

Festive Décor Reimagined

Festive décor is moving beyond conventional embellishment as hotels turn lobbies, restaurants and guest spaces into carefully curated experiences.

By Bindu Gopal Rao



Lighting is used to highlight rather than hide the architecture

Photo courtesy: JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar

From dramatic lighting and floral installations to handcrafted details and contemporary tablescapes, hotels are reimagining the visual language of celebration.

The Festive Hotel Gets a Makeover

Festive décor has moved from being additive, which is simply putting up marigold garlands, fairy lights and diyas to becoming a more considered design exercise.

Lalit Mundkur, General Manager, Fort JadhavGADH, explains, “We look at how lighting can reveal the stone architecture, how flowers can frame a courtyard or gateway, how textiles can add warmth and how traditional elements can be integrated without overwhelming the historic character of the property. The question therefore becomes, ‘How do we make the fort feel festive while allowing the fort to remain the hero?’ The festive identity has to emerge from the property’s own story. At Fort JadhavGADH, we look at festive

“We look at how lighting can reveal the stone architecture, how flowers can frame a courtyard, how textiles can add warmth and how traditional elements can be integrated.”

- Lalit Mundkur

décor very differently because the property itself is a 300-year-old fort and the architecture is already the strongest design statement. Our objective is not to decorate the fort but to create a festive layer that allows guests to experience its character differently.”

A New Language of Festive Design

Naturally then, elements like lighting, scent, sound and floral installations play a distinctive role in creating a distinct festive mood across hotel lobbies, restaurants and guest spaces.

“These elements are particularly important because the experience is built around discovery. Guests move through gateways, courtyards, heritage spaces, restaurants, gardens and accommodation areas, and each space can reveal a different aspect of the celebration. Lighting is used to highlight rather than hide the architecture, illuminating stone walls, arches, pathways and important architectural details while retaining the warmth and intimacy of a fort. Flowers bring colour and softness to the stone



Lalit Mundkur, General Manager, Fort JadhavGADH



Varun Suden, Director of Operations, JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar



Ranjit Phillipose, Senior Vice President Operations – Goa & Karnataka, IHCL



Prem Panday, Revenue Director, Signum Hotels

environment. Rather than filling every space with arrangements, we prefer considered installations that frame important areas and complement the natural landscape,” says Mundkur.

Scent can add another layer, particularly through traditional Indian fragrances and natural elements associated with the festive season. It creates an emotional memory without adding another visual element.

The Festive Edit

Given the scale and contemporary luxury character of modern big hotels, the approach is to complement rather than overpower the existing design language.

“The lobby creates the first and most impactful expression, while the festive story continues through our restaurants, arrival areas, corridors and more intimate guest touchpoints. We consciously play

with scale, texture, light and detailing depending on the space. A larger architectural installation may create impact in the lobby, while our dining venues lend themselves to more intimate and layered expressions. The objective is for guests to discover the festive spirit throughout their journey across the hotel, rather than experience it only at the point of arrival,” says Varun Suden, Director of Operations, JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar.

Festive décor has evolved from simply adding decoration to creating an experience that begins the moment a guest enters the hotel. “At JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar, the Gateway to Mumbai, we look at the property as a series of distinct guest journeys, and each space presents an opportunity to create a different expression of the festive season,” vouches Suden.

“The focus has shifted from recreating palace interiors to deconstructing heritage elements and applying them to sleek, modern forms.”

– Prem Panday



Photo courtesy: Taj West End, Bengaluru

The approach is to complement rather than overpower the existing design language

Photo courtesy: Taj Cidade De Goa



There is a clear and rapidly growing shift toward sustainable festive décor

A Celebration in Design

Indian craftsmanship offers incredible depth, particularly when it comes to texture, material and the human element behind each craft. The opportunity for a luxury hotel is to interpret that richness in a way that feels contemporary and relevant to the space.

“At JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar, we are conscious of maintaining our contemporary design language while creating a sense of place. Rather than relying heavily on traditional festive symbols, Indian influences can come through in the finer details — a handwoven texture, a distinctive material, a craft technique, or a traditional form interpreted through a more contemporary scale or finish. This allows the décor to feel connected to India and to Mumbai, while remaining sophisticated and consistent with the character of the hotel,” says Suden.

The key is integration. These elements need to work with architecture, F&B experiences and, most importantly, the level of contemporary luxury that guests associate the property with.

The Season, Styled

There is a clear and rapidly growing shift toward sustainable festive décor across the hospitality sector. Luxury and boutique hotels are actively moving away from single-use plastics, synthetic tinsel, and disposable installations in favour of conscious, circular design principles.

Prem Panday, Revenue Director, Signum Hotels, says, “Striking the balance between a grand festive transformation and respecting a hotel’s core design identity requires an architectural approach to seasonal decorating rather than a superficial one.

“Indian influences can come through in the finer details — a handwoven texture, a craft technique, or a traditional form interpreted through a more contemporary scale or finish.”

- Varun Suden

Properties in India undergo seasonal and festive transformations to cater to peak holiday rushes (especially during Diwali, Christmas, and New Year). Designers and boutique hoteliers avoid cliché “ethnic” themes by treating traditional crafts as tactile architectural details rather than stage props. The focus has shifted from recreating palace interiors to deconstructing heritage elements and applying them to sleek, modern forms.”

A Table Is Set

Hospitality brands rely heavily on multi-sensory design to craft memorable festive atmospheres. Rather than depending solely on visual decor, hotels and restaurants orchestrate lighting, scent, sound, and floral installations to evoke emotion, trigger holiday nostalgia, and subtly influence guest behaviour. The tablescape is seen as an extension of the story the hotel wants to tell through its food and experiences.

“Our Signum Resort is shifting festive tablescape design from rigid, hyper-symmetrical perfection toward tactile storytelling, immersive drama, and multi-sensory curation. Instead of traditional red-and-green setups, properties are treating the table as an experiential canvas designed to provoke emotion, conversation, and touch,” says Panday.

Rather than relying on conventional décor, many large chains create the setting using fresh florals, vegetables, botanical elements and natural materials, allowing the garden itself to become part of the experience. Every table is thoughtfully designed to have its own character, while still feeling connected to the larger garden-to-table narrative.



Photo courtesy: JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar

Hotels are reimagining the visual language of celebration

“Focus on texture, craftsmanship and storytelling allows regional traditions to be celebrated in ways that feel fresh while remaining deeply connected to the destination.” -

Ranjit Phillipose

Ranjit Phillipose, Senior Vice President Operations – Goa & Karnataka, IHCL, says, “At IHCL, our design philosophy is rooted in celebrating India’s artistic heritage while ensuring it remains relevant to contemporary travellers. The objective is not to recreate tradition literally, but to interpret it thoughtfully in ways that feel refined, sophisticated and relevant to modern hospitality spaces. Months of planning go into selecting materials, crafts and motifs that can be incorporated naturally into the design narrative of each hotel. At Taj Yeshwantpur, Bengaluru, elements of Channapatna craftsmanship are subtly integrated into festive displays, offering a contemporary interpretation of Karnataka’s rich craft traditions. At Taj Cidade de Goa Heritage, Goa, the vibrant Kunbi weave inspires modern tablescapes and decorative accents that balance local authenticity with global design sensibilities. Similarly, Gateway Chikmagalur draws upon local materials such as natural wood, stone textures and handcrafted details to create an understated expression of luxury. What makes these interpretations successful is their restraint. Rather than relying on overt symbolism, designers focus on texture, craftsmanship and storytelling. This approach allows regional traditions to be celebrated in ways that feel fresh and unexpected while remaining deeply connected to the destination.”

The Hotel in Celebration Mode

Creating a festive atmosphere is about layering the senses thoughtfully using lighting, florals, sound and fragrance.

“As our setting is a heritage fort, we can create tablescapes that bring together traditional Indian materials with contemporary presentation. Brass or kansa elements can sit alongside modern crockery; traditional textiles can be used as runners or accents; handcrafted diyas and locally sourced flowers can create simple but distinctive centrepieces. We also look at the relationship between the food and the table. Our festive menus can draw from regional flavours and traditional culinary influences, while the presentation can interpret those traditions in a contemporary manner,” says Mundkur.

As décor moves to a phase where it pleases all the five senses, the intention is to create a multi-sensory journey where the guest gradually enters the festive atmosphere rather than encountering all of it at once. **■**



Photo courtesy: JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar

Hospitality brands rely heavily on multi-sensory design to craft memorable festive atmospheres