

HVS Monday Musings: Is it Time to Adopt a Fresh Perspective on Hotel Banquets?

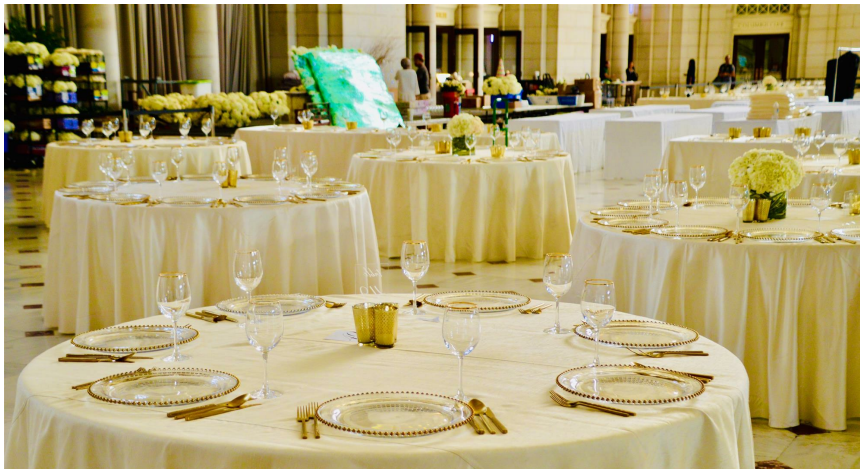
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Banquet halls are once again in high demand due to the resurgence of the 'Big Indian Wedding' and other MICE events in the country. As per a recent **report**, online searches for banquet halls for weddings were up by 28% in 2022, with 45% of the demand arising during Feb-May alone. Meanwhile, in smaller towns (tier II cities), the searches were up by at least 33% in 2022, with 43% of the demand arising during Feb-May. Not just limited to weddings and other social events, the Indian corporate MICE industry also utilizes banquets to host

events.

The banqueting sector in India is currently undergoing a major shift in market dynamics, with several of these events now taking place in hotel banquets rather than standalone banquet halls. Given that the Indian wedding industry (estimated to be worth **USD 50 bn**) and the MICE segment (estimated to be worth **USD 5 bn**) are both expected to grow exponentially in the next few years, it is imperative that hotels move away from the traditional mindset regarding banqueting and take a fresh look at this customer segment to take advantage of the huge potential.



Large hotel chains such as **Marriott, Hyatt** and **IHCL** among others have recognized this potential and introduced specialized services to cater to this market, especially the weddings segment. For instance, Marriott's Shaadi by Marriott Bonvoy vertical not only has a separate interactive website and wedding specialists as part of its staff, but the company has also set up wedding studios at many properties. Meanwhile, Hyatt and **Taj** have introduced targeted advertising campaigns such as Hyatt **#PerfectlyYours** campaign and Taj's **Timeless Weddings** campaign for this segment. However, there's a lot more that can be done to market hotel banquets as an attractive proposition to clients.

As a first step, hotels must utilize technology to simplify the venue scouting and booking process and make it hassle free for the client. The process is tedious and time-consuming for clients and event planners because most hotel websites don't provide up-to-date information, availability and picture banks of the banquet halls and event spaces that help provide a perspective on the spaces available. Virtual tours and interactive floor plans can

Summary

Hotels have an edge over independent banquet halls when it comes to holding events because of their superior infrastructure, safety standards and brand image. However, with the evolving guest preferences and technological advances, it's time for hotels to throw out the old playbook and approach banquets with a fresh perspective, welcoming a new era of hospitality. Read on to know more.

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revolutionize this process and become effective marketing tools for hotels' banquet halls and event venues, while making venue scouting easier for event managers and wedding planners. Potential clients can visualize the layout, decor, and ambiance of the venue without having to travel to the physical location by using a 360-degree virtual tour that offers a realistic and immersive view of the spaces. Having a chatbot which would be able to answer some common questions can also help the client and event managers in making decisions.

Prioritizing accessibility at the venue for all guests is another crucial element. The majority of hotels and resorts still lack wheelchair access and ramps, despite rising awareness and technological advancements. Making sure that these amenities are available and planning seating arrangements to accommodate wheelchair users at banquets and event locations will help make the event more memorable for the guests, especially at weddings with senior and elderly guests. Additionally, hotels should have appropriate signage throughout the property and can offer audio guides, braille signage, and captioning services, etc., during events to make their venues more accessible for visually or hearing-impaired guests.



Menu offerings and the buffet layouts are another area which has largely remained legacy driven, except in select hotels which have worked towards keeping with the times. Perhaps it's time for hotels, other than those in luxury or upper upscale segments, to rethink their banquet offerings by renting the physical space along with the related infrastructure and empaneling leading stand-alone caterers for the food. There has been a quantum leap in the catering sector wherein stand-alone caterers have reimagined the food offering and the presentation taking it to a completely new level which is an area that hotels have not kept up to. Gone are the days when food was laid out on buffet tables in chaffing dishes with a very standard and predictable fare. Catering menus today can offer over 100 diverse multi-cuisine items for a single meal with the most creative out-of-the-box layouts & presentations providing for multiple live kitchens and an array of props, service equipment and decor. Hotels can make reasonable revenue from renting the space and do away with the complexity of running a large food & beverage operation for banquets. It's time for a change in mindset and opening up to outsourcing F&B capabilities to professionals who can deliver a superior experience.

Additionally, banquet space needs to be reconsidered during the hotel design phase as banqueting can be a significant source of revenue for hotels in the Indian market and wherever the location is conducive to weddings and social events, hotels must plan banqueting spaces irrespective of their brand positioning since catering can be easily outsourced in most cities. Demand, pricing, the hotel's capacity to draw guests, and the seasonality of demand should all be taken into consideration during the planning and development process. A suitable banquet kitchen must be provided for which can be used by third-party caterers and allows for better infrastructure, hygiene standards and managing services more efficiently. Due to their superior infrastructure, safety standards and brand image, hotels have an edge over independent banquet halls when it comes to holding events. However, with the evolving guest preferences, technological advances and good quality outsourcing, it's time for hotels to throw out the old playbook and approach banquets with a fresh perspective,

welcoming a new era of hospitality.

About **Mandeep S Lamba**



Mandeep S. Lamba, President – South Asia, oversees the HVS global hospitality practice for South Asia. He has spent over 30 years in the hospitality industry of which the last 19 have been in CEO positions. Having worked with leading International and domestic Hotel Companies such as IHG, Radisson & ITC Hotels, he also set up joint venture companies with Dawnay Day Group UK and Onyx Hospitality, Thailand to own and operate hotels in India giving him a broader exposure to the hospitality business.

An established industry leader, Mandeep has won several awards and recognitions in India and abroad for his accomplishments and contribution to the hospitality industry. He is a Certified Hospitality Administrator from the American Hotels Association (CHA), a member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, UK (MRICS) and a member of the Tourism Council of CII (Northern India). His views are often solicited for television and print media as a spokesperson for the hospitality & tourism sector.

Prior to joining HVS in 2018, Mandeep was the Managing Director, Hotels & Hospitality Group for JLL.

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Dhwani Gupta, Associate - Research with HVS South Asia, studied literature for her undergraduate and believes that you can do anything with the right amount of research. After graduating, she pursued a course in Management and Liberal Arts which gave her a wider perspective of the world. As a result, the more difficult a topic is, the more fun she has writing it. Contact Dhwani at [\[email protected\]](#)