

How is the hospitality and tourism industry in India responding to the dynamic digital era?

The preface to McKinsey and Company's 2019 report, *Digital India: Technology to transform a connected nation*, poses several questions: What does increased connectivity mean in economic terms? And how quickly and effectively will India be able to harness digital technologies? To explore a related question in the context of hospitality and tourism, I am pleased to welcome back theme editor, Sandeep Munjal who is joined by Vedatya Institute colleague, Anjana Singh. I should like to thank Sandeep, Anjana and their team of writers and reviewers from industry and academia for providing a collection of topical, industry-led articles that provide a detailed picture of the industry's response to digital innovation and development.

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

Richard Teare
Managing Editor, WHATT

How is the hospitality and tourism industry in India responding to the dynamic digital era?

We are pleased to present this *WHATT* theme issue that explores the impact of digital communications on hospitality and tourism in India. The hospitality sector in India is rapidly evolving with increasing acceptance and use of various online tools, technologies and digital platforms. These mainly improve customer buying experiences, build strong engagement with stakeholders and more effective marketing of products and services. Social media (digital) platforms, big data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR) are the new buzz words that industry practitioners must come to understand and engage with to avoid losing out on the potential benefits that the digital era has to offer.

Pre-COVID-19, India was one of the fastest growing economies in the world and just as before, beyond the pandemic India is critical market for international hospitality brands and professionals associated with the industry. The industry-based research shared in this theme issue will, we hope, offer perspectives that are of interest to an international readership as well as Indian stakeholders. India accounts for almost 4% of global digital travel sales – the third-largest market by value in the Asia-Pacific region. This scenario implies that national and international hotels, restaurants and other hospitality businesses are adopting digital tools and technologies to market themselves and to enhance service experience. In this context, the theme issue identifies emerging trends, challenges and perspectives on how Indian hospitality businesses are engaging with the digital era. The main findings and implications are summarized in the concluding article, which deduces that going digital is the only way forward for the hospitality and tourism industries with support as needed from traditional marketing.

The tourism space in India is equally impacted by digital interfaces and technology-enabled platforms, from apps to online feedback systems, to enabling service providers to connecting with customers. The opportunities are immense, as are the challenges for the deployment of tools and the implementation of government schemes focused on digital



connectivity. As you read through this collection, it will become apparent that the impact of deploying digital tools is way beyond the marketing aspects of products and services; it has implications for service quality, cost efficiencies and business strategy too.

We would like to thank the team of academics and practitioners who participated in the roundtable discussions and co-authored these industry-led research papers. We hope that the collection of articles in this issue will provide an insight on the main trends and challenges and on how hospitality and tourism industry in India is responding to the new dynamic digital era. We would also like to thank Richard Teare and Emerald for giving us the opportunity and platform to raise relevant issues which need stakeholder attention and engagement.

Sandeep Munjal and Anjana Singh
Theme Editors

About the Theme Editors

Sandeep Munjal is currently Director, Vedatya Institute, Gurgaon, in the National Capital Region (NCR) Delhi, India. Sandeep brings to this theme issue a combination of extensive industry and academic experience spanning more than 24 years and among others; he has worked with industry leaders such as the Taj Group of Hotels in India and Aramark Corp. in the USA. Sandeep studied hospitality management at Widener University, Chester, PA., and Business Management at Temple University, USA. He is an active researcher and has published widely in the areas of hospitality management and heritage tourism in international and national journals. He is also the author of *The Indian Hospitality Industry: Dynamics and Future Trends* and *The Food and Beverage Hospitality Industry in India: An Emergent Segment*.

Anjana Singh has more than 16 years of experience in the hospitality industry and in academia. As Head of the School of Hospitality and Tourism at Vedatya Institute, she is responsible for academic administration of multiple programmes offered at Vedatya. Her area of expertise is Revenue management and Hospitality operations, and these are also reflected in her research, teaching, consultancy and training interests. She has co-authored many research papers that have been published in national and international journals and presented at conferences in India and the USA. She is the Assistant Editor of the *Journal of Services Research*, an International Journal of Vedatya Institute, Gurgaon, NCR, Delhi, India.