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Hospitality sector may stay immune to AI risk

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India's hospitality sector is likely to remain immune to the impact of artificial intelligence (AI), said industry watchers and executives, as it embarks on a CAGR growth of 9.6 per cent over the next five years, on the back of a rebound in tourism.

In its latest projections, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), said that the Indian travel and tourism sector is expected to employ more than 63.9 million by 2035, up from 46.3 million in 2024.

"This is the only industry which may be immune to the impact of AI," the WTTC chief executive Julia Simpson said, while sharing the forecast last month.

The hospitality sector has been known to be a steady source of supply of human resources to sectors that require people-facing profiles such as hospitals and banking. However, new demand is coming in from sectors like flex-space and real estate.

There is another challenge that has come up — shortage of hotel staff and general managers to man the swathe of keys coming up over the next five years.

Hotel chains are sprucing up their internal training programmes while raising the level of campus recruitments for meeting the huge demand for workforce across the value chain.

"In-house training courses will increase as major players take a proactive approach to nurturing their own talent pipeline. Hotel chains like Taj, Oberoi, Lemon Tree, ITC, Marriott have already started and expanded their own training programmes and academies," said Sonal Arora, country manager, GI Group Holding, a global provider of recruitment and HR services, who noted that the high demand for workforce will require a combination of internal training, upskilling, along with hiring from private or government institutions, besides recruiting experienced staff from the industry.

Mielle Batliwala, AVP-HR, Sarovar Hotels said that partnerships with skill councils, and community-based hiring was being looked at equally.

"To ensure we have a strong internal leadership pipeline, we are investing in structured programmes like the Sarovar Leadership Development Programme and the General Manager Development Programme, which help groom high-potential employees to take on key leadership roles as we grow," she said.

Focus on training

- Taj, Oberoi, Lemon Tree, ITC, and Marriott expanding their in-house training programmes and academies
- Sarovar, Royal Orchid collaborating for specialised courses, apprenticeships
- New job roles like revenue management, digital marketing, guest tech, and sustainability being created

"In-house training and development programmes are becoming central to our talent strategy. We are investing in internal upskilling programmes and structured training modules through LMS that help fast-track progression for existing employees," said Arjun Baljee, president of Royal Orchid Hotels & founder Iconiqa Hotels and Resorts, while underscoring the need for supplementing this by fresh recruitment from institutes and lateral hiring.

Hotel chains have partnered with reputed hospitality institutes, participate in campus placement drives but to bridge the talent gap, Sarovar Hotels is also working with government-backed apprenticeship programmes, cross-industry recruitment, and certified skilling bodies.

Hotels and hotel firms are also working closely with the Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council for shorter duration skill-based courses. Initiatives like RPL (recognition of prior learning) RTD (Recruit Train and Deploy) are helping hotels get manpower matching with their specific requirements.

KB Kachru president, Hotel Association of India Chairman – South Asia, Radisson Hotelgroup, said: "As hotels integrate smart tech and enhance guest personalisation, roles in data analytics, IT, and guest experience design will also gain prominence." He noted that with the rise of wellness tourism, MICE, and experiential travel, specialised jobs were being created in spa management, event planning and local experience curation, besides social media management.

"Operationally, there will be high demand for roles in front office, housekeeping, food and beverage service, culinary, and guest relations. On the back end, we will see increased hiring in digital marketing, revenue management, communications, and IT functions. New-age skills like experience curation, wellness are also gaining prominence," said Baljee.

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