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A Bi-monthly Magazine by HRAEI | Vol 8 | Issue 2 | March - April 2022



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The hospitality sector has been clamouring for industry status for over two decades. Such status will help entrepreneurs who wish to enter the hotel industry seek funding at a lower rate of interest and longer tenure of 15-20 years. It will also benefit the majority of hotels in the country, belonging to the budget segment, with investment around Rs 10-20 crores. It will help the industry get benefits, such as reduced electricity and water charges, lower property and development tax. Above all, it will bridge the gap between tourism employment between the globe and India.

The hospitality industry is looking at support for immediate and short-term measures for critical revival in the wake of the pandemic. There is an immediate need for common industry status across the country for the complete

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The hospitality industry is looking at support for immediate and short-term measures for critical revival in the wake of the pandemic.

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hospitality and tourism industry by putting it in the concurrent list to organize the industry and make them post-COVID ready.

Some states in India, such as Karnataka selectively confer industry status to only those hotels that have a star classification. This qualifies only about 70 hotels, leaving out the majority of hotels in the budget segment. In Maharashtra and Kerala the respective state governments only offer lip service regarding industry status, but hardly translates into a substantial benefit.

In eastern India, Odisha was one of the first states to offer industry status to the tourism sector. The only advantage that has helped the hotel industry due to this policy so far is that investors in the sector get land at industrial cost.

Mr Sudesh Poddar
President, HRAEI



“

The volume of wastage at restaurants in Kolkata is around 10% of the food served

Recently restaurants across Kolkata took a joint initiative to prevent food wastage that encourages guests to get the leftovers of their ordered food packed for home or distribute it among the underprivileged. Several Kolkata diners have joined hands to lend support to this movement.

According to an estimate, 68 million tonnes of food is wasted every day in India. The volume of wastage at restaurants in Kolkata is around 10% of the food served. A large number of diners don't bother about the leftovers and leave it on the table. The wasted food is often thrown out as garbage. But if customers are a little more careful, they can take it home to consume it later or give it to the hungry or needy.

The Hotel and Restaurants' Association of Eastern India (HRAEI) is one of the associations that has joined the initiative to ensure that no leftover food is thrown away. Many customers order an excess of food, but fail to consume little they order. We have started requesting such guests to allow us to collect these leftovers and have assigned the staff to serve them to the poor.

MYSTIC EAST

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THIS ISSUE OF MYSTIC EAST CONTAINS 56 PAGES INCLUDING COVER AND BACK COVER

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CRISIL, the rating agency, expects a sustained recovery of the sector hard hit by the pandemic

The economy is fast recovering from lockdowns, but the recent rise in Covid-cases across the country is worrying the industry, especially the hospitality sector, again. Fresh Covid-19 cases have crossed 5000, the most in over a month, as infections continue to increase across countries led by the spread of the new Omicron sub-variant.

With the rising cases, risks of a possible fourth wave and subsequent lockdowns continue to linger. But there are analysts who cite international cases to claim the overall outlook may not be that alarming. The industry is now running at full capacity and high occupancy, and consumer sentiment continues to be strong. The stocks of hotel companies such as Lemon Tree, Mahindra Holidays and Taj GKV have gained 4 to 14% so far this month as occupancy levels keep rising with wider vaccination coverage and ease in restrictions.

CRISIL, the rating agency, expects a sustained recovery of the sector hard hit by the pandemic. A recent report of the agency indicates the revenue is almost going to match the pre-pandemic levels soon.

Not just hotels, quick-service restaurants have witnessed a robust sales recovery in the last few months, according to brokerage firm Motilal Oswal. Both dine-in and delivery outlets are doing good business.

The most prominent silver lining is in the travel sector, expected to experience a strong revenge travelling which will benefit hospitality, tourism and airline industry in the summer months. High occupancy rates are coming riding on the wave of binge travel by a section of customers.

Mr Mohammed Azhar

Honourary Secretary

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Exclusive interview with
Mr Manoj Gangal,
Regional Executive
Director (Eastern
Region), Airport Authority
of India (AAI) spoke to
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■ F&B SPECIAL

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Despite its myriad natural tourist attractions, Meghalaya's tourism potential remains underdeveloped

Get ready for CareerEast 2022

The flagship placement drive of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India's Eastern Regional Office (Kolkata) will be held on 12-16 September 2022



Ministry of Tourism
Government of India
Eastern Regional Office, Kolkata



cally all over the world. Every aspect of the tourism industry, whether it be aviation, hotels, transportation, tour guides, or restaurants, has been negatively impacted in a way that is unprecedented. India is no different. The industry suffered the most damage during the initial wave compared to all other economic sectors. Approximately three million foreign tourists visited India in 2020, a dip of around 75 per cent as compared to the previous year, due to travel restrictions imposed to control the coronavirus pandemic. Following October 2020, the sector gradually began to show signs of recovery over the following three to four months. However, apart from a few rare trips to certain sites, the rapid increase in cases from March 2021 onward almost stopped all tourism operations. From February to March 2020, there was a 68 percent decrease in the number of foreign tourists arriving, which resulted in a 66.32 percent decrease in foreign exchange earnings, which has a substantial effect on the economy. The attrition rate in the tourism and hospitality industry is very high. All the major and smaller business organisations had to face the consequences of this pandemic, however, the hospitality and tourism sector was even more affected with the loss of skilled and

THE Hospitality and Tourism sector has been growing at an exponential rate for the past few decades all over the world. The sector generated 330 million jobs, or 10.4% of all employment in 2019, according to the 2019 annual study, which examines 185 countries and economies and 25 areas of the world. According

to the World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Development Index, India is now rated 54th (2021). In terms of the total contribution of travel and tourism to GDP in 2019, India is ranked 10th out of 185 nations by the World Travel & Tourism Council. The outbreak of Coronavirus has impacted the tourism sector drasti-



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trained staff and employees.

CareerEast is a flagship Placement Drive of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India's Eastern Regional Office (Kolkata) for final year students of 3/4 years Hotel/Hospitality Management Courses in Institutes located in Eastern and North-Eastern India. The objective of this event is to create job opportunities for the hospitality leaders of tomorrow through Tourism while keeping the principles of equity and justice as the core values of this initiative. The aim is to connect the skilled Hotel/Hospitality Management Students to the Tourism and Hospitality Industry (Hotels, Restaurants, QSRs, Retail Sector etc.) to meet the rising demand of quality manpower.

2022 will witness the 2nd Edition of CareerEast, from the 12th to 16th September, at IHM Kolkata premises. The 2nd Edition is being organized in association with Institute of Hotel management (IHM), Kolkata and the

Hotels and Restaurants Association of Eastern India (HRAEI). The 1st Edition, which was organized in September 2019, provided a much-needed shot in the arm to the Hospitality Sector's requirement of skilled human resources. The drive proved to be a great link between budding hospitality professionals and leading players of the hospitality industry. Considered as the largest ever placement drive for the students of Hotel Management, "Career East 2019" had been organised in Kolkata where more than 1800 students from 27 Hotel Management Institutes had registered for placement in 33 leading Hotel Groups, Tour Operator, Retail Chains and Online Aggregators. 1068 jobs were offered through this placement drive.

CareerEast 2022 aims to bring together over 2000 students from the Institutes located in the states of Eastern and North Eastern India (Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland,

Sikkim, Tripura, Meghalaya, Assam, West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar and Andaman and Nicobar Islands) under one roof and provide them an interface with each participating employer organization. The event not only provides the students with promising career opportunities but is a great boon to the participating organisations looking for skilled personnel to help drive their organisations ahead and upwards. At "CareerEast 2022", these organisations would not only gain new and skilled employees but would also be able to compensate for the loss of skilled manpower that they had to suffer due to the global pandemic. In the post COVID-19 situation, there is an upsurge in the number of up and coming hospitality establishments that are gearing up for this competitive sector of tourism to boost our country's economy.

Organizations, namely, The Oberoi Grand Hotel, Taj Bengal Kolkata, ITC Royal Bengal and ITC Sonar, The Lalit Great Eastern Hotel, Novotel Kolkata, Cafe Coffee Day, The Hotel Hindustan International, The Westin Kolkata, The Flurys, Fairfield by Marriott, Mayfair Hotels and Resorts, Fortune Park Panchwati, Ambuja Neotia Group, The Sonnet, Kenilworth Hotels, The Stadel, The Astor Kolkata, Zone by The Park Hotels, The Fern Residency Kolkata, Coral Reef Hotels and Resorts, Pipal Tree Hotels, Pride Hotels and Resorts, Hotel Sonar Bangla, Hotel Sonar Tori, Hotel Polo Towers, Welcomhotel by ITC Hotels, The Imperial Bodhgaya, O2 VIP Hotels, Auris, Beyza Hotels and Suites, Cygnett Hotels, Classic Group of Hotels, Apeejay Surrendra and Biryani Blues have already confirmed their participation at the Event.

Dr. Sagnik Chowdhury, Deputy Director General & Regional Director (Eastern & North Eastern India) at Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India

Pawan Hans to connect key Buddhist destinations

THE proposal to operate helicopter services connecting key Buddhist destinations in North India and Lumbini in Nepal is currently awaiting approval from the concerned central ministries of Civil Aviation and Tourism.

A proposal by the public sector Mini Ratna helicopter company, Pawan Hans Limited to connect helicopter services connecting important tourist destinations connected to the international Buddhist circuit in India and Nepal is currently under the consideration of the central Ministries of Civil Aviation and Tourism. Pawan Hans management is hopeful of relevant approvals from the associated

Ministries sooner than later.

According to Sanjeev Razdan, Chairman & Managing Director of Pawan Hans Limited, the proposal is to facilitate smoother connectivity for international Buddhist Tourists landing either in Varanasi or Gaya to visit other important destinations linked to Buddhist pilgrimage. Currently, international tourists landing in Varanasi or Gaya are taken either by coach or by train to those destinations which is both time-consuming and logistically challenging for visitors.

"70 per cent of the Buddhist traffic is international and comes in groups of 10 to 15. They want to see all would definitely prefer that," Razdan said.

He said that the proposal is to create two hubs in Varanasi and Gaya and operate 3 services each clock-wise and anticlockwise connecting Gaya - Kushinagar - Lumbini - Sravasti - Varanasi with night halts either in Varanasi or Gaya. Razdan said that they have identified MI-172 helicopters with 26-seater capacity as an ideal model to be deployed on the circuit.

Since connectivity will be largely between the heliport to the heliport, he feels that they will have to operate with reduced capacity as well. Since Lumbini in Nepal is also part of the itinerary, the operations would require bilateral approvals as well, he added.

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Odisha's first luxury houseboat inaugurated at Barkul



CHIEF Minister Naveen Patnaik, while inaugurating the houseboat in the presence of Tourism Minister, Ashwani Patra, said that the initiative will certainly boost the tourism profile of Chilika lake and attract national and international tourists to Odisha. The luxury houseboat has been named Garuda. It has two floors with two suite rooms, four premium rooms, a bar and a restaurant. There is an open-air lobby in the upper deck for meetings/conferences. The air-conditioned lounge in the lower floor with a bar can accommodate 30 people comfortably with premium luxury

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik recently inaugurated Odisha's first luxury houseboat at Barkul in Chilika lake. It is an initiative to attract

tourists from different parts of the country and outside to the Chilika lake.

Patnaik, while inaugurating the houseboat in the presence of Tourism Minister, Ashwani Patra, said that the initiative will certainly boost the tourism profile of Chilika lake and attract national and international tourists to Odisha.

"Chilika lake is a major biodiversity hotspot in India. It is one of the jewels of our tourist sector and has potential to transform Odisha as an attractive tourist destination. My government is keen to position Odisha as an eco-tourism destination of the country," said Patnaik.

Name of the luxury houseboat is Garuda. It has two floors with two suite rooms, four premium rooms,

a bar and a restaurant. There is an open-air lobby in the upper deck for meetings/conferences. The air-conditioned lounge in the lower floor with a bar can accommodate 30 people comfortably with premium luxury, said an official statement.

The houseboat is being operated by Vikas Eco Resorts in Chilika. It is developed with an investment of INR 3 crore. The project was indigenously designed, developed and manufactured in Barkul on the bank of Chilika, said the official sources.

The Odisha Tourism has approved the project through a single window mechanism. The Chilika Development Authority (CDA) and Directorate Ports and Inland Water Transport have given licenses/statutory clearances to this project.

IHG marks 6,000 hotels milestone with new openings & partnerships to reward travellers

LEADING hospitality firm, IHG Hotels & Resorts (IHG), is celebrating 6,000 open hotels by unveiling the '6,000 Club' and announcing partnerships with major sports and entertainment events. The milestone was commemorated by Keith Barr, CEO, IHG at the New York Stock Exchange on June 7 when he rang the bell to signal the close of trading, alongside local hotel General Managers and colleagues.

The 6,000 Club features a collection of newly opened hotels from IHG's iconic portfolio, showcasing the global reach of its 17 brands and the many

ways its hotel teams deliver 'True Hospitality for Good', every day.

In the past five years, IHG has broadened its appeal to owners and guests by acquiring or launching six new brands to take the portfolio to 17 - providing more choices and experiences. The new additions include luxury & lifestyle brands Six Senses, Regent, and Vignette Collection; premium brand, voco hotels; essentials brand, avid hotels; and suites brand, Atwell Suites.

The company is further set to grow its portfolio by a further 30 per cent, with more than 1,800 hotels already signed in its development pipeline,

illustrating how much owners value the strength of IHG's scale and brands. To thank guests, the company recently reinvented its loyalty programme, IHG One Rewards, to offer members more choice, value, and rewards - all powered by leading technology on a new mobile app.

The company is also announcing a series of multi-year sports and entertainment partnerships for IHG One Rewards members that will connect travellers at events around the world, including Major League Soccer, European Professional Club Rugby, and music festivals across the US and UK.



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Char Dham pilgrims to get INR 1 lakh accident insurance cover

THE insurance cover to the pilgrims will be provided by United India Insurance Company Ltd on behalf of Manav Utthan Seva Samiti, a spiritual institution founded by Uttarakhand Tourism and Culture Minister Satpal Maharaj, Kedarnath-Badrinath Temple Committee's media in-charge Harish Gaud said.

Pilgrims of Char Dham Yatra will get an insurance coverage of INR 1 lakh if they meet with an accident on the premises of Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri. The insurance cover to the pilgrims will be provided by United India Insurance Company Ltd on behalf of Manav Utthan Seva Samiti, a spiritual institution founded by Uttarakhand Tourism and Culture Minister Satpal Maharaj, Kedarnath-Badrinath Temple Committee's media

in-charge Harish Gaud said.

The insurance coverage will be provided to pilgrims if they meet with an accident on the premises of Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri, he said. Confirming the development, the Uttarakhand minister said the insurance coverage to Char Dham pilgrims in case of accident is being provided in the sacred memory of his father Hans Ji Maharaj and mother Raj Rajeshwari Ji.

Kedarnath-Badrinath Temple Committee Chairman Ajendra Ajay has expressed his gratitude to the minister and the Manav Utthan Seva Samiti for the kind gesture. Since the beginning of Char Dham Yatra on May 3, more than 110 pilgrims have died mainly due to various ailments.

FSSAI issues draft for recycled plastic as food contact material

THE food safety and standards authority of India (FSSAI) has issued regulations connected to recycled plastic material as food contact material.

The food authority in this regard has equipped a draft to amend the packaging materials.

As per the food safety and standards (packaging) amendment regulations, 2022, this draft will make a way for the use of recycled plastic, once it was notified in the gazette.

Under these mandates, products formed with the use of recycled polyethylene terephthalate (PET) may be used for packaging, storing, carrying or dispensing of food products as and when standards and guidelines are

notified by the Food Authority.

This provision will substitute the sub clause (e) pertaining to plastic materials. As per the draft, the packaging materials shall also comply with any other national standards/ regulations as applicable. Currently, FSSAI has initiated this draft related to the usage of recycled plastics for the purpose of packaging by the food industry.

The guidelines related to the recycling process of transforming post-consumer PET bottles utilized for packaging of food grade recycled resins applicable for preparing bottles and packaging material for bottling or packaging and its testing. The guidelines also cover the acceptance criteria for using food upgrade

recycled PET resin material in bottling or packaging operations.

The usage of plastic was earlier banned, but as per the newly notified draft, the usage of recycled plastic is only for the food contact materials. Guidelines are required for the use of recycled plastic for packaging of ready-to-eat food materials. This should include the source of the post-consumer plastic waste, type of polymer that can be used, the nature of the food material that they can be used for packaging, the average time for which the plastic will be in contact with the food and finally, the temperature that the packaging material may be subjected to while still in contact with the food material.

Jharkhand government slashes VAT on jet fuel to 4% from a 20% high

In a bid to strengthen air connectivity to the state and boost tourism, the Jharkhand government recently announced it had slashed VAT (value added tax) on Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) to 4 per cent from 20 per cent. The decision to reduce tax has been taken to increase air connectivity in the state and bring down airfares to boost tourism, a statement by the state government said.

"The state government will amend serial number one of Schedule- II Part-E of Jharkhand Value Added Tax Act, 2005 in order to improve the air connectivity in the state. Under this, the tax rate on Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) will be reduced from 20 per cent to 4 per cent," the statement said.

The Notification shall be effective from the date of its publication in the Official Gazette, it said. This decision is

expected to bring down airfares, the statement said, adding "apart from increasing air connectivity in the state, this shall also provide a major boost to the tourism ATF makes up for about 40 per cent of the operating cost of an airline. Jet fuel prices are at a record high in line with the global surge in energy prices. And since India is dependent on imports to meet its oil needs, the only way to cut jet fuel prices is to reduce taxes.

ATF presently is chargeable at an 11 per cent ad valorem rate of excise duty. A concessional rate of 2 per cent is applicable for ATF sold under the Regional Connectivity Scheme. Ad valorem rate means the incidence of taxation rises whenever there is an increase in the base price. ATF attracts both excise duty of the central government and sales tax or VAT of states.

MoT to pick up 50 destinations for model sustainable tourism destination development under SD2.0

EACH state has been asked to select two destinations for holistic development as model sustainable tourism destinations under the Swadesh Darshan 2.0. Revealing this at the National Summit on Developing Sustainable and Responsible Tourist Destinations organised by the Tourism The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, will develop 50 destinations in the country as holistic sustainable tourism destinations under the Swadesh Darshan 2.0.

The Ministry had revamped the flagship central scheme of tourism infrastructure development, Swadesh Darshan, incorporating sustainable and responsible tourism principles

into it. The Ministry of Tourism has asked each state in the country to recommend 2 destinations each to be considered for detailed master planning and developed as model sustainable tourism destinations under the Swadesh Darshan 2.0.

India launches National Air Sports Policy 2022 to build safe, affordable, accessible ecosystem India, Nepal collaborate to strengthen energy cooperation & cross border connectivity.

Revealing this at the National Summit on Developing Sustainable and Responsible Tourist Destinations organised by the Tourism Ministry to mark the World Environment Day, Rakesh Verma, Additional Secretary,

Tourism said that the government will attempt to complete the development in a time-bound manner in a time frame of two years.

Verma said that the latest Travel & Tourism Development Index ranking of India is distorting and the whole tourism ecosystem is required to introspect and required to take corrective action.

The chief guest at the event, Arvind Singh, Secretary Tourism, Government of India said that there is an urgent need to make principles of sustainable and responsible tourism mainstream. While there are islands of excellence scattered here and there, it needs to be universal and widespread.

GLUTEN ALERT

FSSAI has issued a guidance note on gluten free products for restaurants and those in F&B industry



► Foods that typically contain gluten include breads, cakes, chapatis, breakfast cereals, pastas, and many other grain-based foods.

THE FSSAI has published a guidance note related to gluten free products to ensure food safety of those people who suffer from celiac disease. Recognising that people with celiac disease face food challenges the FSSAI has established the standards for "GLUTEN FREE

FOODS" and their labelling requirements under the Food Safety and Standards Regulations 2011. This guidance note also contains guidance for Food Business Operators that manufacture food products, hotel and restaurant owners and consumers so they are aware about gluten-free foods.

Foods that typically contain gluten include chapattis, breads, cakes, breakfast cereals, pastas, and many other grain-based foods. Gluten is the main storage protein found in wheat and certain other cereal grains including rye, barley, oats, triticale, spelt, kamut



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► FSSAI has established the standards for “GLUTEN FREE FOODS” and their labelling requirements

Grains that have been produced by breeding wheat, rye, or barley with each other or with different grains can also contain gluten. Triticale is produced by breeding wheat with rye, and so it is a gluten-containing grain. Gluten adds elasticity, volume and texture to many food products. However, gluten can cause damage to the intestines of people who have celiac disease and they need to avoid such foods. People who have non-celiac gluten sensitivity also need to avoid gluten containing foods.

Globally, one in 140 individuals has Celiac disease. In India, it was thought to be very uncommon about two decades back. But now Celiac disease is well recognized and it affects one



in 140 Indians (0.6%). Celiac disease is more common in the Northern part of India.

Various myths about Gluten

Myth: Rice contains gluten. Rice has a glutinous part. **Fact:** This is starch and not gluten.

Myth: Ice cream contains gluten. **Fact:** Most ice creams do not contain gluten except if biscuit, cake, cone or wafers are added.

Myth: Only those with Celiac Disease can have gluten sensitivity. **Fact:** Wheat sensitivities can manifest as celiac disease, non-celiac wheat sensitivity (NCWS) or Dermatitis Herpetiformis (Itchy blistery rash) or wheat allergies. The symptoms and manifestations are similar. Treatment of strict lifelong avoidance to gluten is common to all.

Myth: Gluten-free diet is a diet for weight loss. **Fact:** Gluten free diets need not be weight loss diets. However, many who are wheat sensitive respond well but this is only if a healthy gluten free diet is followed. Unhealthy gluten free diets can be high on starch and low in nutrients.

Myth: Gluten-free diets are healthier. **Fact:** Not true. They can be highly processed, loaded with chemical additives and high on starch and sugars. Gluten free diets need to be planned well.

Myth: Once symptoms improve one can restart gluten. **Fact:** Most people with Celiac disease, wheat sensitivity or Dermatitis need to be on a lifelong gluten free diet.

What are the symptoms of celiac disease?

The spectrum of symptoms of celiac

disease is vast and comprises of symptoms as summarized below: chronic/recurrent diarrhoea, failure to gain weight, failure to gain height, generalised weakness, anaemia, delayed puberty, irritability and behavioural issues, infertility and metabolic bone disease

Hotel and restaurants are encouraged to keep gluten-free food options at their outlets. They must provide gluten-free food on demand to the customer

What is the treatment of Celiac disease?

The only available treatment for patients with Celiac disease is strict and lifelong avoidance of gluten containing food. Once gluten is withdrawn from the diet, the flattened villi in the lining of the small intestine gradually return to normal. Individuals diagnosed with celiac disease and their families should consult a qualified nutritionist/dietician for dietary counselling.

Repeated counselling and discussion on the barrier for maintaining gluten-free life is very helpful. The management of this condition requires:

- Adequate knowledge about gluten-free ingredients and foods.
- Focus on healthy eating of a variety of foods, not just a gluten-free diet.
- A lifelong, strict adherence to a gluten-free diet.
- Regulatory aspects of gluten-free food

International Standards: Provisions related to Gluten free food in Codex and European Union (EU) provides that the product shall not have more than 20 mg/kg of gluten.

Provisions under Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 Standards of 'Gluten Free Food' is notified in the Sub Regulation 2.14 of Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives), Regulations, 2011, wherein, it is mentioned that gluten levels shall be below 20mg/kg and it shall bear the label declaration referred to in sub-regulation 2.4.5 (5) of Food Safety and Standards (Packaging and Labelling) Regulations, 2011 i.e., the term "Gluten free" shall be printed in the immediate proximity of the name of the product. These regulations are available on FSSAI website www.fssai.gov.in

FSSAI is also in the process of removing the provisions relating to the standard of "Food specially processed to reduce gluten content to a level 20-100 mg/kg" from the Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulations, 2011 and 'Low Gluten and warning for low gluten', respectively under Food Safety and Standards (Packaging and Labelling) Regulations, 2011.

Further, FSSAI is in the process of adding labelling provisions for addressing the issue of cross contamination.

Provision for approval of Rapid Analytical Food Testing (RAFT) kit/ Equipment/ Method:

'Strip based rapid test methods' are present for testing of gluten free foods. FSSAI has not so far validated these methods. Manufacturers of such kits are encouraged to apply for confirmation / approval of the kit. Details are available on the FSSAI website (www.fssai.gov.in).

Information on gluten free ingredients/foods for people suffering from celiac disease

Grains to be avoided:

Wheat (wheat germ, wheat bran, wheat starch, bulgar, durum, kibbled), semolina (a derivative of wheat), barley (barley malt, barley extract), vermicelli (a derivative of wheat), pure oats (Oats bran and oat germ), triticale (a cross between wheat and rye), einkorn (wild species of wheat), farina (cream of wheat), couscous (a derivative of wheat), rye, spelt, kamut (a variety of wheat)

Grains that can be consumed:

Rice, brown rice, corn, maize, cornmeal, sorghum (Jowar), chestnut flour (singhara), quinoa, carob flour, wild rice, millets [Bajra, ragi], amaranth (ramdana), buckwheat (kasha/kuttu), tapioca sago (Sabudana), all pulses, legumes

Processed food to be avoided:

Patients suffering from celiac disease should check ingredients details on the label before buying any packaged food products since it may contain gluten e.g., (Instant Noodles, Macaroni, Pasta, Bread, Compounded asafoetida or bandhani hing etc.)

Key Points for Food Business Operators (FBOs), manufacturers and processors

Must comply with the provision of Gluten free food standard prescribed by FSSAI Only foods that contain 20 mg gluten/kg or less can be labelled as 'gluten-free'. In case, any gluten free product is manufactured in a plant where gluten containing products are also manufactured this shall be declared on the label as "Processed in a plant where gluten containing products are manufactured." Should avoid cross contamination of gluten free food.

Ingredients must be handled prop-



erly, if there is a common facility for gluten-free and gluten-containing ingredients to prevent cross contamination.

Should establish separate storage and preparation/ staging areas for gluten-free and gluten-containing ingredients.

Should have separate production areas and equipment with controlled air-flow between the two production areas. This practice will minimize the potential for airborne flour dust contamination.

Equipment should be dedicated to each area for use on gluten-free or non-gluten free production.

Should have separate equipment that is clearly marked and used for either gluten free or gluten containing products. This includes measuring tools, mixing bowls, pans, utensils, etc.

Should provide training to all the employees to have clean garments and hands when handling gluten-free products.

Manufacturing, processing and

packaging of gluten free food should be done separately to avoid cross contamination.

For Storage and Transportation: Should avoid cross contamination of gluten free food products with gluten-containing products. Ingredients and finished products should be stored properly to avoid cross-contamination.

For Hotel and Restaurants

- Are encouraged to keep gluten free food options at their outlets.
- May provide gluten free food on demand to the customer.
- If gluten free food options are available, then they should have separate counters and kitchen for avoiding cross contamination of gluten free food.
- Should use clean utensils for preparing gluten free food.
- Should provide training to the workers for handling/ preparing gluten free food and personal hygiene such as; washing of hands between use

of gluten containing and gluten free ingredients, wearing of clean cloths and apron etc.

- Should provide training to all staff on all aspects of sourcing, preparation and serving of gluten-free food.
- Should do an internal audit to ensure 'practice is maintained and staff is efficient in their knowledge and working behaviour'.
- Should use clean oil for frying, clean water for boiling/ preparation etc.
- In the buffet, Gluten free food should be labelled properly.
- Menu card should contain the option for Gluten free foods.

For Consumers (How to read labels?)

Consumers should read the label carefully. Label reading is always done to check the nutritional content of food items. But it is one of the key success factors in maintaining good adherence to a gluten free diet. The

following points need to be checked while checking out a food label for gluten free safety.

Gluten free certification mark

Ingredients – These need to be checked regularly since food companies keep changing them.

Allergen warning – If a product does not mention about being gluten free, it is always advisable to read the allergen warning.

Precautionary statements – Other than allergen warning, some products mention precautionary statements like "Manufactured in the same line with wheat" or "Processed in the same unit that also processes wheat".

If the label doesn't make it clear about its gluten free safety, you can call or contact the manufacturers to confirm.

Lastly, if in doubt, leave it out
Beware of foods labelled "Wheat-free"

as they may contain grains such as barley, rye, spelt or kamut which are not gluten-free.

How to report the sale of misleading products

Consumers should inform the Food Safety Department about any illegal sale of adulterated food stuff in their areas. Anyone can report the problem relating to safety of food to the concerned State Food Safety Commissioners. Contact details of Food Safety Commissioners are available on FSSAI website www.fssai.gov.in.

Consumers can also share their concerns through Food Safety Connect Portal <https://foodlicensing.fssai.gov.in/cmsweb/> or may register their complaint on FSSAI App available at Google Play store.

Consumers can also visit on (<http://foodsmart.fssai.gov.in/home.html>) to become aware of other food safety/ labelling provisions.

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WE HAVE DRASTICALLY IMPROVED PASSENGER AMENITIES IN SEVERAL AIRPORTS

Mr Manoj Gangal, Regional Executive Director (Eastern Region),
Airport Authority of India (AAI) spoke to Mystic East





**MR MANOJ GANGAL,
Regional Executive
Director (EAST), Airport
Authority of India (AAI)**

AS the Executive Director of Eastern Region of Airports Authority of India, Mr Manoj Gangal has revolutionised the management of airports in eastern India. As the administrative and operational head of all AAI Airports in Eastern India, spanning across six states and one union territory, spread over 5,40,000 sq. nm of oceanic and continental airspace he has brought about significant transformation.

Several new airports have started operation or are about to start functioning under his leadership. Soon we shall see airports in Deoghar (Jharkhand) and Rourkela (Odisha) start operating. Besides, many more airports are being spruced up and even novel amphibious aircrafts are going to be introduced in the

Andaman & Nicobar Islands. These colossal efforts will surely immensely boost tourism and hospitality in eastern India.

Mr Gangal spoke to Mystic East in an exclusive interview recently. Here are the excerpts:

What are some of the major developments in airport management in Eastern Region you would want to highlight?

Darbhanga airport in Bihar, operationalised in November 2020, has proved to be a trendsetter under the regional connectivity scheme in the Eastern region. The airport connects many districts in and around the Mithila region and has a catchment area extending to Nepal. To date, Darbhanga Airport has already witnessed

passenger footfall of more than 1.5 lacs with 20 aircraft movements daily and has also helped litchi farmers transport their products across India improving the agricultural economy of the area.

We have drastically improved the passenger amenities in Patna airport which includes better car parking, good restaurants, toilets, waiting lounges and even gyms for the discerning travellers. Many new airports, aerodromes, heliports and expansion of existing facilities are also happening.

In addition, Jagdalpur airport in the remote Bastar district of Chhattisgarh was operationalised on 19 September 2020. The tiny airport provides connectivity to the city of Hyderabad from where many affluent passengers

fly to Chattisgarh. Bilaspur airport in Chhattisgarh was also operationalised on 1 March 2021 under the regional connectivity scheme.

Could you specify the upcoming new initiatives?

Deoghar airport in Jharkhand will be operational very soon attracting lakhs of pilgrims. The eastern region is also moving quickly towards the establishment and operationalisation of three water aerodromes in Andaman and Nicobar Islands in phase 3.1 of the Udaan scheme. Amphibious aircrafts will be introduced in island ports. A thoroughly restructured Veer Savarkar International Airport at Port Blair – redesigned like a sea shell – will soon be able to handle 10 million passengers. In the next three years, the congested Bagdogra airport will be developed with state-of-the-art facilities for passengers with Rs 1300 crore investment.

The Airports Authority of India under ER is moving at a great pace for connectivity at Rourkela (Odisha) and Cooch Behar (West Bengal). Air force bases at Hasimara and Kalaikunda can also civilian passengers in future. We are also thinking of expanding our footprint to Bokaro, Dumka, Burnpur, Balurghat and Malda. Behala, in the outskirts of Kolkata, can get a heliport.

The West Bengal government has frequently claimed that airfields in Bengal such as Balurghat and Chara airstrip should be made functional for civil aviation while flight connectivity needs to be increased at Andal airport. Are there any plans for these under the RCS scheme?

Balurghat and Malda airports in West Bengal have been included in Udaan 4.1 for the bidding process of the RCS route. It is expected that airport connectivity would be established at these airports through coordination

between the AAI and the government of West Bengal. Andal airport is under the category of private airport operations where air traffic services along with communication, navigation and surveillance are provided by the Airports Authority of India. The airport is continuously growing under a regional connectivity scheme and has the potential of being in competition with NSCBI airport, Kolkata.

You have played a key role in engineering the upper airspace (above 25,000 ft) in North East India harmonising with Kolkata Air Traffic Control (ATC). Why is this considered a landmark achievement.

Taking over the North east region above 25000 ft by Kolkata ATC Centre under upper area harmonisation we are a step ahead to realise the long-term objective of establishing four area control centres in India. Due to the total surveillance coverage

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In air traffic management, communication between the air traffic control (ATC) and airline pilots is an extremely important part of the job.



► **Dynamic coordination with IAF provides more efficient flight paths for aircraft**

and VHF coverage of the North East region above 25000 ft:

1. Kolkata can provide surveillance separation throughout the north east, which will increase the air-space capacity to a great extent.
2. Kolkata can provide direct routing to aircraft thus saving fuel and reducing carbon emission.
3. Dynamic coordination with IAF provides more efficient flight paths for aircraft.
4. Provide optimum flight level to aircraft more efficiently.
5. Above all, air safety will improve.

How challenging was it for AAI to ensure smooth flight operations in the Eastern region where states such as Bengal witnessed a record number of Covid cases?

When all people were safeguarding

themselves during lockdowns, AAI officials were working at airports, risking themselves in support of society. Strict Covid protocols had to be organised not only among AAI officials but also for passengers. The challenges were much more for Air Traffic Controllers and officials of communication, navigation and surveillance who had to ensure safe aircraft operations in continental air space and over oceans, working day and night in a closed office environment.

It seems Air Traffic Controller's (ATC) job is one of the most challenging professions.

All airport professionals face numerous challenges in their job. As a passenger you see the terminals, runways, the aircraft and so on. ATCs

are always behind the scene, but performing a very crucial job. In air traffic management, communication between the ATC and airline pilots is an extremely important part of the job. Those who handle the communication also play key roles. It's a very demanding job and you need extreme focus. Currently, these staff are trained in the state-of-the-art facility in Mopa International Airport, an under-construction greenfield airport in northern Goa.

You have been with AAI over three decades. And an airport professional with a long experience...

I have been working in the Indian aviation industry for 36 years. I am an International Airport Professional (IAP), and by that, I mean there is a course through Airports Council

International (ACI). Globally, there are about 2,000 IAP graduates who interact with one another. Airport managers in London or New York or Singapore manage airports in the same manner, with the same principles that we developed together. It's a single community.

You have modernised Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International (SVPI) Airport so dramatically. How was it possible?

Soon after I arrived at SVPI Airport, I undertook a major revitalisation of the airport's operating procedures, and drove a new vision for staff – to focus on the experiences of passengers while they're at the airport.

It was going back to basics. The staff were a bit surprised because they never expected an airport director to talk in this manner. I said, first, look at the washroom, look at its cleanliness, look at how much time passengers are spending in queues. Go back to basics, and then we will talk about something else.

We created clean and comfortable washrooms, ensured there was potable drinking water at convenient places and clean food courts with quality seating arrangements. We also cut down a lot of long queues for airport procedures. Today, we are winning awards at an international level.

Passenger comfort is our utmost goal. We train airport staff, including those in security, to serve passengers with a smile. Frisking or security checks must be done in a humane way with machines, such as body scanners, making the process as contactless as possible.

What is your message to a budding airport professional?

Aviation requires 360 degrees of vision. You have to look at the security



► Mr Manoj Gangal has been working in the Indian aviation industry for 36 years

requirements, coordinate with all stakeholders, and handle media and legal requirements. He/she must, talk to a lot of people at a leadership level, many of whom may not report to him/her, but he/she must accept overall responsibility for their areas. He/she has to keep his cool under all circumstances.

There are the Airlines, Customs, Immigration, and other people in regulatory bodies with whom one has to interact. You have to make them understand that this is our goal; passengers are our main customers and we all work for the comfort of the passengers.

An IAP graduate has to master standardised international terminologies so that they can work cohesively with their colleagues or partners across the world.

Do you encourage youngsters to take up a career in flying?

Of course. My ultimate dream is to see a trained pilot from the underprivileged groups from remote corners of India. I still remember my stint at the National Flying Training Institute (NFTI), at Gondia -- a remote place in eastern Maharashtra. Cadet pilots are trained here for their Commercial Pilot Licence. I noticed a smile on the faces of children of the poorest families while they practiced with flight simulators to land on imaginary "airports" in New York or London. I think some of these kids have by now become accomplished pilots who have flown or taken off airplanes from real airports of New York or London.

Additional information from *The Statesman* and *The CEO Magazine*

Revenge travel is trending after covid

Deval Tibrewalla, CEO & Director of Hotel Polo Towers Group

DEVAL TIBREWALLA is a fifth-generation entrepreneur and the CEO & Director of Hotel Polo Towers Group, the largest hotel company in North East India which currently owns & operates 9 hotels. After completing hospitality management from the prestigious Ecole Hoteliere de Laussane, his mission was to expand the vision of the Group Chairman Mr. Kishan Tibrewalla. Now the group operates in Agartala, Kolkata, Neermahal, Jabalpur, Allahabad.

Deval mentors entrepreneurs by funding startups and supporting young entrepreneurs as a part of the Indian Angel Network. Out of his love for automobiles he established a motor themed 'ML05 Café' in Shillong. Moreover, as a tribute to Shillong's favourite musician Bob Dylan he started the vibrant Dylans café. Keeping in mind the preference of the millennials the group started Woodstock café & Farmhouse at upper Shillong. These three establishments keep him young and involved outside hotels. Cafes are his first love as he started his career as a waiter at Café Coffee Day!

MR TIBREWALLA spoke to Mystic East in an exclusive interview:

Do you think the hotel industry is on a recovery track after three years of disastrous business?

Covid did change in the global busi-



Guests' changed behaviour and expectations is the new normal where we have to position Hotel Polo Towers Group strategically to overcome new challenges

ness dynamics but with travel and tourism the impact was massive. Complete recovery is possible with a sensible strategy and constant monitoring of the same. Yes, it is coming back to track with a lot of new challenges. Guests' changed behaviour and expectations is the new normal where we have to position Hotel Polo Towers Group strategically & effectively to overcome any new challenges and can grab business opportunities in this changing business environment.

Did you notice a feeling of "revenge travel" among customers in the past two months?

Yes, revenge travel is trending after covid and luxury is on top of the mind of the travelers. After two stressful years with restrictions and social distance now people are planning for trips more frequently and around 37% of the travelers are travelling to relax, 18% to meet with family and friends, 10% to experience a change of surroundings. This revenge travel is a positive step for our hospitality industry. But health & hygiene will be of supreme importance in every traveler's mind. The revenge travel destinations will not be the same as pre covid crowd puller destinations as travelers will mature and will prefer domestic destinations as a safe weekend getaway.

The pandemic has battered the hotel industry. How do you see it evolving to meet the challenge?

Innovation of business model is the only way to meet the challenge. Innovations in domestic market offerings will play a vital role for overall growth. Drivable leisure destinations are in demand now and have delivered an excellent ARR. We have understood the altered needs of our guests and invested our time & technology on that and it will pay us in future which are going to be very bright. We have learnt to live with pandemic and its constant challenges keeping our innovations intact, strategies well planned, placed and monitored.

How has your hotel coped with the crisis?

Our priorities were the safety of the guests, employees and to develop

a financial sustainability plan to survive. We introduced contactless check-ins to minimize contact & cost, QR code-based menu, sanitization with medical grade disinfectant to offer a safe stay for our guests. We have analyzed our market and segmented into different categories to understand the crisis of each segment & to offer a healthy mix of our offerings. If one segment is under-performing we can still depend on other segments.

We were well positioned as our properties are mainly high end and the 30-year-old brand gave guests confidence.

Did you try any innovative ideas? What ancillary revenue stream did you tap?

We have developed a few strategies for ancillary revenue. We introduced our own delivery fleet for direct deliv-

ery to maintain the safety standards. We have worked on many customized offers for our guest early check late check out, tailored packages for each guest keeping in mind each guest is different and requirements are also different.

Are you expecting more MICE customers in the coming day? Have the bookings of postponed weddings begun?

We are expecting a rise in Mice booking as companies are planning for strategic planning meetings, team building meets etc which were on hold for the last 2 years. Postponed bookings have also started coming in. Mice is the fastest growing segment and a profitable source of business for hospitality. Mice is an opportunity to build reputation and a sustainable growth path for all our hotels.



Pandemic helped us curate healthy food recipes

CHEF SUMAN CHAKRABORTY, the General Manager at Fenicia Hospitality

CHEF SUMAN CHAKRABORTY is the General Manager at Fenicia Hospitality that runs Club Fenicia, luxurious lounge in Kolkata, located at the city's posh IT hub in Sector V. Apart from its plush décor and exclusive ambience, it is known for its gourmet meals from Asian, North Indian and European cuisines, exquisitely curated by Chef Suman.

In his previous avatars he had been a Director of Food & Beverage and Executive Chef at InterContinental Hotels Group and Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group properties. An alumnus of IHM, Kolkata, he had started his career at Hyatt Hotels in Kolkata.

Recently he spoke to Mystic East in an exclusive interview:

How has the F&B industry staged a comeback after a long hiatus induced by the pandemic? What are the changes and innovations that have helped it bounce back?

The Covid has driven home important lessons in the domain of hygiene and sanitation. Both customers and those who run the F&B industry have unlearned and learned new strategies in the domain. The consumers now know that there can be no compromise



in personal hygiene. For instance, sharing a platter is unthinkable for them. On the other hand, we have tried to cater food with as little human touch as possible and make food delivery almost contactless. Tables are placed with a lot of distance and the focus is on private dining. Diners are allowed secluded spots or corners with minimum interaction with a large number of customers. Some people think more in terms of hygiene than cuisine. Natu-

rally, we had to bring about a lot of changes in the way we function.

Could you specify some changes you have introduced in the kitchen environment?

The SOPs for sanitation, kitchen and restaurant processes and staff training have been massively overhauled. Minimum distances between the staff have been increased to at least six feet. Employee hygiene and getting them fully vaccinated was a top priority. Use of gloves, tweezers and sterilised metallic trays were used to prevent the spreading of infection. Kitchen ventilation was re-designed to allow the entry of more fresh air. Meticulous kitchen hygiene, including thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting every item bought inside the kitchen was an imperative. Cleaning the slabs of the kitchen and the cook tops multiple times with proper disinfectants to do away with all kinds of harmful microbes was also practiced on a war footing.

Did the pandemic inspire you to curate healthier food recipes?

We did focus on a lot of immunologically boosting dishes in the wake of the pandemic and some of these are still quite popular with customers. After Covid-19 the discerning diner has



become quite health conscious and we have designed special menus, rich in nutrients and antioxidants, cooked with safe and traditional methods and ingredients. These dishes are curated with a focus on local flavours and fresh ingredients that strengthen immunity. The food is prepared using simple cooking techniques like sauteing, steaming and grilling to ensure that the nutrient quotient of the ingredients remains intact. For instance, we have a mixed sprouts curry, rich in antioxidants and Omega-3-fatty acids. Turmeric, moringa, spinach, tulsi, mulethi and other nutritious ingredients are used for delicious as well as nutritious meals.

The growth of the Cloud Kitchen market during the pandemic has been phenomenal. But will the growth sustain when restaurants open and people start eating out in hordes?

There are several factors that have encouraged the growth and popular-

ity of the concept of cloud kitchen in the past few years of pandemic. Low operational costs and lower barrier to entry encouraged many new investors and seasoned restaurateurs to get into the domain. As it doesn't require much investment, such kitchens have the potential to fulfil the dream of young chefs who want to own their own eateries. Besides, one of the primary reasons contributing to the growth of cloud kitchens was the pandemic's health and safety factor. With social distancing, most physical restaurants could not take in customers as before; cloud kitchens meant enhanced safety, ensuring that the customer's health is well-protected.

But with great advantages, these kitchens have some limitations too and that is why cloud kitchen businesses fail, such as too much dependence on delivery partners. Moreover, cloud kitchens don't offer you the experience of fine dining that can only be felt inside a well-fur-

nished restaurant. It's not just about eating, but meeting and mingling with friends, relatives, acquaintances or colleagues. You also miss some beautiful cutlery or a well-curated ambience that goes on to make a lasting impression in your memory.

I believe both cloud kitchens and restaurants will co-exist after the pandemic. Especially, those which have earned customers' trust will surely help people enjoy restaurant food at home. And for dining as an experience, you have to visit restaurants.

What is the future of the F & B industry post pandemic?

The future is extremely bright. People are already trying to catch up with the fun and enjoyment they've missed in the past couple of years. They are choosing places which give them special and private dining experiences. Surely, there will be new investments and new places that are going to thrive post pandemic.



F&B TRENDS

Here are top eight trends driving a change in the food & beverage industry

THE covid-19 pandemic and worldwide lockdowns have impacted the food & beverage industry quite prominently. The concerned areas of impact include food delivery, supply chain, and other logistics-related things. Further, the moral obligation of social distancing has made shopping for customers

more chaotic and tiring. One of the important changes in the food industry after covid-19 is restrictions on the dine-in facility at restaurants. Thus, you can't enjoy the outing with your family for dinner. So, to prevail in such circumstances, the changes in the food & beverage industry are already evident.

If you want to know the top trending changes in the food industry, you are in the right place. Keep reading to know all about it.

What are some new trends in the food and beverage industry?

1. Shifting business online

If you analyse the food & beverage

industry deeply, you will find that the pandemic has given rise to digitalization. Thus, to meet the growing needs of society, proactive food and grocery stores have come up with the plan to turn their stores into e-commerce ordering websites. This is one of the most important changes in the food & beverage industry after covid-19. Online shifting of food outlets gives you an option to shop from your favourite bakery without even visiting there. Thus, consumers remain safe from the pandemic and also enjoy their favourite food items delivered to their doorstep directly.

Therefore, the visionary stores that sensed this change quite early invested in modern technologies to sustain the changes in the food & beverage industry amid the pandemic.

2. Increase in sale of healthier foods

India is a country naturally known for its expertise in treatment through Ayurveda. Thus, every household believes in keeping such food items in the home which are herbal too. The covid-19 virus is a threat to those with a weaker immune system. Hence, everyone is interested in buying herbal foods that increase the immunity of a person. So, the latest trend in the food & beverage industry in India is an increase in the sales of healthier food items and beverages in the market. Some examples would be fermented drinks like kombucha which has gained a huge market today. As the demand is increasing, the R & D is also increasing, which has flooded the market with many immunity-boosting food and drink options.

3. Increase in demand for trustable food items

With the onset of the pandemic, everyone now focuses majorly on the

transparency and hygienic conditions of the items they are purchasing. And when someone buys food items, it becomes even more important, as their body will be consuming it. Thus, it directly affects your health.

Hence, one of the important trends in the food & beverage industry in 2022 is people demanding more transparency from their suppliers on the hygienic conditions of the food items they are purchasing and indicating the ingredients on the packaging. It includes transparency in the origin of food, storage house conditions, how it is transported to your home, etc. To meet such trust issues of customers, the food & beverage industry is coming up with innovations such as UV Ray disinfectants, etc.

4. Increase in demand for cooking appliances

The covid-19 pandemic left everyone stranded at home. Hence, it becomes hectic to cook the food all day regularly for all family members. Hence, households are shifting from the old traditional method of cooking on gas to easier and less time taking options. Thus, the other important changes in the food industry are people buying easy cooking appliances.

Or the appliances that show recipes and cooking instructions together. Some of the highest selling appliances amid the pandemic are air-fryers, multi-cookers, electric ovens, etc. These changes in the food industry have given relief to many households. Moreover, home cooking has also resulted in an increase in sales of smart kitchen gadgets.

5. Restaurant style cooking

Not being able to dine-out doesn't mean you can't recreate the same at home. Yes, the recent food surveys show that people are constantly

changing their food habits during their time at home amid the pandemic. To relieve the mood and overcome the stress people are creating a restaurant-like atmosphere in their homes only. It has been eye-catching among all the trends in the food & beverage industry in 2022. People do so by ordering pre-packaged meals, restaurant-like products, and other important stuff that adds restaurant flavours to your homemade food.

6. Automation

Covid-19 spreads through the air hence the number of people in an area increases the chances of its spread. Thus, the food processing and manufacturing units have tried to bring automation into their functioning. It involves less engagement of humans, and thus chances of the virus being spread are less.

Thus, automation is one of the prime changes in the food & beverage industry amid the pandemic. Not only did this help in reducing the spread of covid-19, but it also increased the efficiency of food manufacturing units. It does so by reducing the time taken to produce the same output. It also aids in better quality control, and less wastage of raw materials. Thus, it increases the overall profit of both customers and factories producing goods.

7. Sustainability

Sustainability is nothing but maintaining the changes that the food & beverage industry is bringing to fight the losses incurred during the pandemic. Thus, every food industry is bringing changes in its working model, coming up with innovations. All this is done to win the trust of their customers that they give them the most hygienic and healthier diet to fight off the covid-19 pandemic.



► **Consumers are more tech-savvy and socially informed, thanks to the Internet**

8. The pervasive presence of eCommerce

An online presence is one of the major challenges of the food and beverage industry, considering that consumers are more tech-savvy and socially informed, thanks to the Internet. While core industries, like appliances, electronics, textiles, and other domestic products have already established their presence in the commerce domain, this sector has been relatively slow on the upkeep.

Of late though, wholesalers and retail companies have already begun to invest in grocery e-commerce, however, it is important that most manufacturers have a presence on the World Wide Web, in order to tackle what seems to be one of the most crucial challenges of the food and beverage industry. Citing an instance of the same, Reliance Industries' retail

arm, Reliance Retail Ltd., has made it to the headlines for planning to test its food and grocery app prior to the venture's commercial launch.

The F&B sector has faced the worst brunt of the coronavirus so far. Right from the manufacturing and supply chain and restaurant sector to food service companies and food delivery firms, the F&B industry has been wearily coping up with the pandemic. Countrywide lockdowns prevented employees from working in factories, severely impacting the supply chain. With farming and agricultural activities taking a hit, the fear of food shortage looms large. Petrified with the extended lockdowns, it was observed the masses resorted to panic buying, creating further food shortage and a major disparity between the ones who can afford to stockpile on items and the ones who cannot.

Undeniably, the challenges faced by food and beverage managers are dime a dozen, owing to the ridiculously fierce competition and the fact that a single change is bound to affect the entire supply chain. Newer markets, changing consumer spending, increasing food prices, global appetite, and advanced technology are slated to bring about extensive changes in this sector in the next few years. The onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to continue for a while, as is proved by the recent discovery of the Omicron variant.

Despite the consistent challenges of the food and beverage industry, it is predicted to show healthy gains in the future. It remains to be seen how the global F&B market will fare in the forthcoming years, driven by disposable income levels, changing lifestyles, and favourable government reforms.

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There are huge growth opportunities post the Covid-19 pandemic in Indian food processing industry

THE food processing industry is one of the mainstays of the global economy with a value addition of USD 1.7 trillion (2019E1). The United States of America (USA), China, Germany, Netherlands and Japan are the top markets for the global processed food industry. Meat, beverages, fruits and nuts, fish and cereals account for 43 per cent of the total exports. the USA, Netherlands and Germany are major exporters of processed food.

The Indian food processing market is expected to double from USD 263 billion (2019-20) to USD 535 billion (2025). India is the world's fourteen largest exporter of food products with a 2.6 per cent share in global exports (2010) and growing at a CAGR of 2.6 per cent during 2015-2019.

India's food processing levels (10 per cent) are much lower than its global counterparts however, its strategic geographical location gives it a unique competitive advantage when it comes to exports. With abundant raw material supply and a

huge domestic market for processed food, the opportunities for the food processing industry are innumerable. The conditions are thus right for a food processing boom in India across all sub-segments.

Indian food processing industry – One view

The Indian food processing industry comprises 6 key sub-segments: dairy, meat & marine, cereals, grains & oil-seeds, fruits & vegetables, beverages (non-alcoholic) and packaged food.

The Indian industry grew by 10 per cent over the last 5 years led by meat & marine, dairy and packaged foods segments. The industry generates an employment of 7 million⁷ and is the 5th largest industry in the manufacturing segment.

It is the 13th largest recipient of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in India attracting over USD 9.98 billion (April 2000-March 2020).

As per Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), India's exports of

Agri & Processed Food stood at USD 32.5 billion in 2019 contributing 10 per cent to overall exports from India at growing a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 5.9 per cent (2015-2019).

In recent times, rural and semi-urban India has been witnessing a growing demand for processed foods and the pandemic has further enhanced acceptability and demand for packaged food, snacks, dairy and ready-to-eat (RTE) segments. Demand for allied industries such as food processing equipment and food logistics is also likely to rise.

India has the potential to be the food export hub in the post-Covid-19 era and with the right interventions, can become the global leader in this industry. This paper explores the opportunities for India in the food processing industry.

Segment wise landscape

The industry consists of 6 major sub-segments. Packaged foods followed by Cereals, Grains & Oilseeds



are the highest contributors to the overall Gross Value Added (GVA) of the industry.

Contribution to GVA (USD million) in 2017-18:

Dairy Cereals 2,009; Grains & Oilseeds 4,004; Meat & Marine 959; Packaged Food 8,310; Fruits & Vegetables 607; Beverages (Non-alcoholic) 925

India's competitive position (% global share):

- 1st in Milk (22%) Production

- 1st in Pulses (25.06%) production
- 2nd in Rice (21.8%) production
- 2nd in Wheat (12.74%) production
- 5th in meat (3%) production
- 1st in Sugar (10%) production
- 2nd in tea (21.5%) production
- 8th in coffee (3.3%) production
- 2nd in F&V (11.5%) production

Analysis of the processing capacities of different States indicates that the growth is concentrated within a few segments. There is ample scope for diversification within segments and expanding to new geographies

as the manufacturers shift their focus towards adopting regional cuisines and flavours in processed food.

Top 5 production centres for food processing (2017) – segment wise analysis

Dairy

Uttar Pradesh: 16 per cent
Rajasthan: 13 per cent
Madhya Pradesh: 8 per cent
Gujarat: 8 per cent
Andhra Pradesh: 8 per cent

Meat & Marine

Andhra Pradesh: 21 per cent
West Bengal: 12 per cent
Uttar Pradesh: 9 per cent
Maharashtra: 8 per cent
Tamil Nadu: 6 per cent

Cereals, Grains & Oilseeds

Uttar Pradesh: 18 per cent
Madhya Pradesh: 12 per cent
Punjab: 11 per cent
Rajasthan: 7 per cent
West Bengal: 6 per cent

Fruits & Vegetables

Uttar Pradesh: 12 per cent
West Bengal: 10 per cent
Madhya Pradesh: 8 per cent
Gujarat: 7 per cent
Andhra Pradesh: 7 per cent

Beverages (non-alcoholic)

Maharashtra: 26 per cent
Uttar Pradesh: 15 per cent
Madhya Pradesh: 9 per cent
Karnataka: 6 per cent
West Bengal: 5 per cent

Packaged food

Maharashtra: 13 per cent
Uttar Pradesh: 8 per cent
Karnataka: 8 per cent
Tamil Nadu: 7 per cent
Gujarat: 3 per cent

The food processing infrastructure has expanded significantly in recent years led by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MOFPI). Under Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana (PMKSY), quality infrastructure for modern food processing is being developed across the country with grants from the Government of India.

While, steps have been taken to augment the food processing infrastructure, more needs to be done to scale up infrastructure across various segments such as dairy, fisheries, etc. to utilize the full potential of

the industry. In addition, there are significant opportunities in storage and supply chain infrastructure- cold chain logistics, smart logistics etc. To ensure a faster augmentation/upgradation of quality infrastructure in line with industry requirements, government partnerships with private players through appropriate PPP models should be considered.

Adopting a collaborative approach is the key to catalyse growth in the industry in collaboration of the following ministries: agriculture, food processing industries, health, commerce & industry, animal husbandry & dairying, fisheries

The agencies: National Dairy Development Board, Spice/ Tea Board, industry & suppliers, large players/ MSMEs, foreign investors, start-ups, exporters, processors, equipment providers, warehousing & logistics, farmers/cattle breeders, trade/ FDI, embassies, trade promotion agencies/associations, multilateral financial institutions (MFIs)

Adopting a focused approach with collaboration from diverse stakeholders is critical for catalytic growth of the industry. An inter-ministerial committee led by MOFPI and consisting of various ministries may be constituted for bringing various stakeholders together in a coordinated manner.

Research & development: National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), National Institute of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management (NIFTEM), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Indian Institute of Food Processing Technology (IIFFT), Food standards/ exports

Agriculture and Processed Food Products, Export Development Authority (APEDA), Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA), Food Safety and Standards

Authority of India (FSSAI)

Knowledge/investment promotion: Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, National Investment Promotion Agency, State Investment Promotion Agencies, Consulting Agencies Several schemes have been rolled out by various ministries for the development of food processing and allied industries. However, most schemes are standalone schemes with little reference to other schemes even though the beneficiary sub-segments are common. This has resulted in a fragmented approach where the advantages of one scheme are not captured by another scheme. Integrating various schemes considering the common components involved and to avoid overlaps may be considered going forward

Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the food processing industry. During the recent pandemic, the overall impact on the food processing industry was low compared to other Industries. The food processing industry was among the least impacted sectors across most segments except meat & marine segment, which witnessed a negative impact due to low demand. An interaction with industry stakeholders revealed that the acceptability of processed food products increased as customers focused on hygienic and easily available products with long shelf lives.

The pandemic has given rise to a new normal with sustainable food chains, growing preference for healthy food, localised food supply and increased trade barriers Post Covid-19, the European Union (EU) nations and the USA are expected to avoid 'business as usual' practices such as having stringent measures and practices in place pertaining to the food processing industry. Going forward, nations will require to



► **The conditions are thus right for a food processing boom in India across all sub-segments.**

strengthen their industrial practices and norms to keep in consonance with the changing landscape, or the New Normal.

Food safety & surge in Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs): In the post Covid-19 era, there is likely to be a surge in non – tariff measures including stringent Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPSs) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) by major economies to ensure food safety against transmitted chemicals and diseases.

Sustainability of food systems & value chain: There has been a signif-

icant shift from non-sustainable food systems to environmentally sustainable food systems across the entire value chain for food processing.

Another significant trend has been a steady growth in use of organic and bio-ingredients in the food supply chain including use of chemicals and fertilizers.

Shift towards organic and healthy food: Demand for foods perceived to be healthy such as organic food and related products is likely to increase significantly. Further, adoption of traceability in food products is likely

to witness a steep rise.

Localisation of food supply: Localisation of food supply is likely to gain prominence as an emerging and increasingly credible concept.

Food security: Recognising the essence of food security and shortages, adoption of Information & Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Big Data to improve on-farm handling, post-harvest, storage and transportation processes is likely to gain traction in future.

Resilience: Resilience needs to be strengthened from production of

traditional crops to storage, transportation, processing and preparation.

Top export destinations for India (2019) USA (USD4.6 billion); China (USD2.44 billion); Iran (USD2.29 billion); Vietnam (USD2.07 billion); Saudi Arabia (USD1.65 billion); Malaysia (USD0.85 billion); Nepal (USD0.83 billion); United Arab Emirates (USD1.63 billion); Netherlands (USD0.83 billion)

India's exports to China, Iran and Bangladesh grew by 62 percent, 41 percent and 22 percent (y-o-y) respectively. Conversely, exports to UAE and Vietnam, declined by 6.8 percent and 19 percent (y-o-y) respectively.

Exports from India form a major share of food products imported by Nepal, Iran and Bangladesh.

Way forward

The Indian food processing industry holds tremendous growth potential and has gained further traction due to the pandemic. Going forward, India needs to recalibrate its strategy taking into account the opportunities created in both, domestic and export markets.

1. Domestic demand: Covid-19 pandemic has led to increased acceptance for processed food. Rural areas and Tier 2/3 cities are expected to continue driving the demand for processed food. Health foods, snacks and RTE segments are likely to drive demand. Hotel/Restaurant/Café (HoReCa) segment shall play a critical role as it recovers from the aftermath of Covid-19. E-commerce and Direct to Customer (D2C) are displacing traditional retail as producers redistribute their supply chains post Covid-19 and reach consumers at their doorstep. The industry is expected to move towards an organised structure. The PM FME Scheme has been launched with the

aim of formalising the unorganised micro players in the food processing industry. This shall expedite the intended shift from unorganised to organised structure.

Regional players and national manufacturers offering products catering to regional tastes have found greater success. Players with national footprint and offering a huge variety of products are likely to be more sustainable while competing against local and unorganised segments.

2. Exports: India's processed food products exports have remained low and continue to be dominated by low value-added products. Furthermore, the industry experts feel that the

Indian products are non-competitive in terms of price and quality in the export market. In the post Covid-19 era, India has an opportunity to become the food hub of the world and increase its share in exports. There is significant potential for enhancing exports from India to the top 10 global food markets, especially where it has limited presence. Major segments of export potential include meat & marine and dairy. There is a need to develop scale, quality & cost-effective export capabilities meeting global certification requirements so that the industry is competitive. The Government of India can support the exporters by negotiating Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), lowering Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) and expediting implementation of Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) scheme.

3. Processing capacity and quality infrastructure: Opportunities in domestic and international markets in the post Covid-19 era require that the processing capacities in the food processing industry be enhanced significantly at all levels of the value chain. The Government of India has rolled out several schemes for encouraging processing capacity in meat & marine, dairy and F&V segments. Production Linked Scheme (PLI) Scheme is likely to encourage players in the food processing industry to enhance their processing capacities and meet the demand for rising challenges. Food processing industry is gearing up to the challenge and is likely to see enhanced investment into product expansion and geographical expansion. There is a huge potential for complimentary industries such as food ingredients, food processing equipment, food logistics and food packaging. To enhance competitive-



ness and meet the hygiene needs at a scale, the players especially MSMEs, will require high quality testing and certification infrastructure.

4. Technology: Technology applications across the value chain can help reduce wastage, maintain quality and enhance shelf life of food products. In a price sensitive market dominated by unorganised and small players, technology has taken a back seat. There is a direct need to increase cold storage capacity in the absence of which scalability of perishable products is likely to be a challenge. Traditionally dominated by imports, the food processing equipment market is likely to see an increased demand. With the right interventions this can result in opportunities for domestic industry in line with India's quest for Atmanirbharta or self-sufficiency. Digitalised supply chain, smart warehousing and logistics using industry 4.0 technologies can help India reduce wastage during storage and transit. Intelligent supply chain management systems can help reduce wastage for perishables.

5. Institutional structure: A coordinated approach is the need of the hour for development of all segments of the food processing industry taking into account opportunities in regional preference, exports, quality management systems and measures to enhance competitiveness of Indian products. Initiatives such as National Single Window Clearance System and Project Development Cell are steps in the right direction for a coordinated approach in industry facilitation.

Inter-Ministerial Body led by MOFPI and participation from APEDA, MPEDA, FSSAI supported by a Food

Processing Council (consisting of Industry representatives) can prove to be a catalyst in the future industry development at segment/ product level, tapping value added exports and addressing issues and challenges – infrastructure bottlenecks, quality bottlenecks etc.

6. Driving growth through innovation: Food and food-tech start-ups have registered a CAGR of more than 35 per cent since 2014. Most of the start-ups are either in the agri-tech domain or food retail & service domain with very few in the middle layer of processing.

A thriving ecosystem for start-ups in food processing is critical to driving food innovation and expedited growth of the industry. Innovative products focused on wellness, health and nutrition are likely to see a huge opportunity in the domestic market. During and after the pandemic, many companies have innovated and launched new products meeting the traditional and new cuisines catering to the regional tastes.

Some areas where start-ups can play a role in driving innovative solutions include product innovation, shelf-life enhancement solutions, smart supply chain, logistics and warehousing. In order to succeed, the start-ups will need to be supported by the industry to create enough demand for building scalable solutions.

The post Covid-19 world looks promising for India's food processing industry as it provides India with an opportunity to capitalize on increased opportunities in the industry, calibrate its strategy and gear up to capture new markets.

Post lockdown, there is an enhanced acceptance for processed food especially frozen food and

fish products. With consumers now spending more time at home, segments such as snacks, ready-to-eat or ready-to-fry have managed to gain significant traction. Gradually, with the economy now opening up, the HoReCa segment is expected to lead the recovery along with new channels such as cloud kitchens and prepared meals.

Previously, lack of good quality retail space and associated cold chain infrastructure hampered the growth of the frozen fish segment. Building a solid cold chain ecosystem is the need of the hour today. The industry needs to invest to meet incremental demand for frozen foods specially for new products within the ready-to-cook/fry segment. Relaxed FDI in retail can be leveraged for development of good quality cold chain infrastructure.

Government may incentivise and subsidise 100 per cent frozen retail stores. It could also consider incentivising cold chain set-ups for frozen retail space (veg/ non-veg) as this will enhance domestic demand significantly.

Further, with the rise of E-commerce and rapid digital acceleration, digital marketing can be a game changer. The industry will need to invest in digital marketing to create an impulse in the minds of the modern consumer.

There is a huge scope for India to explore in terms of exports. In order to compete with our global counterparts, it is important to review and rework the current FTA arrangements. Major export processed food also requires consumption of ingredients like additives, colours, starches etc. which are not easily available in India. There is a huge potential for value added manufacturing of food ingredients in India.

MORE THAN A FAD

With healthy lifestyles gaining a new focus people are adopting new eating habits with elan





THE pandemic has brought about some drastic new food trends. These foods and beverages are actually taking the world by storm.

Plant-based diet

With the changing times and a sharpened focus on the consequences of our eating patterns, plant-based foods—which have been steadily gaining currency—is set to reach new heights. Add to this a renewed interest in health, and suddenly, potato milk seems a lot more viable today. While larger food trends like nut-based mylks, plant-based meats and vegan alternatives are seeing new entrants (sunflower butter, anyone?), the foodscape in India seems to be going through a renaissance. Just take a look at the inundation of products in the market. From brands like Hello Tempayy providing an array of plant-based protein options, Imagine Meats, Wakao and Good Dot, making vegan meats right here on Indian soil, Soft Spot, Liveyumfoods.com specialising in vegan cheese alternatives and WhiteCub, Papa Cream and Urban Platter that are bringing a range of plant-based/vegan condiments to the fore—one thing is clear: this is no longer a trend, but a way of life.

Non-alcoholic drinks

Getting drunk and suffering from a

hangover is so 2017. With healthy lifestyles gaining a new focus, mocktails and low or 0 ABV (Alcohol by Volume) drinks are now on the rise. This follows, since the alt-cult of 'Sober Curiosity' seems to be having its time in the sun with GenZ. What is it? Simply abstaining from alcohol. And as this gains momentum, the beverages' industry is all up in arms to appeal to consumers from the said cohort. Svami, for instance, has released variants like Gin & Tonic and Rum & Cola that are alcohol-free. Apart from this we also have modish brands like Kati Patang with variants like NOT Cosmopolitan and NOT Old Fashioned. Coolberg and & Stirred have a range of flavoured non-alcoholic beers and premixed mocktails like Hibiscus Cosmo and Mexican Mule, respectively. Even famous brands in the alcohol sector like Kingfisher, Heineken and Budweiser have understood the assignment and released alcohol-free beers. Restaurants too have joined the movement by adding more mocktail variants to their menus to keep up with the trend.

Korean cuisine

While Korean movies and music numbers took over our screens, Korean cuisine began assembling its own set of fans across the world. K-Cuisine is simply full of colours, textures and the



► With healthy lifestyles gaining a new focus, mocktails and low drinks with 0 "Alcohol by Volume" are now on the rise.

flavoursome convergence of sweet, savoury and spicy. Rapidly appealing to the masses, Korean instant foods (Buldak, Chapaguri) are now a fairly common sight in supermarkets. While these are quick fix snacks, the Korean style of cooking is also seeping into the restaurant space, with several menus offering everything from Korean-style fried chicken to Gochujang-laced appetisers. Korean condiments too, have since seen an exceptional increase in condiments exports (as cited in The Korean Herald) all over the world. At this point it's not a mystery that the flavour and balance of spice is what makes K-cuisine so special and it's set to reach new heights in 2022.

Comfort foods

Comfort foods are our greatest stress

Even famous brands in the alcohol sector like Kingfisher, Heineken and Budweiser have understood the assignment and released alcohol-free beers. Restaurants too have joined the movement with novel mocktail variants

busters, all the way from making them to eating. However, lately, the paradigm of comfort foods has shifted. Social media has brought to our attention that bending the rules while fixing a dish can lead to so many possibilities. We have quick fixes, easy and three-ingredient recipes, and this is only for the amateurs. For the experienced we have gourmet style recipes, fusion, exotic and the list has no end. While chefs like Manish Mehrotra and Amninder Sandhu turned towards simple Indian food, like mathri and mutton curry respectively, for comfort; chefs like Urvika Kanoi and Hanisha Singh breathed new life into all-time favourites like burgers, pasta and taco with their brands Chard Burgers and Cafe Duco, respectively.

Sustainable living

This year we believe individuals are going to opt for a low-wastage and more sustainable diet. Danone, a multinational food company, recently opted to reduce wastage by making use of discarded fruits in their yoghurt. People are actively making conscious decisions to compost food waste rather than simply trashing it. Restaurants, brands and chefs are finding new ways to put leftovers to use—either by storing it for the next day, using it as an ingredient for another dish or simply, donating it to the less privileged. Plural, a restaurant in Mumbai, chooses to follow a closed-loop system, where after produce is procured the discarded portions are used as vegetable stock and citrus peels are used in cordials for cocktails. Apart from this we also have restaurants like Yogisattva, Delhi Accent, Sequel, Masque and Greenr Cafe that are playing an active role in reducing their carbon footprint.

Condiments

While spices are always going to be the fundamental unit of Indian cuisine, let's take a moment and talk about the number of condiments that have entered the market. Since the pandemic, people have rushed back to the kitchen with a new gusto and that could be the catalyst behind this trend. This is now visible in the rise of products that focus on making cooking at home easier. From older brands like Native Tongue and Nomad Food Project that have caused positive disruption with intriguing condiments like alubukhara preserve and bacon thechas respectively; to newer ones such as Chutney Collective (helmed by ex-O Pedro sous chef Velton Saldanha) and Wonder Foods and Farms that are helping us upgrade our pantry with delectable

options for spread, pastes and ready-to-cook sauces. Even brands like Ishka Farms that focussed mostly on ingredients like capers and moringa are now joining hands with chefs like Divesh Aswani of the Commis Station to release unique condiments like black garlic caper spread and a truly delightful sofrito.

Snacks

Snacks are the new meals. And while people prefer to indulge in snacks, they are also making the decision to indulge sensibly. A survey listed in India Today mentions a rise from 12% to 20% in the past year, for clean snacks as post-Covid, individuals prefer to

consume healthier alternatives to regular munchies and at frequent intervals instead of having three square meals a day. From protein bars to oatmeal cookies, many Indian brands have ventured into healthy snacking territories. To Be Honest and The Green Snack Co's healthy chips, Snackible's bars, nibbles and namkeens, Ketofy's snack packs, Monsoon Harvest's gourmet munchies and Soulfull's cereals. One thing is for sure: snacking will never look the same.

It looks like 2022 has a whole lot to offer and this list just barely covers it.

Source: India Food Network (<https://www.indiafoodnetwork.in>)



MEGHALAYA the “Abode of the Clouds” with its picturesque landscape of rolling hills, meandering rivers, cascading waterfalls, lush forests, diverse flora and fauna and unique culture and tradition has great potential for development of tourism. During the last few years, Meghalaya has evolved as a fast-growing destination for both domestic and international tourists.

Meghalaya is endowed with the gift of nature. Being a hilly area with a moderate climate, it is the perfect destination for summer vacation. The potentiality of eco-tourism is dependent on availability of natural resources, involving beautiful sceneries, topography, water resources, vegetation and wildlife and cultural resources and Meghalaya has them all. Also known as the abode of clouds due to heavy rainfall during monsoon season, Meghalaya is bestowed with cascading crystal-clear water bodies, diverse flora and fauna, deep gorges and canyons, high cliffs and gentle meadows and valleys in many areas, magnificent waterfalls and caves in some areas, green canopies, gigantic rocks, sacred groves, etc.

One can experience a thrill simply by travelling on the hilly roads in many parts of the state. Apart from the gift of nature, the beauty of Meghalaya also lies in its rich cultural heritage and tradition, beliefs and customs, languages and numerous dialects. The capital city of Meghalaya, i.e. Shillong, is one of the most preferred destinations for holding of meetings, conferences and conventions, festivals, trade fairs and Sports events, besides it is also an educational hub and many prestigious hospitals are located in the city. The city is also one of

the most preferred destinations in India for holding international concerts due to the likeness of its people for music and hence it has got the name as the rock capital of India. The state is also known for the inherent knowledge of its people to treat medical or trauma cases using herbal medicines. Some places in the state are famous for the existence of fossil remains or stone impressions

ABODE OF CLOUDS

of folkloristic origins like Ka lew-Lu-ri-Lura (legendary animal market) at Mawlyngbna, U Thlen (dragon snake) at Sohra. Meghalaya is also known for the agrarian lifestyle of the people and their good use of leisure time in weaving, arts and handicrafts

Scope of tourism

Based on the above available resource base, it can clearly be understood that Meghalaya has a huge potential for development of alternative or eco-tourism. There are four main approaches of ecotourism which can be employed in the context of Meghalaya based on the availability of resources and the fragile nature of the resource base viz. adventure tourism, cultural tourism, agri-tour-

Despite its myriad natural tourist attractions, Meghalaya's tourism potential remains underdeveloped

IDS



ism and educational tourism.

- **Adventure tourism:** It can be of two types, hard and soft. Hard tourism activities that have been undertaken or can be undertaken in the future in the state involve rock climbing, caving, trekking in wilderness areas. Soft adventure tourist activities are comprised of backpacking, exploring bio reserves, bird watching, camping, canoeing, cruising, eco-tour, educational programmes, boating, fishing, hiking, kayaking, orienteering, rafting, sky walk, side walk by the cliff side, sightseeing, swimming, angling, mountain cycling and car or bike racing, parachuting, attending or participating in games and sports events, etc.

- **Cultural tourism:** Cultural tourism products that Meghalaya can offer include of homestay, homely stay in local resorts, exploring legendary attractions, tasting local cuisines, attending religious festivals, visiting cultural heritage sites, museums, monuments and churches, pilgrimage to some sacred sites in Jaintia and Garo hills, visiting sacred groves, attending cultural events, shopping for local souvenirs, attending music festivals, talent shows, story-telling, etc.

- **Agri-tourism:** Agri-tourism has not been projected as an approach in any tourism events and yet some activities like exhibition of agri-products, fruit, pickles, jams, tea leaves, heirlooms had been witnessed and wine festivals were conducted many times in the state. Some other agri-tourism activities that can be undertaken include barn dances, breweries, cabin living, campfires, camping in agricultural sites, flower arrangement, jelly making, meeting barnyard animals, gardening, farm cooking contests, fee-fishing, herb walk, hiking paths, etc.

- **Educational tourism:** Educational tourism activities that can be offered

to tourist visiting the state include of wildlife discoveries, exploring cultural heritage sites and monuments, exploring folklores associated with places, rivers, waterfalls, stone impressions or fossil remains, science expedition, marvelling the traditional skills of creating arts and crafts, calligraphy and carving on rocks, walk with nature, exploring biodiversity, learning local history and literature, learning indigenous herbal treatments, visiting museums, exploring local tribal lifestyle, etc.

It is important to note that the tourism landscape on the basis of the above foreseen resource base is fragile in nature and hence proper assessment of the fragility level of the physical landscape and local culture and incorporation of the outcome of the assessment in the infrastructure development plan, site maintenance, management and community participation plan before developing a place for tourist attraction is a prime necessity in order to achieve the objective of sustainability.

Trend of Tourist Inflow in Meghalaya

According to the Meghalaya tourism statistical report, 2016, the share of foreign tourist visits into the state from 1999-2014 was quite low compared to that of domestic tourists. The period from 2005-2010 witnessed a steady decrease in the number of foreign visitors in the state. The following Table 1 shows the statistics of tourist arrival in the state from 1999-2014.

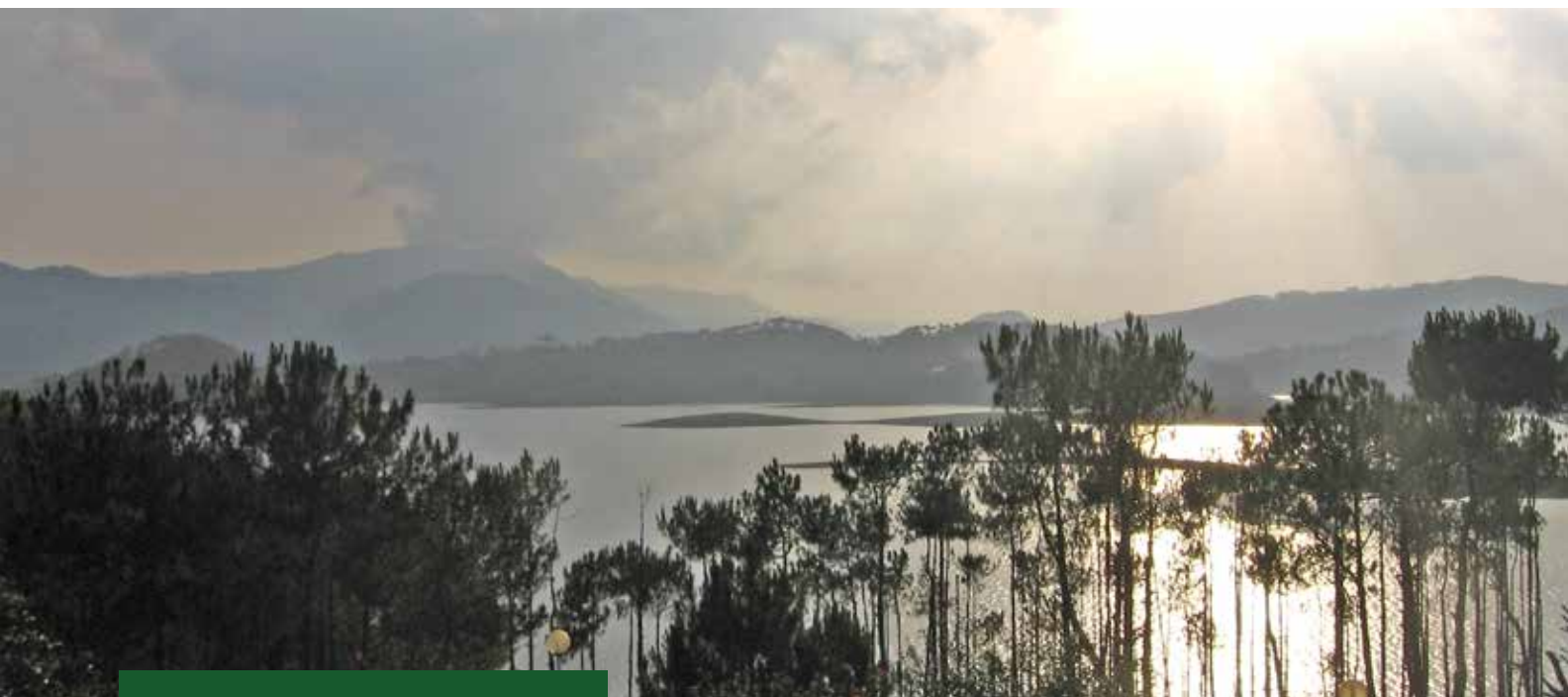
Moreover, compared to Assam, the leading recipient of tourists in North-East India, Meghalaya still functions as an add-on destination to Assam for the last one or two decades and till today. A statistical report on tourist arrival in the North East

showed that in 1996, Assam received 3,27,260 domestic tourists and 5885 foreign tourists while Meghalaya received a mere 1,36,183 domestic tourists and 1573 foreign tourists. In the year 2000, there were 10,01,577 domestic and 5,959 foreign tourists who visited Assam, while Meghalaya received only 1,69,929 domestic and 2,327 foreign tourists. In 2007, there were 34,79,870 domestic and 13,657 foreign visitors in Assam while there were only 3,75,911 domestic and 5,099 foreign visitors in Meghalaya. However, compared to other North-East states, Meghalaya still stands second to Assam in terms of tourist arrival. The state also witnessed a steady increase in both domestic and foreign tourist arrival since the year 2011 onwards.

Boosting Tourism Development in Meghalaya-Challenges and Prospects

Even though Meghalaya has the potential resources for sustainable tourism development, there are also hindrances that must be addressed and incorporated in development planning in order to achieve sustainability in the process.

- The adventure tourism resource of Meghalaya is purely nature based which implies that adventure tourism in the state takes place mainly at the cost of serene landscapes which are fragile in nature. Hence, it is important to know the context of fragility of attraction sites so that precautions can be undertaken may it be in the case of infrastructure development or in maintaining limits in entry of visitors and waste disposal so that the process of development itself should not go beyond the carrying capacity of the attraction sites and whatever resources belonging to the attraction sites should not be disturbed,



► **Lake Umiam in the hills north of Shillong is a major tourist attraction of the state**

tarnished or degraded in any way.

- Meghalaya has a rich cultural resource base for cultural tourism development because of its distinct cultural identity, customs and traditional lifestyles, the existence of stone impressions, waterfalls associated with folklores, monoliths and monuments, unique arts and crafts, etc, however, the indigenous folks are not even aware of the economic value of all these cultural attributes that they have and even if they are aware, they do not have the courage to come out of their conservative nature and they do not have the knowledge to present them to the world. Eco-tourists are eager to learn much about the culture and way of life of local folks by involving themselves in homestay in local households, in cooking and eating, in games and religious rituals, however, they do not find a way to do so. Therefore, the need of the hour

is to generate proper conscientization of local people about their own economic situation and their own position in the world and how to get rid of that situation by becoming active participants in the process of cultural tourism. Raising awareness on the economic value of cultural attributes and creating platforms for the local people to display their culture to the world is vital to the process of cultural tourism development in the state.

- The state has a huge potential for agri-tourism on account of the fact that agriculture remains central to the economy of the state and the agricultural products of the state are known for their good quality. Agri-tourism requires less investment compared to other forms of tourism, however, so far it was not projected as an approach in tourism development initiatives of the state. Hence, it requires that agri-tourism should

be encouraged and be projected in a distinguishable manner.

- Lack of local control over management of most of the attraction sites is another challenge which demotivates community participation. Local control and local economic benefit should be the central focus while setting up plans for tourism ventures. Mawlynnong, one of the eco-tourist destinations in Meghalaya, sets a good example of the success of eco-tourism on account of citizen control and equal sharing of benefits among local households which then serve as motivational factors for more active community participation in tourism.

- The negative impact of seasonality is quite high in the state. To reduce this impact, it is advisable to introduce more niche tourism products during low seasons to serve the demand of different types of tourists. It is also



► Artificial lakes in Shillong attract thousands of tourists

important to note that the state government has introduced theme tourism programmes which were quite successful and hence more of such theme tourism approaches should be organized in the state.

Conclusion

Meghalaya has a huge potential for alternative tourism development because it is bestowed with varied natural attraction attributes. However, in

tapping such potential resources for tourism ventures, it is also necessary to establish measures in order to ensure long term benefits. Community participation and community control over management of tourism is a determinant of success of tourism and hence local communities should be encouraged to come forward and be active participants in alternative tourism development and special programmes for raising awareness

on community participation in tourism should be organised. Where tourism ventures are nature based, it is impossible to avoid seasonality effects, however, the same effect can be reduced by introduction of niche tourism products and theme tourism approaches to serve certain high-end visitors during the low seasons.

Source: Journal of Tourism & Hospitality



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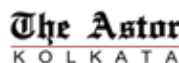
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