Fire & Life Safety Consultant

- **Entrances & reception:** Automatic doors or easy-to-use handles reduce physical effort. Reception counters benefit from having a lower section for guests in wheelchairs while high contrast



and Braille helps individuals with visual impairments.

- **Corridors & access routes:** Hallways should be wide enough (minimum 1200 mm clear width) for wheelchair users to navigate and turn without difficulty
- **Elevators & level changes:** At least one elevator must be wheelchair accessible, featuring audible floor announcements and tactile/Braille controls.

ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL

Hotel rooms designed with universal accessibility aren't just larger, they are smarter:

- **Doorways:** Clear opening widths should be at least 900 mm.

- **Bathroom accessibility:** Features must include grab bars, wall-mounted shower seats, low wash basins, and handheld shower heads.
- **Space & manoeuvrability:** Sufficient turning space in rooms allows guests using mobility devices to move freely. Modern thinking encourages hotels to make all rooms adaptable, ensuring any room can be used by a guest irrespective of their physical abilities, without labels that stigmatise.

UNIVERSALLY SECURE

Safety is a foundational component of accessibility:

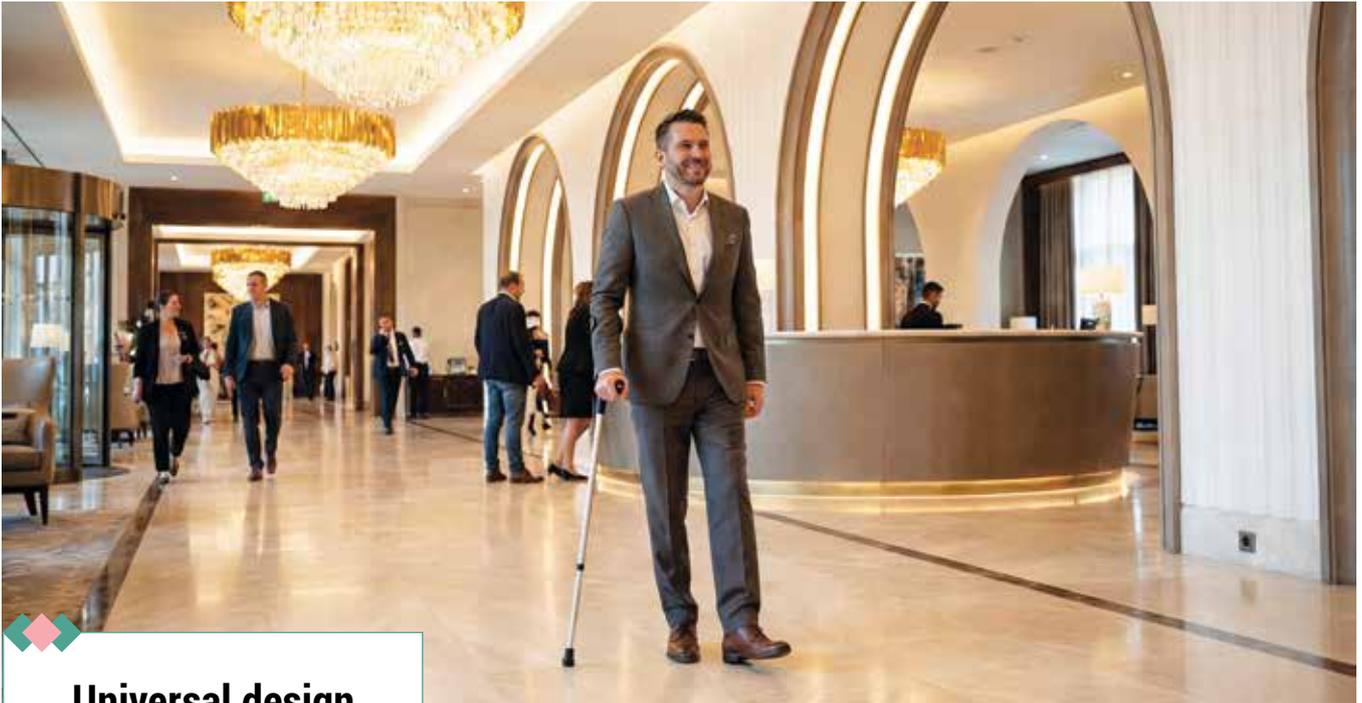
- **Emergency egress:** Evacuation routes must account for people with mobility challenges. Refuge areas on stair landings, visual and audible alarms, and tactile evacuation maps can save lives.
- **Fire safety integration:** Fire exits should be reachable without stairs, ensuring that all guests can evacuate safely.
- **Signage:** Clear visual, tactile, and auditory cues support stress-free evacuation.

INCLUSIVE GUEST SUPPORT

Accessibility is not only about physical design; human interaction plays a crucial role. Staff training is essential – employees should

Accessible hospitality is a moral imperative that expands market reach while enhancing brand reputation and loyalty





Universal design creates inclusive hotel spaces, ensuring every guest enjoys dignity, safety, and comfort

be confident and respectful when assisting guests. Awareness of diverse needs (e.g., sensory issues, cognitive disabilities) helps ensure dignity and independence. Hotels should clearly describe their accessibility features on websites to build trust and enhance reputation.

India's legal path

The National Building Code (NBC) 2016 includes a section on Barrier-Free Built Environment, outlining standards for routes, parking, toilets, and signage. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) makes compliance with harmonised guidelines mandatory. Additional Indian standards, such as IS 4963, recommend ensuring at least 5 per cent of rooms are fully accessible.

Case studies

Leading luxury chains have introduced fully accessible entrances with level thresholds,

tactile pathways for the visually impaired, and assisted devices for safe evacuation. These enhancements generate positive guest reviews and loyalty. Boutique and heritage hotels are creatively retrofitting older structures with discreet ramps and adaptive fixtures, proving that accessibility can coexist with character and aesthetics.

Growth through access

Investing in accessibility yields multiple benefits:

- **Market expansion:** People with disabilities represent a significant segment of travellers globally.

- **Enhanced reputation:** Accessibility signals corporate responsibility and social values, furthering brand equity.
- **Universal comfort:** Features like ramps, lever door handles, and clear signage improve the guest experience for all.

Universal design is a way of thinking while designing hotels. When buildings are planned around real human needs, every guest feels comfortable and respected. By adopting accessibility as a core value, hoteliers can truly deliver hospitality that is inclusive to all. ♦♦





Agentic AI is changing hotel pricing

Sciative’s sophisticated SaaS platform, ZettaRMS.ai, leverages Agentic AI to transform hospitality revenue management through automated, high-frequency pricing decisions.

In today’s volatile market, static revenue management is a relic of the past. As guest behaviours shift and competition intensifies, Sciative addresses these challenges through ZettaRMS.ai. This platform unifies fragmented data from PMS, channel management, and booking systems into a single, cohesive source. At

its core, Zetta features a powerful, built-in “RateShopper” that monitors market prices and availability every hour. This continuous data ingest enables dynamic price optimisation around the clock – even through the night – ensuring that every minute counts with automated “price-pushes” directly into your core systems. Because manual lag often leads to missed revenue, Zetta functions as a 24x7 digital sentinel, pivoting strategies the moment a competitor moves.

The platform’s “Nowcast” Intelligence Layer employs deep learning to detect nuanced demand patterns across various channels. By integrating local festivals and major events into its predictive logic, the AI anticipates market fluctuations before they ever hit the books. This advanced forecasting ensures deep data coverage and market visibility

during both peak and shoulder periods. Furthermore, the in-built market intelligence ensures pricing remains competitive without sacrificing ADR – allowing hotels to capture revenue that traditional systems simply leave behind.

The impact is substantiated by the numbers: partners have seen revenue climb by 17 per cent, occupancy by 21 per cent, and RevPAR by 15 per cent. This success is backed by Sciative’s massive scale, managing \$19 billion in business and executing 8 billion daily price optimisations. As a SOC 2 compliant and ISO-certified leader, Sciative combines technical innovation with world-class security, touching over 64 million lives globally, enabling hotels to respond faster to demand shifts and unlock consistent, data-driven revenue growth across all market conditions. ♦♦

Because manual lag often leads to missed revenue, Zetta functions as a 24x7 digital sentinel

IHCL sweeps ICSI Awards for Corporate Governance



Setting the gold standard for corporate transparency, IHCL recently secured the title of “Best Governed Company” title at the ICSI National Awards 2025. This recognition was further bolstered by winning the “Best Audit Committee Award” at the Asia Business Responsibility Summit. These accolades underscore a culture of rigorous oversight and ethical management, positioning them as a benchmark for listed entities in India. IHCL also became the first Indian hospitality firm to secure a sound mark registration for the Taj brand’s iconic sonic identity. ■

Marriott Bonvoy bags ICC global hotel partnership

In a high-stakes play for sports tourism dominance, Marriott Bonvoy has padded up as the Official Accommodation Partner for the International Cricket Council (ICC) through 2029. This blockbuster multi-year deal ensures the hospitality heavyweight remains the “home away from home” for teams, officials, and fans across the globe’s most prestigious cricket stages — including the Champions Trophy, the World Test Championship, and the 2027 World Cup. By locking in this partnership, Marriott is strategically aligning its loyalty ecosystem with the world’s most emotionally charged sport across key growth markets like India, Australia, and the UK. Beyond mere room nights, the alliance is a masterstroke in experiential marketing. Members will gain access to exclusive “Marriott Bonvoy Moments” — ranging from pitch-side views to meet-and-greets with cricketing legends. With the 2028 Olympic debut looming, Marriott’s strategic move secures its position, leveraging cricket’s global gravity to drive unprecedented brand loyalty and long-term market dominance. ■



ITC growing in leaps and bounds, hits 150 hotels

ITC Hotels have officially shattered the 150-property milestone. Driven by an asset-right strategy, the hospitality giant is rapidly scaling into tier II and tier III markets, with recent high-profile openings in Bodh Gaya, Rishikesh, and Jaipur. This surge brings their total inventory to over 14,000 keys, reinforcing their dominant footprint across India. The numbers tell a story of peak performance: room revenues have climbed by 12 per cent, while EBITDA margins sit at a commanding 39 per cent. This growth is fuelled by a relentless demand in the premium wedding, corporate, and MICE segments. ITC continues to set the global gold standard for sustainability, boasting more LEED Platinum certifications than any other hotel chain in the world. As they eye a new 5-star landmark at Yashobhoomi, Delhi, ITC’s trajectory proves they aren’t just growing — they are redefining the scale of Indian luxury. ■

Radisson bets big on India with 2026 push

Announcing a strategic aggressive expansion across four premier spiritual hubs, Radisson Hotel Group is pivoting toward the heart of India's ₹1.34 trillion domestic travel boom. By locking in new signatures in Kedarnath, Guruvayur, Tirupati, and Ayodhya, the global major positions itself at the intersection of faith and luxury. This calculated play targets a "pilgrimage-plus" demographic that drove over 1,439 million religious visits in the most recent peak cycle. The 2026 pipeline aims to cross 150 operating hotels, utilising the upscale Radisson Individuals and the vibrant Park Inn by Radisson brands. As infrastructure in these tier II and tier III centres — like Ujjain, which saw 52.8 million visitors — undergoes a facelift, Radisson is moving early. With over 50% of its portfolio now in emerging markets, the Group is securing prime real estate to meet surging demand ■



Brij Hotels debuts in the serene coast of Sindhudurg

Brij Hotels is officially heading to Sindhudurg. It is a fresh — and surprisingly quiet — chapter for the brand along India's western coast. This upcoming boutique resort is specifically for those who find the typical tourist hubs a bit too crowded these days. Accessible via both MOPA and Sindhudurg airports, the property is designed through a slow luxury lens. Think private beachfront villas, direct ocean access, and mornings spent spotting dolphins or snorkelling in clear water. For **Udit Kumar**, Co-founder, Brij Hotels, the move is a conscious one. The goal is to protect the region's raw, romantic charm while offering a retreat deeply connected to the Konkan spirit. Between the locally inspired seafood and the village traditions, this project is clearly about more than just putting another pin on the map. ■

SAMHI profits double amid revenue surge



SAMHI Hotels Limited has clocked a massive 111.3 per cent jump in its Q3 FY26 profit — even as new GST rules squeezed margins across the board. Total income for the quarter hit ₹3,419 million, a 16.2 per cent year-on-year climb. This growth was fuelled by stronger room rates and a steady 73 per cent occupancy rate, despite a chaotic December. Same-store RevPAR rose by 13.3 per cent, showing that demand for branded stays remains rock-solid. Management noted that without the recent GST slab changes—which cut into input tax credits—those growth figures would have been even higher. The balance sheet is looking much leaner — SAMHI appears well positioned to sustain momentum in the coming quarters. ■

Gujarat CM unveils forest tourism course



In a meeting of the State Wildlife Board, **Bhupendra Patel**, Chief Minister, Gujarat, has issued a directive to formalise visitor policy guidelines for the state’s protected forest areas. The move signals a transition toward a more regulated, conservation-first eco-tourism model, ensuring that the surge in wildlife enthusiasts does not compromise the state’s biodiversity. A key highlight was the inclusion of the Jessore Sloth Bear Sanctuary in the National Programme for Bear Conservation – a federal nod to Gujarat’s successful preservation efforts. The meeting also addressed a significant ecological shift: the sighting of a tiger in the Ratanmahal Sloth Bear Sanctuary. With officials optimistic about the predator establishing a permanent territory, the CM has greenlit community-led training in collaboration with the NTCA. From identifying new habitats for a burgeoning leopard population to approving critical infrastructure like optical fibre and renewable energy – the administration is clearly aiming to bridge the gap between modernisation and raw wilderness protection. ■

Eco Hotels strikes first MMR Greenfield deal

Eco Hotels and Resorts Limited (EHRL) has signalled a new era of aggressive expansion, signing its inaugural greenfield project in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR). Located in the surging hub of Dombivli, the 70-room development marks a strategic pivot toward ground-up, large-scale assets. Debuting under the flagship “The Eco” brand, the property is positioned to capture the premium mid-range vacuum in an area increasingly defined by commercial and residential density. The hotel is the anchor of a massive 10-acre integrated ecosystem featuring high-street retail, healthcare, and education. By embedding its net-zero DNA into a community-driven development, EHRL is bypassing the constraints of retrofitted conversions. With a 24-month delivery timeline and a robust 2026 pipeline already in motion, **Vinod Kumar Tripathi**, Chairman, is banking on the MMR’s infrastructure boom to validate the group’s scalable, sustainable vision for urban India. ■



SulaFest 2026: 15 years of wine, beats, and bliss

SulaFest 2026 successfully wrapped its 15th edition, drawing 12,500 attendees to Nashik for a weekend – proving legacy festivals can evolve without losing their soul. In an era of interchangeable content farms, SulaFest remains a rare lifestyle anchor that has aged alongside its audience. By leaning into homegrown sounds, the festival reaffirmed its status as the premier intersection of Indian independent music and world-class viticulture. The anniversary served as a high-stakes showcase for Sula’s premium portfolio, featuring exclusive previews of The Source Chardonnay Reserve and Merlot. Supported by heavy-hitting partnerships, SulaFest 2026 was a masterclass in experiential marketing. ■

North East India – the new hospitality frontier

The North East is no longer a peripheral player in India’s travel story, it is the country’s next high-growth hospitality corridor. After a late start – opening its first five-star hotel only in 2014 – the region saw tourist footfall double in FY2024–25. States like Mizoram and Sikkim recorded over 100 per cent growth, fuelled by a massive infrastructure push that increased operational airports from 6 to 19 in a decade. Assam is leading this charge, with Guwahati projected to host 11 five-star hotels by 2027. Investors are pivoting to this “sunrise sector” as domestic travel is forecast to hit 5.2 billion trips by 2030. However, the mandate for the North East is unique – avoid mass-market replication. Industry leaders at the 2026 Siliguri Conclave emphasised “ecosystem-driven” growth. By prioritising high-value, low-impact tourism, the North East is positioning itself as a global model for sustainable, community-centric hospitality. ■



Lemon Tree leans into faith tourism in Omkareshwar

Lemon Tree Hotels has signed its latest property, Lemon Tree Premier, Omkareshwar, marking a significant entry into Madhya Pradesh’s spiritual tourism sector. Located on the sacred Mandhata island – home to one of India’s twelve Jyotirlingas – the 85-room upscale hotel bridges the gap between ancient pilgrimage and modern luxury. The property will feature a signature restaurant, expansive banquet halls, and high-end wellness facilities. **Vilas Pawar**, CEO – Managed & Franchise Business, noted that this signing aligns with the group’s aggressive push into faith-based travel hubs. With 14 hotels operational or in the pipeline across the state, Lemon Tree is positioning itself to capture the surging “spiritual-leisure” demographic seeking comfort amidst divine reflection. ■

Taj Santacruz marks ten years of urban luxury

Taj Santacruz, Mumbai, is celebrating a decade of redefining contemporary hospitality – marking ten years since it first merged architectural grandeur with the signature warmth of the Taj brand. Ideally positioned as a cornerstone for global business travellers and leisure seekers, the hotel has spent the last decade establishing itself as one of Mumbai’s most consistent luxury addresses. Its success is built on a foundation of intuitive service, a philosophy that has transformed it from a strategically located airport hotel into a standalone destination for the city’s elite. The property’s enduring appeal is its diverse culinary portfolio, being a sanctuary for wellness, and a premier venue for high-stakes corporate galas. ■



Two decades of hard-hat engineering



In industries where equipment reliability determines operational continuity, engineering contractors play a crucial role — SN Enterprises has built its presence supporting power, refinery, and infra operations.

In the world of heavy infrastructure, reliability isn't just goal; it's a survival strategy. Based in Mumbai, S.N. Enterprises has spent over twenty years proving itself a specialist that can handle the heat. From the initial spark of fabrication to the final commissioning of massive industrial equipment, our work keeps plants running. Our portfolio covers significant technical ground: expansive piping network, high-pressure pumping stations, chilled water and condensate systems, and industrial air handling units (AHU). Whether it is a routine maintenance check or an intricate pipeline

installation, we ensure operational stability for the long haul, across refineries and fertiliser units.

Our history is carved into India's energy map. Since 1994, we have been a fixture of the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL), holding completion certificates for high-stakes work at both the Tarapur Atomic Power Station and the Kaiga Nuclear Power Project. That same standard of excellence

carries over to our projects at NTPC Thermal Power Plants.

Beyond steel, we manage the full lifecycle of materials, including compliant industrial scrap supply and disposal. We are fully GST and ESIC registered team, backed by a skilled workforce that knows the rules as well as the machinery. SN Enterprises remains the trusted partner for engineering solutions that actually hold up under pressure. ♦♦



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