

HVS Monday Musings: Rebuilding the MICE Segment in India

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If 'virtual' was the key trend in the meetings, incentives, conferences, and events (MICE) industry in 2020, 'hybrid' has been the buzzword in 2021, as in-person attendance made a comeback at large-scale events in various countries. All popular international MICE locations are taking measures to resurrect the segment, with Singapore and the UAE leading the way, having hosted multiple hybrid events successfully in the past year, with even international delegates in attendance.

Dubai hosted its first in-person event post-lockdown as early as in July 2020 and has, since then, successfully hosted a series of events, including the Gulfood, an in-person food & beverage sourcing event with 2500+ exhibitors from 85 countries, in February 2021. The city is now preparing to host the Dubai Expo, a six-month event estimated to attract 25 million visits. High vaccination rate (over 80% of the population in the UAE is fully vaccinated), efficient government-private sector cooperation, and rigorous government efforts to enforce COVID-related norms through penalties and deployment of volunteers at tourist attractions, have helped the city gain global recognition as a 'safe' travel destination, helping attract business travelers.

Meanwhile, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), in collaboration with various trade bodies, has been experimenting with a series of pilot events in the last year, trying out novel formats and testing digital solutions to ensure COVID-appropriate safety norms at events. The events have used plexiglass shields in exhibition display booths, private meeting pods, social distancing ambassadors spread across the event as well as digital tools like online travel concierge, facial recognition tech, and touchless event check-in kiosks. With each successful pilot, the number of in-person attendees has been raised from the initial 25 to 1,000 now.



The MICE segment in India, which was limited to only social events in the last year, is also gradually coming to life. Business events such as dealer meetings and company training are set to return in the coming months, with corporate India resuming a "work-from-office" model.

India's MICE segment has significant growth potential

In the long run, India's MICE segment, which accounts for a minuscule 1% share in the global MICE market, has the potential to become a significant demand driver for the tourism sector in the country. In line with this

Summary

This article discusses some of the measures adopted by select global destinations to aid in the revival of the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) segment in their countries.

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thought, the government recently released a draft National Strategy and Roadmap that includes a plethora of recommendations aimed at positioning India as a popular MICE destination in the post-COVID era. Improved MICE infrastructure, targeted marketing campaigns, institutional support, and skill development, among other things, are expected to help the country boost its share of global MICE business to 2% in five years and improve the country's International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) ranking to the top 20.

With the government's increased focus on this segment, now may be a good time for hoteliers to rethink their MICE operations, get creative and come up with new ideas to ensure that they are future-ready. The hybrid approach is here to stay, as many of the advantages of in-person attendance at events, especially in industries like apparel, automotive, and manufacturing, etc. are difficult to replicate in a virtual format. Furthermore, event organizers will also be able to reap the benefits of hosting a much larger virtual audience along in addition to the in-person audience in the future. Hotels and convention centers can take advantage of this opportunity by upgrading their facilities and technological capabilities to meet the needs of a hybrid event. Hotels will need to ensure that they are equipped with high-quality cameras, sound equipment, and a strong network to support advanced tech such as live streaming, augmented reality, and virtual reality. MICE players must adapt quickly and learn from global best practices to provide high-quality hybrid meetings that maximize the experience for both virtual and in-person attendees.

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.

Contact Mandeep at +91 981 1306 161 or [\[email protected\]](#)

About **Dipti Mohan**



Dipti Mohan, Associate Vice President - Research with HVS South Asia, is a seasoned knowledge professional with extensive experience in research-based content creation. She has authored several 'point of view' documents such as thought leadership reports, expert opinion articles, white papers, and research reports across industries including hospitality, real estate, infrastructure, cement, and construction. Contact Dipti at [\[email protected\]](#)