

# HONOURING THE BEST

Top-notch industry experts came together at the 13<sup>th</sup> Hotelier India Awards' Grand Jury Meet to select the country's brightest hospitality talent across 18 categories

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO



Jury members of the 13<sup>th</sup> Hotelier India Awards: (Top line L to R) Anuraag Bhatnagar, Jaideep Dang, Vikram Cotah, Navjit Ahluwalia, Ranjit Batra, Souvagya Mohapatra and Nikhil Sharma. (Middle line L to R): Ranju Alex, Anil Chadha, Sanju Soni, Puneet Dhawan, Bibhor Srivastava, Sanjay Sethi, Aman Kapoor, Dilip Puri and Vineet Verma. (Bottom line L to R): Chef Varun Inamdar, Deepika Rao, Vijay Thacker, and Ajay Bakaya.

To pull it through the challenging times, post-pandemic, the hospitality industry required all its stakeholders' unwavering focus, understanding and collaboration to ensure their respective businesses prevailed. Having witnessed the efforts, sacrifices and contributions each of the members put in, the Hotelier India Awards this time around aims to honour more than just mere talent. Most professionals had to navigate the process of adapting to a new normal while balancing the creative, technical, and corporate resources to deliver the best business outcome. They had to change their priorities, plans and campaigns for the year as they explored and adopted several initiatives to drive non-room revenues.

Many industry stakeholders experienced unprecedented scenarios requiring a set of skills that had no genesis in their erstwhile education or existing experience. In addition to focusing on things they could control, they had to quicken their learning curve - and this occurred across the board. Against this backdrop, the 13th Hotelier India Awards is all set to rejuvenate the industry's spirit, which is working with renewed focus.

To select the winners of the coveted and much anticipated Hotelier India Awards, the team organised a meeting of the Grand Jury to look at all the nominations. Bibhor Srivastava, Managing Director, ITP Media India, introduced the jury to the categories and set the action rolling as the members gathered in teams to judge each of the shortlisted nominations and choose the best.

For the 2022 edition, the Hotelier India team received record 1500-plus nominations, of which 194 were shortlisted for the final judging process, from which the chosen few, vetted by the high-powered jury, will be awarded on 19th December, 2022, at JW Marriott Aerocity, New Delhi.

## CATEGORIES AT THE HOTELIER INDIA AWARDS 2022

- Chief Engineer of the Year
- Director of Rooms of the Year
- F&B Manager of the Year
- HR Person of the Year
- Hotel Manager of the Year
- IT Person of the Year
- Procurement Person of the Year
- Project Manager of the Year
- Revenue Manager of the Year
- Front Office Manager of the Year
- GM of the Year
- Marketing & PR Person of the Year
- Sales Person of the Year
- Unsung Hero of the Year
- Wellness Person of the Year
- Young Hotelier of the Year
- Housekeeper of the Year



➔ Jury members being briefed about the judging methodologies during the Jury Meet.



➔ Bibhor Srivastava, Managing Director, ITP Media Group India.

## JURY MEMBERS JUDGING THE NOMINATIONS UNDER LUXURY TO UPPER UPSCALE SECTOR

- Anil Chadha, Divisional Chief Executive, ITC Hotels
- Anuraag Bhatnagar, Chief Operating Officer, The Leela Palaces Hotels and Resort
- Ranju Alex, Area Vice President - South Asia, Marriott International
- Sanjay Sethi, CEO & Managing Director, Chalet Hotels
- Vijay Thacker, Director, Horwath India

The Grand Jury Meet was hosted in Mumbai on 29th November 2022 and witnessed some strategic changes in the judging process. With the ever-increasing number of nominations received each year, the team at Hotelier India decided to adopt a two-tiered system. The first round of preliminary jury was set in place to screen the nominations that the Grand Jury then judged at JW Marriott Sahar, Mumbai.

The other momentous development was the decision to move the jury process onto a digital platform completely. This shift obviated the need for any printed nomination forms and helped fast-track the complete process, which the jurors very well received. This year also saw nominees submitting their entries in a 90-second video format, which was specifically called in for the PR category. The video helped the jury gain clear insights into the creative strategies adopted by the PR executives of the respective hotels.

As the jury members huddled together to choose winners in three teams -- Luxury to Upper Upscale, Upscale to Midscale and



➔ Jury members judging the nominations under the Luxury to Upper Upscale sector: (L to R) Vijay Thacker, Anuraag Bhatnagar, Ranju Alex and Anil Chadha.

## JURY MEMBERS JUDGING THE NOMINATIONS UNDER THE UPSCALE TO MIDSCALE SECTOR

- **Deepika Rao**, Executive Vice President - Hotel Openings & Corporate Communications, IHCL
- **Jaideep Dang**, Managing Director, Hotels and Hospitality Group JLL
- **Navjit Ahluwalia**, Senior VP & Country Head, Hilton India
- **Puneet Dhawan**, Senior Vice President Operations - India & South Asia, Accor
- **Sanju Soni**, Senior Vice President Operations, Trident Hotels, Oberoi Group
- **Zubin Saxena**, Managing Director & Vice President Operations, South Asia, Radisson Hotels
- **Ranjit Batra**, President, Hospitality Management, Panchshil Realty

Economy to Budget -- it was clear that the event had more nominations than ever before, a sign of hope for better times for the hospitality industry.

Ajay Bakaya, Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels and Resorts, said, It is a privilege and a pleasure to be associated with Hotelier India Awards for so many years and be part of its jury, and this is something I cherish very much."

Anil Chadha, Divisional Chief Executive, ITC Hotels, added, "It's

great to be back as part of the jury for Hotelier India Awards. We had a great afternoon going through all the nominations, which have doubled over last year. There is so much good work, which has happened over the year that I hope we have done justice to all the winners and may the best individuals win."

For someone who has had a long association with Hotelier India and the team at ITP, Chef Varun Inamdar exclaimed, "This is a beautiful opportunity to get the whole industry together and see the wonderful work that they have done through the year. The three words that come to my mind when I think of the Hotelier India Awards are -- credible, authoritative, and transparent, and I don't think it gets bigger than this. Hotelier India and I go back several years, and it is a relationship for keepsakes that gets stronger every year. This year's nominations are extremely competitive. The whole industry has gone all out and poured their hearts. And we all understand that post-pandemic, a lot of things have changed the dynamics of hospitality and aviation at large. It is a wonderful mix of nominees from across India."

The Hotelier India awards are coveted and often said to be the most premier hospitality awards in the country. Ranju Alex, Area Vice President - South Asia, Marriott Interna-



➔ Jury members arriving for the meet: (L to R) Chef Varun Inamdar, Bibhor Srivastava, Navjit Ahluwalia and Ajay Bakaya.



Team judging the nominations under 'Economy to Budget scale' sector.

### JURY MEMBERS JUDGING THE NOMINATIONS UNDER THE ECONOMY TO BUDGET SCALE SECTOR

- Ajay Bakaya, Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels and Resorts
- Chef Varun Inamdar
- Dilip Puri, Founder & CEO, Indian School of Hospitality
- Nikhil Sharma, Regional Director Eurasia, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts
- Souvagya Mohapatra, Managing Director (India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan), Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts
- Vikram Cotah, Chief Executive Officer, GRT Hotels & Resorts
- Vineet Verma, Director, Brigade Group

tional, said, "Exciting times are here again, and we are here for the Hotelier India Awards Jury Meet. As a GM, I have always aspired to win one of these awards, and it is so exciting to see more and more applications come in every year. It is indeed the Oscars of the hospitality industry and very exciting times. And I am so glad this is happening once again. May the best ones win, and let us also celebrate those who do not win because every effort needs to be celebrated at the end of the day."

These words were also echoed by Jaideep Dang, Managing Director, Hotels and Hospitality Group, JLL India, who said, "Hotelier India is the most premier publication in our trade and from a



(L to R) Deepika Rao, Ajay Bakaya and Nikhil Sharma.



(R to L) Bibhor Srivastava greeting Anuraag Bhatnagar and Ranju Alex.



Team of jury members judging the nominations under 'Upscale to Midscale' sector.



(L to R) Puneet Dhawan, Vineet Verma, Dilip Puri and Ajay Bakaya.

quality, visibility and coverage perspective -- it is on the top. The winner selection is a very comprehensive process when you look at the phenomenal participation. This is a premier award; people look forward to it year after year, and it is like getting the Oscars. So, I would say it is a great process and a great award and people yearn for it."

As the sector comes out of the throes of the pandemic, these awards are intended to celebrate the fighting spirit of the industry that has been the most affected. Navjit Ahluwalia, Senior VP & Country, Hilton India, said, "I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all the winners of the Hotelier India awards. I think we have been through a very difficult time, and thank you for everything you all have done for the industry. You deserve a lot of credit for your efforts and hard work."

Deepika Rao, Executive Vice President - Hotel Openings & Corporate Communications, IHCL, added, "It was a very comprehensive compilation of so many nominations. It was nice to see that the Hotelier India team put a lot of effort into digitalising this

whole experience. We spent a lot of good time in discussions and looking at the comprehensive information. I am quite confident with all the collective experience in the room; we have put our best effort into choosing the deserving candidate. Thank you so much to Bhibhor and his team for making it a unique day for us, away from the routine work and spending some time looking at our industry's talent."

Nikhil Sharma, Regional Director Eurasia, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, said, "I would like to congratulate team ITP, Hotelier India and Bhibor. This is a testament to all the team members who have put in the hard work, commitment, and a lot of long hours to ensure the guests are comfortable in this part of the world. I want to congratulate all the winners. There has been a lot of hard work put in by the jury, and all the winners' are very well deserved."

While vetting the nominations, the jury made a critical observation of the high participation of independent hotel brands, a segment that has shown staggering growth across all regions. Having closed doors on the jury meet, the industry now awaits the final results and the prestigious winners of the 13th edition of the Hotelier India Awards to be held 19th December 2022 at JW Marriott Aerocity, New Delhi. ■