

What should Indian tourism and hospitality managers focus on to stay competitive in the coming decade?

In 2018, tourism to and within India generated US\$240bn– equivalent to about 9 per cent of the country's gross national product and around 8 per cent of total employment. Further, the industry is expected to expand at an annual average rate of between 6 and 7 per cent until the late 2020s. In this context, Gunjan Sanjeev and her team provide a comprehensive response to their question: What should Indian tourism and hospitality managers be focusing on so that their operations remain competitive in the medium to long term? I should like to thank Gunjan for her passion for *WHATT* – this is the fourth time that she has served as a theme editor – and her team of writers and peer reviewers from academia, industry and tourism policy.

Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (WHATT) aims to make a practical and theoretical contribution to hospitality and tourism development and we seek to do this by using a key question to focus attention on an industry issue. If you would like to contribute to our work by serving as a *WHATT* theme editor, do please contact me.

Richard Teare

Managing Editor, WHATT

What should Indian tourism and hospitality managers focus on to stay competitive in the coming decade?

The tourism and hospitality industry in India and indeed worldwide continues to expand and in so doing, it is helping to shape the global economy. In recent years there have been developments in the areas of innovation, globalization, consolidation and technology in these industries globally. Cross border investments, high valuation mergers and acquisitions, and emerging data analytics are playing an integral role in shaping the changing hospitality industry landscape. The Indian scenario is no different, social media is changing how leading travel and hospitality companies are managing businesses using large amounts of data and more advanced, analytical techniques to make more precise decisions. It also means that customers have all the information related to their travel needs available at the click of a button. It is a revolution that will gather momentum as information technology and especially social media platforms change the fundamentals of doing business both for service providers as well as for consumers.

With so much effort devoted to innovation and creating differentiation, the tourism and hospitality industry is bound to be faced with more and different kinds of risk, so it is time for managers to gear up with risk management techniques. Given the costs involved, the valuation of hotels will have more importance in the coming years so as to ensure that the correct return is derived from investments made in these businesses.

Differentiation in culinary experiences for consumers will be of even greater importance in the years ahead. However, given tough competition and rising costs, there should be more alternatives available to managers as they seek to establish new and attractive cuisines in their specialty restaurants or opt to outsource these offerings to mitigate costs and at same time, attract more customers to their hotels. Surely a challenging decision, but it seems inevitable in the near future as margins continue to be challenging. For tourists in India, a cheaper alternative is fast emerging – homestays. An economical way to travel, it won't be long before this concept is well established in India's lodging market.



Staffing and retention issues are of prime importance and the tourism and hospitality industry has to continuously create differentiated incentive and reward systems to keep employees motivated in the years ahead. Let us learn from what industry leaders are doing in this endeavour!

Another important area, often ignored by researchers, is the role that higher education institutions (HEIs) can play in preparing budding practitioners for employment. The foundation received at the HEIs can go a long way in terms of how hospitality professionals deal with uncertainties in the future. Are we ready for a groundbreaking concept in higher education for hospitality professionals? We had better be as the future will demand it.

This theme issue addresses aspects of all of the above in the context of India's tourism and hospitality industry and it contains articles, applied research and viewpoints from hoteliers, practitioners, higher education leaders, policy makers and other stakeholders. It also considers a wide array of perspectives – strategic, functional and operational, and in so doing, we hope that readers will derive a deeper understanding of the dynamic changes occurring in India's tourism and hospitality industry.

Gunjan M. Sanjeev
Theme Editor

About the Theme Editor

Dr Gunjan M. Sanjeev is Professor of Finance, Vice President and Founding Director for International Affairs at the Amity Education Group, India. She has received several awards for her published work in the areas of hospitality and banking and has served as a *WHATT* theme editor on four occasions. Gunjan says that she feels privileged to have a continuing association with the journal. She is also a reviewer and an editorial board member for several journals. Gunjan is currently leading some key strategic initiatives for her institution: internationalization of higher education via foreign campus development, international accreditation, collaboration and linkages with overseas institutions and innovations to globalize the academic framework of her institution.