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Holidays are meant to be Experiential - Signs of Resurgence: Vikram Lalvani, Sterling Holiday Resorts Ltd

the pandemic has encouraged the hospitality industry to cultivate some groundbreaking ways to improve on their businesses writes Vikram Lalvani, Chief of Revenue Management, Sales & Destinations, Sterling Holiday Resorts Ltd.



The last 6 months have been hard on various sectors across the globe, including hospitality.

Although the onset of the ongoing pandemic has crippled the nation, with some innovative ideas, the pandemic has encouraged the hospitality industry to cultivate some groundbreaking ways to improve on their businesses. As travel restrictions and lockdown norms are slowly being relaxed across major states in the country, the industry is now trying to get back up with a new zest of optimism and confidence. Furthermore, it is rightly said - a crisis is an opportunity riding a dangerous but hopeful wind.

Holidays cannot be experienced digitally

The need for business continuity has led to a larger acceptance of the "Work from Home" trend and an increase in digital transactions, digital meetings and even digital events, however, one cannot really digitise holidays. People are now feeling the innate need to step out of their homes and take a vacation. Months of being cooped up at home because of stringent lockdown norms has had a strong impact on people's mental health and magnified the need for people to take a break.

Hence, holiday goers and travel enthusiasts are now starting to venture out and hospitality brands have already started to witness signs of gradual revival with considerable bookings and inquiries coming in from the month of July. Short haul destinations that can be reached in a self-driven car are gaining popularity because they are only a few hours away. Destinations such as Jaipur, Thekkady, Pallavelli, Mt Abu, and Puri are some of the places that are likely to witness good inflow of travellers owing to their proximity to key cities. Moreover, with the uncertainty pertaining to international travel, domestic travel is most likely to boom. In terms of holiday pricing, there isn't much of an expectation of price war because of the relatively low demand and supply trend.

The Trends

Many companies intend to continue work-from-home for employees in the near future. Hence, scores of young people are looking at taking short road trips to nearby resorts that offer a change of scenery and strong Wifi connectivity so as to enjoy a 'workcation'. Another trend that is picking up is that of destination weddings. Although social distancing is the new norm, people still want to be able to have a memorable wedding. Hence, destination weddings offer couples the chance to have a wedding ceremony in the presence of a few friends and family. Young couples are slowly warming up to the idea of hosting an intimate destination wedding at an exotic location with loved ones and social distancing norms in place. This is where resorts and hotels with larger spaces and open areas can cash in because they have natural social distancing in the form of gardens, lawns, auditoriums, pre-party areas and other venues.

However, while choosing a destination or a hospitality brand, travellers will factor in aspects like sanitisation, hygiene, and social distancing. In this regard, many hotels and resorts have already set protocols for guests, employees, and vendors.

Sterling CARES offering

Sterling Holidays has introduced "Sterling CARES" - a holistic hygiene and sanitation programme which is further enhanced by an association with Apollo Clinics. Such arrangements induce confidence in travellers and help them make an informed decision. Apart from contactless dining, takeaways will be also heavily encouraged and promoted. In order to give an additional sense of safety, the hospitality industry will also witness a surge in "Holiday Insurance" products. These insurance products will cover travellers end-to-end and offer relief in case of medical emergencies, baggage loss, flight delays, and cancellations.

What does the future hold?

Going forward, there will be a lot of innovation in the hospitality business; sustainability and exclusivity will be key to this new paradigm shift. There will also be a move towards more conscious travel, with sensitivity towards the impact of a hotel on both the environment and community. Hospitality is one of the most buoyant industries and although this pandemic has affected businesses heavily, the industry is hoping to witness a spike in signs of recovery post-COVID era as holidays cannot be experienced from home and the need for travel among the population has not subdued.

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