

Growing high-end travel to India

A look at the increase in the foreign tourist arrivals and the foreign exchange earnings reveals that, when it comes to top-end luxury travellers, India is a popular destination. TRAVTALK spoke to the leading destination management companies in India to get a sense of the ongoing evolution in the top-end luxury market.



VIVEK SETHI

The top-end luxury market is a coveted segment, wherein clients strive for out of the world unique experiences than haggling for additional benefits. While all stakeholders in the travel and

tourism industry wish to garner a bigger slice in this market; the leading destination management companies have mastered the art of luring such high-end luxury travellers to the Indian shores. Here are the key insights, the leaders at distinct National award winning

DMCs have on tapping the right note in the top-end luxury market.

Key to luring high-end luxury clients

According to Arjun Sharma, Managing Director, LPTI and TUI India, "The

Luxury Trains of India offer the complete experience in natural surroundings; Spa & Wellness treatments are one of the most unique and life changing experiences that attract people for its effective therapies and various rejuvenation programmes. Spa

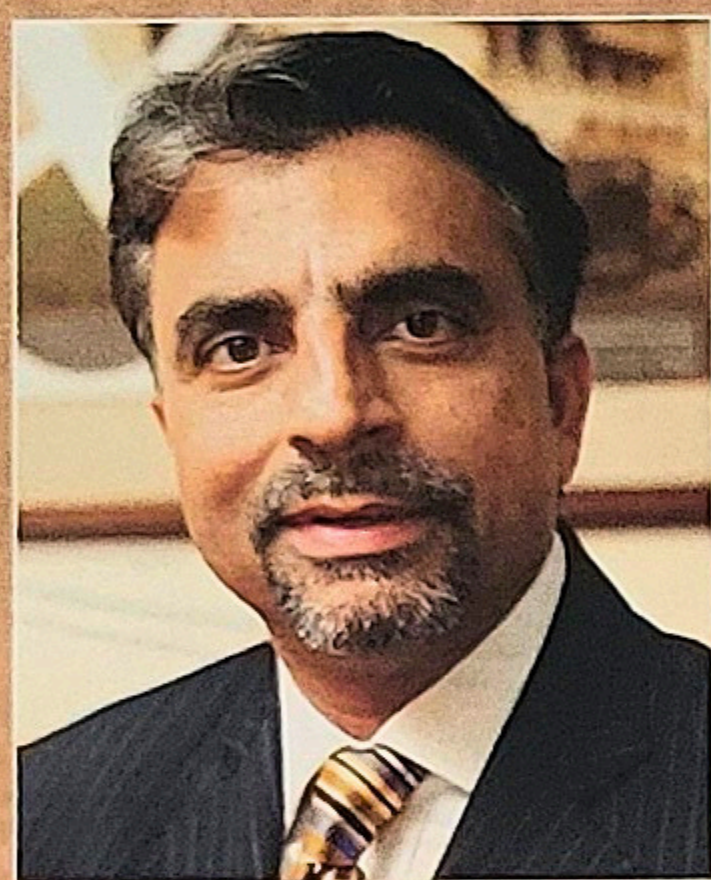
Explaining the psychology of the high-end travellers, Arup Sen, Director, Special Projects, Cox & Kings explains that the high-end travellers have all the comforts that money can buy. What they do not have is the time and when they invest in

The herd mentality

"Luxury clients always bank on local advice and that is where we as DMCs get a stronger hold. The best marketing for any company in this segment is reference business. It is like a chain reaction and if we can deliver the



Arjun Sharma
Managing Director
LPTI and TUI India



Vikram Madhok
Managing Director
Abercrombie & Kent India



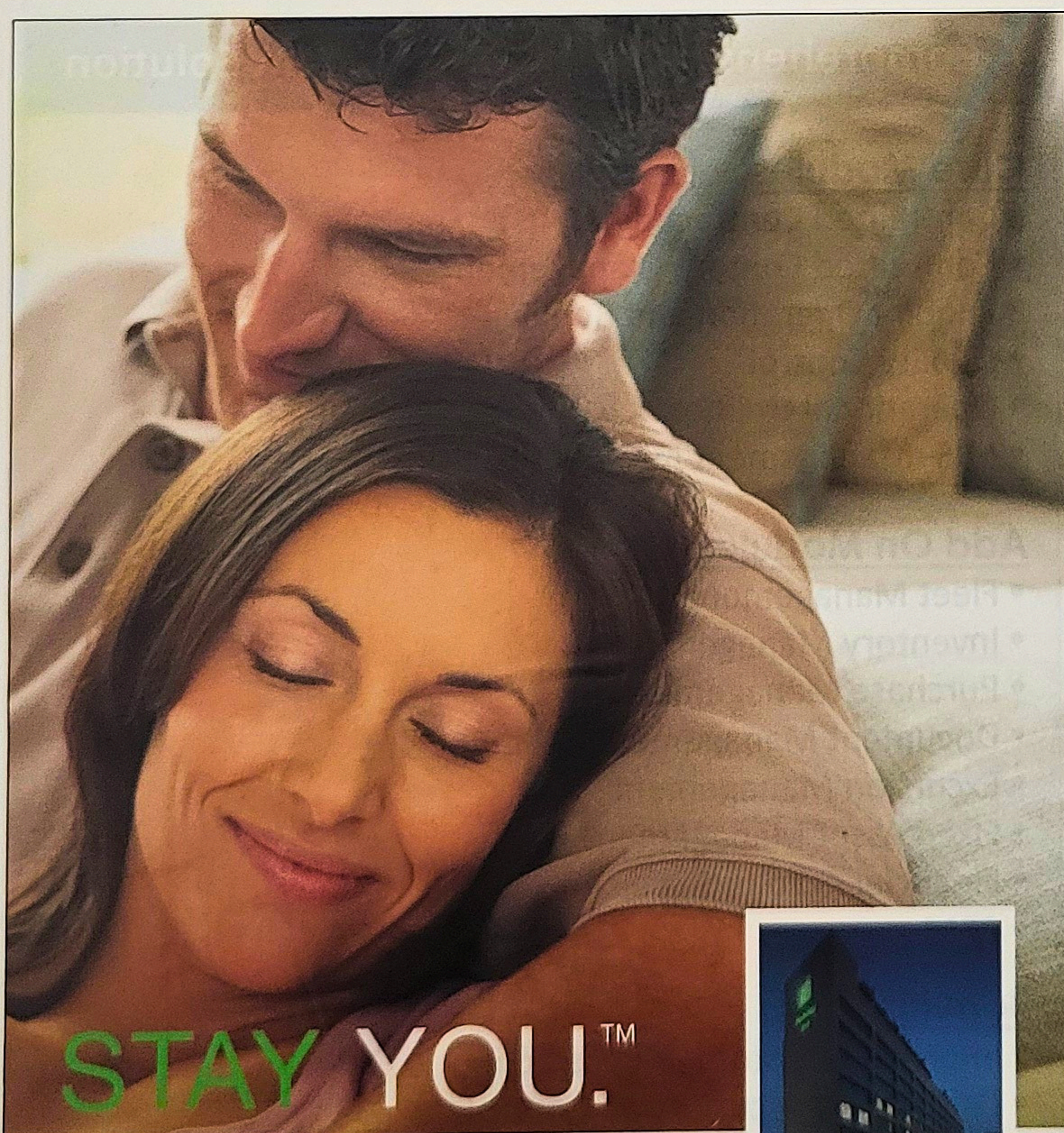
Dipak Deva
CEO - Destination Management
India & South Asia, Kuoni India



Arup Sen
Director - Special Projects
Cox & Kings



Surinder Singh Sodhi
Senior Vice President - Leisure Travel
(Inbound), Thomas Cook India



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Resorts like Ananda in the Himalayas help us create, such experiences, for the high-end clients. The Royal Indian living experience in Palace properties like Taj Luxury Palace Hotels, mix well with the culture, heritage and history of India, to give the high-end travellers, a 'wow' experience."

Here, **Vikram Madhok**, Managing Director, Abercrombie & Kent India believes that India is an enigma for the world and people wonder, the manner in which, over 1.2 billion people co-exist happily. Moreover, the resilient India growth story is built on the curiosity and yearning to explore Incredible India, which has also been marketed well across the leading source markets. Moreover, India has to offer world-class tourist attractions, which includes out of the world palaces and villas that serve the unique requirements of the high-end tourists. The positive press reports also played its role in building a positive image.

Highlighting the changing trends, **Dipak Deva**, CEO - Destination Management, India & South Asia, Kuoni India adds, that the trends have now changed and luxury travellers want to live experiences and not just be pampered every day in a fancy resort. The future of Luxury Travel in India is great, if we can continue delivering; a high level of service, great hotels and find interesting experiences for our guests.

a holiday, they make sure that they are getting, a fantastic experience. It is not about staying in five-star hotels etc.. India has this opportunity of offering products that are unique and experiential. They may like to watch a camp fire in a desert or experience rural Indian life. We need to promote more products that are experiential and unique.

Here, **Surinder Singh Sodhi**, Senior Vice President - Leisure Travel (Inbound), Thomas Cook India suggests, that to increase India's market share of high-end travellers, we have to focus on marketing India as a Luxury Tourist destination through infrastructure and logistics, short air strips for quick regional connectivity by charters, enhanced Visa-On-Arrival facilities and seamless immigration facilities, which fosters the image of India as a convenient and exotic international holiday destination.

Sharma also highlights the need to develop the Infrastructure in this segment to attract more tourists through International Luxury Hotel chains, as it will then also be correctly marketed to the correct segment. He also insists on the need to promote India depicting the luxury side of India as done by Malaysian and Australian Tourism by broadcasting fine-dining, private jets, Polo games, the rich culture, fashion shows etc.

experience to one influential client, they will send you another twenty clients. High-end travellers are an interesting community, where people follow people and are ready to believe. The best experience is the one their friend just had," said Deva.

"Suppliers of the luxury tourism product will not only have to stay ahead but will have to lead the way while hotel operators also need to adjust their product with today's needs. There are numerous opportunities and challenges and the question is, are we ready to take the lead in this very lucrative market as the Indian luxury travel segment has the potential to grow at a rate higher than that of the overall industry growth rate," he adds.

Here, Madhok adds a simple classification, as in his opinion, there are, broadly speaking, two kinds of high-end travellers. The high-end long haul leisure travellers and another set of high-end travellers, who are

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Experts Speak

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Making India synonymous with luxury

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travelling to India for business and have a window of about 3-4 nights during the course of their visit.

"With encouraging business environment and a growing economy, more and more people want to set up business in India. The best way to tap the top-end luxury travellers is through word-of-mouth. We had been conducting many joint events with several luxury brands to tap into both high-end leisure and corporate segments. Our international network also helps us to tap into the high-end corporate clients," he added.

Average stay and spend

The high-end travellers are known to spend a lot, but that's earned on account of the state-of-the-art amenities, top-class service extended by well-groomed manpower. According to Sharma, the average stay of luxury clients in India is between 8-12 days and spending is between \$1000-2000 per day

for a couple including stay, transport & meals.

Madhok's experience suggests that, on an average, the top-end long haul luxury travellers from North America and Australia, to name a few, spend about 14 nights, while such travellers from Europe spend 7-8 nights and from UK spends about 8-9 nights. The average spend of the first set of travellers ranges between \$300-600.

Special care for luxury segment

"Even the minutest of details need a lot of attention, when taking care of high-end clients and we need to have a very good understanding, with our B2B partners that help us cater such travellers. We need to focus on having the latest high-end cars and very articulate and well-dressed drivers & staff to attend to this segment of clients. A standardised grooming and communication session workshops should be held for guides, drivers and other related

service providers periodically, to help them enhance their skills and services and create the desired experience," said Sharma.

Here, Sodhi also stresses that help from business partners, service providers, vendors is required in the form of better pricing and collective efforts in destination promotion as well as helping the DMCs in right positioning of the products backing them with a state-of-the-art infrastructure of the products and professional services being offered. "Keeping the service delivery levels to the highest standards, training, service etiquettes and quality review of guest feedbacks is equally essential," he added.

Mega Events in India

Our travel trade loves the mega events that draw global attention on India. Fortunately, we had a few of them in the past few years. "Hosting such grand events is good for the image of the country and it definitely increases the number of inbound travellers, giv-

ing a boost to tourism. High profile, well run events like F1 are good for the destinations image," said Deva. Here, Madhok adds that mega events like the F1 series in India helps attract niche clients to India. It includes both F1 sports enthusiasts and the others, who like to cherish the excitement at the grand stands and are being seen at the various social events. Events like the CWG 2010 had got lot of positive press and fostered India's image as a growing country that has ample growth opportunities and state-of-the-art infrastructure.

According to Sharma, such mega events attract high-end clients as it holds their interest and is associated with the glamour world. "Celebrities like to attend sporting events like tennis, musical concerts, F1, etc, and by offering special luxury packages, a destination is able to market itself to this segment. These events have higher global visibility and create an opportunity to target such clients and give them an experience of such

magnitude that India becomes a favoured and repeat destination," said Sharma.

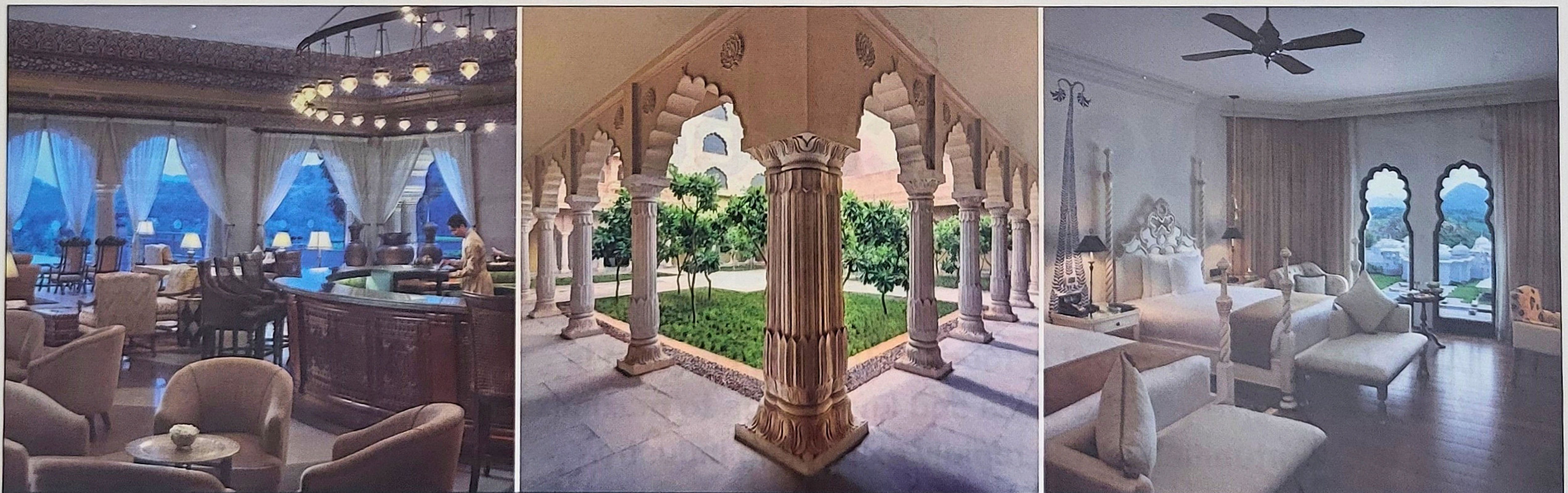
In Sen's opinion, these events are indicators of India's infrastructure development and this will increase the profile of the country. However, Sodhi believes, it showcases India as a destination ready and gearing up to handle the best of the luxury travellers and such high profile events. Timely marketing and promotion of such events, right distribution of tickets, coordination and tie-ups with DMCs to combine the events as the packages to promote to the international market is required. Going forward, Deva feels India as a destination requires world-class tourism attractions like the Disney Land or the Universal Studios in the USA. The tourist attraction should be designed to cater to the need of one and all, starting from children, women, corporate and leave one and all enticed with its world-class offerings.

"Golfing event is also one of the areas that we need to focus on as they attract high-end travellers. They are not just enthusiastic viewers, but unlike the other events, the travellers can be a part of the event as they can play in both professional and amateur tournaments giving them a more interactive role and learning experience. These clients like to stay in resorts close to the beach and spend the day playing Golf and relaxing at Spas. Through specialised golf division, Pashindia of Le Passage, we hold such events and combine them with wellness," concluded Sharma.

Sporty Glitz

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