



Rebuilding Confidence to Travel during Pandemic: A Study examining Initiatives taken by Hotels

Aditya Sharma¹ and *Rahul Bora²

¹Student, M.Sc., Institute of Hotel Management, Catering & Nutrition, Pusa, New Delhi (Governed by NCHMCT under Ministry of Tourism).

E-mail: adisharma0581@gmail.com

Mobile no: 7018329399

²Student, M.Sc., Institute of Hotel Management, Catering & Nutrition, Pusa, New Delhi (Governed by NCHMCT under Ministry of Tourism).

E-mail: raahul.boraa@gmail.com

Mobile no: 8800166968

Background: The pandemic of coronavirus still continues to pose a great challenge and an issue of concern for the entire world. The outbreak of the disease has led to great inconveniences for every industry. Tourism & Hospitality Industry is no different from the others. There have been complete restrictions of movement of people due to the lock down enforced for controlling the spread of the disease which has led to huge economic losses and loss of jobs. But now due to the unlock process the restriction are now being eased step by step. The authorities have now opened way for domestic tourism with some guidelines for the travel. Despite the devastating impact on tourism, consumption expectations for the post-coronavirus stage provide a glimmer of hope for the sector. Hence, the present study attempts to explore various innovative steps and initiatives taken by hotels to welcome guests in times of pandemic and post-pandemic.

Objectives: The present study is an investigation of various new steps and initiatives formulated and practiced by hotels during the time of corona virus and for post- pandemic times.

Methodology: The study adopted a qualitative research design in which data collection was done through an overview of relevant literature from sources such as the hotels' website, reports and other hospitality websites.

Findings: The finding of the study revealed that every hotel brand is working towards formulating, improving and upgrading their existing standards and norms with respect to the cleanliness & hygiene of the hotel in all spheres. Also, it was observed that hotels are also taking up collaboration and certification from various renowned certification agencies of the world. **Conclusion:** Presently every hospitality brand is working in various dimensions, through various practices to rebuild confidence among guests to come and stay with them. It is also recommended that the communication of the initiatives taken by hotels can only be done through enhanced marketing and advertisement of these initiatives so that they reach out to the maximum guests which will help in regaining confidence to travel and staying in the hotels not only for important work but also for leisure purposes.

Keywords: Coronavirus, Hospitality, Hotels, Initiatives, Tourism.

Introduction

The major reason for most of the human mobility in the modern world is tourism (Ranasinghe *et al*, 2020). Tourism is potentially a great employment generator besides being an important source of foreign exchange for the country (Patel *et al*, 2020). The tourism industry is largely regarded as a major component of growth in the developing countries, engaging in a significant source of foreign exchange earnings and employment (Craigwell, 2007). The novel Corona virus (nCOVID-19) is posing a great challenge to the world. The hasty spread of COVID-19 since the early cases appeared in December 2019 in China, has led in reduction of just about every activity related to tourism (Ibanez, 2020). The global pandemic of novel Corona has brought socio-economic structure of the world into a standstill and also has challenged the globalization and operation of enterprises in every sector and the decisions by the appropriate authority on limiting the movement of people and commodity mainly affected tourism industry, because, tourism includes air transportation, sea transportation, food handling, accommodation sector, entertainment and recreation etc (Ranasinghe *et al*, 2020). According to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), Travel & Tourism contributes 10.3% of Global GDP, is responsible for generating one in four of the world's new jobs, and for successive years, it has outpaced the growth of the global economy but coronavirus pandemic presents a significant threat to the industry. Around 50 million jobs are at stake due to this pandemic. The COVID-19 outbreak has put back the whole travel and tourism industry (Niewiadomski, 2020). Indian Chamber of Commerce in its report 'Sectoral Impacts of Coronavirus Pandemic in India- Tourism and Hospitality Sector' Travel and Tourism alone accounted for 9.2% of India's GDP and generated 26.7 million jobs in the year 2018. The effects of the pandemic have led to cripple the Indian tourism



and hospitality industry at an astonishing pace. The report also cited around 67% decrease in the inbound Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA) in the January-March quarter, while the domestic tourists arrival has dropped by 9.3% month-on-month and about 7% year-on-year.

Bakar & Rosbi, 2020 in their study 'Effects of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) to tourism industry' revealed that the coronavirus pandemic brought panic among the consumers of the tourism industry and as an effect of which there was a decrease in the demand in tourism industry.

Ranasinghe *et al*, 2020 in their study 'Tourism after Corona: Impacts of Covid 19 Pandemic and way forward for Tourism, Hotel and Mice Industry in Sri Lanka' emphasised that in this time of ongoing pandemic the top concern of the hospitality industry stakeholders should be on ensuring the safety of the guests and the staff. Also, to recover business losses and to rebuild the positive image in the mind-set of the guests it is also necessary to initiate strong marketing and promotional campaigns both locally and internationally.

Tourism is an industry which has been growing ever since its inception. Tourism is dependent on movement of people. The Indian travel and tourism industry is also one of worst hit countries due to this pandemic. Almost all the strategies put in place to fight the pandemic affected the industry. The daily erupting cases of the disease are increasing the burden on the world economy. An unprecedented lock-down has followed the pandemic due to which the hospitality industry is facing unparalleled challenges. Hotels and restaurants saw a steep decline in their occupancy and revenue due to the restrictions posed by the authorities to limit the spread of the pandemic. Various approaches to flatten the COVID-19 curve like social distancing, stay at home orders, community lock-downs, containment zones, travel curtailment have resulted in short-term closing of the hospitality outlets in almost every country. During this difficult time, it can be seen that the crises has also led to various new discoveries and innovations at various aspects in all the sectors. Similarly, the hotels have also come up with various such new out of the box solutions and alternatives. In these crucial times the organisations those have adapted and innovated their operations by adhering to the best of the hygiene and sanitation practices will be the ones that guests can put their trust on.

Objectives of the Study

- To explore various initiatives undertaken by hotels during Covid-19 pandemic for rebuilding confidence among guests.

Research Methodology

The present study was qualitative in nature in which secondary data was collected from various hotel websites, reports, published articles and previous studies on hospitality, tourism and coronavirus. The study focused on hotel brands which operate in India which included both national and international brands. The national brands include ITC Hotels, Leela Hotels, Lemon Tree Hotels, Oberoi Hotels, Sarovar Hotels, Taj Hotels and The Park Hotels. The international brands include Hyatt Hotels, IHG Hotels, Marriott Hotels and Radisson Hotels.

Results & Discussion

ACCOR HOTELS

Accor S.A. is the largest hospitality company in Europe and the sixth largest worldwide, it was founded in 1967 is a French hotel group which is headquartered in Paris, France currently operates around 5,000 hotels and residences across 110 destinations. In India the Accor group operates various brands such as Novotel, Sofitel, Pullman, Fairmont, Mercure and Ibis.

All Safe: All Safe is global cleanliness and hygiene standards that have been developed by Bureau Veritas (BV), a leading testing, inspections and certification organization. These standards are followed by every hotel of the group. The standards established are some of the most stringent cleaning standards and operational procedures in the hospitality industry to ensure safety of the guests. The group has developed a label called All Safe Label which will help the guests to understand that all the standards have been executed and the property is clean and hygienic for them to stay with.

HILTON HOTELS & RESORTS

Hilton Hotels & Resorts is a global brand of American multinational hospitality company Hilton. The original company was commenced by Conard Hilton in the year 1919. Headquartered in Virginia, U.S.A. it operates it's 6,200 properties under 18 brands. In 2009, the company opened it's first hotel in India in New Delhi.

Hilton Clean Stay: Hilton has launched an innovative program which raises the existing rigorous standards of cleaning and provides enhanced training for their team members. The



program has been formulated through partnership with Reckitt Benckiser, a renowned British group and producer of health, hygiene and home products.

Hilton Event Ready with Clean Stay: The program sets new standards for event cleanliness and customer service. The program aims to address safe group travel practices and develop event experiences which are clean, safe, flexible and socially responsible. It address every touch point at the event experience with their elevated level of safety and responsibility.

The Hilton Honors App: An application designed for seamless and contactless service. The app will facilitate guests for Digital Check-in, Check-out, Digital key, reviewing receipts and messaging staff etc. This will help guests to go straight into their room and enjoy contactless service at various intervals during their stay in the Hilton hotels.

HYATT HOTEL CORPORATION

Hyatt Hotels Corporation, commonly known as Hyatt, an American hospitality company with worldwide presence is headquartered in the Chicago. Hyatt has over 100,000 employees worldwide operating nearly 900 properties across 20 brands in 60 countries of the world.

Global Care & Cleanliness Commitment: They announced Global Care & Cleanliness Commitment program that focuses on the safety and well being of guests and employees and, builds on existing rigorous safety and cleanliness protocols in their hotels. The hotels operated by Hyatt are complying procedures and protocols developed in consideration of guidance and information shared by the World Health Organization (WHO), other leading organizations and experts, and local government requirements and guidance.

IHG HOTELS

InterContinental Hotel Group is an international hotel chain spread nearly in 100 countries with 5,656 hotels. It is headquartered in England. The group operates fourteen brands namely Crowne Plaza, Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants, InterContinental, Regent, Voco, Hotel Indigo, Staybridge Suites, Candlewood Suites, Hualuxe, Avid Hotels, Even Hotels, Holiday Inn, Holiday Inn Express and Holiday Inn Club Vacations worldwide.

IHG Clean Promise: is an initiative launched from June 1, 2020 in partnership with Cleveland Clinic, Ecolab and Diversey. It is an upgradation of their pre-existing programme IHG Way of Clean which

was launched in 2015, which was developed in collaboration with the world leaders in hygiene and cleaning technologies & services, Ecolab and Diversey. The program already entailed deep cleaning with hospital grade disinfectants and in the wake of coronavirus pandemic various additional protocols recommended by the World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, and local public health authorities in markets around the world have been added into the new program.

ITC HOTELS

ITC Hotels entered the hotel business on 18 October 1975. It is India's third largest hotel chain which operates under four distinct brands with more than 100 hotels in over 70 destinations in the country. The group operate its hotels under four brands namely ITC Luxury Collection, Welcom Hotels, Welcom Heritage Hotels and Fortune Hotels.

We Assure: ITC launched it's new initiative We Assure, their commitment towards health, hygiene & a safe environment. It is a program launched in collaboration with medical professionals and disfunction experts. They have elevated their hygiene protocols as recommended by World Health Organisation (WHO) and Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW).

Gourmet Couch Menus: ITC Hotels have partnered with home delivery platform such as Zomato, and Swiggy. Gourmet Couch presents a distinctive menu collection showcasing the culinary legacy, and delivering the finest cuisine offerings from the signature brands and the award-winning kitchens of the ITC Hotels.

5 Star Kitchen ITC's Chef Special: ITC Ltd launched 5 Star Kitchen ITC's Chef Special show from 23 May 202 and will was aired every Saturday & Sunday at 11 am for about six weekends. It was 12 episode series which were aired on hotter and the Star Tv Network across 33 channels and in seven languages which were Hindi, Bangla, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil and Telugu. The show was first of its kind experience wherein 12 ITC Hotel Chef's showcased and shared their culinary skills and attempted to share and teach the regional cuisine of our country to budding home chefs of India.

LEELA PALACES, HOTELS & RESORTS

The Leela Group is an Indian luxury hotel chain founded in 1986 by Captain Poovakkatt Krishnan Nair, who founded the group at the age of 65 and



named it on his wife's name. Today, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts form one of the biggest and most celebrated indigenous group of hotels in India.

Suraksha Program: The Leela group has launched Suraksha program which is a comprehensive program which redefined the cleaning and hygiene protocols of the brand to ensure a high degree of safety of its guests and employees. The group collaborated with Bureau Veritas (BV) to rework the hygiene protocols of all its hotels.

LEMON TREE HOTELS

Lemon Tree hotels founded by Patanjali Keswani in 2002 is an Indian chain which is India's largest mid priced Hotel chain. The brand operates presently operates 81 hotels across 49 destinations under seven distinct brands namely Aurika Hotels & Resorts, Lemon tree Premier, Lemon tree Hotels, Redfox, Keys Prima, Keys Select, Keys Lite.

Rest Assured: is an initiative launched on 28 May 2020 by Lemon Tree Hotel's in collaboration with Diversey. The initiative is aimed at creating an environment which focuses on health, hygiene, safety and wellbeing. As a part of this program the organisation has formulated a new set of house rules for guests, visitors and employees of the hotel in order to maximise health and safety in their hotels.

MARRIOTT HOTELS & RESORTS

Marriott Hotels and Resorts is an International hospitality company founded by John Willard Marriott in 1957, is a brand of Marriott International based in Maryland, U.S.A. The company has 582 hotels and resorts presently operating under 30 brands worldwide. The brand currently has 26 hotels in India.

Commitment to Clean To help alleviate the risk of COVID-19 transmission the hotel company has launched its Commitment to Clean program as the Marriott Cleanliness Council has redefined their cleaning and safety standards. With the development of the brand's mobile app the guests can now have contactless service. This service is renderable in more than 3200 hotels. These services include Mobile check-in, mobile key to unlock their rooms without key-card, and also special requests and room service can be requested.

OBEROI HOTELS & RESORTS

The Oberoi Group was founded in the year 1934 by Rai Bahadur Mohan Singh Oberoi. The group currently operates 32 hotels worldwide, spanning 7

countries under the luxury 'Oberoi' and five-star 'Trident' brand in Indonesia, Egypt, Mauritius, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and India.

Commitment to Cleanliness & Hygiene: With the risks associated with COVID 19, the brand have implemented a number of additional measures keeping up with World Health Organization (WHO) and Ministry of Tourism (MOT) guidelines. The group has come up with a list of detailed standards and extraordinary measures that are being followed for the highest standards of safety and cleanliness. Also, the group has now partnered with Bureau Veritas (BV) which is the world leader in testing, inspection and certification services. This has helped to validate and review their safety and hygiene programme.

Immunity Building Dishes and Drinks: The Master chefs of the group have curated a collection of immunity building recipes which are available on the Oberoi and the Trident hotels website of the group. The recipes have been created keeping in mind the use of immunity boosting ingredients which are essential in the current scenario of a pandemic.

RADISSON HOTEL GROUP

Radisson Hotels is an international hotel chain founded in 1909 and headquartered in the United States and owned by Jin Jiang International Holdings. The company operates the brands Radisson Blu, Radisson Red, Radisson Collection, Country Inn & Suites, and Park Inn by Radisson.

Radisson Hotels Safety Protocol: The hotel group announced its Radisson Hotel Safety Protocol program of in depth cleanliness and disinfection procedures in partnership with SGS, the world's leading and inspection, verification, testing and certification company based in Switzerland.

The hotel group adopted the enhanced protocols, operational guidance and comprehensive health and safety validated by SGS to ensure the safety of guests and their employees.

SAROVAR HOTELS & RESORTS

Sarovar Hotels and Resorts headed and founded by Anil Mandok in 1994, headquartered in Mumbai is an Indian hotel brand an abroad.

'#ThinkingOfYouandCaringForYou': The Sarovar Hotels and Resorts have joined in the noble cause to combat Covid-19 and has started initiative with the objective to provide to those who are distressed. The company is extending its aid in different parts of the nation through various initiatives.



TAJ HOTELS

Taj Hotels is a subsidiary of Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL), founded in the year 1903 by Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata. The group operates its hotels under the brands namely Taj Hotels, Vivanta, SeleQtions and Ginger. As of 2020, the company operates more than 100 hotels with 84 present in India and 16 in other countries. Also, ten hotels of the Taj group are members of the Leading Hotels of the World.

Tajness: Tajness, an initiative launched in 2015 is rechristened with health and safety in wake of the ongoing pandemic. Tajness – A Commitment Restrengthened is an assurance of IHCL's authentic Indian hospitality, with an added comfort of safety, hygiene and physical distancing. The brand has renewed its safety and hygiene standards in accordance with the norms laid by the World Health Organization, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India and Government of India. The brand is also using technology and extensive training to its staff on safety and hygiene to ensure the well being of the guests.

I-Zest: IHCL's Zero Touch Service Transformation: IHCL launched their initiative I-Zest on August 4, 2020 for its Taj, Vivanta & SeleQtions brand hotels. The program offers digital solutions for ensuring safety of their guests as well as their employees. The digital initiatives of I-Zest includes zero touch check-in and check-out's, digital invoicing, online payment options and QR codes to digital menus in their restaurants. The program will also help in maintaining and practicing social distancing in their hotels.

Qmin: The company launched the Qmin application on July 25, 2020 for offering guests to experience the dishes of various restaurants of the Taj hotels from the comfort of their homes. With the help of the app the guests can order from eight iconic and celebrated restaurants of various locations including Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Bengaluru etc.

THE PARK HOTELS

Founded by Late Surrendra Paul on 1 November 1967, The Park Hotels is a collection of five star boutique hotels in India. The group operates its hotels under three brands namely The Park, The Park Collection and Zone by the Park.

References

1. Bakar, N. A. & Rosbi S. (2020). Effects of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) to tourism industry. *International Journal of Advanced Engineering Research and Science*, 7(4), 189-193. doi: 10.22161/ijaers.74.23

S.H.I.E.L.D: The Park Hotels launched the SHIELD program for hygiene, cleanliness and sanitization. The abbreviation stands for: S- Sanitization, H- Hygiene, I- ISO Standard Equipment, E- Excellence, L- Luxury Redefined, D- Distancing. The group has elevated their standards through SHIELD. The group partnered with Diversey to formulate various standards of health, hygiene and safety for the program. Some key features of the program are: Health: Body temperature screening for employees and guests, Facility of 24/7 doctor.

Conclusion

All over the world, the tourism & hospitality industry is going through a very tough phase. People are travelling only for emergency purposes and for urgent work. The ongoing pandemic has also created a psychological barrier for many people to choose to stay in hotels at this time. The present study attempts to identify and report the current initiatives taken by hotel chains to rebuild confidence among guests to come and stay in their hotels. After examining these initiatives, it is very much clear that almost every hotel brand is working towards improvising their cleanliness and hygiene standards. Also, it is seen that these hotel brands are also collaborating with various renowned organisations for the development, management and certification of sanitation and hygiene standards. It was also observed that certain brands are making use of technology for various routine operations in order to practice social distancing and enable contactless service. A few hotels have also come up with home delivery service of their restaurant's cuisine for guests at comfort of their home. All the initiatives and steps will lead to rebuild confidence among guests to travel and stay, but there exists a need of an enhanced marketing and advertisement of these initiatives so that they reach out to the maximum guests which will help in regaining confidence to travel and staying in the hotels.

Recommendations

The present study focused on initiatives and practices undertaken by hotel brands operating only in India. Hence, it is recommended to future researchers to study and compare initiatives of various hotel brands operating outside India.



2. Craigwell, R. (2007). Tourism Competitiveness in Small Island Developing States. WIDER Working Paper Series RP2007-19, World Institute for Development Economic Research (UNU-WIDER).
3. Sarovar Hotels and Resorts introduces initiatives to fight against Covid-19. <https://hospitality.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/hotels/sarovar-hotels-and-resorts-introduces-initiatives-to-fight-against-covid-19/75080208>. Accessed on 10th of September, 2020
4. Hilton Introduces Hilton EventReady with CleanStay, Setting New Standards for Event Cleanliness and Customer Service. <https://newsroom.hilton.com/corporate/news/hilton-taking-event-cleanliness-to-new-level>. Accessed on 18th of October, 2020.
5. Committed to You. <https://covid.hilton.com/>. Accessed on 18th of October, 2020.
6. COVID-19 Travel Update. https://www.hyatt.com/en-US/info/coronavirus-statement?icamp=hy_cvstatement_jan2020_alertbanner_en. Accessed on 10th of September, 2020.
7. Hyatt. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyatt>. Accessed on 5th of September, 2020.
8. Ibanez, V. A. (2020). The Impact of CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) Global Pandemic towards Hospitality Industries in Indonesia. Retrieved from: https://www.academia.edu/43371806/THE_IMPACT_OF_CORONAVIRUS_COVID_19_GLOBAL_PANDEMIC_TOWARDS_HOSPITALITY_INDUSTRIES_IN_INDONESIA
9. IHG Clean Promise. <https://www.ihg.com/content/us/en/customer-care/clean-promise>. Accessed on 8th of September 2020.
10. InterContinental Hotels Group. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/InterContinental_Hotels_Group#:~:text=IHG%20owns%20several%20brands%20including,EVEN%20Hotels%2C%20and%20Staybridge%20Suites. Accessed on 8th of September 2020.
11. COVID-19: Master chefs of Oberoi group of hotels curate immunity building food recipes. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/delhi/2020/may/19/covid-19-master-chefs-of-oberoi-group-of-hotels-curate-immunity-building-food-recipes-2145197.html>. Accessed on 2nd of September, 2020.
12. ITC Hotels. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ITC_Hotels. Accessed on 8th of September, 2020.
13. The Leela Brand Journey. <https://www.theleela.com/the-leela/about-the-leela/history/>. Accessed on 15th of September, 2020.
14. Leela Hotel, Palaces and Resorts. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Leela_Palaces,_Hotels_and_Resorts. Accessed on 15th of September, 2020.
15. Lemon Tree Hotels. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lemon_Tree_Hotels. Accessed on 1st of September, 2020.
16. Marriott Hotels and Resorts. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriott_Hotels_%26_Resorts. Accessed on 3rd of September, 2020.
17. Niewiadomski, P. (2020). COVID-19: from temporary de-globalisation to a re-discovery of tourism? *Tourism Geography An International Journal of Tourism Space, Place and Environment*, 22(3), 651-656.
18. Immunity Building Dishes. <https://www.oberoihotels.com/immunity-building-dishes/>. Accessed on 2nd of September, 2020.
19. Patel, P. K., Sharma, J., Kharoliwal, S. & Khemariya, P. (2020). The Effects of Novel Corona Virus (Covid-19) in the Tourism Industry in India. *International Journal of Engineering Research and Technology*, 9(5), doi: IJERTV9IS050618
20. Radisson Hotels. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radisson_Hotels. Accessed on 15th of September, 2020.
21. Ranasinghe, R., Damunupola, A., Wijesundara, S., Karunarathna, C., Nawarathna, D., Gamage, S., Ranaweera, A. & Idroos, A. A. (2020). Tourism after Corona: Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic and way forward for Tourism, Hotel and MICE Industry in Sri Lanka. doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.27955.17442
22. Lemon Tree Hotels announces their initiative – Rest Assured. https://www.lemontreehotels.com/Rest_Assured_press_release_final.pdf. Accessed on 1st of September, 2020.



23. Sarovar Hotels and Resorts. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarovar_Hotels_%26_Resorts. Accessed on 5th of September, 2020.
24. Taj Hotels. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarovar_Hotels_%26_Resorts. Accessed on 7th of September, 2020.
25. The Oberoi Group. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Oberoi_Group. Accessed on 2nd of September, 2020.
26. COVID-19 Update. <https://www.theparkhotels.com/important-notice.html>. Accessed on 3rd of September, 2020.
27. The Park Hotels. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Park_Hotels. Accessed on 3rd of September, 2020.
28. We Assure. <https://www.itshotels.in/content/dam/projects/hotelswebsite/itc-hotels/WeAssure/WeAssure-itc-hotels.pdf>. Accessed on 8th of September, 2020.
29. WTTC now estimates over 100 million jobs losses in the Travel & Tourism sector and alerts G20 countries to the scale of the crisis. <https://wttc.org/News-Article/WTTC-now-estimates-over-100-million-jobs-losses-in-the-Travel-&-Tourism-sector-and-alerts-G20-countries-to-the-scale-of-the-crisis>. Accessed on 18th of September, 2020.