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EXPERIENTIAL GETAWAYS

HOTELS AND RESORTS IN INDIA ARE BETTING BIG ON EXPERIENCES AS PART OF THEIR OFFERINGS

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO









As travellers increasingly seek meaningful experiences when they travel, hotels are offering a lot of options towards this end. What this means is that conscientious hoteliers are now able to offer differentiated products to the new age guest.



GUEST FIRST

In creating experiences, hotels are focusing on identifying what makes them stand out from other hotels and discovering ways to craft memorable and engaging moments for guests. Most hotels have started these programmes after a thorough research on their target market to better understand what guests prioritise in a hotel experience. Bhawani Singh Shekhawat, Director of Rooms, The Westin Mumbai Garden City, says, "Our wellness experts work closely with each guest to develop customised fitness and nutrition plans that cater to their individual goals and needs. We invite guests to participate in our eco-friendly initiatives, such as sapling planting, and embrace sustainable practices like glass water bottles in rooms and restaurants, as well as reusable bath amenities. Guests can enjoy exclusive access to local concerts, festivals, and sporting events, adding a memorable touch to their stay."

"WE INVITE GUESTS TO PARTICIPATE IN OUR ECO-FRIENDLY INITIATIVES, SUCH AS SAPLING PLANTING, AND EMBRACE SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES LIKE GLASS WATER BOTTLES IN ROOMS AND RESTAURANTS, AS WELL AS REUSABLE BATH AMENITIES."

Bhawani Singh Shekhawat, Director of Rooms, The Westin Mumbai Garden City



WelcomHeritage Bal Samand Lake Palace offers unique cultural experiences like traditional Rajasthani cuisine cooking classes, heritage walks around the property, sunset high tea and more

BEYOND THE ORDINARY

Hotels want their guests to feel valued and recognised from the start. By personalising their welcome, they make them feel special as individuals. Amaan R Kidwai, Area Manager Luxury Hotels (North) and General Manager, ITC Maurya, says, "Through its various facets, Mementos Jaipur showcases a compelling architectural narrative steeped in the state's history. Apart from a host of on-premise culinary experiences and indulgences, the resort facilitates exciting off-premise engagement activities like Old city heritage walks/ cycle tour, guided tour of forts and palaces, elephant village (haathi gaon) tour, jhalana leopard safari, Jaipur by night in open jeep, crafts village (pottery) tour, Pink City food sherpa trail and the like.

Jitendar Shekhawat, General Manager, WelcomHeritage Bal Samand Lake Palace, adds: "We offer unique cultural experiences like traditional Rajasthani cuisine cooking classes, heritage walks around the property, sunset high tea, farming in the organic vegetable garden, royal Marwari horse stud farm visit and immersive cultural performances. In addition, our bespoke wellness services, including yoga sessions by the lake, allow guests to experience relaxation and rejuvenation in a serene environment."







BESPOKE VIBES

The idea behind experiences is to make guests feel that these experiences are curated based on what they truly love and enjoy, customised to meet their unique needs.

A spokesperson from Courtyard by Marriott Mumbai International Airport, says, "We are introducing a range of in-hotel activities, from quick 15-minute experiences to more immersive 60-minute engagements. These include both complimentary and paid options, ensuring there's something for everyone, no matter the purpose of their trip."

"We curate local experiences, and customise dining options, creating stays that are both memorable and meaningful. Most importantly, we tailor each experience, integrating guest preferences and past behaviours to enhance future visits," she adds.

"WE UNDERSTAND THAT OUR GUESTS SEEK MOMENTS THAT ENRICH BOTH THEIR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL STATES, WHICH IS WHY WE CONTINUOUSLY REFINE OUR PRACTICES TO MATCH THEIR INDIVIDUAL PREFERENCES AND VALUES."

Monal Prabhu, Director of Sales & Marketing, JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu



DISCERNING TRAVELLERS

The thought process behind the differentiated guest experiences is rooted in a deep understanding of the evolving preferences of today's discerning travellers.

"In an era where guests seek more than just a luxurious stay, they increasingly desire personalised, immersive experiences that allow them to truly connect with the destinations they visit. With this in mind, we have carefully crafted offerings that blend the timeless appeal of tradition with the sophistication of modern luxury," says Nelson Sumit Gomes, Assistant General Manager, Marketing, Mayfair Hotels & Resorts.



Monal Prabhu, Director of Sales & Marketing, JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu, adds: "We understand that our guests seek moments that enrich both their physical and mental states, which is why we continuously refine our practices to match their individual preferences and values. In doing so, we contribute to a broader sense of well-being, enhancing their stay and making it a truly memorable experience for the mind, body, and spirit."

"IN AN ERA WHERE GUESTS INCREASINGLY DESIRE PERSONALISED, IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES THAT ALLOW THEM TO TRULY CONNECT WITH THE DESTINATIONS THEY VISIT, WE HAVE CRAFTED OFFERINGS THAT BLEND THE TIMELESS APPEAL OF TRADITION WITH THE SOPHISTICATION OF MODERN LUXURY."

Nelson Sumit Gomes, Assistant GM, Marketing, Mayfair Hotels & Resorts



"FOR FAMILIES SEEKING TO RECONNECT ON STAYCATIONS, TAJ PALACE NEW DELHI OFFERS THOUGHTFULLY CRAFTED EXPERIENCES, IMAGINE CHILDREN CAPTIVATED BY A DELIGHTFUL PICNIC BRUNCH IN OUR LUSH LAWNS, OR A PARENT AND CHILD SHAPING CLAY TOGETHER IN A POTTERY WORKSHOP, THEIR HANDS AND HEARTS INTERTWINED IN CREATION. THESE MOMENTS TRANSCEND ENTERTAINMENT; THEY FOSTER BONDS AND ETCH MEMORIES THAT ENDURE."

STAYCATIONS THAT MATTER

City hotels are also upping the ante when it comes to experiential getaways, largely driven by staycations.

A spokesperson from, Taj Palace New Delhi, says, "For families seeking to reconnect on staycations, we offer thoughtfully crafted experiences, imagine children captivated by a delightful picnic brunch in our lush lawns, or a parent and child shaping clay together in a pottery workshop, their hands and hearts intertwined in creation. These moments transcend entertainment; they foster bonds and etch memories that endure."





Interestingly, they have recently transformed an existing lawn into Panchhi Bagh, a vibrant retreat that redefines leisure. **SHOWCASING**



DESTINATIONS

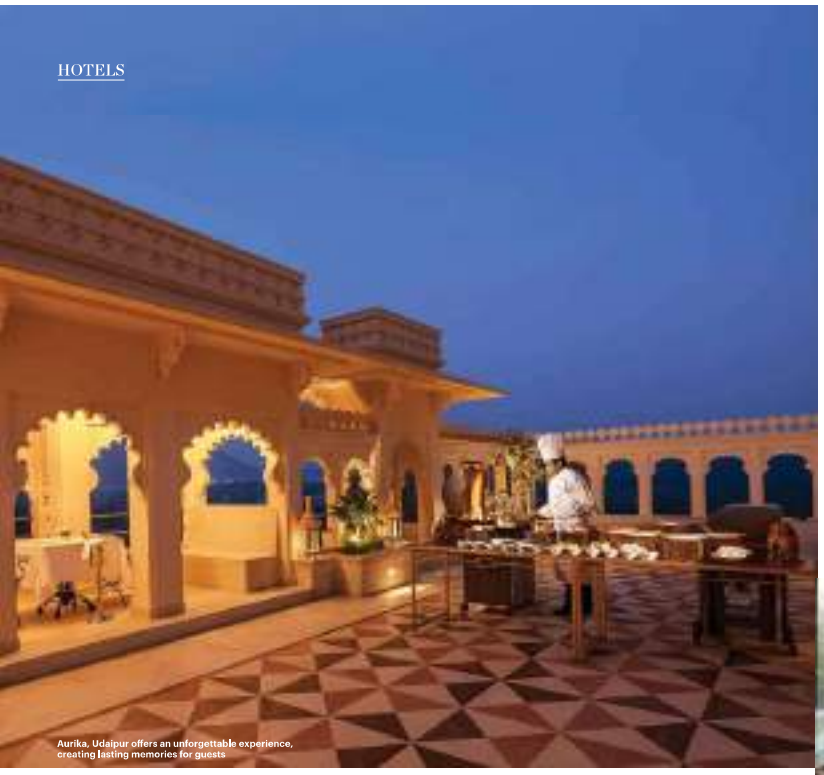
The concept behind Stotrak Hotels, for instance, was to be able to offer experiential stays accessible to all.

"The unique experiences we have on offer as of now are, village trails in Uttarakhand, trek to an ancient cave which was once home to Pandavas and now hosts a beautiful temple together with a secret waterfall. In Rajasthan, we offer wilderness, and nature across our properties, on top of this we have a property in Shekhawati where we take the guests to the actual farm and they can experience the farm living," says Manish Goyal, Founder, Stotrak Hospitality.

Pratiti Rajpal, General Manager, Ronil Goa – a JdV by Hyatt, adds: "Our dedicated Experience Team collaborates with guests prior to arrival, curating itineraries tailored to their vision of the perfect getaway. Whether it's a heritage walk through Fontainhas, kayaking along serene backwaters, or indulging in riverside dining, our offerings extend beyond the property, encouraging guests to discover the soul of Goa. Such enriching experiences not

"OUR DEDICATED EXPERIENCE TEAM COLLABORATES WITH GUESTS PRIOR TO ARRIVAL, CURATING ITINERARIES TAILORED TO THEIR VISION OF THE PERFECT GETAWAY."

Pratiti Rajpal, GM, Ronil Goa – a JdV by Hyatt



Aurika, Udaipur offers an unforgettable experience, creating lasting memories for guests

only encourage longer stays but also enhance guest satisfaction."

INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION

Crafting bespoke moments for guests with thoughtfully designed aspects reflect their individuality.

Kamal Singh, General Manager, Aurika, Udaipur, explains: "The Paheli Bagh at Aurika, Udaipur, offers an unforgettable experience reserved for a select few guests. Upon arrival, each guest receives a riddle that leads them on a delightful quest to discover the hidden location of the Paheli Bagh. Once they uncover this enchanting spot, guests are invited to snap a selfie and present it to the resort team. As a reward for their adventurous spirit, guests are treated to complimentary wine and cheese, enjoyed while taking in the breathtaking views from the Paheli Bagh. This unique experience adds a touch of intrigue and fun to your stay, creating lasting memories in the heart of Udaipur."

A spokesperson from The St. Regis Goa Resort, adds: "A guest who arrives is greeted not just with warmth but with an intuitive understanding of their preferences. Their butler, attuned to the smallest details, has already prepared a handwritten note, reflecting a personal touch that sets the tone for their stay. At The St. Regis Goa Resort, these personalised experiences are curated entirely around the occasion and the unique preferences of each guest, ensuring no two are ever the same."



Toyam by Orchid meets the diverse expectations of guests and ensures that every activity consistently delivers the desired experience

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

The response from guests has been overwhelmingly positive. Most of them are delighted with the unique range of activities available.

"However, maintaining this high level of satisfaction comes with challenges. Meeting the diverse expectations of guests and ensuring that every activity consistently delivers the desired experience can be demanding. Additionally, balancing operational costs while



offering such a wide range of activities requires meticulous planning and efficient resource management," says a spokesperson from Toyam by Orchid.

REVIEWING CUES

With the aim of constantly improving guest experiences by anticipating trends and addressing feedback, hotels also regularly review their programmes' effectiveness by analysing guest feedback, occupancy rates, and other key metrics. This feedback is collected through surveys, social media, and direct conversations, helping them identify areas for improvement.

"Biannual analyses of industry trends and competitor activities keep us updated on relevant hospitality developments. We also run pilot programmes to test new ideas on a smaller scale before full implementation. To ensure our staff is well informed, we hold monthly training sessions on changes and new initiatives, maintaining our high service standards. Our annual reviews of sustainability practices incorporate the latest eco-friendly innovations to achieve our sustainability goals," says Akash Agarwal, Owner, Rajasthali Resorts and Spa.

After all, an engaged guest is also far more likely to return, fostering loyalty that is a cornerstone of the hospitality industry.

"TO ENSURE OUR STAFF IS WELL INFORMED, WE HOLD MONTHLY TRAINING SESSIONS ON CHANGES AND NEW INITIATIVES, MAINTAINING OUR HIGH SERVICE STANDARDS."



Akash Agarwal, Owner, Rajasthali Resorts and Spa

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