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TTJ Travel Trade Journal

Vol. 12 | Issue 09 | July 2022 | Pages 52 | ₹150

travel
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HOSPITALITY SPECIAL

Consumers Say Yes To Hospitality 2.0

Hospitality sector revenue rebounds

Since the pandemic, a lot has changed in the hospitality industry. This summer season witnessed a robust occupancy in hotels and in an attempt to entice monsoon travellers, the hospitality groups are going the extra mile to float attractive concepts. Low inbound travel has given rise to high footfall in domestic tourists, which has emerged as an advantage for the hospitality industry. TTJ delves deep into the hospitality sector of Eastern, North-eastern and Central regions of India in an attempt to gather info on the current trends prevailing during monsoon and the innovative concepts rolled out to cater to the post-pandemic travel demand.

Swaati Chaudhury

The Indian hospitality sector is poised for a unique re-emergence after the pandemic. With the ease of travel norms, more and more travellers are focusing on safe and healthy travel. The well-established hospitality groups in today's times are witnessing a steady rise in the footfall of domestic travellers, be it leisure or business.

Bhubaneswar's Mayfair Lagoon, one of the most distinguished hospitality groups in the east, throws light on its current occupancy rate and the attractive monsoon packages on offer. Sanjeeb K Pattnaik, Assistant Vice President - Operations, Mayfair Lagoon commented, "Mayfair Hotels has experienced a steady rise in occupancy level in the post-pandemic era. All our properties are destination-oriented hotels nestling on beaches, mountains, and islands. We do have heritage properties and a one-of-a-kind tea resort. The flow of tourists in all our properties was beyond our expectations. MICE and destination weddings have a substantial contribution to business growth. The occupancy in our hospitality



▲ Sanjeeb K Pattnaik

group has crossed 80 per cent with an average daily rate hovering around Rs 8,500 to Rs 11,000."

Although COVID-19 restrictions have been minimised considerably on foreign shores, destination weddings are still confined within the country. Pattnaik said, "Domestic tourism is at an all-time high and our hospitality property receives a major chunk of its business from domestic travellers. Once destination wedding tourists were jet-setting to foreign shores, but now these events are happening in our country. Hence, there is a high demand for rooms leading to a higher average room rate. Inbound travellers have been replaced by domestic tourists. The concept of the lean travel period is passé. With the rise in disposable income and high purchasing power, any leisure period makes a sound holiday vacation. At times, monsoons act as a barrier during natural calamities such as cyclones, floods, and landslides. We provide lucrative packages for leisure tourists to enjoy the monsoon. MICE tourism has a significant contribution in bolstering the revenue of our group and our well-equipped, sprawling indoor banquets form a perfect destination for hosting such events. Revenge tourism does not require any sales strategy. It is our hospitality brand and keeping with stringent COVID protocols that have generated confidence among our guests to vouch for our properties."

The hospitality group has been moving a step ahead to cater to the needs of its visitors in the post-pandemic period. Pattnaik further said, "We have taken a slew of initiatives to instil confidence among our guests who are hygiene-conscious and are concerned about COVID-safety measures. Our group has geared up with fully vaccinated staff and has on offer exclusive dining options, health food and beverage menu options. The stress is on contactless service and online documentation,

and several awareness campaigns are hosted. Our group also has on offer Yoga and wellness experience with spa therapies for guests. Besides, there are customised packages on offer for visitors."

Take the example of Kolkata-based Vedic Village Spa Resort that has witnessed a commendable growth in its revenue and an increase in its occupancy level with the setting of this fiscal. Rajib Roy Choudhury, Senior General Manager, Vedic Village Spa



▲ Rajib Roy Choudhury

Resort, stated, "There has been a big jump in our revenue during the summer of this fiscal. Our property has witnessed 23.75 per cent growth in occupancy in the first quarter of this fiscal. We have the most number of FITs as visitors. While our growth has been close to 90 per cent as compared to last year and the first quarter of last fiscal, we are experiencing double gain. There has been a significant rise in hotel occupancy over the past few months. When it comes to inbound travel, there is no doubt that our revenue would be hampered, since our property is a resort. Having said this, we are demographically

blessed. Our property has been hit by the pandemic and there is a revenue shortage of 15 to 20 per cent which we are not earning owing to lack of inbound travel." Nestling in the outskirts of the city and away from the hustle and bustle of the metropolis, the resort is nearest to the airport as well as to the latest developments of New Town. It is best described as a biodiversity zone replete with four natural lakes, medicinal herbs, flora and fauna.

The wellness resort has drawn up some novel plans to entice guests during the monsoon. Roy Choudhury added, "Since our property is by and large an inland resort, the advent of monsoon brings down the occupancy level. Leisure travellers and corporate visitors reduce movement owing to inclement weather conditions. Social events are on hold. We are targeting those groups who thrive during the monsoon period like those in the field of photography and film shootings. We would like to create more bundle packages with stays that have more indoor activities and water sports. The focus will be on residential conclaves." The resort has floated several interesting concepts to entice travellers. Roy Choudhury further added, "We have rolled out room check-ins for our visitors and in-car checks for guests availing of our transportation facilities from airports and railway stations. We have satellite or check-in personnel for MICE travellers and resident guests as part of the social distancing norm. Open-air restaurants with attached air-conditioned extensions have caught the imagination of visitors."

Some of the other interesting concepts introduced in the resort include stargazing, angler's package, paintball game and the revival of archery. Roy Choudhury quipped, "We are looking ahead to kick-off a nature therapy centre- Sanjeeva Wellness Centre sometime in August, this year. Our destination wedding offer- Shaadi by Vedic takes care of all wedding requirements of our guests."

Changes have occurred in the dynamics of global business after the pandemic, with the travel and tourism industry being the worst hit. Deval Tibrewalla, Chief Executive Officer, Hotel Polo Floatel, informed, "Regular monitoring and sensible strategy could pave the way for complete recovery. The hospitality industry is gradually coming back on track with a plethora of new challenges. There has been a paradigm shift in the behaviour of travellers and expectations in the new normal world. We have to position our



▲ Deval Tibrewalla

group strategically and effectively to encounter new challenges and cash on business opportunities in the changing environment."

Be it the monsoon or the scorching heat of summer, today's new-age travellers are ready to pack their bags all round the year. Tibrewalla said, "After two years of staying in confinement and keeping with social distancing norms, tourists are frequently planning their tours. Around 37 per cent of travellers are going on trips to recharge their batteries, 18 per cent tourists are travelling to meet their family and friends and 10 per cent to experience a change of environment. This kind of revenge travelling is a positive step for the hospitality sector. Health and hygiene are of the topmost priority in the minds of travellers and tourist destinations will not be the same as in pre-COVID times. Travellers will give preference to domestic destinations that form safe weekend getaways. Undoubtedly, the presence of inbound tourists will add more value to the growth of the hospitality industry. Overall, we are looking forward to a gradual and stable rise in the revenue growth curve."

The hospitality entity does not believe in formulating short-term strategies, but remains consistent to provide memorable experiences. Tibrewalla added, "The peak travel season in Meghalaya is monsoon but it is a 365-day destination. Being the largest hospitality player in the Northeast, we intend to provide a safe and unforgettable experience. We have devised a one-of-a-kind concept for our visitors, including 'boat ride' at Polo Floatel that offers a lifetime experience on the river Ganges. The boats are replete with bygone instruments like a gramophone and an English teapot et

al. Visitors can get to savour a number of delicacies on their boat ride. Besides, we have come up with our own delivery fleet for direct delivery in order to keep with the safety norms. There are a host of customised offers for our visitors like early check-ins, late check-outs and customised packages for each visitor to suit their requirements at our nine properties across the country. We have unveiled our new website- www.hotelpolotowers.com"

Opened sometime in September last year, Radisson Bhopal has been quite successful in clocking a fair share of the business. According to Gaurav Shanker, General Manager, Radisson Bhopal, "Occupancy has shot up in the past few months owing to greater demand to host social events with the lifting of the pandemic restrictions. The corporate and online segments were productive in the second quarter



▲ Gaurav Shanker

of this calendar year. Inbound travel certainly has an impact on the revenue of the hotel since overseas travel depends on the Global Distribution System (GDS) for accommodation in the hotel, which has a significant role in contributing to a higher average daily rate. With the approach of monsoon, travel movements in the corporate world and social segments become limited, leading to a downward trend in business. The accent will be more on leisure and residential conclaves." Shanker also informed that with the rise in demand of domestic tourism, the property has rolled out creative and immersive experiences catering to all segments of its guests. These include lounge access, upgrades and transfers, city tour and sightseeing.

Hotel Connect

The pandemic has made domestic tourism soar to great heights that has, by and large, benefitted the hospitality sector. Vinod Tripathy,



▲ Vinod Tripathy

General Manager, Sayaji Hotel Bhopal said, "Our hospitality group performed better in the first quarter of the current fiscal than at the beginning of this year. Social events make up our significant segment. With the relaxing of pandemic restrictions, there has

been a turnaround in the number of social events and banquet activities. More number of visitors are heading to our hotel. Our hotel rooms are running with around 95 per cent occupancy in this quarter. Leisure tourism is on an upward trend owing to summer breaks. The current global scenario is largely responsible for inbound travel. However, this is a positive sign that has been a game-changer, leading to higher footfall in domestic travel. With limited travel options to foreign shores, visitors are focusing on social events. COVID cases are at an all-time low and with no signs of an upsurge in the upcoming period. We are anticipating that brighter days are ahead for the hospitality sector."

Monsoon has an impact on the occupancy level of the hotel since business slows down, affecting corporate travel. Tripathy further said, "The pandemic posed a tough challenge for the hospitality sector, making it quite robust. We have emerged touching new segments of the market that are more likely to focus on sports events and production houses for group checking. A number of corporate houses are working on new product launches, new training and development and this, in turn, opens up new avenues to stress

on MICE. During trying times, we have witnessed that visitors offering preference to our competitors have begun choosing our brand that we have delivered in the past. This has enabled us to reap rich benefits. The newer segments that we have explored earlier and kept open to explore new business verticals have emerged to be a better strategy. Our increasing number of visitors and high occupancy level has depicted the outcome of our innovative concepts."

The hospitality group is going digital in the post-pandemic world. Tripathy added, "We have come up with online hotel booking in the current year. Visitors can book a table online or call up our hotel. All our restaurant tables are sanitised, and once the diners leave, the tables are re-sanitised. The baggage of our resident guests is also sanitised. We have spa service and city tours for our resident guests depending on the demand. We have customised packages suiting the needs of our guests. Our newest concept for wedding guests, Shubh Vivaah by Sayaji, has struck a chord, and the response is terrific. Our group takes care of all amenities of destination wedding guests."