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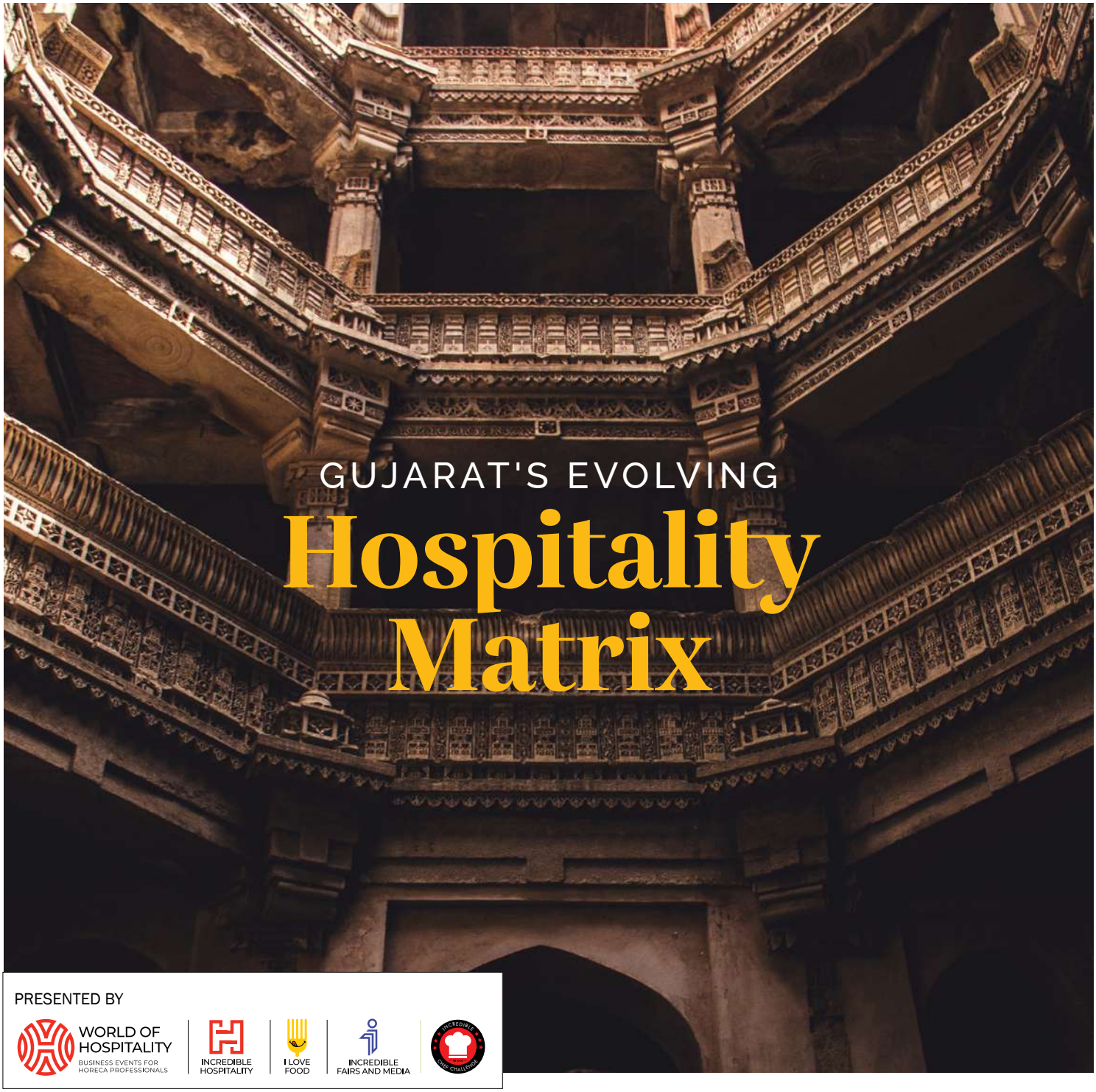
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GUJARAT'S EVOLVING

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Aavo Padharo *(welcome to Gujarat)*



Steena Joy
Editor
editorial@worldofhospitality.in

Gujarat's hospitality landscape is undergoing a significant transformation, and the change is particularly visible across the HORECA sector.

Ahmedabad has emerged as a key driver of this evolution, with a rapidly expanding restaurant and café culture alongside traditional hotel dining. Across Surat, Vadodara, Rajkot and other urban centres, consumers are becoming more experimental, seeking international cuisines, speciality cafés, premium dining, artisanal products and distinctive food experiences.

This new wave is also creating a broader ecosystem for HORECA suppliers. Technology is increasingly influencing ordering, inventory management, payments, delivery and customer engagement, while sustainability is gradually entering conversations around packaging, waste management and energy-efficient equipment. Gujarat is therefore becoming not just a consumption market, but an increasingly important business opportunity.

For the HORECA industry, the opportunity ahead lies in combining local tastes with global standards. As Gujarat's hospitality sector matures, businesses that can deliver quality, efficiency, innovation and memorable customer experiences will be best positioned to benefit from the state's next wave of growth.

If you wish to experience this wave of change, visit us at WOHXpo Ahmedabad from September 1 to 3 at the Gujarat University Exhibition & Convention Centre.

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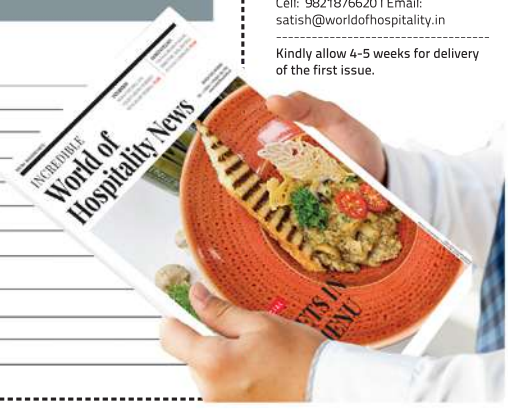
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GUJARAT'S EVOLVING HOSPITALITY MATRIX

Gujarat's integrated hospitality & MICE future

VIKAS SOOD
General Manager, The Leela Gandhinagar



With strong growth expected over the next three to five years, Gujarat's hospitality outlook is very positive. As the state strengthens its position as a preferred destination for business, governance, industry and large scale events, demand is expanding across corporates, industry associations, government events, exhibitions, sports, destination weddings, and social celebrations. The integrated hotel and convention ecosystem enables hosting events of every scale while maximising opportunities across segments. The focus ahead is on optimal utilisation of both assets by building a robust, year round events calendar that drives consistent business throughout all 365 days.

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Key growth drivers and challenges

Priority lies in strengthening visibility across national and international MICE platforms, positioning the ecosystem as a seamless destination for accommodation, conventions, hospitality, logistics, and event execution. Long term partnerships with corporates, government bodies, associations, and organisers ensure consistent occupancy while increasing conversion of event business into hotel stays, dining, and ancillary revenues. Delivering flexible, technology enabled solutions and uncompromising luxury service remains critical to attracting marquee events while maintaining a balanced mix across conventions, exhibitions, corporate events, sports, and weddings.

Reshaping demand patterns

Event led travel has redefined guest expectations, with travellers seeking seamless experiences rather than simply accommodation. The integrated ecosystem offers a single destination for stay, events, dining, and curated experiences. Pricing remains dynamic and demand responsive, but emphasis is on delivering exceptional value aligned with brand positioning. Personalisation is central, recognising the distinct needs of corporates, associations, government delegations, sports teams and wedding guests. Supported by operational agility, technology and thoughtful pre arrival planning, guest journeys are becoming seamless.

Diversified hospitality landscape

Gujarat's hospitality landscape is diversifying. Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar are increasingly viewed as an integrated destination, combining economic strength, governance, tourism, and world class event infrastructure. Continued investments in convention facilities, luxury hotels, airport connectivity, metro expansion, road networks, and GIFT City enhance competitiveness. Coupled with success in hosting international summits, exhibitions, sporting events, and forums, Gujarat is poised to emerge as one of India's leading global MICE destinations.

Strengths and gaps in the ecosystem

Gujarat's hospitality ecosystem is evolving rapidly, driven by government initiatives across sports, manufacturing, finance, healthcare and trade. Corporate travel and MICE remain foundational. Increasing interest in heritage, pilgrimage and cultural experiences, along with destination dining, wellness and experiential hospitality, is encouraging business travellers to extend stays–a broader shift in luxury hospitality. Collaboration among government, tourism bodies, venues and hotels, supported by innovation and responsible practices, will strengthen Gujarat's positioning. ■

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Ahmedabad's hospitality evolution: From business to lifestyle

PRASHANT CHADHA
General Manager, Le Méridien Ahmedabad



Ahmedabad is entering an exciting phase of growth, driven by business expansion, infrastructure development, and an increasing appetite for premium lifestyle experiences. As Gujarat continues to attract global investments and host large scale business events, the city's hospitality sector is evolving beyond accommodation to deliver thoughtfully curated, experience led stays. At the same time, Ahmedabad's rich heritage, vibrant culinary traditions, and cultural attractions are drawing a broader mix of leisure travellers. The city is well positioned to emerge as one of India's leading hospitality destinations, where business, culture, and contemporary lifestyle converge to create distinctive and memorable experiences.

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Hospitality demand drivers

Ahmedabad's hospitality growth will be shaped by a balanced combination of demand drivers. Corporate travel remains the strongest contributor, supported by the city's thriving commercial ecosystem and expanding industrial corridors across Gujarat. Cultural tourism is steadily gaining momentum as travellers seek authentic local experiences, distinctive architecture, regional cuisine, and vibrant festivals. The rise of MICE events, destination celebrations, and weekend leisure travel is further broadening demand. Hotels that combine operational excellence with curated lifestyle experiences will be best positioned to attract a diverse guest mix and maintain strong occupancy throughout the year.

Evolving hospitality market

The city presents compelling opportunities across premium and lifestyle segments. With sustained investments in infrastructure, business districts, and connectivity, demand is growing for high quality accommodation, distinctive dining, wellness offerings, and sophisticated event venues. Travellers increasingly seek hotels that provide meaningful experiences rather than simply a place to stay, creating opportunities for brands to introduce differentiated concepts inspired by the city's cultural identity. There is considerable potential in mixed use developments and integrated lifestyle destinations that blend hospitality, retail, and entertainment. Investors who prioritise long term value creation and experience led hospitality will find Ahmedabad an attractive market.

Transition to Le Méridien Ahmedabad

The transition from Courtyard by Marriott to Le Méridien Ahmedabad has elevated the guest journey by introducing a refined lifestyle experience inspired by culture, creativity, and discovery. While preserving warmth and service excellence, the transformation has enabled curated spaces, distinctive dining, and signature brand programmes that invite guests to savour the good life. The repositioning has strengthened appeal among discerning business and leisure travellers while enhancing market presence. Encouraging business momentum reflects a growing preference for elevated, experience led hospitality in Ahmedabad.

Signature programmes

Each dining destination contributes distinctively to the Le Méridien Ahmedabad experience. Java+ has become a preferred hub for artisanal coffee, pastries, and informal meetings. Bayleaf celebrates progressive Indian cuisine with contemporary interpretations of regional flavours. Drift transforms evenings with its relaxed poolside ambience, curated menus, and engaging social experiences. Together, these reinforce Le Méridien Ahmedabad's positioning as a contemporary lifestyle destination where exceptional dining, meaningful connections, and curated experiences create lasting impressions. ■

Commonwealth Games 2030, a catalyst for hospitality

AMARENDRA SINGH
General Manager, The Fern Residency Ahmedabad Ellisbridge



How do you view the current hospitality landscape of Gujarat?

It is incredibly encouraging to see the momentum we are building, especially as we look ahead to hosting the 2030 Commonwealth Games. This is not just a milestone for the sports community; it is a transformative catalyst for Gujarat's hospitality and tourism ecosystem, creating new opportunities for infrastructure, investment, employment and global visibility

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What impact do you anticipate from GIFT City on the sector?

From a purely geographic standpoint, GIFT City sits about 35 kilometres away from our main city centre. Because of this physical separation, the massive wave of development happening over there doesn't instantly translate into a direct boost for businesses operating in the heart of the city.

Which infrastructure developments do you believe will most significantly boost the hotel industry?

Ahmedabad's transformation into India's definitive sports capital is set to reshape its hospitality landscape. With the global prominence of the Narendra Modi Stadium, alongside the upcoming Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (SVP) Sports Enclave and Veer Savarkar Sports Complex in Naranpura, the city is building an integrated, multi-sport ecosystem.

This emerging cluster will position Ahmedabad as a major destination for training camps, tournaments and international sporting events. The inclusion of a dedicated Athletes' Village, along with commercial and hotel zones within the enclave, further strengthens this ecosystem. For hospitality, this signals a structural shift, creating sustained demand for accommodation, F&B, wellness and long-stay facilities, while opening new opportunities to serve athletes, teams, officials, spectators and international visitors. ■

> AHMEDABAD'S TRANSFORMATION INTO A DEFINITIVE SPORTS CAPITAL IS SET TO RESHAPE ITS HOSPITALITY LANDSCAPE





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Gujarat's hospitality landscape is at an exciting inflection point

AJIT SINGH
Hotel General Manager
Lemon Tree Premier, Sabarmati Riverfront, Ahmedabad



How do you view the current hospitality landscape of Gujarat?

Gujarat's hospitality landscape is at an exciting inflection point, with the next 10-12 years expected to be extremely fruitful. The state's plans to host the Commonwealth Games 2030 and bid for the Olympics 2036 are strengthening its global profile. Improved airports, expressways and rail networks are enhancing connectivity, while religious and heritage tourism is driving demand across destinations such as Somnath, Dwarka, Palitana and Ekta Nagar. Industrial hubs including Dholera, Kandla and GIFT City are creating sustained corporate and MICE demand. New industrial hubs like Dholera, Kandla, and GIFT City are driving consistent corporate and MICE demand. As a result, national and international hotel brands are expanding beyond Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar into Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities like Junagadh, Kutch, Una and Mandvi.

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What impact do you anticipate from GIFT City on the sector?

GIFT City is emerging as a world-class International Financial Services Centre and global business hub, with significant implications for Gujarat's hospitality sector. Its growth is expected to drive demand for premium hotels, branded residences, serviced apartments and MICE facilities, supported by BFSI firms, fintech companies, global investors, corporate headquarters and business travellers.

Beyond accommodation, GIFT City will generate demand for international conferences, high-value MICE events, world-class F&B, banquet facilities and 24x7 hospitality services. It is also likely to attract new international hotel brands and raise service standards across the region. Most importantly, GIFT City will strengthen the Gandhinagar-Ahmedabad corridor as a 24x7 business destination and position Gujarat's hospitality industry for greater global visibility and growth.



Which infrastructure developments do you believe will most significantly boost the hotel industry?

For the hotel industry, growth is closely linked to connectivity and large-scale events. Improved air, road and rail connectivity will make Tier-2 and Tier-3 destinations more accessible, enabling wider hotel expansion. The Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail will reduce travel time between two major economic hubs, creating opportunities for business, transit and weekend leisure hotels. Meanwhile, sports and event infrastructure, driven by plans for the Commonwealth Games 2030 and the Olympics 2036 bid, could generate substantial demand for rooms, MICE venues and hospitality services. Alongside these, GIFT City, Dholera SIR and new expressways are creating business and industrial corridors that will support sustained corporate travel. ■

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TULSI NAIK
General Manager, Hilton Garden Inn Surat City Centre



How do you view the current hospitality landscape of Gujarat?

Gujarat's hospitality sector is going through one of its strongest growth phases in years. The state used to be defined mostly by transit stays for trade and the diamond business, but that's changing. Ahmedabad–Gandhinagar has moved firmly into the luxury conversation, and cities like Surat aren't far behind, riding their own economic strength. At Hilton Garden Inn Surat City Centre, we're seeing this shift directly in our guest mix. We're no longer serving only textile and diamond trade travellers; MICE groups, weekend leisure guests, and long-stay corporate visitors now make up a growing share. The market is maturing from transactional stays into experience-led hospitality, and branded, service-consistent properties are the ones capturing that demand.

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What impact do you anticipate from GIFT City on the sector?

GIFT City is set to become one of the biggest demand generators for Gujarat's hospitality sector over the next five years, and the effect won't stay confined to Gandhinagar. As it scales up as India's financial and IFSC hub, it's adding more than twenty new hotels along with expanded serviced-living facilities, a clear sign of how much international business travel it expects to host. Global banks, funds, and professionals coming into GIFT City will need consistent, branded stays, and that raises the bar for hospitality standards across the state, Surat included. It also strengthens the Ahmedabad-Gandhinagar-Surat corridor as a single business ecosystem, so a stronger GIFT City indirectly lifts occupancy, corporate rate confidence, and brand recall for hotels across the region.



Which infrastructure developments do you believe will most significantly boost the hotel industry?

Surat's infrastructure growth is emerging as a strong driver of hospitality demand. The city's airport has received full international status, while its terminal expansion from around 8,500 to over 25,000 square metres is expected to support capacity of 5.5 million passengers annually by 2035. The 40.35 km Surat Metro, connecting key areas across two corridors, will improve connectivity between the airport, railway station, business districts and hotels. The redevelopment of Surat Railway Station into a Multi-Modal Transport Hub is also progressing, with the first phase more than halfway complete and the integrated Station City targeted for 2027. Beyond Surat, the Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train and Delhi-Mumbai Expressway are strengthening connectivity across Gujarat, making travel easier and supporting growth in business and leisure hospitality. ■

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Ahmedabad: Poised to become India's vibrant hospitality hub

AKSHAY KAVRA
General Manager, ITC Narmada, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Ahmedabad

Primarily a business travel hub, Ahmedabad is also India's first UNESCO World Heritage City, adding leisure appeal. With CWG 2030 ahead, strong infrastructure, expanding connectivity and urban projects are reshaping it into a dynamic business-cum-leisure destination. Heritage, culinary richness and cultural events broaden its charm, while opportunities across premium business travel, MICE and experiential leisure will define growth. Over the next five years, Ahmedabad is poised to become one of India's most vibrant hospitality markets.

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Demand drivers

Three segments, namely corporate travel, cultural tourism and industrial corridors, will contribute to hotel occupancy in the city of Ahmedabad, but corporate travel and industrial growth will remain the primary demand driver for this market. Gujarat's manufacturing ecosystem, financial services, pharmaceuticals, healthcare and emerging technology sectors continue to attract business travellers here through the year. At the same time, cultural tourism is also gaining momentum as more travellers look for unique local experiences and nearby excursions. A marquee of concerts and sporting events is also creating incremental demand, attracting visitors from within the state and across the country.



> WE BELIEVE IN CURATING IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES THAT CELEBRATE GUJARAT'S CULTURE, CUISINE AND CRAFTSMANSHIP. EQUALLY IMPORTANT IS OUR COMMITMENT TO RESPONSIBLE LUXURY WITH OUR SUSTAINABILITY-LED OPERATIONS AND WORLD-CLASS SERVICE STANDARDS

Opportunities for evolving hospitality market

Continued industrial expansion, improved air and rail connectivity besides increasing domestic tourism are key factors that keep the demand for premium hotels, branded mid-scale properties, extended-stay offerings and destination-led leisure experiences. This is not just limited to big cities like Ahmedabad, Vadodara and Surat, but also extends to the hinterlands like Dholera, Palitana, Gir, Somnath, Dwarka, among others, wherein industrial expansions as well as tourism circuits have come up. Moreover, the Tourism Policy rolled out by the state government also supports convention, wellness and heritage tourism initiatives. Hospitality sector players who focus on quality, sustainability and differentiated guest experiences are well positioned to benefit from the market's long-term growth.

Elevating performance with an action plan

At ITC Narmada, our focus is on strengthening our position as Ahmedabad's preferred luxury hospitality destination. Our focus is to deliver bespoke luxury hospitality experiences that are personalised to the guest's needs alongside expanding our engagement with corporate and MICE segments. We believe in curating immersive experiences that celebrate Gujarat's culture, cuisine and craftsmanship. Equally important is our commitment to responsible luxury with our sustainability-led operations and world-class service standards. By aligning our offerings with the city's evolving business and tourism landscape, we aim to drive sustainable growth, while delivering exceptional value to our guests. ■

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The restaurant of tomorrow starts today

SURIL UDESHI
Principal Consultant, SRC

What does the 'restaurant of tomorrow' look like?

The restaurant of tomorrow is not defined by expensive interiors or a celebrity chef. It is built on a clear concept, operational excellence, memorable guest experiences, and financial sustainability. Guests today seek authenticity, emotion, and consistency. Tomorrow's successful restaurants will deliver all three.

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What is the biggest mistake entrepreneurs make while opening a restaurant?

Most entrepreneurs invest heavily in décor but underestimate the importance of planning. A successful restaurant begins with a strong concept, a well-engineered menu, an efficient kitchen, the right team, and a sustainable business model. Every decision made before opening influences long-term profitability.

How is guest behaviour changing?

Today's guest is well-travelled, digitally connected, and highly informed. They don't simply order food–they seek stories, craftsmanship, wellness, sustainability, and experiences worth sharing. Restaurants that understand these evolving expectations will continue to stay relevant.

Will technology replace hospitality?



> THE RESTAURANT OF TOMORROW IS NOT DEFINED BY EXPENSIVE INTERIORS OR A CELEBRITY CHEF. IT IS BUILT ON A CLEAR CONCEPT, OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE, MEMORABLE GUEST EXPERIENCES, AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Technology should enhance hospitality, not replace it. AI, digital ordering, inventory systems, and analytics can improve efficiency, but genuine smiles, thoughtful service, and emotional connections remain irreplaceable. Hospitality will always be about people serving people.

How important is menu engineering in today's restaurant business?

A menu is one of the most powerful business tools in a restaurant. It should balance creativity with operational efficiency, profitability, guest psychology, and brand identity. Every dish should have a purpose–both on the plate and on the balance sheet.

What role does sustainability play in the future of restaurants?

Sustainability is becoming a business necessity. Responsible sourcing, reducing food waste, conserving energy, and supporting local producers are not just ethical choices–they create stronger brands and smarter businesses. The restaurants that embrace sustainability today will lead the industry tomorrow.

If you could give one piece of advice to aspiring restaurateurs, what would it be?

Don't build a restaurant simply because you love food. Build it because you understand the business of hospitality. Passion brings you to the starting line; strategy, discipline, and consistency keep you in the race.

In one sentence, what does "The Restaurant of Tomorrow Starts Today" truly mean?

The future isn't built on trends–it is built on thoughtful decisions made today. Every choice, from concept and kitchen planning to menu design, team culture, and guest experience, shapes the restaurant of tomorrow. ■

Gujarat is steadily emerging as one of India's most dynamic culinary destinations

CHEF PRAVIN JHA
General Secretary, Gujarat Culinary Association



Evolution of Gujarat's culinary landscape

Gujarat's culinary landscape is undergoing a remarkable transformation. While the state proudly preserves its rich traditional cuisine, it is simultaneously embracing global flavours, modern presentation, and innovative dining concepts. The rapid expansion of premium hotels, speciality restaurants, cafés, cloud kitchens, and food entrepreneurship has elevated consumer expectations. Today's diners seek authentic experiences, healthier options, sustainable sourcing, and visually appealing cuisine. Gujarat is steadily emerging as one of India's most dynamic culinary destinations, where tradition and innovation coexist harmoniously

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Role of Gujarat Culinary Association

The Gujarat Culinary Forum serves as a vital platform for connecting chefs, educators, hospitality professionals, and industry stakeholders. It encourages knowledge sharing, mentorship, skill enhancement, and professional networking. Through competitions, workshops, masterclasses, industry collaborations, and international exchanges, the forum nurtures young culinary talent while promoting continuous learning. It also acts as a bridge between academia and industry, ensuring chefs remain aligned with evolving global standards and best practices.

Technology, automation, and AI

Technology and AI should complement, not replace, the chef's expertise. Automation can improve consistency, inventory management, food safety, production planning, predictive procurement, and operational efficiency, allowing chefs to focus more on creativity, flavour development, and guest experiences. AI-driven analytics can optimise menu engineering and reduce food waste, but culinary artistry, emotional connection, cultural understanding, and innovation remain uniquely human qualities. The future belongs to kitchens where technology enhances efficiency while chefs continue to lead with passion and craftsmanship.

> WOHXPO AHMEDABAD SERVES AS AN IMPORTANT CATALYST FOR INDUSTRY GROWTH

Challenges faced by Chefs

Today's chefs face several challenges, including skilled workforce shortages, increasing operational costs, high employee turnover, demanding work schedules, rapid technological changes, and evolving consumer expectations. To address these issues, stronger collaboration between hospitality institutes, industry associations, government bodies, and employers is essential. Greater investment in vocational training, apprenticeship programs, certification, leadership development, mental well-being initiatives, and continuous skill enhancement will help create a resilient and future-ready culinary workforce.

Importance of Chef Competitions

Competitions are invaluable learning platforms that challenge chefs to think creatively, perform under pressure, and benchmark their skills against industry standards. They cultivate discipline, confidence, teamwork, and innovation while exposing participants to new techniques and international trends.

WOHXpo Ahmedabad serves as an important catalyst for industry growth by bringing together chefs, restaurateurs, hoteliers, manufacturers, suppliers, educators, and innovators on a single platform. ■

Gujarat growth and global hospitality trends

CHIRAG PANCHAL
Founder & Principal Consultant, HDS Consulting, Mumbai



Consumer expectations are increasing every day, and clients now expect both guest facing (FOH) and back of house (BOH) spaces to be planned and designed to the highest standards. In the past, leftover or irregularly shaped spaces were often allocated for BOH operations, while the best spaces were reserved for interiors and guest areas. Today, many clients now understand the importance of well planned BOH spaces.

As facility planners, our responsibility is to educate clients that efficient BOH planning leads to smoother operations, higher staff productivity, and ultimately better business performance. At the same time, guests expect intuitive layouts, contactless services, seamless digital connectivity, and spaces that reflect local culture while meeting international standards. The focus has shifted from creating visually attractive interiors to designing spaces that enhance the overall guest experience while supporting efficient operations behind the scenes.

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Gujarat's development influencing design strategies

Gujarat has experienced significant growth in industrial development, infrastructure, and tourism over the past several years. This growth has created strong demand for a diverse hospitality sector, including business hotels, convention centres, leisure resorts, and mixed use developments.

As a result, hospitality design strategies are evolving to combine international standards with local culture and regional requirements. Developers are focusing on creating facilities that are operationally efficient, scalable, and capable of serving both business and leisure travellers. With continued investments in connectivity and infrastructure, Gujarat is becoming an attractive destination for hospitality projects that are modern, sustainable, and designed for long term growth.

Embedding energy efficient systems

Sustainability has become an essential part of hospitality development rather than an optional feature. Developers are increasingly incorporating energy efficient HVAC systems, LED lighting, smart building management systems, water conservation technologies, and effective waste management solutions from the initial planning stage.

Many hospitality projects are also designed to achieve green building certifications. Clients today understand that sustainability not only reduces environmental impact but also lowers long term operating and maintenance costs. As a result, sustainable solutions are being implemented not only in new developments but also in renovation and refurbishment projects.

> GUJARAT HAS EXPERIENCED SIGNIFICANT GROWTH IN INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND TOURISM OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, CREATING STRONG DEMAND FOR A DIVERSE HOSPITALITY SECTOR

Technology reshaping design

Technology will become an integral part of hospitality design rather than simply an additional feature. Smart guest rooms with IoT enabled controls, AI powered personalisation, and predictive maintenance systems will improve guest comfort while increasing operational efficiency.

In food service operations, technology is transforming commercial kitchens through induction based cooking equipment, advanced combi ovens with programmable cooking functions, and intelligent kitchen management systems. Many Indian equipment manufacturers are upgrading their products by introducing touchscreen controls, pre programmed cooking menus, and IoT enabled features in fabricated equipment such as tilting pans and boiling pans. These features were previously available mainly in imported equipment but are now also seen in Indian made products. ■



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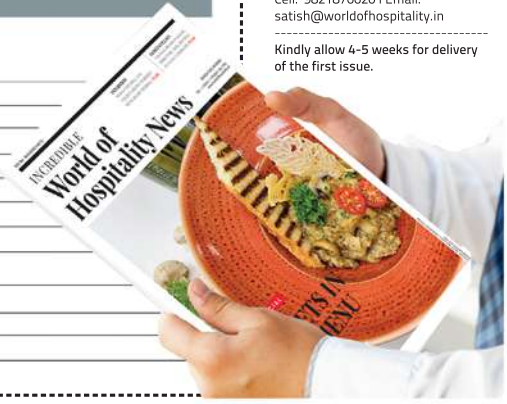
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City's infrastructural developments will support multiple hospitality formats

NIRAJ SHAH
Co-founder / Design director
Ido design / Ido graph



Top architectural and design trends

The Copycat Syndrome: Lower entry barriers have enabled homegrown ventures and new entrepreneurs to replicate successful brands, often relying on quick visual validation rather than research. This results in disconnected decisions across concept, product, positioning, format, brand and spatial experience.

From Labels to Experience: Brands are moving beyond predefined labels such as luxury or minimalism, instead focusing on authentic founder stories, research and cohesive experiences that connect product, format, marketplace and space.

Spatial & Experiential Flexibility: Spaces are evolving to support multiple revenue streams and experiences–combining food with coworking, social gatherings, music, theatre and community-led programming for deeper, longer engagement.

Design has shifted from creating impressive spaces to crafting emotional journeys, with experiences and memories becoming central to the design process. Spaces are increasingly designed for both interaction and isolation. Interaction may involve chefs engaging directly with guests, customers connecting, or dedicated content-friendly spaces where food experiences extend into the digital world. At the same time, intentional nooks support individual work, dining and quiet moments across casual and luxury settings, reflecting the rise of quiet luxury. Layered lighting, acoustics, adaptability, outdoor connectivity and purpose-specific furniture are no longer optional; they are essential design drivers shaping meaningful, flexible hospitality experiences.

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Technology and sustainability shaping design over the next five years

Technology and sustainability will become necessities, not choices. As competition intensifies, brands will embrace both to differentiate themselves while improving feasibility and scalability. Though they involve higher CAPEX, progressive brands will recognise their long-term value. Technology will increasingly become invisible yet integral to management, operations, CRM, billing and customer engagement, while also enabling dynamic spatial and mood experiences. Sustainability will move beyond compliance towards authentic brand alignment, reflecting the expectations of younger, conscious consumers.

Impact of Gift City on the sector

The most obvious catalyst is the liquor allowance within GIFT City, despite Gujarat being a prohibition state. This creates new opportunities for both local and national hospitality players with established expertise and brand equity. GIFT City is poised to build an entirely new hospitality ecosystem, driven not only by global investments but also by MICE demand, expatriates and professionals with international exposure. This will raise design standards across specifications, aesthetics, compliance and overall guest experience. Beyond conventional hotel rooms, opportunities are emerging for long-stay serviced residences, boutique business hospitality, social and event catering, and wellness offerings.

Infrastructure growth

Ahmedabad's expansion, driven by radial and concentric planning, is increasingly integrating **GIFT City, Gandhinagar and Ahmedabad** into one connected urban ecosystem. Enhanced connectivity through the Bullet Train, Metro expansion and airport development will be critical catalysts. This growth will support diverse formats, from neighbourhood cafés and independent F&B concepts to branded hotels, serviced stays and large-scale banqueting. ■

Gujarat offers diverse regional, micro regional, and community cuisines

ANIL MULCHANDANI
Author, freelance journalist and food critic

Way back in 1992, when I visited the craft villages of Kutch, it was a life changing experience. My first published articles focused on Kutch and its artisan communities and received excellent response – many readers said they had never known Kutch as a crafts hub and had even bought embroidered pieces sold as Rajasthani work.

My mission became to write about lesser known rural areas of India – travelogues, tourism pieces, and articles on arts, crafts, food, and social development. Lodges and heritage property owners sought my help in developing and promoting their rural properties, which became catalysts for village development. Without realising it, I mentored many rural entrepreneurs.

Between 1992 and 2006, my articles on heritage hotels, Ayurvedic tourism, and tea tourism generated much interest. In 2017, food enterprises sought help with GST issues, leading to the creation of Innovative Food Entrepreneurs with the help of co-founders Dilip Thakker, Rohit Khanna and Darshan Rawal, later registered as the non-profit company – Culinary Education and Enterprise Development Association.

Celebrating regional food

Gujarat offers diverse regional, micro regional, and community cuisines. Yet for non natives, it is often reduced to thali or farsan snacks. In reality, the state spans tribal staples to princely delicacies, with vibrant non vegetarian traditions alongside Parsi and Bohra influences. Stereotypes of Gujarat as purely vegetarian overlook this richness. Restaurants can reshape perceptions through storytelling, refined presentation, and collaborations with home cooks to showcase authentic dishes and broaden culinary awareness.

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Scope of hospitality in Gujarat

Gujarat, an industrial state, hosts numerous hotels spread beyond major cities into hubs like Dahej and Mundra. While branded hotels are present, luxury names remain limited due to lower room rates, minimal leisure tourism, and restricted international conventions. Recently, global events, concerts, and sporting fixtures, alongside GIFT City and upcoming Commonwealth Games, signal growth potential. For hospitality to thrive, government support is vital in developing business, convention, and lifestyle destinations, creating an ecosystem to attract high end restaurants and luxury hotels.

> GUJARAT, AN INDUSTRIAL STATE, HOSTS NUMEROUS HOTELS SPREAD BEYOND MAJOR CITIES INTO HUBS LIKE DAHEJ AND MUNDRA. WHILE BRANDED HOTELS ARE PRESENT, LUXURY NAMES REMAIN LIMITED DUE TO LOWER ROOM RATES, MINIMAL LEISURE TOURISM ETC.



India's culinary landscape

India's culinary diversity offers entrepreneurs the chance to transform traditional recipes and regional ingredients into modern, sustainable businesses that emphasize cultural, environmental, and social responsibility. Hotels and restaurants can elevate regional foods through storytelling and refined presentation. I have presented a forest food festival along with Harshita Kakwani at Lithosphere in Ahmedabad and Gazra Cafe in Vadodara where tribal dishes and foraged ingredients were presented with fine-dining precision and plating. Such initiatives popularise authentic food, creating demand for native ingredients and benefiting farmers, foragers, processors, and home chefs alike.

(The writer, based in Ahmedabad, has written extensively about industries, tourism, culture, art, handicrafts, heritage and cuisines of Gujarat for magazines, newspapers and books. He has lectured about heritage and culinary tourism in India at symposiums, conferences, seminars, workshops and educational institutions.) ■

Hospitality design today is shaped by a strong sense of place

HIREN PATEL
Founder & Principal Architect, HPAD



What architectural and interior design directions are most influencing hospitality across India today?

Hospitality design today is shaped by a strong sense of place. Hotels, resorts, restaurants, and cafés must interpret local culture, heritage, and architecture through a modern lens. Travellers seek authentic connections, while locals showcase venues reflecting their city's identity. Spaces should never feel generic – they must embody their location's spirit while offering comfort, functionality, and memorable experiences that blend tradition with contemporary hospitality.

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With Gujarat seeing growth in business, weddings, pilgrimage and entertainment travel, how should hotel design balance local identity, operational efficiency and long-term commercial viability?

Gujarat's demand is genuinely diverse - a Dholera business traveller, a 600-guest wedding, and a pilgrimage stay are three different buildings pretending to be one. My view is you design the back-of-house for the most demanding use case (weddings and banqueting), and let identity live in the front-of-house - courtyards, stepwell-inspired water bodies, craft, shade. Local identity should be in the plan and the section, not in the decor package that gets swapped out in year seven. Long-term viability comes from flexible F&B and banqueting envelopes that can be re-tenanted without breaking the structure.

> GUJARAT'S DEMAND IS GENUINELY DIVERSE - A DHOLERA BUSINESS TRAVELLER, A 600-GUEST WEDDING, AND A PILGRIMAGE STAY ARE THREE DIFFERENT BUILDINGS PRETENDING TO BE ONE

Role architects are playing to help hotels and resorts become more sustainable, distinctive and future-ready?

Architects have to stop treating sustainability as a certification exercise and start treating it as an operating-cost argument the owner can read on a spreadsheet. Passive orientation, water strategy and material sourcing decide 70% of the outcome, and all three are locked in the first month of design. On our projects we've pushed natural bio-pools over chlorinated systems and native plantation over imported landscaping - lower lifecycle cost and genuinely more distinctive. Future-ready also means designing for change: floor plates, MEP shafts and structural grids that let a hotel adapt without demolition.

Technology reshaping hospitality designs over the next five years?

The visible layer of smart rooms and automated kitchens is only half the story. Real change begins pre-construction, with VR and AI walkthroughs catching errors early. Kitchen automation and IoT reshape service areas and staffing. Ultimately, technology must make hospitality feel more human – if guests notice the tech, design has failed. ■

Addressing challenges will require stronger industry-government collaboration

ARUN SHETTY
President
Southern Gujarat Hotel & Restaurant Association (SHARA)



Key drivers of growth

Gujarat's hospitality sector is entering a period of significant transformation, driven by progressive tourism policies, infrastructure development, business expansion and a rapidly diversifying visitor economy. A key driver is the Gujarat Tourism Policy, which offers incentives such as capital subsidies, stamp duty concessions and tax exemptions. These are complemented by major attractions including the Statue of Unity, UNESCO World Heritage sites and the Rann Utsav.

Meanwhile, GIFT City and Gujarat's expanding industrial base are generating consistent corporate travel and MICE demand. Upgraded pilgrimage infrastructure at Dwarka, Somnath and Ambaji is further creating demand for quality accommodation, while expressways, high-speed rail and regional airport expansion continue to improve accessibility. This growth is opening opportunities for operators across formats. Experiential resorts, glamping, luxury tented accommodation and coastal or heritage boutique properties can tap high-value leisure demand. Destination weddings and MICE events offer strong potential for banqueting, while F&B is witnessing opportunities for speciality cafés, pure-vegetarian global cuisine and rooftop concepts. GIFT City's evolving liquor regulations could further strengthen its appeal for international business events.

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Current Operational Challenges

However, growth comes with challenges. Skilled manpower remains a critical concern, with high attrition as workers move to metros, overseas markets or Gujarat's industrial sectors. Rising wages, commercial electricity costs, food inflation and urban rentals are also squeezing margins. Operators additionally face complex regulatory processes and supply-chain volatility.

> GIFT CITY'S EVOLVING LIQUOR REGULATIONS STRENGTHENS ITS APPEAL FOR INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS EVENTS

Addressing these challenges will require stronger industry-government collaboration. Partnerships with Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), structured career paths, performance incentives and apprenticeship programmes can help build a local talent pipeline. Plus utilising the National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) for on-the-job training. Technology can complement these efforts through digital PMS, QR ordering, automated KDS, self-check-in and AI-enabled inventory management, reducing operational pressure while improving guest experiences.

Looking ahead, Gujarat's hospitality industry will need policy reforms including single-window clearances, rationalised power tariffs, industry-status benefits and subsidised skill development.

Five-Year Vision

The future vision for Gujarat's hospitality sector will require strong industry associations to act as a bridge between hospitality businesses, government and local institutions. Associations such as SHARA and Gujarat Rajya Hotel Federation can drive policy advocacy for single-window clearances, rationalised power tariffs and industry-friendly regulations. At the operational level, associations can enable collective procurement, negotiate better supply costs and facilitate knowledge-sharing among members. Equally important will be joint destination marketing, positioning Gujarat as a leading sports, MICE and sustainable tourism destination, while promoting hospitality growth across Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. ■

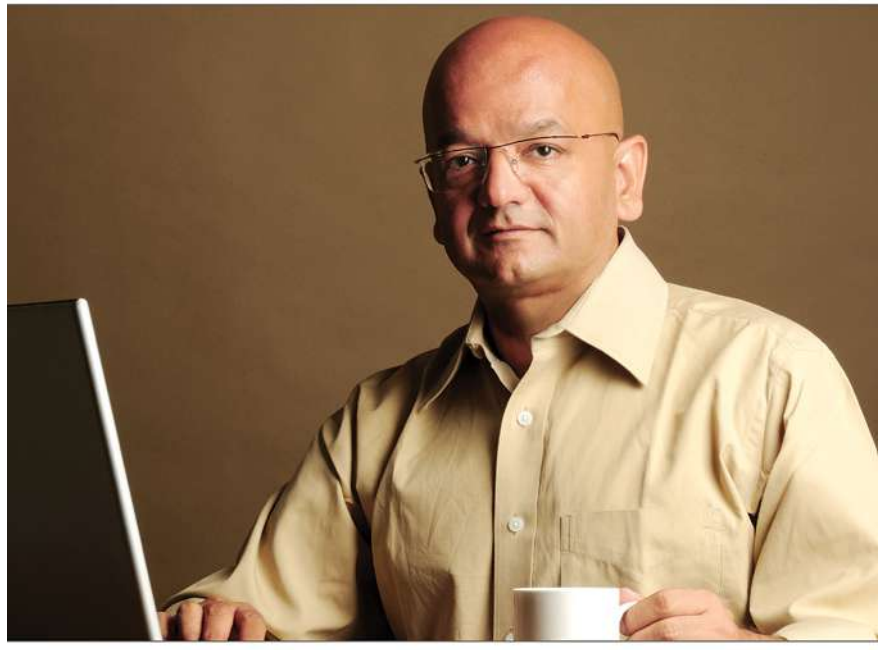
Shaping Ahmedabad's food culture

DILIP THAKKAR
CEO, Gopi Dining Hall and NRAI Co-Chapter Head – Ahmedabad

You carry forward a legacy brand. What were the most defining moments in your entrepreneurial journey that built you as a leader in the F&B segment?

I began at 13, when food wasn't big in Ahmedabad. In 1979, we pioneered Gujarati thali – ₹1 limited, ₹2 full. Our location near major hospitals drew crowds, including Narendra Modi, then a Sangh worker, who often ate at Gopi. I have gone through several initiatives that were taken at our restaurant like introduction of unique touches: I held babies so mothers could eat, and then being the first to accept credit cards when thali cost ₹10, and offering paan to every guest for retention and feedback. These gestures built loyalty and trust, and helped me learn and grow as an entrepreneur.

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WE ARE BRINGING GUJARAT'S LARGEST EVENT ON 20TH AUGUST IN AHMEDABAD I.E., NRAI FOOD DELIVERY SUMMIT 2026, WITH 4,000 ATTENDEES

The brand has sustained its appeal for 47 years. How do you balance traditional authenticity with modern requirements for consumer impact and loyalty?

We are sticking around with our authenticity of the food, but otherwise, we provide all good infrastructure and facilities that a modern diner would provide. We stick to authentic Gujarati food, and ensure a hygienic environment with clean kitchens. While we are being 100% compliant with all norms and licenses, we are also adopting all modern tactics and practices to make the place offer a beautiful and fool-proof experience. And we are not playing with our food.

The restaurant business landscape in Gujarat...

Gujarat's food industry faces challenges without alcohol, so focus is entirely on food. Celebrations and events revolve around meals. Mumbai thrives as people eat all four meals outside due to commutes, while - in comparison -Ahmedabad is more laid back, with dining out mainly on weekends. Supply has surged – fine dining, QSRs, street food, home chefs, cloud kitchens, roadside stalls, etc. Demand lags as health consciousness rises.

As NRAI Co Chapter Head here, how is the association helping Gujarat's restaurant industry flourish?

We are bringing Gujarat's largest event on 20th August in Ahmedabad i.e., NRAI Food Delivery Summit 2026, with 4,000 attendees. Seminars, workshops, panels, and 100+ stalls will gather under one roof. The initiative like this is aimed at building awareness, professionalism and fraternity among restaurateurs in the state. ■

Radisson Blu Resort Temple Bay unveils *Shore Temple Dialogues*

IWOH News

GRT HOTELS & RESORTS unveiled Shore Temple Dialogues, a signature sub-brand under its acclaimed GReaT Conversations platform, with an exclusive evening at Radisson Blu Resort Temple Bay Mamallapuram, bringing together the country's leading voices in luxury weddings against the timeless backdrop of the UNESCO World Heritage Shore Temple and the Bay of Bengal.

The inaugural

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edition convened an influential gathering of celebrated wedding planners, destination specialists, hospitality leaders, representation from Tamil Nadu tourism and lifestyle influencers to explore the evolution of destination weddings and Mahabalipuram's emergence as one of India's most coveted wedding destinations.

The panel featured John Santhana Paul Business Head The Chozhas Media & Entertainments, Nikhil Jetha, Founder of EWE Events, Ramkumar R Managing Director of Varsham Events & Vice President South India of EEMA, and Murugan



Rajan, General Manager, Radisson Blu Resort Temple Bay Mamallapuram, and was moderated by Jit Bose, Vice President - Commercial, GRT Hotels & Resorts.

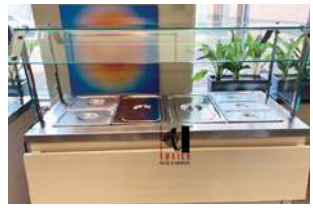
Guests were treated to an immersive culinary experience by the resort's award-winning chefs.

The evening concluded with an intimate networking dinner, reinforcing Mahabalipuram's appeal as a destination where heritage, luxury and bespoke celebrations converge. ■


Pasta Cooker -Table Top


Electric Teppanyaki with pan slide


Three Burner Bulk Cooking Range


Cold Salad Counter with wooden covering foldable flaps sneeze guard


Dim Sum Trolley


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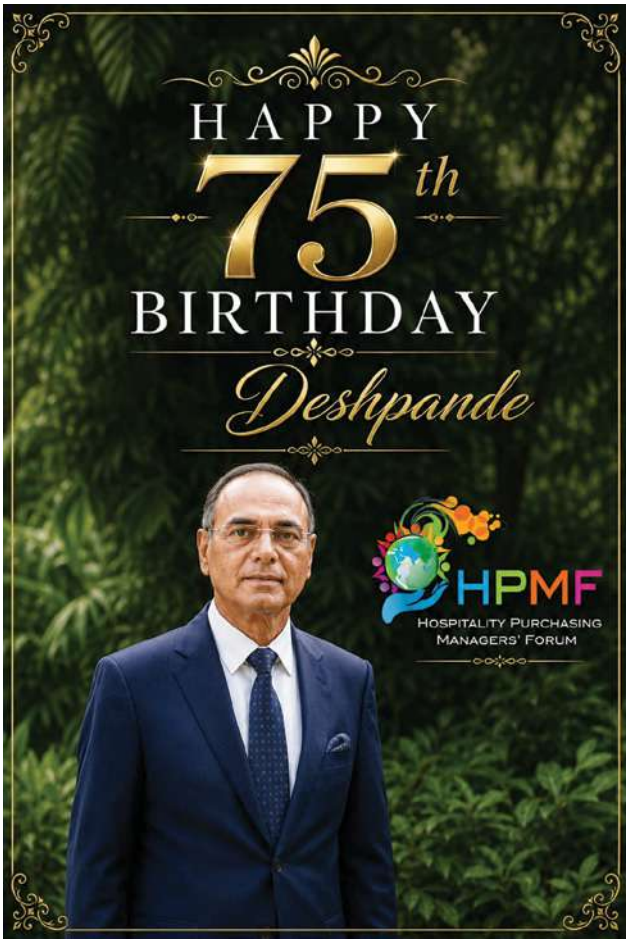
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HPMF launches the **Chairman's Legacy Series**

IWOH News

THE HOSPITALITY PURCHASING MANAGERS' FORUM (HPMF) recently celebrated the 75th Birthday of its esteemed Chairman, Mohan Deshpande, by announcing the launch of the HPMF Chairman's Legacy Series, a permanent institutional initiative established to honour his outstanding contribution to the hospitality industry and his enduring legacy of leadership, integrity, mentorship and service.

Deshpande has been an integral part of HPMF's journey, providing visionary leadership, unwavering guidance and steadfast support in shaping the Forum into one of India's most respected professional hospitality organisations. His wisdom, humility and commitment to developing people have positively influenced countless hospitality professionals across the country. Recognising this remarkable contribution, HPMF has instituted the Chairman's Legacy Series to ensure that the principles Deshpande has championed continue to inspire present and future generations.

The initiative will serve as a long-term platform for leadership development, professional recognition, education and sustainability within the hospitality fraternity.

The Legacy Series will progressively introduce the flagship programmes:



Chairman Deshpande Leadership & Excellence Award

An annual national honour recognising outstanding leadership, ethical conduct and excellence in hospitality procurement and supply chain management.

Chairman Deshpande Mentorship Programme -

A structured initiative connecting experienced hospitality leaders with emerging professionals to nurture future industry leadership.

Chairman Deshpande Scholarship for Hospitality Students -

Scholarships designed to encourage deserving hospitality management students and support the next generation of professionals.

Chairman Deshpande Annual Leadership Lecture -

An annual keynote delivered by a distinguished national or international hospitality leader, fostering knowledge sharing and leadership excellence.

75 Trees for 75 Years Sustainability Initiative -

A nationwide environmental programme symbolising growth, responsibility and HPMF's commitment to sustainability.

> **“We aim to preserve those values and transform them into meaningful initiatives that will benefit our industry for decades to come**

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Nitin Shankar Nagrale, Founder & General Secretary of HPMF, said:

"Today marks a truly historic moment in the journey of HPMF. We are not merely celebrating the 75th Birthday of our respected Chairman; we are establishing a legacy that will continue to

inspire generations of hospitality professionals. Mr. Deshpande has always led with integrity, humility and an unwavering commitment to serving our fraternity. Through the Chairman's Legacy Series, we aim to preserve those values and transform them into meaningful initiatives that will benefit our industry for decades to come."

He further added, "For me personally, Deshpande has been far more than a Chairman. He has been a mentor, a guiding force and a source of immense inspiration. It is both a privilege and an honour to launch this initiative in recognition of his extraordinary contribution to HPMF and to the hospitality community."



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The HPMF Chairman's Legacy Series will become one of the Forum's flagship institutional initiatives, with the inaugural roadmap and future programmes to be formally showcased during the HPMF Convention & Awards 2027, scheduled to be held from 28-31 January 2027 at The Leela Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

As HPMF continues its mission of connecting, collaborating and growing together, the Chairman's Legacy Series will serve as a lasting reminder that true leadership is measured not merely by achievements, but by the lives inspired and the values passed on to future generations. ■

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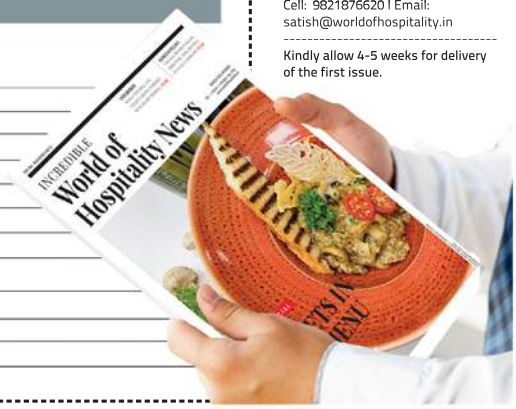
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Tier-2 & 3 cities are central to the future of India's hotel industry growth



Mohammed Parvez, CEO, Essentia Hotels & Resorts outlines the potential of India's mid-market segment and his brand's positioning to tap it

BY STEENA JOY

Your insights on India's mid-market hospitality segment.

As the CEO of Essentia Hotels & Resorts, I believe India's mid-market hospitality segment holds tremendous growth potential. Rising domestic travel, increasing demand from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, and the shift toward experience-driven stays are reshaping the industry. Today's guests seek quality, comfort, and personalised experiences at accessible prices. At Essentia, we see this segment as the future backbone of Indian hospitality, where strong branded players can scale by combining operational excellence with warm, destination-focused experiences.

As many of your properties are in Tier 2 & 3 cities, do you think these cities are critical to the future of hotel growth?

I strongly believe Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities are central to the future of India's hotel industry growth. These markets are witnessing rapid economic development, better infrastructure, rising business activity, and increasing domestic tourism.

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Demand for quality hospitality in these cities is growing significantly, especially for weddings, corporate travel, social events, and leisure stays. At Essentia, we see immense opportunity in bringing premium yet accessible hospitality experiences to emerging destinations where branded hotel presence is still limited.

How has the geopolitical situation affected tourism, especially corporates?

I believe geopolitical uncertainties do create short-term caution in the tourism and corporate travel sectors. Companies tend to reassess travel budgets and event planning during periods of global instability. However, India's strong domestic travel market has helped the hospitality industry remain resilient.

We are also seeing corporates increasingly prefer trusted domestic destinations for meetings, conferences, and retreats. This shift has created opportunities for quality hospitality brands in emerging cities and resort destinations, where demand for reliable and experience-driven stays continues to grow.

How has the Indian traveller evolved over the years? Is affordable luxury a myth in India?

The Indian traveller today is more experience-driven, digitally aware, and value-conscious than ever before. Travel is no longer just about staying somewhere – it's about personalised experiences, wellness, comfort, and discovering new destinations.

Affordable luxury is definitely not a myth in India. Modern travellers seek premium experiences at smart value, where luxury is defined by quality service, thoughtful design, and memorable experiences rather than excess. The hospitality industry is evolving to meet this growing demand for accessible yet elevated travel experiences.

What is the future roadmap for the brand?

At Essentia Hotels & Resorts, our future roadmap is focused on strategic expansion, stronger guest experiences, and building a trusted hospitality brand across India. We aim to grow in key business, leisure, and wedding destinations while strengthening our presence in the weddings and events segment. Our focus will remain on digital growth, personalised hospitality, operational excellence, and sustainable practices. At the same time, we are committed to investing in our people, technology, and service standards to ensure every guest experiences the warmth and quality that define Essentia. Our vision is to position Essentia Hotels & Resorts as one of India's most preferred and respected hospitality brands in the coming years. ■

Chef Set Housewares Makes Ahmedabad Debut

Chef Set Housewares will make its debut at World of Hospitality Expo Ahmedabad, Gujarat 2026, bringing almost five decades of cookware manufacturing and supply experience to one of India's leading hospitality trade events.

The company will showcase its portfolio of Stainless Steel Cookware, Aluminium Cookware, Tri-Ply Cookware, Pizzaware, and Stainless Steel Topes, including its specialist range of stainless steel impact-bonded cookware for hospitality, restaurant, catering, and foodservice (HoReCa) sectors.

Established in Pune, India, in 1994 following the success of its UK parent company, Chef Set Housewares began as an international sourcing operation before expanding

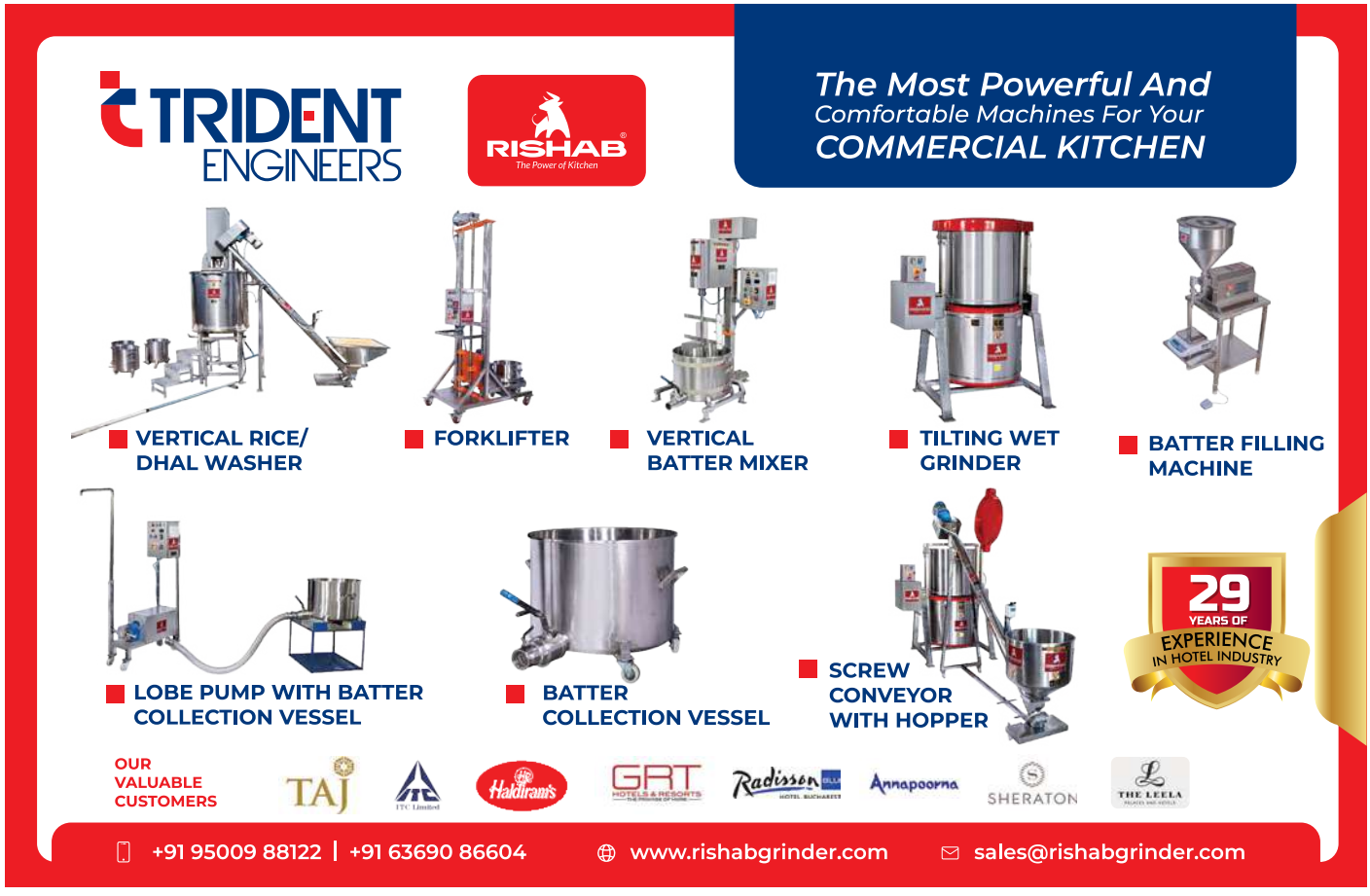


into full-scale manufacturing in 1996. Today, the company supplies distributors, importers, wholesalers, and hospitality suppliers across the UK and international markets.

Combining UK led product design with state-of-the-art Indian manufacturing, Chef Set Housewares produces both its own brands and private label cookware solutions for customers worldwide. Investment in semi-automated manufacturing has enabled the business to increase production capacity, improve efficiency and maintain consistent quality across its product range, while supporting reliable supply for trade and hospitality customers.

Visitors to World of Hospitality Expo Ahmedabad Gujarat 2026 can meet the Chef Set Housewares team at Stand H138 to discuss sourcing requirements, opportunities and export partnerships. ■

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Mob : 9922741313 / 9423582337
Website : www.chefset.co.in



Are Hospitality Institutes Ready to Prepare Students for an

AI-Driven Market?

Today, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is an integral part of hotel operations; it is no longer a technological intervention for corporate's MIS and certainly no longer a futuristic concept; it's a reality. **Dr. Nisheeth Srivastava** explores how hospitality institutions can prepare students for an increasingly AI-driven industry

From AI-powered reservation systems and revenue management to predictive analytics, personalised guest experiences, and automated customer interactions, the hospitality industry is undergoing one of the biggest transformations since its evolution. This technological interference can not be accommodated by amending the curriculum; it needs refurbishment of infrastructure, faculty mindsets, pedagogy and shifting focus from manual skills to best use of technology. For UG & PG programs, we need to work on the issues affecting this change.

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Hospitality Education is at a Crossroads

For decades, hospitality education has focused on developing operational competencies. Students learn food production, food and beverage service, front office operations, housekeeping, hospitality accounting, and hotel management principles. However, today's hospitality professional requires much more than operational excellence. Hotels are becoming technology-intensive organisations where data, automation, digital marketing, artificial intelligence, customer analytics, and smart decision-making are becoming part of daily operations.

If educational institutions continue to teach hospitality exactly as they have since 1954, when Cyril Belfred Smith designed pedagogy for hospitality education, they risk producing graduates who are academically qualified but professionally underprepared, which the industry is already realising. We must understand that the industry is evolving much faster than academic curricula.



> **"The biggest challenge lies in preparing faculty members**

Travel apps, hospitality platforms and hotel front offices are increasingly using AI-powered chatbots to answer guest queries, process reservations, provide concierge and guest feedback services around the clock. The revenue management vertical of front office uses AI applications to forecast demand, optimise pricing, and maximise occupancy. Housekeeping not only employs predictive maintenance tools that identify equipment failures before they occur but also uses AI for inventory control. Food production benefits from AI-assisted material and manpower management, demand forecasting, waste reduction, and recipe standardisation.

I believe AI technology cannot replace hospitality, because hospitality is rooted in empathy, emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity and the human ability to create meaningful experiences. A warm smile or compassionate response cannot be replicated by a machine. However, hospitality education needs a fundamental shift. Simply adding an optional AI subject is not enough. Academicians must rethink the learning ecosystem, using AI to move beyond information delivery towards practical application and experiential learning. Students should understand AI applications, data analytics, digital transformation, smart hotels, cloud-based systems, customer analytics, cybersecurity and ethical technology use, while developing critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making skills.

Hospitality education should move from simply teaching 'how hotels operate' to teaching "how to compete in hospitality businesses."

The biggest challenge lies in preparing faculty members. Curriculum revision alone cannot create change. Many hospitality educators built successful careers before the emergence of AI. While they possess rich operational knowledge, they may not yet feel confident teaching emerging technologies.

Institutes must invest in continuous faculty development through industry immersion, which I made mandatory for faculty during my tenure in Kolkata and Mumbai. Now, the focus of faculty should be on AI certification programmes, partnerships with technology companies, research collaborations, and international exposure. Teachers must become lifelong learners first before they prepare professionals. An institution cannot produce future-ready graduates if its faculty remain rooted in the past. Training of faculty in real-life situations should be a continuous process with all institutions; conducting special classes in the head office for a few faculty is not a solution.

Since academic institutes can not invest heavily in creating new infrastructure for AI applications that's why they should create Stronger Industry Partnerships for faculty development.

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Technology companies, hotel chains, start-ups, hospitality software providers, and AI solution developers should regularly interact with students through workshops, live projects, hackathons, innovation labs, mentoring programmes, internships, and guest lectures.

Furthermore, students should participate in national and international competitions, innovation challenges, research conferences, entrepreneurship programmes, leadership camps, industry mentoring, certification courses, and interdisciplinary learning. Hospitality education must expose students to business schools, engineering institutions, design schools, and technology ecosystems. Collaboration across disciplines will prepare graduates to think differently and solve real-world challenges. Institutions that encourage exploration, experimentation, innovation, and continuous learning will produce future leaders. ■

About the Author

Dr. Nisheeth Srivastava has successfully led the Institutes of Hotel Management at Srinagar, Kolkata, and Mumbai. He is also the founder Director of Banarsidas Chandiwala IHM and FHRAI IHM in NCR Delhi.

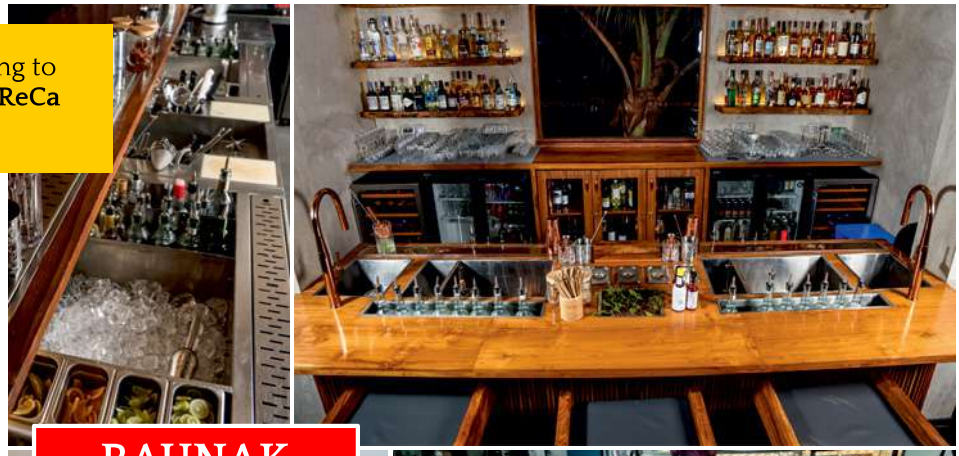
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Setting Sail for Global Careers: SAI Institutions

Chef Dr. Vinoth Kumar, Founder & Principal, Global Careers and Training, shares how specialised training, international certifications, and industry-ready skills are helping Indian hospitality professionals build successful careers aboard the world's leading cruise liners



As international cruise lines continue to expand their fleets, the demand for trained chefs, food and beverage professionals, housekeeping associates, front office executives, and guest service personnel is rising steadily. However, securing a position onboard requires far more than a conventional hotel management qualification. According to **Dr. Chef VK**, aspiring cruise professionals must combine hospitality education with internationally recognised maritime certifications to meet global recruitment standards.

"Many students believe a hotel management qualification alone is enough to secure a cruise career," he explains. "While it provides the hospitality foundation, today's cruise industry also requires candidates to meet international maritime standards before they can join a vessel."

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Along with a 10th pass qualification and a minimum one-year hospitality diploma or degree, candidates are expected to possess relevant industry experience, a valid passport, and mandatory certifications such as STCW (Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping), INDoS registration, Continuous Discharge Certificate (CDC), medical fitness certification, and the Orientation Course for Catering Personnel (OCCP). Mandatory cruise certifications are required in the order of United States Public Health (USPH), STCW, INDoS and Placement Login. These, along with the other mandatory documents and certifications, help candidates become merit candidates eligible for cruise interviews.



While traditional hotel management programmes focus on culinary operations, accommodation management, and guest services, cruise-specific training prepares students for life at sea. Maritime safety, emergency response, shipboard discipline, international hygiene protocols, and operational procedures become integral parts of their learning, enabling them to work confidently in highly regulated global environments.

Cruise hospitality also offers a career unlike any other. Beyond attractive international salaries ranging from USD 850 to USD 3,500 per month, professionals gain exposure to multicultural workplaces, structured career progression, and world-class hospitality standards. "A cruise career is not simply a job at sea," says Chef Dr. Vinoth Kumar. "It is an opportunity to become an international hospitality professional."

Today's cruise

lines recruit across a wide range of departments, including food and beverage, culinary operations, housekeeping, bakery, spa and wellness, retail, casino operations, inventory management, security, and medical services. Yet, employers increasingly value qualities that extend beyond technical expertise. Strong communication skills, professionalism, adaptability, teamwork, emotional intelligence, and cultural sensitivity often determine long-term career success.

One of the biggest barriers for aspiring candidates, he believes, is awareness. Many students remain unfamiliar with certification requirements, documentation processes, and the overall recruitment pathway. Institutions specialising in cruise careers therefore play a critical role in guiding students through certifications, professional grooming, interview preparation, and placement support.

Technology is also reshaping the cruise hospitality landscape. Modern ships operate with AI-assisted hospitality operations, advanced digital guest management systems, cashless transactions, inventory controls, and smart operational platforms. As a result, training today extends beyond hospitality fundamentals to include digital awareness and international operating standards.

Looking ahead, Chef Dr. Vinoth Kumar remains optimistic about India's role in the global cruise industry. Indian hospitality professionals continue to earn recognition for their service excellence, discipline, and adaptability, while the industry's expansion promises even greater opportunities in the years ahead. ■

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Celebrating India's culinary craftsmanship

Karigari redefines dining as a tribute to India's culinary craftsmanship. Rooted in heritage yet shaped by innovation, the brand celebrates authentic flavours, heartfelt hospitality and sustainable growth while expanding across key markets and embracing Gujarat's evolving F&B landscape. **Manish Sharma**, Co-Founder & Chief Operating Officer, Karigari Ventures, elaborates more about the brand's measured expansion strategy focussed on sustainable growth

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How does Karigari define its core concept?

Karigari was created as more than a restaurant–it is a celebration of India's culinary craftsmanship. Inspired by the stories of regional cooks, artisans, spice growers and families preserving traditional recipes, the brand honours the people behind India's rich food heritage. Every aspect of Karigari, from its menu and interiors to its service philosophy, is designed to evoke nostalgia, authenticity, and emotional connection. The brand believes



Karigari believes its greatest strength lies in its culture, values, and emotional connection with guests

hospitality is about creating memorable experiences, where genuine warmth and timeless values remain at the heart of every guest interaction.

Karigari's expansion roadmap?

Karigari is pursuing a measured expansion strategy focussed on sustainable growth rather than rapid scaling. Over the next two years, the brand plans to strengthen its presence across key markets, including Hyderabad, Jaipur, Bhubaneswar, Gurugram, Dwarka, Aerocity, Kanpur, Patna, Bareilly, and Varanasi. Alongside geographic growth, the company is investing in operational excellence, leadership development, technology, and consistent guest experiences. It is also exploring premium high-street locations, destination formats, and strategic hospitality partnerships to ensure every new outlet reflects the brand's philosophy and commitment to Indian culinary heritage.

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How do you view Gujarat as an F&B market?

Gujarat has emerged as one of India's most promising hospitality markets, driven by evolving consumer preferences and growing demand for premium dining experiences. The development of GIFT City has been a game changer, creating a world-class business and hospitality ecosystem that has attracted leading restaurant brands. Karigari sees GIFT City as a natural fit for its concept and believes it reflects the aspirations of modern consumers seeking authentic, experience-led dining. Beyond GIFT City, cities like Ahmedabad, Surat and Vadodara offer strong long-term potential, making Gujarat a key pillar of the brand's future expansion strategy.

What makes Karigari distinctive in a competitive restaurant market?

Karigari believes its greatest strength lies in its culture, values and emotional connection with guests. Rather than chasing trends, the brand focusses on celebrating Indian craftsmanship, regional cuisines, and heartfelt hospitality. Its emphasis on quality ingredients, consistent execution, staff training, storytelling, and guest engagement creates an experience that is difficult to replicate. Karigari aims to build lasting trust by offering not just exceptional food, but a genuine sense of belonging and authenticity. ■



THE PAN BORN FROM A RIFLE BARREL

Why stricter kitchen rules in 2026 make frypan quality a hotel's problem too

In 1913, a metallurgist named Harry Brearley was trying to solve a military problem in Sheffield, UK. Gun barrels were wearing out too fast from heat. While testing different steel mixes, he made a batch containing chromium and carbon that completely resisted rust. Almost by instinct, since Sheffield was a cutlery town, he tested it with vinegar and lemon juice. It held up. That's how stainless steel found its way into kitchens instead of guns.

That old story matters again today, especially in Indian kitchens, where acid is part of almost everything on the menu. Tomato-based gravies, tamarind, kokum, raw mango, and citrus are daily ingredients, and a pan that reacts to any of them affects both taste and food safety.

Why this is a compliance story, not just a cooking one

Cooking equipment causes most restaurant fires. India has tightened its fire safety rules through 2026, with hotels now expected to maintain proper compliance records and pass stricter inspections.

A frypan sits right in the middle of this. A warped base sits unevenly on the flame or induction coil. A flaking coating creates both a food safety issue and a housekeeping headache. And a pan that fails mid-service is often replaced in a hurry with whatever is on hand rather than what was actually specified.

Maxfresh manufactures its triply frypans in India, under the Shree Vallabh Metal group, a stainless steel houseware and hotelware maker and an in-house design studio that works directly with hospitality clients.

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The construction uses the same chemistry Brearley discovered: a food-grade stainless steel interior for acid resistance, an aluminium core for even heat distribution, and a magnetic base for stable induction heating.

For a chef running a tadka station or a dum biryani pot through a ten-hour banquet shift, this means predictable heat and a cooking surface built to hold its finish, shift after shift, whether the kitchen runs on gas, induction, or both.

India's commercial cooking equipment industry was worth USD 545.9 million in 2023 and is expected to reach USD 1,020.2 million by 2030, growing at 8.8% a year, as hotels and restaurants replace older equipment faster than before, often specifically choosing Indian-manufactured cookware over imports.

Brearley's discovery answered one question: does this hold up under pressure? A century later, Maxfresh answers the same question for every hotel kitchen it supplies, with a pan engineered to perform through the busiest service and the strictest inspection alike. ■



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Chef & Founder, The Pasta Bowl Company, Bombay Meri Jaan, Chef Om's Hospitality



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Culinary Director, Avas Wellness | Author of Tell My Mother I Like Boys



AMIT BAGGA
Co-Founder, Daryaganj Hospitality



AMITABH NEGI
CEO, Vita Nova (Coffee Island)



SAMIR KUCKREJA
Founder & CEO, Tasanaya Hospitality Pvt. Ltd.



JINRAJ ADYANTHAYA
Head of Sales, Nestle Professional India



RAHUL BAHL
Deputy General Manager (North) – Food Services, Tata Consumer Products



KISHORE SHARMA
Chief Operating Officer, Giani's Ice Cream



NITIN MATHUR
COO, EHV International (Indian Accent, Comorin, Hosa, Fireback, Barback, Chor Bizzare, Drift Cafe Bar, EHV Catering)



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Building Better Food Holding & Meal Transportation Experiences with ScanBox

By Vivek Sinha
Country Head – Indian Subcontinent, ScanBox

India's hospitality industry is experiencing remarkable growth, driven by rising travel demand, expanding foodservice operations, and increasing expectations for quality and efficiency. From luxury hotels and restaurants to corporate cafeterias, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and large-scale catering businesses, the need for reliable, sustainable, and high-performance foodservice solutions has never been greater.

At ScanBox, our vision is to support this transformation by bringing world-class food holding and meal transportation solutions to Indian kitchens. We believe that every meal served should reach the guest exactly as intended—fresh, safe, and at the right temperature, regardless of where it is prepared or served.

ScanBox is a premium hot and cold food holding cabinet designed specifically for the HORECA sector, institutional catering, healthcare, and corporate foodservice operations. Trusted globally and engineered to European standards, our solutions help operators maintain food quality, improve operational efficiency, and deliver a superior dining experience.

What makes ScanBox unique is our commitment to combining innovation, sustainability, and affordability. Our products are **BIS-certified** and designed to meet the highest standards of quality and performance.

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Featuring lightweight construction, advanced fan-assisted heating and air circulation technology, superior heat retention, and minimal energy consumption, ScanBox ensures consistent food holding performance without compromising taste, texture, appearance, or food safety.



As foodservice operations continue to evolve, kitchens are under increasing pressure to do more with less—reduce food waste, improve productivity, optimize energy usage, and maintain consistent food quality. Sustainability is no longer an option; it is a responsibility. ScanBox addresses these challenges through energy-efficient solutions that support better meal management while helping operators reduce their environmental footprint and operating costs.

Our mission extends beyond supplying equipment. We aim to elevate the standards of food holding and meal transportation across India. Whether serving guests in a luxury hotel, employees in a corporate dining facility, patients in a healthcare institution, or attendees at a large-scale catering event, maintaining food quality throughout the service journey is critical. ScanBox helps foodservice professionals deliver meals with confidence, consistency, and efficiency.

As part of our long-term growth strategy, we are strengthening our presence across the country. We are currently expanding our team with the appointment of a dedicated Sales Manager for South India. Following our growth in South India, we plan to further strengthen our footprint across North India, bringing ScanBox's innovative solutions to a wider network of hospitality and foodservice professionals.

Our vision is clear: to become the preferred food holding and meal transportation partner for HORECA, institutional, healthcare, and corporate kitchens across India, helping create better foodservice experiences—every guest, every meal, every day. ■

HCF elects new Managing Committee (2026–2028)

IWOH News


Arvind Gopal


Pramod Paleri

THE HOSPITALITY CONSULTANTS FORUM (HCF) marked a significant milestone with the official swearing-in ceremony of its newly elected Managing Committee for the 2026-2028 term. Pramod Paleri, President; Arvind Gopal, Secretary, Aditya Jhala, Treasurer and the Governing Committee members are Mehul Shah, Jayesh Hingarth, Chef. Rajneesh Gandhi and Chirag Panchal.

Elected through a transparent and democratic process, the new Managing Committee has assumed office with a shared commitment to serve the HCF fraternity with integrity, accountability, and vision. The office bearers took the oath of office, reaffirming their dedication to upholding the Forum's values, promoting transparency in governance, and working collectively for the benefit of its members.

During its tenure, the committee will focus on enhancing member engagement, strengthening professional networking opportunities, encouraging knowledge sharing, and driving initiatives that contribute to the advancement of the hospitality consulting profession. The leadership will also oversee the Forum's day-to-day administration, financial planning, organisational development, and implementation of strategic initiatives that support HCF's long-term vision.

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The successful transition of leadership reflects HCF's strong democratic principles and its commitment to inclusive governance, ensuring that every member has a voice in shaping the Forum's future. With renewed enthusiasm and a forward-looking approach, the 2026-2028 Managing Committee aims to build upon the achievements of its predecessors. As HCF embarks on this new chapter, the Forum remains committed to fostering excellence, professional ethics, collaboration, and continuous learning, further strengthening its position as a respected platform for hospitality consultants across. ■



FHRAI to Host its 56th Annual Convention in Varanasi

IWOH News

THE FEDERATION OF HOTEL & RESTAURANT ASSOCIATIONS OF INDIA (FHRAI), is set to host the 56th FHRAI Annual Convention from 21st to 23rd August 2026 at Taj Ganges, Varanasi, under the inspiring theme "Ananta Kashi: Leading the Future of Tourism through Spirit, Culture, Cuisine and Craft."

Supported by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, with Uttar Pradesh Tourism as the Partner State, the three-day convention will be one of India's largest and most influential hospitality and tourism gatherings. The event will bring together policymakers, industry leaders, investors, entrepreneurs, hospitality professionals, tourism stakeholders, and thought leaders to deliberate on the future of India's tourism and hospitality sector.

The prestigious convention is expected to witness the participation of Shri Yogi Adityanath, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, as



Shri Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo



Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat

the Chief Guest, along with Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Hon'ble Union Minister of Tourism & Culture, Government of India; Shri Satish Mahana Ji as Guest of Honour Speaker, Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly; Shri Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh; Shri Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister of Odisha; Shri Jaiveer Singh, Hon'ble Minister of Tourism & Culture, Government of Uttar Pradesh; Shri Ravindra Jaiswal, Hon'ble Minister of State (Independent Charge), Government of Uttar Pradesh; Shri Rohan Khunte, Hon'ble Minister for Tourism, Government of Goa; Bhuvnesh Kumar, IAS, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India; Suman Billa, IAS, Additional Secretary & Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India; Amrit Abhijat, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary, Tourism, Culture and Religious Affairs, Government of Uttar Pradesh; along with several other senior

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policymakers and distinguished industry leaders.

The convention will also feature an impressive line-up of global hospitality leaders and industry stalwarts, including Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director & CEO, IHCL (Taj Group); Anil Chadha, Managing Director, ITC Hotels; Dimitris Manikis, President & Managing Director - EMEA, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts; K.B. Kachru, Chairman - South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group; Nikhil Sharma, Managing Director & COO - South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group; Zubin Saxena, Senior Vice President & Regional Head - South Asia, Hilton along with several other leading voices from India's hospitality ecosystem.

Shri Surendra Kumar Jaiswal, President, FHRAI, said, "The 56th FHRAI Annual Convention will serve as a landmark platform for meaningful dialogue on the future of Indian tourism and hospitality. Hosted in the spiritual capital of India, the convention reflects our vision of combining heritage with innovation while creating opportunities for industry collaboration, policy discussions and sustainable growth. We look forward to welcoming delegates from across India and abroad to Varanasi for this prestigious gathering."

Garish Oberoi, Vice President, FHRAI, added, "It is our privilege to welcome delegates from across India and around the world to the 56th FHRAI Annual Convention in the sacred city of Varanasi. This convention has been thoughtfully designed to encourage meaningful dialogue, foster partnerships, and inspire new ideas that will shape the future of India's hospitality and tourism sector. We look forward to providing every participant with an enriching blend of business, culture and unforgettable experiences."

The inaugural ceremony on 21st August will feature welcome addresses by the leadership of FHRAI and eminent industry personalities. The evening will also host the FHRAI Bharat Gaurav Awards, honouring distinguished personalities for their outstanding contribution to the cultural and artistic heritage of Varanasi. Delegates will also witness vibrant cultural performances celebrating the city's timeless traditions, followed by the inauguration of the exhibition and a networking gala dinner. ■

Hotel Industry seeks policy boost as KSHA meets Karnataka Chief Minister





IWOH News

THE KARNATAKA STATE HOTELS ASSOCIATION (KSHA) has called for a series of policy reforms to strengthen the state's hotel and hospitality sector, citing its significant contribution to employment, tourism and economic activity. A delegation led by President G.K. Shetty met Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar and submitted a detailed memorandum outlining key concerns and recommendations for the industry.

One of the association's primary demands is a substantial reduction in the solid waste disposal fee, currently set at ₹12 per kg. KSHA has proposed reducing the charge to ₹3-₹5 per kg, stating that the existing rate could place considerable financial pressure on hotels, particularly smaller establishments.

The association also sought the introduction of permanent trade licences for GST-registered commercial establishments, replacing the current system of annual renewals. According to KSHA, this would reduce administrative burdens and simplify compliance for hospitality businesses.

Excise reforms also featured prominently in the memorandum. The association has called for a clear legal framework governing the existing excise licence contract system, along with resolution of long-standing issues concerning the transfer of licences to legal heirs. Another major concern is the recently increased minimum wage of ₹24,407. KSHA has argued that the revision could significantly affect small and medium-sized hotels, many of which already provide employees with food and accommodation. The association has urged the government to retain the existing wage structure until a scientific assessment of the industry's financial capacity is undertaken.

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KSHA has further requested that the permission allowing hotels in Bengaluru to operate until 1 a.m. be extended to other major cities, including Mysuru, Mangaluru, Hubballi and Belagavi. While permissions have reportedly been issued in several locations, the association has sought stronger implementation by district administrations and police authorities.

On urban development, KSHA welcomed efforts to clear footpaths of encroachments but called for dedicated street food vending zones to protect livelihoods while maintaining pedestrian safety.

The association emphasised that sustained policy support is essential to enable investment, employment generation and long-term growth across Karnataka's hotel, hospitality and tourism ecosystem. ■

Propositions by KSHA

- Dedicated Street Food Vending Zones
- Excise Reforms
- Lower Waste Charges
- Scientific Review of Minimum Wages
- 1 AM Hotel Operations Across Karnataka's Major Cities

Ahmedabad is Gujarat's densest market for Lords Hotels & Resorts



As Gujarat emerges as one of India's most dynamic hospitality markets, Lords Hotels & Resorts has built a strong footprint across business hubs, pilgrimage destinations, and leisure circuits. **Pushpendra Bansal**, COO of the hotel group, shares insights on segmentation, expansion, competitive edge and future hospitality demand drivers

Gujarat is now one of your densest markets. How are you segmenting your portfolio by brand and price point to avoid cannibalisation and keep RevPAR healthy?

We position each hotel based on its location, demand drivers and guest profile rather than following a one-size-fits-all approach. Business hubs, pilgrimage destinations and leisure markets each require a different product mix. Through strategic brand positioning, dynamic pricing and revenue management, we ensure every hotel complements the portfolio while maximising occupancy and RevPAR.

With fast, asset-light expansion in Gujarat's Tier-2 and Tier-3 markets, what challenges do you face on owner's profitability, seasonality and rates and how are you protecting GOP margins over the next 3-5 years?

The biggest challenges in Tier-2 and Tier-3 markets are managing seasonality, maintaining healthy room rates and ensuring consistent returns for hotel owners. Our focus is on driving a balanced business mix through corporate, leisure, pilgrimage and social events, while leveraging technology for revenue management and cost optimisation. By strengthening ancillary revenues, maintaining operational efficiencies and working closely with our owners, we are confident of protecting and improving GOP margins over the next three to five years.

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As competition intensifies in Gujarat's mid-market and pilgrimage segments, what will be Lords' core competitive edge and how will you defend and grow your share in industrial corridors and temple towns?

Our core competitive edge lies in our strong regional expertise, owner-centric approach and consistent service standards. With deep roots in Gujarat, we understand the unique needs of both industrial hubs and pilgrimage destinations. We continue to strengthen our market share by offering quality hospitality at the right price point, building long-term corporate partnerships, enhancing guest experiences and expanding strategically in high-growth locations where demand is sustainable.

Within Gujarat, where do you see the next wave of demand for Lords - pilgrimage travel, MSME/ Industrial business, weddings or weekend leisure, and how are you adapting your product and sales strategy to capture it?

We see strong growth across all four segments, but pilgrimage tourism and industrial/MSME travel will continue to be the primary demand drivers in Gujarat. At the same time, weddings and weekend leisure are emerging as high-potential segments in select destinations. Our strategy is to tailor each hotel to its local market, strengthen corporate and travel partnerships, enhance banquet and dining offerings, and leverage digital sales channels to maximise year-round occupancy and profitability. ■

> **"We see strong growth across all four segments, but pilgrimage tourism and industrial/MSME travel will continue to be the primary demand drivers in Gujarat**

Tradition is the foundation, innovation is the presentation

Gujarat's dining scene is undergoing a remarkable transformation, with guests seeking authenticity, premium vegetarian concepts and experiential dining. In an interview with *IWOH News magazine*, **Chef Aanal Kotak** of The Secret Kitchen shares insights on evolving consumer preferences, balancing tradition with innovation and the opportunities shaping Gujarat's restaurant industry



How is the Gujarat market evolving for premium and regional dining, and what trends are you seeing in guest preferences, pricing, and concept demand?

The Gujarat dining landscape has evolved tremendously over the last few years. Diners today are far more informed and well-travelled, which has increased their appreciation for quality, authenticity and thoughtfully curated experiences. There's a growing demand for premium vegetarian dining that goes beyond traditional expectations, with guests looking for regional cuisines presented in a contemporary yet authentic manner.

At The Secret Kitchen, we've seen guests become more adventurous with their choices while still valuing familiar flavours. Consumers are also willing to pay for quality ingredients, consistency and memorable hospitality, provided they see genuine value. At the same time, experiential dining, chef-driven menus and concepts that celebrate local flavours with a modern perspective are gaining significant traction. The market is no longer just about food it's about the overall experience.

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Our vision for The Secret Kitchen has always been to take authentic Indian vegetarian cuisine to a wider audience while maintaining the highest standards of quality and hospitality



With GIFT City, better connectivity, and rising organised F&B growth, where do you see the biggest opportunity for your restaurant business in Gujarat over the next few years?

Gujarat is entering an exciting phase of growth. Developments like GIFT City, improved infrastructure and increasing corporate investments are bringing in a more diverse consumer base with evolving dining expectations. This creates tremendous opportunities for restaurants that can balance authenticity with innovation.

For The Secret Kitchen, I see immense potential in expanding premium vegetarian dining concepts that celebrate India's rich culinary heritage while appealing to younger audiences. There's also growing demand for destination dining, curated tasting experiences and restaurants that offer a strong identity rather than simply serving good food. As cities continue to grow, guests are seeking brands they can trust for both quality and consistency.

Your brands combine tradition with innovation. How do you decide which dishes, formats, or experiences should stay rooted in heritage and which should be modernised for today's diners?

For me, tradition is the foundation, while innovation is the presentation. At The Secret Kitchen, we never believe in changing a dish simply for the sake of being different. If a recipe has stood the test of time, its soul should remain untouched.

Innovation comes in how we present the dish, improve techniques, use better ingredients, create healthier alternatives where appropriate or enhance the overall dining experience. The goal is to make traditional food more accessible and relevant to today's diners without compromising its authenticity. When guests taste our food, I want them to recognise the heritage first and the innovation second.

What are the biggest business challenges and opportunities in running and scaling a restaurant brand in Gujarat today?

One of the biggest challenges is maintaining consistency while expanding. As The Secret Kitchen grows, preserving quality, service standards and the original guest experience across multiple locations requires strong systems and a committed team.

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Talent retention is another industry-wide challenge, as hospitality is a people-driven business. Rising operational costs also require restaurants to continuously innovate while remaining commercially sustainable.

At the same time, Gujarat offers enormous opportunities. The organised dining sector is growing rapidly, consumers are increasingly open to new concepts and there is greater appreciation for regional Indian cuisine than ever before. Brands with a clear identity, strong values and consistent execution have significant room to scale.

What are your future expansion plans?

Our vision for The Secret Kitchen has always been to take authentic Indian vegetarian cuisine to a wider audience while maintaining the highest standards of quality and hospitality. We are actively exploring expansion opportunities both within India and internationally, with a focus on markets that appreciate authentic Indian flavours and premium dining experiences.

Beyond opening new locations, our priority is to build experiences that celebrate India's culinary diversity. Every new The Secret Kitchen should reflect our philosophy of combining tradition with thoughtful innovation, ensuring guests enjoy not just a meal, but a memorable culinary journey rooted in authenticity. ■

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Western Refrigeration launches smart commercial vending machine

Western Refrigeration introduces a 100% designed, engineered, and manufactured-in-India vending solution, strengthening the future of automated retail

As India's retail and hospitality sectors embrace automation and self-service technologies, the demand for reliable, intelligent vending solutions continues to grow. Responding to this shift, **Western Refrigeration, a Hoshizaki Group company**, has launched **India's Own Commercial Vending Machine (VMW1000)**–a smart self-service retail solution that is entirely designed, engineered, and manufactured in India.



Backed by more than five decades of refrigeration expertise, Western Refrigeration has developed the machine to meet the operational demands of Indian businesses while reducing dependence on imported systems. Unlike many vending machines currently available in the market, which are either imported or assembled using imported platforms, the VMW1000 has been developed entirely in-house–from product design and engineering to manufacturing, testing, and after-sales support.

The launch comes at a time when automated retail is expanding rapidly across metro stations, airports, hospitals, educational institutions, IT parks, corporate campuses, hotels, shopping malls, and other high-footfall commercial spaces. Businesses are increasingly seeking solutions that combine convenience, operational efficiency, and dependable service support while reducing manpower requirements.

One of the key innovations of the VMW1000 is its removable modular refrigeration cassette, allowing technicians to service or replace the refrigeration unit quickly without dismantling the entire machine. This significantly reduces maintenance time and operational downtime.

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Designed with 60 mm insulation, the vending machine delivers superior thermal efficiency by reducing compressor load and improving energy performance. Its 9-depth by 5-wide configuration across six shelves also offers higher storage capacity than many conventional vending machines, enabling operators to stock more products while reducing refill frequency.

Recognising the diverse operational requirements of businesses, Western has built the platform to be software-agnostic, allowing operators to integrate either Western's software or their preferred operating platform. The machine also supports multiple digital payment options, providing consumers with a seamless and cashless purchasing experience.

A key differentiator is Western Refrigeration's nationwide service infrastructure. With an extensive Pan-India network, businesses benefit from faster response times, readily available spare parts, and dependable technical support–critical factors for ensuring uninterrupted operations.

The VMW1000 is suitable for vending snacks, beverages, and other packaged products across a wide range of commercial environments, offering businesses a flexible and scalable retail solution.

Looking ahead, the future of retail is becoming increasingly automated, connected, and customer-centric. As public infrastructure expands and consumer expectations continue to evolve, businesses will require solutions that scale with changing demand while delivering convenience and operational efficiency. Commercial vending machines are no longer confined to dispensing snacks and beverages; they are emerging as an important retail touchpoint across spaces. By combining indigenous engineering with advanced technology and nationwide service support, Western Refrigeration is positioning itself to play a significant role in shaping the next phase of India's automated retail ecosystem. ■

Suba Hotels



SUBA HOTELS has announced the opening of **Quality Inn Bhavishya, Brookfield, Whitefield**, Bengaluru, further expanding its footprint in Karnataka and reinforcing its strategic growth in one of India's most dynamic commercial markets. The launch marks the company's sixth operational hotel in Bengaluru and the second Quality Inn in the city under its partnership with the globally recognised Choice Hotels portfolio. Strategically located in Brookfield, Whitefield, one of Bengaluru's most sought-after IT and business corridors, the hotel enjoys seamless connectivity to leading technology parks, multinational corporations, EPIP Zone, ITPL, RMZ Ecospace, and key commercial districts. ■



Vivanta Gurugram

INDIAN HOTELS COMPANY (IHCL) recently announced the opening of Vivanta Gurugram in Sector 95A. The 154-key Vivanta Gurugram Sector 95A enjoys a strategic location with convenient access to the city's key commercial districts and business centres. The hotel offers a range of dining experiences including Mynt, the all-day diner serving global cuisine alongside local favourites; Wink, the rooftop bar offering panoramic views of the city paired with crafted cocktails; and Tease, a poolside lounge designed for relaxed evenings under the open sky. ■

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Polo Hotels and Resorts



POLO HOTELS & RESORTS announced the signing of Polo Hotel Aizawl, its first property in Mizoram, reinforcing the Group's commitment to expanding premium hospitality across Northeast India.

The signing follows the execution of a Concession Agreement with the Government of Mizoram for the redevelopment of the Chaltlang Tourist Lodge into a premium hotel under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. Slated to be Mizoram's first 5-star hotel, the property will feature an all-day diner, a specialty restaurant, a lounge, and an upbeat pool area. The hotel will also offer the largest versatile event spaces in the city, including banqueting halls and multiple meeting rooms, along with a state-of-the-art fitness centre and swimming pool. ■

MOVEMENTS

Air India



» The Board of Directors of Air India recently announced the appointment of **Tewolde Gebremariam** as the airline's Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, succeeding Campbell Wilson. The Board conducted a comprehensive search to identify the next leader for Air India, overseen by a dedicated Board committee. The committee rigorously evaluated internal as well as highly accomplished external candidates from across the world. Tewolde Gebremariam is widely recognised as one of the most successful aviation chief executives. ■

Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Tech Village



» **Abhiram Menon** has joined Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy TechVillage, Outer Ring Road (ORR), as the Cluster General Manager. In his new role, he will provide strategic direction for the 529-key dual-branded complex, which features 37,000 square feet of banquet space, four food and beverage outlets, a temperature-controlled swimming pool, a yoga deck, a gym and a spa. ■

The Orchid Hotel Mumbai



» The hotel announced the appointment of **Gaurav Shiva** as the new General Manager. With close to three decades of experience in the hospitality and tourism industry across leading brands including Taj Group, Accor Hotels, Carlson Hotels & Resorts, Carnival Cruise Lines and Royal Orchid Hotels, Gaurav brings extensive expertise in hotel operations, food and beverage, sales and marketing, and business performance management. ■

GOPIZZA



» GOPIZZA, a global food-tech company behind one of the world's largest single-serve pizza chains, has named **Mahesh Reddy** as co-founder of its India business. This appointment recognises his role in building India into one of GOPIZZA's strongest international markets, marking the start of an accelerated expansion of its K-Food Platform. Reddy brings more than 26 years of leadership experience in the food and beverage industry. ■



Suba Hotels

» Suba Hotels recently announced the appointment of **Kevin Ashley Martis** as Vice President - Sales & Marketing. In this leadership role, he will oversee the sales and marketing functions for the company's diverse portfolio of brands, including Suba Hotels, Click Hotels & Resorts, GenX Hotels, RnB Hotels, and the Choice Hotels brands - Clarion, Quality, and Comfort. Martis brings over two decades of extensive experience in the Indian hospitality industry, having held key leadership positions with several renowned hotel brands across the country. ■

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